I keep a close watch on this heart of mine
I keep my eyes wide open all the time
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds
Because you’re mine, I walk the line
– Johnny Cash, “Walk the Line”

A lot of people don’t like bumper stickers. I don’t mind bumper stickers. To me a bumper sticker is a shortcut.
It’s like a little sign that says “Hey, let’s never hang out.”
– Demetri Martin

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.
– Mark Twain

Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich.
– Napoleon

To me, it seems a dreadful indignity to have a soul controlled by geography.
– George Santayana

Bisexuality immediately doubles your chances for a date on Saturday night.
– Woody Allen

All of us grow up in particular realities – a home, family, a clan, a small town, a neighborhood.
Depending upon how we’re brought up, we are either deeply aware of the particular reading of reality into which we are born, or we are peripherally aware of it.
– Chaim Potok

The bonds that unite another person to our self exist only in our mind.
– Marcel Proust

All human beings are also dream beings. Dreaming ties all mankind together.
– Jack Kerouac

Almost all of our relationships begin and most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barter, to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods.
– W. H. Auden

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.
– Nelson Mandela

Our failings sometimes bind us to one another as closely as could virtue itself.
– Luc de Clapiers

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.
– F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother
– Shakespeare, Henry V

The eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages.
– Virginia Woolf

True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.
– Kurt Vonnegut

I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality.
– James Joyce

Oh, you hate your job? Why didn’t you say so? There’s a support group for that.
It’s called everybody, and they meet at the bar.
– Drew Carey
Background and Purpose

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, is the University of Southern California's general education alternative: an interdisciplinary program of academic rigor that encourages exciting and vibrant discussion among its community. Each year approximately 200 outstanding freshmen from all majors participate in a unique combination of core courses, supplemental theme courses, writing classes and tutorials.

The Thematic Option conference provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to enrich their academic experience by publicly presenting their ideas and research. In response to a general call for papers, Thematic Option students developed topics under the theme “The Ties that Bind” to be presented as part of a panel. Each panel is composed of five to six students, with a faculty member serving as the panel’s chair and respondent. A question and answer session follows the presentation of papers in each panel. Topics are reflective of students’ various disciplines and interests and focus on issues ranging from politics to popular culture. Possible themes include politics, war, family, love, romance, and sex, gender, religion, community, responsibility, food and basic needs, race and racism, patriotism and nationalism, betrayal and treason, morality, technology, social media, language, communication, education, fandom, social construction, identity, prisons of all kinds, memory and commemoration, the body/embodiment, mind, soul, laws, . . . remember: Nietzsche tells us, “Invisible threads are the strongest ties.”

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

Yuliana Baskina
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Fan Fan
Joshua Faskowitz
Katherine Gardiner
Madison Hunter

Daniel Kim
Katherine McCormick
Carrie Moore
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Nandini Ruparel
Sara Worth
Shannon Zhang

Many thanks to the faculty and staff who have played an integral role in the success of the Thematic Option Research Conference.
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USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences  
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Dangerous Liaisons
Moderated by Professor William Handley, Department of English

Nick Cegelski

Out of the Way, Into the Wild

Jack Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* sees protagonist Chris McCandless cut all ties with family and friends in a symbolic turning of his back on excess and injustice. His turbulent relationship with his father, Walt McCandless, provides Chris with impetus to terminate his relations with the “civilized” society in which he feels misplaced. Interviews with both his parents indicate Chris’ loss of attachment not only to people formerly important in his life, but also to normalized living. Setting out to traverse the country, McCandless finds that he cannot resist forming bonds with the men and women he encounters. His connection with Wayne Westerberg, his employer, provides McCandless with necessary companionship while still allowing him the independence he craves. Similarly, Chris' influence upon Roland Franz, an elderly man whom McCandless converts to his nomadic lifestyle, provides him with a sense of accomplishment, in that his mark has been left upon the world. These two relationships are further investigated in the Sean Penn feature film, also titled *Into the Wild*, as McCandless’ sense of independence is strengthened while at the same time his attachment to “civilization” is cultivated. Examination of his travel diary reveals partial consequences of these relationships.

Ryan Green

Saving the Saved in *Magnolia*

Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia* is revolutionary in two ways. Like the Latin word “revolutio,” which means “to turn around,” the film focuses on the repeated transgressions of its characters and their futile attempts to escape their circular existences. These characters seek redemption through confession. But as Peter Brooks argues, the “performative aspect [of confession] produc[es] the constative.” In other words, the act of confession creates its own guilt and is, therefore, circular and self-perpetuating. Though cyclical in structure, *Magnolia*, through its self-reflexive manipulation of familiar cinematic tropes like the dying father and absolution of the protagonist, revolts from such a repetitive temporality and finds the power of redemption in the future of American cinema.

Trevor Masland

A Tangled Web We Weave:
Exploring the Close Relationship Between Truth and Deception
in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*

*Oh, what a tangled web we weave . . . when we first practice to deceive.*
-Walter Scott

In Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Jack Worthing creates a false identity named “Ernest” in order to live an extravagant double life in London. Initially, it seems that Jack's frequent deception prevents him from connecting with the other characters in the play because his relationships are built on false pretenses. This disconnect from the other characters is most evident in Jack's failure to receive Gwendolyn's hand in marriage. Although the reader suspects that only complete honesty can repair Jack's relationships with the other characters, ultimately the distinction between truth and deception becomes indiscernible. This paper will argue that Jack is able to genuinely connect with the other characters by entangling them into his web of deceptive truths. In this sense, people are not connected by total honesty, but by our imperfect tendency to lie. Moreover, this paper will demonstrate that love requires acceptance of the blend of truths and lies in the ones we love.
“Nothing is Genuine Anymore”:
Deceit and Distrust in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*

*In the covert world of espionage, what is truth and what is not? Is there such a thing as truth?*

- John Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire*

As John Thompson notes in his *Fiction, Crime, and Empire*, an analysis of espionage fiction, these are two of the key questions raised throughout the postmodern espionage sub-genre. *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* takes place during the Cold War and follows George Smiley’s quest to root out a mole that has infiltrated the British Secret Intelligence Service. Through watching Smiley tirelessly sift through meticulously constructed fictions surrounding the cabal of conspirators in his homeland, he manages to find that truth is a privilege and not a given right. The thickly concealed nature of truth in this movie has a myriad of consequences—chief among them is the prevention of real relationships built on trust and the obfuscation of truth as a necessity. Indeed, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* demonstrates that when lies govern a nation at war, no ties will bind.

Spencer Prescott

**What It Means to be Free**

This paper examines the struggle to find one’s authentic being and freedom in Andre Gide’s *The Immoralist*. Michel, the main protagonist of Gide’s novel, attempts to escape from his conventional identity as husband and scholar in hopes of finding his “authentic being.” Michel easily abandons his scholarly life to explore other social roles that he encounters, such as a tough man, manager, and farm hand. Despite his attempts, he is unable to integrate himself into a lifestyle that fits his individual being. His desire to “be free” from the social laws that governed France in the early twentieth century, including marriage and the obligations of family life, ultimately attracts Michel to the innocence of youth, an experience he never had because of his neglected childhood. His deficient childhood also causes him to treat his wife as both a lover and mother. Michel’s inability to care for his wife and work causes him to lose both of them, and he ends up as lonely as he began, lacking any sense of true transformation.

Chloé Warehall

**The Supernatural Woman:**
*Sexuality, Monstrosity, Female Agency, and Transgressive Desire in Homosocial Triangles*

*Woman exists in the horror film primarily as victim.*

*Perfect as a fearful victim, what she does best is to faint in the arms of a gorilla,*

*or a mummy, or a werewolf, or a Frankensteinian creature.*

- Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*

This essay discusses how HBO’s *True Blood* portrays homosocial triangles, involving the supernatural, that transform the common notion of the silenced woman. I will explore how the main female characters’ self-awareness of their own monstrosity allows them to defy the passive conduit that male characters use to channel their homoerotic rivalry. I will argue that the supernatural woman threatens the male-dominant social structure with her transgressive desire. By casting the supernatural woman as a victim, the men seek to hinder her agency and reduce the threat of her monstrosity—the source of her appeal and their fear. In the opening scene, we see that the supernatural woman, Sookie Stackhouse, is socially outcast and framed as insane due to her power to read minds. By analyzing the supernatural women of *True Blood*, I will reveal that despite the endeavors to suppress their powers, these supernatural women can not only transgress their roles, but also use them as tools to determine their own paths.
Sayuli Bhide

Stockholm Syndrome: Resistance to Freedom in *Cloud Atlas*

You're captives of a civilizational system that more or less compels you to go on destroying the world in order to live. You are captives—and you have made a captive of the world itself.

-Daniel Quinn

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* shows that our history is directed by our struggle against oppression. Or so it seems. Through the past, present, and into the future, the book's six narratives are each driven by efforts for greater advancement and liberation—efforts that are thwarted by a natural resistance to freedom. Our aversion to accepting ambiguity and our dependence on, and faith in, the past leaves us trapped within self-imposed limitations. *Cloud Atlas* suggests that, consciously or not, we are attracted to this confinement because it offers us an escape from responsibility. By accepting the status quo as inevitable, we are released from the crushing uncertainty of true freedom.

Shirley Chung

Moving Nowhere: Setting and Development in *The Bell Jar*

This essay investigates setting in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, and more specifically, how Esther's aspirations develop while she is in college, in New York, at home, and finally in the mental institution. College and New York are supposed to prepare Esther for the future, but instead of feeling prepared, she ends up feeling overwhelmed. New York symbolizes the real world, and it serves as the fulcrum in her development. While Esther explores the city, she discovers the extent of her ignorance. Her mental state further declines upon leaving New York, and her return home to a domestic and suburban environment is representative of her regression. Esther's sanity continues to deteriorate until she ultimately enters a mental institution, where she is reminded of college life. The cyclical progression of the novel's setting suggests that in spite of Esther's efforts throughout her college years, she has moved nowhere.

Lindsey Joost

Identity Lost: *The American Nightmare*

As humans, we find comfort in routine, reliance in the predictable. But inherent to this security is a certain monotony. Stephen Wright explores this tedium of the expected and the folly of the exalted American Dream in his novel *Going Native*, as well as the mindset of feeling "stuck" and the societal pressures—real or imagined—that bind the characters to the lives they have chosen for themselves. This constant chase of the American Dream without any sense of fulfillment creates a void, particularly in a secular society, that humans replace with either something from the spiritual realm, or with violence. *Going Native* explores why, as humans, we feel tied to the routine of our daily lives, whatever they may be, and what happens when we try to sever these bonds.

Gabrielle Micheletti

Places and Faces: The Irreplaceable Ties of People to Their Pasts and Country in *Midnight's Children*

This essay discusses the detrimental effects that occur when characters in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*...
lose touch with the people, places, and traditions of their pasts. The inability to pull away from the past in a healthy manner and move forward also influences the inability for India itself to create a functional country from the many fragmented and dominated cultures of which it is composed. Ultimately, no one manages to successfully leave their pasts behind. It is inescapable, making the attempt to be citizens of a successful young country even more challenging.

