

Kaylynn Marie Powell

“The Outsider’s Infinite Fall,” Performance

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Perched in a city built entirely of nets and ropes, how can one assimilate? Or is it a false fantasy of fitting into a world that is not meant for you? “The Outsider’s Infinite Fall” delves into the question of can one escape your origins and create new roots, or is it a gross appropriation of native cultures? Drawing inspiration from the notorious Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, specifically the city of Octavia, and his moralistic Italian fables, this story I created follows the narrative of a man coming to be in a city that does not treat outsiders kindly. The man rifles through the famed poem, “L’infinito” by Giacomo Leopardi, and reflects on his own identity.

My purpose and intent for this story is that I am personally connected to the narrator traversing of his own values and culture. I was raised to be proud of my Native American heritage, however because I do not fit the stereotypical mold of what a “Native American” looks like, I often have been accused of appropriating a culture that is my own. Therefore, I have distanced myself from my own culture. Yet in my college experience, I have found myself educating others on what appropriation is and the repercussions of the act are in order to at least get people talking about the impact that words have on others’ cultures. In creating a world, the listeners and readers are better able to put themselves into the shoes of a man who is attempting to fit it. He is a neutral character and is meant to be able to be seen as a both a voyeur to Octavian culture and someone who was abandoned by his previous identities and was forced to find himself through his travels to Octavia. The ambiguous ending allows the reader/listener to decide the fate of the protagonist, just as society ultimately makes a choice of where they want to categorize the people in society. The artist referenced, Kerry Skarbakka, uses his medium of photography to document the anxieties of falling and the portrait of *The Ledge* mirrored my image of the mountain and the protagonist’s leap of faith at the end of the short story. Taking leaps of faith and exposing identity is a consistent struggle for people in our society today which is paralleled in the blind-faith of the community members of Octavia, or the people secure in their identity, and by the final fall of the protagonist, a less self-assured character.

In Italian literature, every piece I have read, from *La Divina Commedia* to the modern musings of Silvana De Mari, is static. They are stuck in a historic freeze frame and have difficulty to transgress into the modern world. In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino outlines cities, but gives no depth. I want to create more of an opportunity for this story to be able to be present in whichever time period it is read in, whether it be two years or two hundred years from now.

The intent of this piece is to orally tell the short story while simultaneously projecting key words and quotes from my work to serve as a visual for the audience members. This piece is additionally aided by Kerry Skarbakka’s portrait from his “Struggle to Right Oneself” series, *The Ledge*. My original work plays with the visuals of actually reading the story in order to force the reader into feeling the same anxieties of the protagonist and truly hearing the monologue of him. Through hearing the story and projecting the thoughts of the protagonist and the image of the falling man from Skarbakka’s work, the impact is much more profound than any written word on a page could convey.

Performance Requirements: A screen capable of projecting Microsoft PowerPoint and a microphone to project my voice.

Works Cited

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. Vintage, 2009.

Leopardi, Giacomo. "L'infinito." Preface. *Canti: Poems*, translated by Jonathan Galassi, Bilingual ed., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, p. 106.

Skarbakka, Kerry. *The Ledge*. 2008.