Diane Um

Community Across the Centuries: The Search for Unity in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*

The past is undeniably a part of the present—but how can we find it? In Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, a young 20th century black woman named Dana time-travels between 1815 and the present with the mission of ensuring the birth of her great-grandmother Hagar. Butler’s portrayal of Dana’s ancestors shows the complexities behind relationships in the slave community, defying romanticized views of life on a plantation. While the community is fragile and sometimes frail, the flesh and blood bonds ultimately unite them. Connected by pain, the community persists despite personal conflicts and power struggles. Throughout the novel, Dana’s experiences in the slave community, specifically in gaining the acceptance of fellow slaves, reveal the necessity of fellowship amidst systematic dehumanization of the individual.
Knowing Time: The Aesthetics of the Beat Generation

This essay focuses on Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* in an analysis of the defining qualities of the Beat generation’s aesthetic principles. Through an examination of Kerouac’s definitive novel, I will discuss his ground-breaking improvisational language and style, resistant to editing, that represents the jazz-based aesthetic style of all beat literature that favors the sensual over the intellectual. Furthermore, I will relate this aesthetic style to the lifestyles and attitudes of Kerouac and his contemporaries in their attempt not just to create beat art but to live it. Ultimately, I will examine the influence the Beat generation had on American literature to better understand its role in the cultural and artistic revolution spanning the mid 50s and 60s, including the beatnik influence on other competing and evolving sub-cultures such as the mods and the hippies, discussing both the true nature of the movement and the ways in which the movement was portrayed by the media, as well as what the Beats mean to contemporary literature and ways of thinking.

Stop and Go: How Sal and Dean Diverge in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*

*Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise.*

*Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake.*

—Walter Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’”

In the midst of a world that kept getting faster, Walter Benjamin thought that stopping altogether would constitute a genuinely revolutionary act—a ceasing of motion instead of an acceleration. In Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty, in the constant motion of life on the road, is always thinking, “Man, this will finally take us to IT!” His journey is a search for something. Sal Paradise, however, seems to be after something different: “This can’t go on all the time—all this franticness and jumping around. We’ve got to go someplace, find something.” Sal and Dean both set out cross-country for “IT,” and the novel ultimately presents a dichotomy in how to get there: by speeding up, or by stopping. I argue that Kerouac does not uphold the consensus image of the novel represented by Dean Moriarty—what might be called, in the words of the Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti, “The absolute beauty of speed.” Instead, Kerouac privileges Benjamin’s conception of stopping—halting the endless motion as a way to reach something more.

Moral Combat: How Our Most Striking Differences Draw Us Closest Together

*In each of us, two natures are at war—the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our own hands lies the power to choose—what we want most to be we are.*

—Robert Louis Stevenson

From God and the Devil to the Jedi and the Sith, the dualist idea of Good and Evil pervades our society. While at first seeming completely at odds, these two opposing concepts are nevertheless intimately connected—in fact, reliant on each other for their very existence. In *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell builds a world comprised of six narratives surrounding six characters separated by time, space, circumstance, and literary tradition. While the characters are
Reason and consciousness are the pinnacle traits of mankind—they distinguish humans from every other species on the planet. In two of his essays, “Getting Away from Already Being Pretty Much Away From It All” and “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again,” David Foster Wallace gives a more primitive description of the people he sees: “bovine.” Wallace immerses himself in two distinctly different environments, a luxurious cruise ship and a rural state fair in Illinois, yet resurfaces with the same description of the people he observes—the people are a mindless herd. The convergence of Wallace’s observations of the groups as being “bovine” is more than a coincidence, though. There is a very clear explanation provided by the discipline of group psychology: human nature. What Wallace observes is an instinctual human tendency for people to form into groups, as Wilfred Trotter explains. Trotter explains the cause of human “herd instinct” as a survivalist response to danger and anxieties, a seeking of comfort and security provided by the group. Another psychologist, Gustave LeBon, identified the result of human gregariousness—a change in the actions of the individual and thus the collective mind into a more primitive, less rational state, which Wallace also sees on the boat and at the State Fair. Sigmund Freud also explains exactly why it is humans change when in a group setting. Ultimately, while the “herd” is able to provide humans with a refuge from the anxieties and insecurities of the world, it also brings along very negative implications in how it affects people’s behavior. These negative implications extend beyond basic social spaces such as a cruise ship into more impactful, non-physical settings, such as economic markets, where irrational thinking and the “herd mind” has helped crash world markets.

Vivienne Tsan

Justifying Betrayal in Homeland

The television series Homeland explores important questions about betrayal and truth through following the psyche of those who must either prevent or commit acts of national betrayal. When CIA agent Carrie Mathison develops a romantic relationship with Sgt. Nicholas Brody—the very man she suspects to be a national threat to the United States—we discover the reason behind Brody’s betrayal to be justified by the murder of 82 children in a U.S. drone attack, and ideas of truth, the good, and the bad are muddled. Consequently, the romantic, patriotic, and familial ties distort and hinder our abilities to judge the characters of Homeland. In Fiction, Crime, and Empire Jon Thompson notes the postmodern themes in such espionage stories such as these: “Truth, reference, and objective cause are no longer absolute values in the postmodern thriller . . . but are instead strategic values, easily disposed of or changed.” This paper will use Homeland and Thompson to explore both the moral and emotional complexities behind acts of betrayal and question the validity of truth when multiple loyalties conflict and notions of ethics and national loyalty become inevitably compromised. Vice President Walden, the man responsible for the drone attack, could not be more narrow-mindedly wrong when he says, “It doesn’t matter why terrorists do what they do,” for it is precisely this underestimation of the power in the ties that bind that leads to the most destructive actions.
One for the Ages
Moderated by Professor Richard Fox, Department of History
Monday, April 8
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Sharon Choi

Fatherhood and Redemption in Magnolia

The absent and manipulative fathers of Paul Thomas Anderson's Magnolia inhibit their children from developing an independent identity, and their children struggle to erase them. In other words, the children constitute identity outside of paternal will, and in doing so try to find redemption outside of an Oedipal framework. The fragmented narrative of the film, however, suggests that redemption is only possible in what Walter Benjamin calls “empty time.” It can’t avoid the past entirely because the past acts on the present and future. Thus, by refusing to let the characters break the chains of the past, the film forces us to question the violence that is enacted within redemptive narratives.

Andres Eras

The Children's Crusade:
The Implications of the Nonlinear Storyline in Slaughterhouse-Five

This essay discusses how, despite its erratic timeline, Slaughterhouse-Five shows the growth of the main character, Billy Pilgrim, from the beginning of the book to the end. Furthermore, it analyzes how this structure illuminates the aging process. The essay uses interviews with Vonnegut as well as scholarly work on the novel to explore the unusual narrative structure and its purpose in the novel. Billy’s progression from apprehension to comfort with his situation, parallel with his growing disconnect with the reality experienced by others, offers much to say about the universal walk through life. This essay uses that implicit data and Vonnegut’s own words, obtained through interviews, to create a picture of what the author thought on aging.

Deena Khattab

Buds on the Tree of Life:
Involuntary Memory and Exquisite Moments in Mrs. Dalloway

In a profoundly mundane experience in Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa thinks, “as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life . . . one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments.” Thus, we are presented with the idea that there exists a secret deposit of exquisite moments, a vault of beautiful experiences pulled from and contributed to by mankind as a whole. But how to access it? The answer lies in Marcel Proust’s idea of involuntary memory, defined as the act of unconsciously remembering elements of the past during everyday activities, such as Clarissa’s picking up the notepad. This theory operates in modern literature and much of modern experience—whether through what was, in the 1920s, the novel concept of déjà vu or through documented cases of post-traumatic stress disorder following the first and second world wars. This paper investigates instances of involuntary memory in Mrs. Dalloway and analyzes how the novel transports both its characters and readers from the mundane to the deeper, collective history of the world.

Kirstin Louie

Just a Number:
The Meaning of Age in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio

Should age be a restriction? Sherwood Anderson explores this question, as he breaks the confines of maturity levels that accompany the ages of his characters. Through characters like Wing Biddlebaum, George Willard, and Kate Swift, Anderson shows that, despite the ages he assigns these characters, they are by no means restricted to maintaining age-appropriate behavior. They, instead wander between reverting to their youth and maturing rapidly.
So why even give his characters ages? What does that do for them? What does it mean? While age matters in this text, it does not necessarily define the characters and their behavior. This paper addresses how age contributes to the mystery of Anderson's grotesques.

Olivia Niland

To Live and Die in *Dubliners*:
Joycean Chronology and the Unity of Age

*One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age.*

–James Joyce, “The Dead,” *Dubliners*

Given that the arrangement of stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners* feels every bit as natural as the daily lives they depict, one might never guess that Joyce spent more than a year choosing their order. But in this anthology of fourteen otherwise unconnected tales, chronology becomes critically important as *Dubliners* winds its way from cradle to grave, from the youthful mischief of the schoolboys in “Araby” and “An Encounter” to the wistful backward glances of the older characters in “Grace” and the symbolic final story, “The Dead.” In *Dubliners*, life and death continually overlap, and the two are never experienced quite so strongly as by people who find between themselves the commonality of age. In this paper, I utilize Florence L. Walzl's “The Life Chronology of *Dubliners*” to argue that the lives of *Dubliners*’ characters are strongly influenced, for better and worse, by age, measured by both the years they have already spent on earth and the tentative number they have left. The harmony and discord always palpable between the characters in Joyce’s *Dubliners* demonstrates the way in which something as intrinsic as age has the power to both strengthen and sever ties in this life and beyond.
Kayla Caldwell

“Scapegoats” and “Pet Causes” of Society: Stigmatized and Subhuman Slum-dwellers

“Elysium Heights” and “City of God” conjure up images of spiritual paradise, but ironically, they refer to slums full of poverty and violence. In Beukes’ fantasy novel *Zoo City*, people with guilt are magically bound to animals; for those who are and those who feel guilty alike, an animal is a criminal stigma in the eyes of society, a one-way ticket to the slums. Slum-dwellers are socially and economically excluded due to their stigmatization, and out of desperation they partake in illegal activity, which society demands yet uses to further reinforce their stigmatization. Beukes’ Johannesburg and Meirelles’ Rio de Janeiro in the semi-documentary film *City of God* cannot fully excise these slums, but they do exclude them from the protection of the law, like colonies and concentration or refugee camps. I will explore why society through the law not only passively neglects slum-dwellers, but actively denies them self-sovereignty. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe writes that “sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not.” The narrators Zinzi and Rocket, due to their ties to the slums, are limited from investigating and exposing injustice by the extreme personal risk of being implicated or threatened by law enforcement officers. They cannot make themselves matter.

Ashley Chang

The Human Being Versus The Human Organism: Analysis of the Role of Biomedical Ethics on Humanity in *The Skin I Live In*

*It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.*
- Albert Einstein

How far can we push the boundaries of what is considered “wrong”? Recently, man has used science to manipulate everything around him: food, clothes and animals. Why not use scientific advances to improve his own species? Pedro Almodovar’s psychological thriller *The Skin I Live In*, in which the brilliant but disturbed plastic surgeon Dr. Robert Ledgard kidnaps a young man named Vincent and forces him to undergo a sex-change and facial reconstruction surgery, asks this question. Robert’s experimentation violates both aspects of the U.S. “Common Rule” that deals with human subject research: informed consent and oversight by the Institutional Review Board. When Robert severs the tie with the scientific community, he casts aside not only the strict regulations dealing with trans-species experimentation, but also his own humanity. Without an outside party to monitor a person’s progression in scientific exploration, the concept of humanity becomes solely dependent on the individual’s notion of what he considers “right” and “wrong.” In *The Skin I Live In*, Robert’s ignorance of the boundaries in the scientific field creates an unregulated deterioration of morality that is motivated and debased by his personal vengeance and selfish indulgence.

Esteban Fajardo

Brazil Online

Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* was released in 1985, before the Internet was even called the Internet. Yet it predicted a culture obsessed with information, and crafted a valuable warning on where our own “Ministries of Information” may go. *Brazil* is a story of control and rebellion—one that has been replicated in real life. In this presentation we will examine hacker culture and the conflict between Aaron Swartz and JSTOR, as well as the balance between total information control and total information anarchy as they relate to Gilliam’s celebrated film. It will connect texts by Jean Baudrillard and Bruce Sterling about life in the Information Age. How closely does the internet bind us? Does it constrain us, or inspire us? Find out, when we take Brazil online.
Carla Frankenbach

**Sin City:**
Hollywood’s Role as the Puritan Nightmare

*The shadow of Babylon had fallen over Hollywood, a serpent spell in code cuneiform; scandal was waiting.*

-Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*

Los Angeles is most likely the only city in America that offers regular tours of the county morgue. Why is this not surprising? The City of Angels has a fantastical and alluring quality that is mostly due to its sacrilegious reputation. Many see it as a place where dreams come true, yet Los Angeles seems to be a symbol of an inverted American dream. Kenneth Anger seizes this definition of what he names “the movie colony” and revels in a Hollywood of his own making in his controversial book, *Hollywood Babylon*. Though Hollywood is known as the epitome of moral corruption, Anger looks upon it with wonder as a new world. Hundreds of years before, John Winthrop warned citizens of an entirely different colony of their future: “. . . if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken . . . we shall be made a story and byword through the world.” It would seem that Hollywood embodies Winthrop’s darkest nightmares, yet for Anger it is a dream come true. In this presentation I will uncover the connections between Anger and Winthrop by delving deeper into Puritan theory, as well as investigating the role and importance of Babylon in the American myth.

William Orr

**Prose and Patriotism:**
An Analysis of British Nationalism through *Mrs. Dalloway*

*He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays.*

-Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Throughout the early part of the 20th century, Great Britain was consumed by surges in nationalism before both world wars. Literature was used as a rallying point to create a common cultural heritage for the British people. For example, one can look to the works of Rudyard Kipling to see this romantic nationalism in literature at work. In turn, this created a romanticization of war and national unity that preceded both wars. In her work *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf criticizes this national infatuation with creating a patriotic canon of uniquely British literature. She critiques the misappropriation of Shakespeare as a rallying cry of what it means to be British. She casts Shakespeare’s work as a victim of nationalism and conformity, being used by everyone for different reasons. From the romantic ideals of Septimus Smith, to the conformist requirements of Dr. Holmes, Shakespeare’s works are employed by Great Britain’s citizens in *Mrs. Dalloway* to each fulfill their own ideas of nationalism. She raises questions about why the employment of literature in a nationalistic setting is detrimental, but also leaves many questions unanswered due to the somewhat oblique nature of her prose.
Angel Choi

**The Animal Inside Man:**

**Zoomorphism of People in *Two Serious Ladies***

*Let us never forget that the greatest man is never more than an animal disguised as a god.*

—Francis Picabia

In her modernist novel, *Two Serious Ladies*, Jane Bowles demonstrates the bond between animal and human with subtle instances of zoomorphism, the shaping of someone or something in animal form. As humans, we tend to forget or even disregard the fact that we are animals. Why? We think of ourselves as a superior species, associating animals with negative and undesirable traits, such as uncivilized behavior and an inability to make rational decisions. Bowles helps to break this hierarchy that holds man above animals and instead, ties us together with repeated portrayals of shared characteristics, actions, and appearances. For the two protagonists, life is a “horse race.” Miss Goering’s neighbors fight back “like tigers,” and as far as Mrs. Copperfield is concerned, all of “these people might as well be kangaroos.” With such metaphors and analogies, Bowles articulates the bond between man and animal—a bond that cannot be broken despite any physical, mental, or social differences. Thus, she informs readers that humans are not a superior species. There is no hierarchy; we are all animals.

Kayla Foster

**The Beast with Two Backs:**

**Metaphor Too Animal to be Sexy in *The Bloody Chamber* and *Zoo City***

When described with animal metaphor, even the most loving act of sex takes on an entirely new meaning absent of humanity, romance, or respect. The presence of animal analogy emphasizes the natural state of sex and its proximity to mankind’s primordial roots; this transforms sex into something vulgar and abject. Framed in the historical heritage of Shakespeare’s tragedies—some of the earliest examples of excessive bestial metaphors describing sex and sexuality—this paper examines Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City* as modern examples of animal metaphor’s power over the perception of sex. In these texts bestial analogy not only gives sex a repulsively violent and base connotation, but also transforms it into a violation of human nature. Both authors demonstrate that the more animal metaphor describes characters’ sexual acts, the more it denies the existence of their human sexuality. In this way the animal metaphor reveals greater anxieties with the line between human and animal.

Hanna Jolkovsky

**Blinded by Love and Duty:**

**The Heavy Price of Truth in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy***

“This isn’t about soldiers and trenches anymore,” warns Roy Bland, a member of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service called the Circus in Tomas Alfredson’s film *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. During the Cold War—a war fueled by worldly paranoia and distrust—the Circus fervently believes that Britain’s best defense mechanism is to gather as much secret intelligence as possible. However, their desire for intelligence may have caused their demise; there may be a mole “right at the top” who is leaking British and American intelligence to the Russians. George Smiley, a disgraced former agent, is tasked with discovering the mole’s identity. Interestingly, it is when he is isolated from both the Circus, and his failing marriage, that Smiley is able to piece together evidence and discover everything. In correlation with John Thompson’s idea that “truth and objective cause are not impossible to ascertain, but they are often obscured, if not obliterated” by simulations of reality in his essay “Agents and Human Agency in the Postmodern World,” the film raises the question of how the bonds of loyalty to a duty or a person can blind people from seeing the truth in front of them. *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* suggests that one must detach oneself from all ties of loyalty in
order to rationally and objectively search for, and thus discover, the truth. Smiley, once detached, is finally able to see that “everything the Circus thinks is gold is shit.”

Nora Steinhagen

The Devil:
The Appendix of the Soul

Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.
—Mark Twain

Acclaimed by many as “the most terrifying movie of all time,” William Friedkin’s The Exorcist has chilled audiences for four decades. What is it about this Oscar-winning 1973 film that has unnerved even the most courageous moviegoer, and has caused the number of cases of reported “possession” to double in the years following its release? Is the concept of being possessed by the Devil so universally terrifying because it reminds us that beneath the ideal human beings that we want to be, we may possess demons that threaten to overpower us? If this idea is indeed so terrifying, then why are there people so willing to embrace it that they pretend, or allow their subconscious to believe, that they are indeed possessed by the devil? Friedkin is a self-proclaimed admirer of Freud, and when analyzed under Freud’s psychoanalytic lens, this film offers startling insights into the “demonic” forces in all of us.

Jason Tse

Beauty:
The New Modern Cyborg Aesthetics and Society

This paper examines J.G. Ballard’s Crash as an exploration into what is described by Enda Duffy in The Speed Handbook as “cyborg aesthetics”: the examining of beauty, pleasure, and sexuality in a modern age where humanity is intimately intertwined with the machine. The new pleasures afforded by modern technology can act as a liberating force from today’s constraints, but raise issues of perception, sexuality, insanity, and new bondage as shown in the automobile crash fetishes of the characters of Crash. It ultimately questions the true value of the liberation that modernity and technology offers humanity and asks whether the same liberation can lead to a breakdown of the mind.
Abigail Becker

**Fast Forward:**

**Recording Problems in the Works of Robert Johnson**

In recent years, the works of blues artist Robert Johnson have come under fire because of a suspicion that his music was sped up at the time of recording. The debate is yet to be settled and various critics have offered their opinions on the subject, some claiming that the tempos were never increased and others arguing that the songs should be slowed down to their “true” speed. This essay examines the reasons behind this debate and explores the implications of the Robert Johnson controversy, and how, as the cultural theorist Paul Virilio considered, the “science of speed” has come to shape this discussion. Many blues aficionados have become invested in the discussion surrounding Johnson, and their passion on the subject sheds light on our culture’s emphasis on speed and technology. Some listeners react positively to the fast versions of Johnson's blues, while others relish the slowness of the “original” versions; this essay analyzes these alternate reactions next to various social forces, including the rhetoric of technological “progress,” and gives an account of how the case of Johnson’s sped-up tracks reveals fundamental changes in twentieth-century aesthetics as they come into contact with recording technology.

Nathan Chau

**Language as Border in Cathy Park Hong’s Dance Dance Revolution**

Is language our best tool for forming ties that bind us with the community? Or is language the most imposing cultural barrier that separates people in the 21st century? In cases where the other is prejudged based on their first language and/or the listener’s inability to comprehend it, a rift is created that can sever any possible ties between the two. In *Dance Dance Revolution*, poet Cathy Park Hong invents an entirely new language by combining several different existing dialects, patois, and linguistic registers. This act of poetic license creates a gap between the author and the reader, as the reader initially finds it almost impossible to understand what the author is trying to say. However, through close reading of repetitions, sounds, and patterns, and a willingness to understand and accept the differences between linguistic manifestations of culture (whether the culture is real or imagined), it is possible for the reader to cross this linguistic border and be bound with the author. In Hong’s book, this is signified through the gradual shift toward a familiar language. Thus, when putting in the effort to mend and create a bond between differences in culture, language, people, and ideas, the effect is a connection of mutual understanding and trust.

Brandon Cheung

**Gilman Unhinged:**

**Real Life Horror Translated into Fiction**

> The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors. But so are horses.
> -Charlotte Perkins Gilman

During the Victorian Era, who would be worse off: a patient with a mental illness or a woman? In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator faces the immense struggle of being both. As an ardent feminist and victim of severe postpartum psychosis, Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” with the dual intention of exposing the poor state of mental healthcare and the even poorer treatment women received throughout her lifetime. However, in order to more thoroughly understand Gilman’s complex motivations behind writing “The Yellow Wallpaper,” selectively and discriminatingly examining Gilman’s early personal life is imperative. From growing up with several progressive figures in her household to being rendered completely dependent as a new mother and depression patient, Gilman’s first adult experiences undoubtedly shaped the intricate nature of her most famous short story.
will illustrate how Charlotte Gilman herself is projected onto the story's narrator, and how Gilman's experiences shaped the complicated relationship between the narrator and her husband.

Lindsey Khim

The Red Badge of Impotence

At the conclusion of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming feels a “quiet manhood” growing inside of him. He convinces himself that the cowardly boy who fled the battlefield ceases to haunt him and only a man, molded by the pressure of war, remains. But Henry Fleming does not become a man. Crane ends the novel ironically to suggest that war does not make every boy a man. Fleming falls victim to the nineteenth-century American obsession with “the machine,” and he believes that his phallic weapons—and war more broadly—can birth men without women. In other words, war promises to reproduce without female influence. In other words, war promises to reproduce without female influence. Crane turns to the novel to critique this misogynistic view, perhaps because the form of the novel allows him to represent Henry’s interiority and therefore depict how ideology works on the level of the individual. Henry is caught in the masculine mentality of war, and as Judith Butler argues in *Frames of War*, “some power manipulates the terms of appearance and one cannot break out of the frame.” In other words, ideology erases its own process, and Crane's project is to expose it. From this perspective, then, Crane intends to impress upon us the boy, not the man, who emerges from the nightmare of war. Henry exists in a state of self-delusion and truly believes that war has produced and validated his masculinity. Crane suggests, however, that instead of embodying valor, conquest, and phallic authority, the red badge of courage actually comes to symbolize Henry’s cowardice, failure, and total emasculation.

Camille Saucier

Angels or Devils: The Human-Animal Relationship

This essay investigates the paradoxical relationship between humans and animals. By examining the history of the animal-human relationship and the resulting literature today, it is possible to contextualize the affective and relational bonds between humans and animals and the way these bonds have changed in conversation in modernity. In western culture, the animal-human relationship has been reevaluated due to historical shifts in intellectual, socio-political, and emotional factors from a casual relationship to one where animals have become beloved figures in popular culture, yet simultaneously subjected to exploitation. The contemporary novel *Zoo City* by Lauren Beukes serves as a criticism of this dichotomy in the animal–human relationship as well as an allegory of the co-dependence between animal and humans.
**Gender’s Game**
Moderated by Diana Arterian, Department of English

**Daffany Chan**

**Sex and the Self:**
The Female Role in a Misogynistic World

*Women never bought Freud’s idea of penis envy. Who would want a shotgun when you have an automatic?*
-Natalie Angier

Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal complex has long influenced theories of the psychosexual development of individuals. But Freud’s ideas perpetuate, and serve as a justification for, the subjugation of women. This patriarchal system is captured in David Foster Wallace’s short story “Adult World,” as the narrator details the mindset of a young, confused woman who becomes paranoid and self-conscious about her sexual role in marriage. Worrying only about pleasing her husband leads her to the Adult World of the story’s title for instruction and toys to practice on. However, this leaves her feeling sinful and inferior, becoming stuck in a vicious catch-22. Through her struggle, “Adult World” highlights the complex legacy of Freud’s thought and the impossible expectations imposed on women. This paper thus explores, above all, how the female perception of self is our long-standing misogynist culture’s main victim, and how “Adult World” offers its protagonist a way out.

**Halle Edwards-McQuilton**

**The Man Who Never Was:**
Denying Gender in *The Red Badge of Courage*

When we first read *The Red Badge of Courage*, we might assume that Henry Fleming renounces femininity and embodies masculinity through warfare. After all, he proudly declares that he is a “sturdy and strong” man. I suggest, however, that he cannot embody either gender as these labels are, as Judith Butler suggests, socially constructed. Just as Gayle Salamon claims that “power . . . does not fundamentally just oppress subjects, but fundamentally makes them,” the gendered power structure in war shapes Henry. As he tries to abandon femininity and embody an ideal masculinity, he unknowingly embraces this binary and reinforces the illusion of gender stability. Henry is stuck in the closet. Because queerness subverts static identities, Henry subverts static masculinity. He attempts to destroy his queerness through male bravado. Ironically, his overtly masculine performance is predicated on homosocial behavior and an erotic fixation on his male comrades. What this illuminates, then, is the paradox of gender and sexuality: heteronormativity relies on queerness to define and reproduce itself.

**Susi Lopera**

**Women:**
Muses and Demons—Not Humans

Every artist struggles to develop his or her creative consciousness, and sexuality often plays a central role in this struggle. In Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* Stephen’s experience with the feminine takes on the dual function of inhibition and creative inspiration on his path to becoming an artist. Women bind Stephen both to and away from his artistic pursuits. Women inspire him, and yet Stephen also takes refuge in the church after his experience with prostitutes, temporarily abandoning his artistic pursuits. Functioning as moral and aesthetic guides and as sources of life experience, women and sexuality provide the exposure necessary for Stephen, as an artist, to explore and understand both himself and the greater world. However, Stephen’s experience with the feminine also blinds him from viewing women as human beings, as he struggles to define them as either guiding ethereal visions of purity or debased prostitutes. Until Stephen understands women as neither of these two extremes, but as human beings, his creativity and art do not fully develop, and therefore Stephen’s development as an artist directly correlates to the evolution of his view of women and sexuality throughout the novel.
Justine Nugent

“She’s A Crazy B*tch!”:
Trapped in the Sexist Diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder with Susanna Kaysen

What does it really mean to be a “crazy b*tch?” Almost any woman can fall victim to the slur, but to truly be considered “crazy” requires a diagnosis. In *Girl, Interrupted*, Susanna Kaysen reflects on her adolescent experience as a patient held in a mental institution for her struggle with Borderline Personality Disorder. This memoir delves deeply into Kaysen’s psyche, past and present, and when placed in dialogue with feminist criticism of the American psychiatric establishment, the novel reveals a complex narrative of the detrimental effects of sexist cultural perceptions both on women’s diagnoses and on their coming-of-age experiences.

Sasha Spala

The Good Girl:
Gender Roles and Evil in John Carpenter’s *Halloween*

*The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends . . . who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again . . .*

–Carol Clover, “Men, Women, and Chainsaws”

When Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) saves the day (or night) at the end of John Carpenter’s *Halloween*, the audience is supposed to cheer in support. But do we cheer because of her badass girl power, or something more subtly sexist? By analyzing this problem through literature and cinema scholar Carol Clover’s figure of the “victim-hero” and the “final girl”, it becomes clear where sexism plays a role in such kinds of horror “slasher” films. “Victim-heroes” like Laure Strode are subjected to violence and torment for the audience’s pleasure, and ultimately overpower their antagonist, thus making such circumstances “acceptable” to viewers. Clover’s academic analysis of gender roles in horror films in her influential study “Men, Women, and Chainsaws,” explains how concepts like Laurie’s fearlessness and victory over evil may stem from a much less feministic idea. What does Laurie’s embodiment of a classically sexist image show about how our culture views women in regards to the question of evil? Is Laurie an image of female strength, or just another product of a misogynistic culture?
Inside/Out
Moderated by Lisa Locascio, Department of English

Asher Levy

**The Unspeakable and the Unrepresentable:**
**W.G. Sebald’s* The Emigrants* and the Morality of Holocaust Literature**

The representation of the Holocaust in literature poses several moral problems, most significant of which is encapsulated in Holocaust scholar Berel Lang’s critical question of whether “writing centered in the Nazi genocide against the Jews [is] literally and morally possible”; that is, whether the gap between the unimaginable brutality of the actual genocide of European Jewry and the artifice of a figurative representation of said atrocity poses a moral problem. W.G. Sebald grapples with this problem of representation in *The Emigrants* by engaging the Nazi genocide obliquely through four fragmented, haunting narratives that powerfully, albeit circuitously, reflect the traumatic, unrepresentable experience of genocide. This study explores how Sebald’s adoption of the *bilderverbot*, or the ‘ban on representation’ of the Holocaust, was deeply shaped by his identity as a non-Jewish German born during the years of the Holocaust, as well as how the ideas of such seminal figures as Berel Lang and Primo Levi influenced Sebald’s notions of the “morality” and “possibility” of Holocaust literature.

Hailey Sayegh

**Radical Passivity and Queer Identity in *Stone Butch Blues***

We might believe all rejected queer people share a bond because, as Judith Butler contends, “culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism.” In Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess Goldberg thinks she has found acceptance when she experiences her first gay bar scene. She believes that among the femmes, butches, and transpeople she can simply be, without conforming to a category. She soon realizes, however, that even among like-minded individuals, some perpetuate the logic of oppression that Feinberg sets out to critique, perhaps as a way to safeguard the community’s exclusivity and legitimacy. I suggest that Feinberg, revealing this tension in the novel, exposes the hypocrisy of the queer community’s resistance to marginalization. She offers an alternative mode of resistance in the form of radical passivity, or refusing to publicly articulate an individual identity, thereby depriving others of the information they exploit to discern a person’s proclivities. But Feinberg also acknowledges the value of those very categories of queer. Depending on where one is on the continuum of self-acceptance, the categories can provide comfort or constraint.

Kiersten Stanley

**Dominicanness:**
**Fitting a Cultural Image in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

Junot Díaz’s novel depicts Dominicanness as rooted in what Dick Hebdige refers to as “homology,” a culture’s shared “symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group, its subjective experience.” The novel suggests cultural definitions stem from shared ideas manifested through homogenous physicality. However, Dominican culture is ambiguous in that it is defined as much through demonstrating ideology as it is through genetics. Oscar may not act or look “Dominican,” but he is still Dominican. The tangibility of Dominican ethnicity overrides cultural expectations in defining who belongs to a group and, like objects of hyperreality, discussed in Umberto Eco’s essay “Travels in Hyperreality,” can make “the real thing” difficult to pinpoint. The Dominican tendency in the novel to fit cultural stereotypes dictates cultural practices, instead of cultural practices defining stereotypes. Dominicanness has become hyper-real because the idea of cultural authenticity has replaced cultural authenticity, making fitting a true cultural image impossible.
Brandon Tang  

The Insanity, Humanity, and Solidarity of Our Solitude

In *100 Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez crafts a portrait of humanity; he blends time, memory, and the experiences of generations of the Buendia family into a simultaneous narrative, and demonstrates how the tie that binds is the inevitability of solitude. Through the lens of exploring madness and the self, this essay discusses how humans, as uncertain products of a subjective past and fragmented memory, endure the solitude of present life. This solitude is our freedom, an irrational and insane gift, but also an uncomfortable burden of mortality. Insanity is a recognition of this solitude, the understanding that to live and to be human, one must brave the uncomfortable journey of life alone. The meaning of life is not to realize a reward, not to connect pictures of constellations in the sky, but to place the light of your one and only dead star among its peers and experience the fear, mistakes, and solitary beauty of one mortal life.

Susan Xing  

Frank O'Hara’s Anti-Democratic “Liberal Irony”

Early postmodernist poet, Frank O’Hara, mocked the stiffness of poetry, treating poems as spontaneous inventions rather than premeditated forms. Yet, in his ironic attempts to break out of the confining binds of art, life, and poetry, he in turn revealed the isolating effects of liberal irony. In his poems “Having a Coke with You” and “Eager Note,” O’Hara contradicts the “liberal ironist” that philosopher Richard Rorty defines, an individual open-minded and self-aware enough to have “radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary he currently uses.” In this paper, I will argue that O’Hara characterizes liberal irony instead as despairing, snobby, and hypocritical. By criticizing the loftiness of European high culture in “Having a Coke with You,” the supposed liberal ironist ironically develops a “final vocabulary” of his own. Even if a hierarchy of values does cease to exist with this denial of a metavocabulary, the obliteration of ideals and principles, as in O’Hara’s poem about an “Eager Note,” ultimately leads to emotional detachment and eventual chaos. Instead of tying the binds of human solidarity as Rorty envisions, irony in O’Hara’s poetry ultimately isolates the liberal ironist from the world around him.
Outside Influences
Moderated by Chris Belcher, Department of English

Tina Crnko

Paint Me Like One of Your French Girls:
Creation and Deconstruction of the Ideal Feminine Beauty in The Skin I Live In

When does art become pornographic? Imagine: a woman completely in the nude reposing on her side. She looks over her shoulder, as the curve of her body is traced and highlighted. This is the image of the Odalisque, an icon in classical painting that has graced canvases across cultures. Yet at what point is the Odalisque lifted from her static artistic frame and sexualized by the observer? In Pedro Almodovar’s film The Skin I Live In, noted plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard becomes obsessed with transforming Vera Cruz into his ideal aesthetic beauty, until Vera clearly resembles the canonical paintings of the Odalisque that adorn the walls of Ledgard’s home, her prison. Throughout the film, Ledgard attempts to mitigate his need as an artist to capture the perfect Odalisque beauty that he so venerates with the sexual desire cultivated through his domination of the subject of his art piece, Vera, thereby suggesting that the representation of a woman through the image of the Odalisque voids her of personhood and grants her artist complete control over her sexuality and individual purpose.

Nick Halsey

Music and Perceptual Manipulation in Into the Wild

In his film Into the Wild, Sean Penn leverages music to bind viewers to his interpretation of Chris McCandless’ ultimate loneliness. While there is evidence that Chris becomes lonely by the time of his death, Penn goes too far when Chris imagines running into his parents’ embrace as he dies. Because the film is based on a true story—Penn even displays facts about the aftermath of Chris’ journey immediately after portraying his death—viewers expect a level of objectivity in the film. I’m not criticizing the re-sequencing of events. Instead, I’m exploring the extent of Penn’s shaping of Chris’ broader purpose and his presentation of Chris’ relationship with his parents. In the end, Penn is successful in constructing a satisfying, but overly subjective, ending to an unsatisfying story. Detailed harmonic analysis reveals that Penn’s use of incidental music perceptually manipulates the viewer, thus allowing his extensive shaping of Chris’ final thoughts to go largely unnoticed.

Ryan Lee

Embracing the Water Cooler:
The Effect of Lost’s Fandom on Its Narrative

The show no longer belongs to the people who are writing it and performing it and directing it. It belongs to the fans just as much.
-Damon Lindelof, Lost creator and showrunner

The TV series Lost was groundbreaking in many ways creatively, helping to popularize the nonlinear, heavily serialized storytelling style that is almost ubiquitous today. Its most lasting impact, however, came in how it interacted with its fans. Partially due to internet fandom’s entrance into the mainstream, and partially due to inherent nature of how audiences consume television, Lost became defined by its fans. The passionate, sometimes obsessive fans felt that theorizing and discussing the show was as much a part of the Lost experience as watching it. In response, the writers began to weave into the narrative meta-commentary on the series itself and its fans. While the writers were the ones actually crafting the narrative, the fans felt a strong sense of ownership, because they had invested countless hours of their lives watching, discussing, and thinking about the show. Lost wasn’t meant to be enjoyed passively by viewers—the show was expected to engage in a conversation with their viewers, be beholden to audience reaction, and, in a sense, acknowledge its own fictitiousness. The communication between the show
and its fans has become a model for shows that followed, and its legacy could change the way audiences view their entertainment.

Monika Petkova

**Woolf and the Camera:**

*The Influence of Cinematography in Writing Mrs. Dalloway*

This essay discusses the intriguing relationship between the modernist novel and early cinema through the lens of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. In what fundamental ways is the form of Woolf’s narrative inextricably linked to filmic form? Does it even seem plausible that *Mrs. Dalloway*—and by extenuation other modernist texts—could have been created if not for the influence of cinematography? I approach these questions through a detailed exploration into the underpinnings of both mediums, more specifically through the ways that Woolf’s narrative voice operates cinematically. *Mrs. Dalloway*’s narration can be defined in large part by a concept called “intersubjectivity,” in which we can only interpret characters through the lens of other characters, and thus in effect become its audience members just as much as we are its readers. Furthermore, in the erratic and multi-varied way in which time flows throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is a distinct resemblance to the cinematic privileging of psychological over linear time. In short, with the advent of early cinema, the modernist novel took its own cinematographic twist—and it is a twist that just may have altered literature’s entire evolution.

Renee Wang

**Russian Nesting Dolls**

In Salman Rushdie’s novel, *Midnight’s Children*, the main character, Saleem, birth at the exact hour of India’s independence forever ties his life to that of his country and to that of the other children born in that independence hour. In my paper, I examine how this confluence of geography and timing creates an unintended community for Saleem, and how that community prevents him from being his own individual. I will be using critical texts like Rushdie’s own writings from his other works, like “Imaginary Homelands.” I conclude that geography is the greatest shaper of community, and that the community it creates actually makes it harder to be an individual, though it is not impossible.

Lara N. Windisch

**A Dream in Time Gone By:**

*The Collapse of Identity and the Death of an Ideal in Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby*

*The distinction between the past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.*  
-Albert Einstein

Old sports and beautiful fools alike find Gatsby mysteriously intriguing. However, as the enigma of a man becomes unraveled by his past, his normalcy is uncovered. The misrepresentation of the past, the illusionary perception of the present, and the unrealistic hopes for the future lead to the creation of Gatsby’s artificial identity. By using the psychology of social categorization, as well as studies on attention and self-control, I will illustrate Gatsby’s conception of self in relation to Daisy as the cause of his loss of identity. When illusion is forcibly made into reality, Gatsby displays an inability to relinquish his reconstruction of the past. His disappointment and resulting uncertainty stems from his unrealistic expectations, and this desire to grasp the idea of the past destroys him. These ties that bind Gatsby to his past, to his own idea of self, and to his material belongings disintegrate under the weight of Daisy’s glance. By incorporating elements of the inconsistency of memory as well as the measurement of self-worth in relation to speculation, I will discuss the effect of perception on identity and relate the death of a dream to Gatsby’s inability to accept the shortcomings of reality.
How Real Is Reality?:
The Objective and Subjective Worlds of Joan Didion's Hollywood

In her novel *Play it as it Lays*, Joan Didion blurs the divide between objective and subjective reality, questioning the significance of “truth” and “actuality.” This essay explores what the impact Hollywood’s superficial “hyperreality,” as defined by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, has on the meaning of objectivity for Maria, a disillusioned actress. The essay looks at a variety of scholarly opinions on objectivity, subjectivity, and their overlap and applies them to the multilayered setting of Didion’s novel. Ultimately, Didion asserts that authority belongs to the sphere of internal subjectivity, especially in a world where the external primarily consists of lies, selfish arrangements, and a distinct duality between the façade and the behind-the-scenes. Maria compensates for the superficiality of Hollywood by distracting herself with fantasies and driving, constructing her own world apart from her surroundings. This withdrawal into her mind allows Maria to control how she perceives the present and the future, enabling her to continue “playing” despite the “nothingness” that saturates her life. Maria shows that one’s reality exists only in subjective consciousness; the external objective world is perceived individually and thus uniquely construed. And when the external world is so artificial, the only thing to do is make of it what you can and “play it as it lays.”

The Beat of Salvation

In the novel *On The Road*, Jack Kerouac’s character Sal embodies the widespread Beat culture of the 1950s, a hedonistic bohemianism that encouraged the adoption of a subversive countercultural lifestyle to find a purpose. Sal illustrates this quest for purpose by journeying back and forth across the country, perpetually abandoning various identities after his inevitable disillusionment with each new role sets in. Yet ironically, only through his mercurial approach to self-realization does Sal learn enough about himself to stop searching. He finds himself—but only through an impulsive, destructive process of elimination. In this respect, Sal’s personal Beat culture eliminates itself by nature. Each new place and each new person he considers as a model provides Sal with what he is not, therefore allowing him to discover exactly who he is by the end of the novel.

Lust, Fear, and Tract Houses:
The Act of Omission in *Invisible Cities*

Invisible threads may create the strongest ties, but invisible cities are far from perfect. In Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo describes to Kublai Khan cities created from pipes, garbage, and postcards, cities at the height of their splendor and cities on the brink of crumbling. What matters, however, is what lurks beneath these fantastical cities built on signs, trades, and the dead. The things that go unspoken warn of the dangers of our present condition—our selfishness, our unsustainable lifestyles, our lack of courage—and consequently illustrate the necessity of a selective memory when it comes to the pursuit of happiness. It is the glances and almost-encounters shared by a city that wallows in unfulfilled desire, the certain doom of the city whose last unborn is ready to fall, the concealment of lovers and conspirators in the city of movement and ever-changing routes. Calvino’s cities represent our innate need to escape, be it from social conditions or internal conflicts, while showing us just how far we may lose ourselves to fantasy in order to find what we seek. This paper explores how our desires influence what we choose to hide or omit, and questions what motivates us to conceal these things in the first place.
Kristen Woodruff

**Life Is But a Dream:**
*The Conspiracy of Imagination and Reality in “The Barnum Museum”*

Baudrillard wrote that human experience is that of a simulation of reality, that the world is dictated by simulacra—“the truth which conceals that there is none”. According to him, Disneyland is a perfect model of such simulation: “The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real.” In Steven Millhauser’s short story, “The Barnum Museum,” he explores this idea of defining reality by contrasting it with illusion. The story is organized by a pattern in which vignettes of the museum’s wondrous, almost sorcerous displays are punctuated by elaborations on the conspiracy theories enveloping its essence. The exhibits in the museum are condemned by its critics because they defy notions of what is possible, but it draws in crowds of people for the same reason, suggesting a very human tendency to be simultaneously repulsed and captivated by the inexplicable. Does our ability to explain and predict something make it “real” to us? What kind of power comes with the ability to create something inexplicable? And how deeply do language and culture play into this power of explanation? Are these meccas of imagination no less real than the outside world?

Sara Yang

**Right to Remain Silent:**
*Limitations of Language in Stone Butch Blues*

In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess Goldberg remains silent. Acting tough and impassive distinguishes her as a butch, but she desperately believes in the necessity of self-expression and self-identification. Yet once she finds and shares her words, they seem self-conscious and performative. The limitations of language impede her search for self-actualization; in this case, speaking up actually manifests as the antithesis thereof. As Judith Butler suggests, words fail to encompass the amorphous nature of gender and sexuality. By refusing to articulate, an individual may embody a transcendental, queer mode of experience.
Olivia Hudnut

Thirsting After Blood: Cormac McCarthy’s Blood Meridian and Our Fascination with Evil

The trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears . . . dangerous, filthy, brutal, the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh.

Foremost among them, outsized and childlike with his naked face, rode the judge.

-Cormac McCarthy, Blood Meridian

What makes us keep reading after these morbid lines? What fascinates us about the character the Judge, the representation of all things evil? We become captivated with Judge Holden, just as we are naturally drawn to Satan. Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic depiction of a world ravaged by savage warfare is dominated by Judge Holden and his gang of Indian-killers. In a world controlled by evil, the only glimmer of religion we receive is through miracles that are blessed upon the unworthy, massacred bodies in forgotten churches, and King James Bible-esque prose. Coupling the angelic with the satanic creates a dynamic that brings to question our perception of good and evil. In Freud's theory of the unheimlich, he draws on our fear and obsession with what he calls the “uncanny,” or the once familiar. McCarthy destroys what we found familiar in religion by translating it into a heathen world ruled by the devil. In this presentation, I will discuss what it is about the “uncanny” that simultaneously draws us to and repels us from the devil.

Corinne Osnos

Benzodiazepines, Antidepressants, Antipsychotics, and Now, Antigrievants?

This essay explores grief, using Joan Didion's personal experience after the unexpected death of her husband as chronicled in her memoir, The Year of Magical Thinking, to illuminate the individualistic, complex nature of grief: the inexplicable, contradictory, and peculiar elements that make it a process and not an illness. Stemming from the recent proposal under consideration to include “abnormal” grief as a medical condition included in the Diagnostic Statistics Manual VI, the bible of psychiatric disorders in North America, this essay argues instead that grief is acceptable in every manifestation. The problem with grief is not one of medical, but rather, societal origin. It exemplifies American over-dependence on medicine as the “quick-fix” to each and every problem. To characterize grief as normal is further illogical for this assumes that normal is possible when in fact, no amount of recovery, treatment or therapy will undo the grief. Didion herself must come to this realization, to accept that grief leaves an indelible mark, an emptiness that can never be filled. In the words of Didion, “it was in fact the ordinary nature of everything preceding the event that prevented me from truly believing it had happened, absorbing it, incorporating it, getting past it.” There is nothing “magical” about grief.

Thomas J. Placido

The Oedipa Complex: Absurdity and Nostalgia in The Crying of Lot 49

In Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Oedipa Maas' life is, simply put, absurd. Confronted with an antiquated mail-delivery service conspiracy, sexual ambiguity in Jacobean revenge drama, and a husband addicted to LSD, Oedipa desperately struggles to unravel the web of intrigue surrounding the will of her late first husband. This encounter with the absurd, however, should not beget fear or despair; as Albert Camus argues in The Myth of Sisyphus, the absurd, rather than debilitating all human experience, serves as an enabling force, allowing Oedipa to confront
her relationship with real experience, if only indeterminately. Further, this paper argues that the only way in which Oedipa can gain fulfillment is to embrace the inevitable disconnect between the real and her imagined intrigue. Her desire for order and clarity in the face of a broader corporate conspiracy allows genuine reflection upon the meaning of her life and the remoter truths that surround it. And as the novel closes with the reader grasping for additional pages where none will be found, one can imagine that Oedipa, like Camus' Sisyphus, is happy.

Hallie Roth

Meshing Their Minds: 
Fixing the Mental Imbalance in Equus

Society often traps us, be it in organized religion or professionalism, making us adhere to accepted values. However, if we reject all of the values society instills in us, we may succumb to utter chaos, trapped in our own minds. This essay examines Equus by Peter Shaffer and the concept of confinement to an extreme mental state. Doctor Dysart, an overworked psychiatrist, must treat Alan Strang, a disturbed boy who has created his own ecstatic horse-god. Through his interactions with Alan, Dysart realizes that he is missing the elements of passion that his patient possesses. On the other hand, Alan has rejected all societal expectations and now relies on Dysart to capture missing elements of lucidity. He was never able to find a proper mental balance between societal rationalism and pure creation. Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy supports this meshing of two mental states, which he labels the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Both men operate with completely different mindsets—one of rationality and one of ecstasy—but their relationship inspires the need for a balance between the two mentalities.

Valerie Yu

Of Traitors and Heroes: 
Double Identities in Jorge Luis Borges’ Ficciones

In Jorge Luis Borges’s Ficciones, two short stories explore the necessity of double identities in societal ties. “Three Versions of Judas” speculates that the world’s most infamous traitor, Judas, is in actuality a secret Jesus-like figure, while “Theme of the Traitor and Hero” tells the tale of fictitious Irish martyr Fergus Kilpatrick, who secretly commits treason. The coexistence of two such contradicting identities within one individual is essential to the ties that bind and perpetuate whole communities in both stories. Despite a lapse of thousands of years and stark differences in culture, context, and narrative, both Judas and Kilpatrick shoulder this same burden of double identity for a greater cause than themselves: for Judas, it is the crux of Christianity; for Kilpatrick, it is the weight of Irish independence. The sense of myth created by the separation of public image and secret identity becomes the foundation on which generations of followers thrive. Across the stories, double identity serves as an essential structure that plays on human nature’s need for a delicate balance between the binaries of traitor and hero, good and evil. In order for communities to stay intact and prosper, the hero must always have a villain to play opposite—and sometimes, as in the case of Judas and Kilpatrick, they turn out to be one and the same, good and evil merged for greater glory.
Veronica L. An

**Naming and Non-Identity in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother***

In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman sheds her old name to reclaim her African slave roots. In terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of language, the individualistic action of naming herself reflects "more of a means of self-expression than of communication with other people". While Saidiya succeeds in reinventing her personal identity, her name change is not enough to form bonds of kinship. Instead of reflecting the limitation of naming, this demonstrates a flawed perception of kinship and the futility of reliving the past. As Walter Benjamin suggests, the past is irreclaimable: "[it] can only be seized as an image that flashes up . . . and is never seen again." In other words, Saidiya cannot find a mother in the past. Despite the importance and power of names, the historical trauma of the Atlantic slave trade leaves everyone mute. Saidiya's journey suggests she can only shape her own identity by renaming herself, not revive her ancestors to create a post-slave community.

Jason Lawler

**Happy-Hour Jesus: Drinking Buddies and Spiritual Malaise in Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man***

Leonard English, the protagonist of Denis Johnson's spiritually starved *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, occasionally finds himself wandering into bars. However, far from the social isolation that literary bar-goers usually seek, English goes to the bar to find camaraderie—a tonic for his confused and empty life. Friends who share drinks at the bar form bonds which are essentially spiritual, according to Thomas B. Gilmore who, in his study *Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature*, viewed drinkers as possessing “an enviable, almost Christlike power of self-resurrection, removed from the limitations of sober reality and thus able to experience a daily renewal of wonder at the strangeness of life, as if waking to it for the first time.” This escapist thread characterizes most of the drinkers in Johnson's novel. Yet, for English, he feels bound to no one, and the relationships he creates at the bar only further aggravate his loneliness and spiritual malaise. Through English's forays into the bar, this paper will explore Johnson's postmodern perspective on the bar as a place of indeterminate spirituality, and the resulting non-reciprocal nature of relationships created there.

Yuqi Jasmine Li

**World of Automatons: Identity and Madness in *The Bell Jar***

In a largely automated society, in which everyday interaction rests on a pre-calculated matrix of “normality,” just how plausible is it to construct a comprehensive identity? In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath feeds the talented but yet unformed Esther Greenwood into this merciless machine and then invites the audience to watch as the girl struggles to find herself. Inspecting Esther's downward spiral into insanity through R.D. Laing's concepts of “ontological insecurity” and the “false-self system,” I interpret that the conflict between self and society as presented by Plath can never be resolved. To be perceived by others, Esther quickly realizes, she must fit herself into molds already pre-determined by the expectations of society; she is given no chance to shape herself. After all, humans are blind to what they do not foresee and understand. In the end, the price that Esther—and, by extension, each and every one of us—must pay for acceptance into a world of misunderstandings and mechanical interaction is a high one: namely, any hope of ever establishing who we truly are.
Stephanie Lu

**Tied Up in *Lost* Numbers**

*If we can't live together, we're going to die alone.*

-Jack Shepherd, *Lost*

Are there forces beyond our comprehension that bind us together? Are coincidences really coincidences, or are they the manifestations of a greater force operating behind the scenes? Is it these ties that bind us closer together? In the first season of the television series *Lost*, the “magical numbers” 4, 8, 15, 16, 23, and 42—numbers that appear on unlucky, winning lottery tickets, on the doors of hidden hatches, and in the incoherent doodles of a mysterious French survivor—are what ultimately tie the victims of the crash together. Seemingly benign, these numbers represent something greater, beyond the realm of human control, which connects characters from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations. Is this supernatural binding force fate? Destiny? Sheer coincidence? Though *Lost* features a fantastic world, J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, and Carlton Cuse show that what ties we form may not be entirely based on our own decisions, but may emerge from something greater than ourselves—something that may be planned without our knowledge.

Kyron Richard

**“I Ain't So Queer”: Grotesques, Community Values, and Repression in *Winesburg, Ohio***

This essay will examine the relationship between individuals and community in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Specifically it will undermine the common conclusion of literary critics that Anderson's main purpose in writing the novel was to note the unique, yet frightening, aspects of individuals. Instead this paper argues that the “grotesques” termed in the novel's prologue refer to the community that projects hypocritical values upon its members. Anderson uses third person omniscient narration to delve into the psyche of various characters, while dually creating rapport with the reader through occasional narrative shifts. The reader is able to make conclusions about the state of the community and the mental and emotional state of these individuals through these various perspectives. Although readers come across striking—and at times alarming—individuals, ultimately these literary devices build a dynamism that represents the need for strong individuals, even in the face of a repressive and cruel community.
Moderated by Mike Bennet, Department of English

Fiona Alfait

Race and Irony in *Erasure*:
When the Ties That Bind Turn into the Ties of Bondage

*I don't believe in race. I believe there are people who will shoot me or hang me or cheat me and try to stop me because they do believe in race, because of my brown skin, curly hair, wide nose and slave ancestors.*
- Monk, *Erasure*

Are authors of color bound to being the voice of their minority, or can their stories be read free from racial ties? In Percival Everett’s *Erasure*, the protagonist Monk spends much of his career fighting those who attempt to pigeonhole him due to his race. His serious postmodern works aren’t commercially lucrative and it isn’t until he writes a satirical novel in a very uneducated, stereotypically “black” style that he, or rather his stereotypically black alter-ego, finds critical acclaim. Literary society in *Erasure* seems unable—or unwilling—to separate Monk the serious author from Monk the man of black descent, which, in the end, renders Monk unable to separate his racially-unhinged self from his stereotypically black alter-ego. This paper will explore how race in *Erasure* serves not as an ameliorating source for union and identification, but as a prison of bondage to an unwanted racial identity from which not even irony can offer freedom.

Abigail Calder

Lambëo Melehtë:
The Artistic Power of Invented Languages in *The Lord of the Rings*

This essay examines the invented languages appearing in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, and the reasons for their presence in the trilogy. Unlike the English of which most of the story is composed, languages such as Elvish and the Black Speech possess both healing and destructive power that can only be described as magical. These languages are more than simply made-up words and grammatical concepts; they derive their power from the fact that they are, in and of themselves, a form of art, and like all art they have the ability to sway the mind and ensnare the senses. Created before *The Lord of the Rings* was ever conceived and constantly informing the events of the trilogy, invented languages are the backbone of Tolkien’s fictitious world.

Eleanor Johnson

The Ego Kills the Identity:
A Walk with *Into The Wild*

Alexander Supertramp: a man with no past and no future. Chris Mc Candless, the sad hero in Jon Krakauer’s *Into The Wild*, leaves a complicated past and a bright future to embark on an epic adventure as Alexander Supertramp. By fully embodying a new identity, thus losing all obligations and connections, Chris lives his desired, but illogical, life. In Jack London’s *Call of the Wild*, London creates a similar character: “With a handful of salt and a rifle he could plunge into the wilderness and fare wherever he pleased and as long as he pleased.” Chris walks into the wild with little more than a rifle and a bag of rice, with no promise to return. Sadly, it was Chris’s inability to separate truth from fiction and to separate himself from his desired persona that blinded him from the reality of surviving in Alaska. Supertramp killed Chris.
Bob Overing

The Binary I Live In: Queer Theory, Judith Butler, and Pedro Almodóvar’s The Skin I Live In

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way.
- Judith Butler, Gender Trouble

That gender and sex are disconnected is a powerful claim—it means that those with power and authority can largely define how gender is constructed, but also that individuals have some measure of control in defining their own gendered identity. This tension is the basis for Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar’s The Skin I Live In, which depicts a twisted act of revenge by a doctor who forces his daughter’s rapist to undergo a complete sex change over the course of several years. My paper analyzes how the film answers important questions of gender identity: is gender connected to the physical body? Can the prescribed societal roles or meanings for one’s sex be challenged? Almodóvar’s characters definitely show that individuals may “read” a sexed body in a certain way and impose their own meaning, as we see when Dr. Ledgard falls in love with his sex-changed patient. However, the film’s protagonist Vicente has the power to resist the assigned identity and challenge the dominant cultural interpretation of his body. Thus, the film is consistent with a postmodern, queer conception of gender identity, which is neither innate from birth nor externally imposed by societal influence, but rather fluid and based on individual choices.

Sarina Eywa Romero

When the Mind Meets the Media: The Creator of “Beauty”

Esther Greenwood is trapped. Yet what hinders her is far from physical. Esther’s mental constructs, definitions of womanhood and female identity have a firm grasp on her perception of herself and those around her. She is incorrigibly dictated by the definition of femininity imposed upon her by mass media culture and societal expectations. I will be exploring these external sources and examine how these forces control Esther. The overwhelming power media has over Esther, however, extends beyond Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar. In my exposition, I will use Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth to explore how women are bound to societal definitions of femininity. Esther’s experience translates to a macroscopic and current topic that elucidates the pertinent—and troubling—societal definitions and expectations of women that inevitably effect how women relate to themselves and their greater world.

Canon Thomas

Gatsby: Fitzgerald’s Most Successful Screenplay

The Great Gatsby was born at precisely the moment in history when the film industry blossomed—it was the period of transition from silent movies to talkies. Strangely, in the hundred years since Fitzgerald wrote Gatsby, there have been many film adaptations (though none has met with critical success), including a 1974 version starring Robert Redford which has been critiqued as faithful to the book but entirely lifeless. Why is it that one of America’s most beloved novels has never been done justice on the silver screen? Interestingly, Fitzgerald himself desperately wanted to be a screenwriter, but Hollywood completely rejected his scripts. Criticism of Fitzgerald’s screenplays was that they often showed too much, explained everything for the audience—he went into such lyrical and expressive detail that scenes seemed to drag on. It was concluded he was not suited to the medium. But, that is precisely why his novels are so compelling: Fitzgerald uses a filmic vocabulary, so he has essentially already written the movie. We watch the film play out as we read, and he directs his literary camera lens masterfully.
Who’s the Boss
Moderated by Devin Toohey, Department of English

Katherine Armstrong

Made into a Body:
Obligation, Community, and the Corporate Ethos in David Foster Wallace’s The Pale King

The Pale King, David Foster Wallace’s unfinished last novel, depicts the bureaucratic work of IRS employees posted to an examinations center in 1985 Peoria, Illinois. Wallace theorizes that the structure of the Service bureaucracy is based, at root, upon a moralized civic model: according to this model, the employees are situated within an authentic community and are thus embodied by their roles as agents of a civic moral code. A counterpoint to the civic bureaucracy, then, is the postmodern corporation. According to Wallace, the day-to-day participants in a corporate structure do not engage with the collective in the same way that civic workers do, since the corporate collective is driven by a capitalistic endgame and not a moral ethos. This paper examines the extent to which the corporate model corrodes the authenticity of community, particularly as the IRS of The Pale King’s world shifts closer to a pseudo-business, increasingly driven by a for-profit imperative. But even as the Service becomes increasingly concerned with revenue generation, we find that interpersonal responsibility is not simply negated as Wallace himself seems to suggest—rather, as individuals’ sense of obligation to one another manifests itself in new ways in a corporate structure, so too does the way we imagine the community contained within a group.

Lydia Etters

Bank Barriers:
Social Irony in The Importance of Being Earnest

In Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest, wealth serves as a tie that binds individuals into distinctive cliques rather than uniting them as one cohesive society. The ensuing result is the ironic separation of various characters into specific levels of social hierarchy. By examining renowned theorist Richard Rorty’s definition of irony, we see that irony serves two diverse purposes in the context of Wilde’s play: as a coping mechanism for the poor and as a source of comic relief for the rich. The poor, represented by the butler Lane, employ irony to manage the social tension they experience as low-class employees while emphasizing the ridiculous triviality of economic factions. The rich, embodied by the aristocrat Lady Bracknell, utilize irony to poke fun at their own lifestyle while adding excitement to their seemingly hollow existence. This paper will illustrate how money divides society through “invisible barriers”—unspoken assumptions that monetary power is an appropriate justification for egotism and pretentiousness. Wilde’s exploration of these public distinctions effectively establishes irony’s power to relieve the poor and humor the rich, despite irony’s inability to create a social utopia.

Lauren Haas

The Hunger Games:
Ties Stronger Than Death

In The Hunger Games, Gary Ross’ film adaptation of Suzanne Collins’ novel, sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen is forced to participate in the brutal, every-man-for-himself fight to the death known as the “Hunger Games,” a competition designed by the rulers of the dystopian Capitol to assert dominance over the Twelve Districts. During the games, however, Katniss teams up with Rue, a young girl from another district who shares Katniss’ underprivileged background and disenchantment with the social order. The strength of their bond allows Katniss and Rue to rebel against the rules of the Games and thereby break the ties that bind them to their totalitarian rulers. The ties of community, similar lifestyles, and morality bind Katniss and Rue together strongly enough to transcend their obligation to the rules of their society, creating a sanctuary for emotion and sacrifice in the midst of violence and death. The ties revealed in the Hunger Games—those of community and ethics—transcend the power of destruction, revealing that the loyalty and love within these relationships have significance beyond the finality of death.
Joyce Seo

Erotic Car Accidents: Dependence on Technology as Seen in Crash

Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think. Either we use those languages, or we remain mute.

-J.G. Ballard

In a city where almost nobody takes the subway and getting anywhere takes at least half an hour, we all feel as though a car is absolutely necessary. James Ballard, the protagonist of J.G. Ballard’s Crash can certainly agree, but to a new extreme. After getting into a car accident, he meets Vaughan, the “nightmare angel of the highways,” who fetishizes car crashes and the wounds they inflict upon people. Instead of being repulsed by the idea, James is drawn into this world until he solely relies on the erotic destructiveness of the car in order to have any sort of intimate relationship. His entire life ends up revolving around this obsession, to the point where he is unable to do anything without imagining himself in a car. Crash initially presents itself as a seemingly unrelated novel, but upon closer analysis, it causes us to reevaluate our dependence not only on cars, but technology in general.

Daniel Silvermintz

Finding the Right Speed: The Temporality of Sex in Milan Kundera’s Slowness

This paper discusses how the ideals of efficiency that rose to prominence during and following the Industrial Revolution have conflicted with the ideals of slowness that have been generally associated with sex. Contrasting modern academic work on pornography and the speed of society with the portrayal of sex in Milan Kundera’s Slowness elucidates a complex interplay of correspondence and conflict between the speeds of society and sex. As Kundera suggests, sex serves as a form of discontinuity in the linear narrative of modern progress as long as it resists the temptation to become a means to an end, a temptation to which seemingly every aspect of society has fallen prey. To unpack the social and political role that sex plays in Slowness, this paper reads the novel next to Walter Benjamin’s critique of the teleological idea of “homogeneous and empty time,” which, according to Benjamin, strips “experience” from time.
**Flashback**

Moderated by Heather Dundas, Department of English

**Diana Yu Chun Chen**

“Gliding Over All”:
The Role of Walt Whitman in *Breaking Bad*

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the deliberate usage of Walt Whitman and his poems in the television series *Breaking Bad*. In terms of politics, Walt Whitman’s poetry has been typically interpreted as ambivalent. Critic Betsy Erkkila believes that the division and contradiction within Whitman’s poems “symbolically enact the larger political conflicts in [America].” This essay seeks to explore the ways in which Walter White and other secondary characters in *Breaking Bad* embody Whitman’s vision of individuality and unity by representing both sides of an American cultural conflict: between personal freedom and cultural expansion. In my paper, I will trace the evolution of the character Walter White through the entire series of *Breaking Bad* and expound the method in which he progresses from symbolizing the “oppressed” to symbolizing the “oppressor” in the context of America.

**Matthew Kalina**

**Misunderstood Satire:**
*Starship Troopers* and American Militarism

As a movie, *Starship Troopers* never received the credit it deserved for its caustic satire of American militarism. Through the course of the movie, the audience finds itself introduced to a utopian fascist society fighting a foe of dehumanized space-arachnids. Critic Brian E. Crim states of the movie’s director: “Verhoeven cleverly mixes Nazi imagery with the patriotic fervor promoted in American propaganda films from the Second World War. Verhoeven attempts to seduce the audience into accepting and even cheering for genocide on a galactic scale. The irony of this approach was lost on most of the audience and reviewers.” This temptation to support the fascist cause raises the question: How pervasive is militarism in American culture? This beckons response because the film’s contemporary audience not only accepted, but supported, the fascist bloodbath on the screen as the collateral damage of the “good guys.” It is my contention that the satire presented in *Starship Troopers* shows how far American culture has gone in its fascist tendencies, or in the words of character Jean Rasczak, “The contrary opinion, that violence doesn’t solve anything, is wishful thinking at its worst.”

**Marie McCoy-Thompson**

**Pulpy Morals in a Fictional World**

In the final scene of *Pulp Fiction*, Jules Winnfield repeats a Biblical quote he has recited twice before: “The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men.” These words are a ritual for Jules; he says them every time he is about to kill someone. In this pivotal scene, Jules finally reflects on the meaning of the quote—which, contrary to popular belief, was written by Tarantino for the film and is not an actual quote from the Bible—and the nature of evil. Having committed multiple cold-blooded murders that same day, Jules is but one of many characters in *Pulp Fiction* who seems to have a warped sense of morality. The movie provides a fascinating portrayal of the way external sources—from religion to authority figures to the satanic—can influence a person’s morals. By looking at *Pulp Fiction* through the lens of selections from the King James Bible, Anton LaVey’s blasphemous Satanic Bible, and academic criticism of the film, I will explore the diverse and often conflicting ways people determine right from wrong. An extremely influential film, *Pulp Fiction* has a lot to tell us about where we look for moral guidance in postmodern America.
Caleb McCracken

**Humanatee: Is It Under the Sea?**

This essay discusses how both Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* from 1837 and Disney's 1989 cinematic interpretation of Andersen's work contribute to different understandings of the inherent value in being a human being. Initially inspired by my affinity for fairy tales and all things Disney, I quickly became distressed upon remembering that I do not, in fact, have mermaid blood running through my veins. Fortunately, I realized that I could reconcile this passion and depression in a meaningful paper that would help me better understand the attraction humans have towards these mythical merpeople, and why we imagine the sea-species to have an attraction towards us as well. Using a mixture of biographical research about Andersen and feminist critiques of Disney, I intend to explain not only how the perception of human “worth” has changed in the past century and a half, but why it is problematic to assume that a change over time must be a “progression” of an advanced society.

Kelly Peretzman

**Springtime for Hitler, Germany, and Postmodernism: Mel Brooks’ Transitional Role in the Artistic Movements of the 20th Century**

In this paper I will contextualize comedian and filmmaker Mel Brooks' early life and the beginning of his career within the modernist period and, focusing primarily on his 1968 film, *The Producers*, contextualize the height of his professional life within the postmodern era. I will argue that because the high point of Mel Brooks' career occurred alongside the transition from modernism to postmodernism during the 60s and 70s, many of his most popular works serve as perfect transitional pieces between the two artistic movements, particularly *The Producers*. Additionally, I will examine his tendency for taking benchmark events from the modernist era, such as World War II and the Holocaust, and treating them in a distinctly postmodern manner. In doing so, I will prove Mel Brooks and *The Producers* as perfect examples of the shift between the modern and postmodern movements in American history.
Nirali Dave

**Killed by the Camera:**
**Representing Death in *Breaking Bad***

According to Roland Barthes, the camera plays a role in preserving death as life; the only way to discuss photography accurately is to define it in relation to death. The camera captures death by freezing time into a single frame or moment, as described in Laura Mulvey’s *Death 24x a Second*; therefore, the role of time is implicit in understanding the function of the camera. This essay discusses the camera’s role in relation to time and death in *Breaking Bad*.

In order to prolong the life of terminally ill Walter White, the camera is utilized to manipulate the temporal gap between the present and his inevitable plunge toward death. White’s life is representable only in relation to death, a feat only the camera can document by accentuating the contrast between stillness and movement. Thus, by exploring the prospective future, yet holding on firmly to the past, the camera serves as a determining factor for the identity of the subject it captures.

Mara Harris

**Thanatophobia (n):**
**The Abnormal Fear of Death**

For most, the fact that we are all going to die one day seems daunting and perhaps saddening, but we accept it as inevitable and a natural part of life. However for a few people, Thanatophobia, the fear of death and dying, consumes their lives. One such person is Jack Gladney in Don DeLillo’s bestseller *White Noise*. Jack’s paralyzing fear stems from his innate desire to rationalize every aspect of life. Death does not fit neatly into his order; it is unpredictable and possibly unexpected. He feels isolated and lost, so he turns to violence as a way to simplify the world and his place in it. As author of *Platonic Noise*, J. Peter Euben, explains, “Why is Jack so paralyzed by his dread of death? One reason is his uncertainty of where death comes from, how to read the signs that might tell him, and where it fits in the order of things.” The fear of death may become white noise for the majority of us, fading into the background of life. But for Jack it is the meaninglessness of white noise, and death, that haunts him every day.

Gwendolyn Holst

**Avoiding the Price that All Men Pay:**
**Approaching Death in “Cool Air”**

From the moment we are born, we are all in the process of dying. This age-old adage captures an indisputable fact that unites all human beings. The fear of our fate after death permeates the mind of each person, making it a commonality to which all can relate, a motive all can share. While other values may be culture bound, the instinct to preserve one’s life is intrinsic. The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, spoke to this drive to live and fear of death in his discussions “Eros Meets Thanatos” and “Our Attitude Towards Death.” Contemporaneous with Freud, H.P. Lovecraft explored through fiction the horror that can result when this ambition become perverse. In his short story “Cool Air,” Lovecraft creates a doctor who has discovered how to keep himself functioning after his natural death, but in doing so estranges himself from society. At what point does our avoidance of death turn from a shared pursuit to an obsession that alienates us from mankind? What factors could make a person slip into this abnormal realm? Lovecraft’s example reminds us that because mortality binds all of humanity, there are norms associated with its maintenance.
Elizabeth Lobach

Living to Die: Masculinity and the Death Drive in *Fight Club*

“LET GO!” Tyler says. The steering wheel spins by itself. He presses the accelerator. The car slips along on the rain-slicked pavement and crashes into another. Both careen off the road and down the embankment. Pulled from the wreckage, Tyler laughs: “We’ve had a ‘near-life’ experience!” Welcome to David Fincher’s film *Fight Club.* A nameless man, “Jack,” searches to find his meaning and identity in a mundane, commercialized life of cubicles and health support groups, yet he feels an inexplicable void. Then he meets Tyler Durden, who ushers him into a life lived at the edge of death—the fullest realization of masculinity. According to Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* life is a struggle between “Thanatos,” the death drive, in constant opposition to “Eros,” the life drive. This paper will analyze *Fight Club*’s treatment of masculinity in the context of Freud’s death drive psychology, looking in depth at the search to redefine masculinity through violence and the rejection of corporate American archetypes. How is masculinity defined in the pull between Eros and Thanatos? What do the organizations of *Fight Club* and Project Mayhem reveal about masculinity in the lives of the film’s characters? How do the violence, chaos and loss of personal identity in these institutions serve to counteract the emasculation of consumerism and reaffirm masculinity? And, most importantly, why do we more fully experience life when we have tasted death? After all, Tyler says: “It’s only after we’ve lost everything that we’re free to do anything.”

Janis Yue

*Zooming in on Photographic Grief in* *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

*All photographs are memento mori.*

–Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

On the cover of *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* lies a photograph—but it’s not your standard smiling family snapshot. It’s a photo of Alison Bechdel and her father, reproduced by Alison as a finely-hatched drawing in black ink. As her father looks off into the distance, aloof and intimidating, child Alison makes eye contact with the reader, silently searching. These poses become thematically relevant in *Fun Home,* which details Bechdel’s introspective recall of her tumultuous relationship with her dad after he unexpectedly dies. But how exactly does Bechdel’s review of photography throughout the text inform her own journey of self-identification in relation to her primary form of the graphic novel? Employing voices of classic photography theorists, such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, I argue that Bechdel’s use of photographs within her graphic narrative simultaneously deconstructs and fortifies her memories. I acknowledge the problematic status of photographs as a source of veracity, but I also find that photographs allow for a removal of self, which ultimately facilitates Bechdel’s newfound insights. While photographs may be “memento mori”—reminders of our ephemerality—they also act as catalysts of renewal when we try to respond to changing contexts.
Those Damn Racist Animals

*Memory cultures are difficult to pin down, finding expression as they do in such diverse forums and at so many levels of a community's private and public discourse.*  
—Shirli Gilbert

When dealing with human tragedies, both Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City* and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* deliberately use animal metaphors to depict and comment on racism. They approach and implement their respective metaphors differently depending on the context of the situation. *Maus* deals with the Holocaust while *Zoo City* takes place in contemporary South Africa and alludes to Apartheid. Though the animal metaphors are different, they are both complicated and most importantly, imperfect, which reflects the difficulty of still understanding racism today. Beukes and Spiegelman, through their animal metaphors, create a shield between the complex, perpetuated problem of racism and ourselves to try and examine the issue from an outside, deferred perspective.

Jack Koppa

Off the Road:  
Kerouac’s Temporal Dissonance

In the realm of complicated narratives that make up so much of twentieth-century American literature, Kerouac’s *On the Road* is remarkable for its sense of immediacy, which, according to critical consensus, possesses a “magical intensity of intimacy” delivered by few other writers. An observant reader, then, is shocked to find consistent interruptions in the presumed cause of this intimacy—Kerouac’s straightforward, close-up, play-by-play narration through the character of Sal Paradise—caused by present tense or subjunctive mood commentaries on the action. This paper finds an explanation for such blatant and disruptive breaks in the flow of narration by adopting a narratological lens, which is then focused on the similarities between Kerouac’s present tense interruptions and the commentary inherent in the most basic of narrative forms: oral, conversational storytelling. After asserting this similarity, I argue that Kerouac, by bracketing his commentary within tense shifts, approaches the episodic, narrative interruptions typical of oral narratives (characterized as “natural narratives” by Monica Fludernik). In so doing, this paper concludes, Kerouac creates an even stronger, more intimate connection with his audience than would be generated by a consistent past tense alone, by successfully recreating an atmosphere of oral storytelling.

Bo Yan J. Moran

To Cut or Not to Cut:  
The Threads that Connect the Characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*

People often concentrate on the roles of time and death in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. But the bombardment of images of threads and knives can hardly be avoided. Although the two are mentioned separately, these knives, and other weapons, are meant to cut these threads that connect people. This opens the door to a key problem that every character in the novel faces: with whom do I keep ties and with whom do I cut ties? As each character is explored, these symbols begin to reveal the true relationships amongst the characters and their motives during their interactions.
Alexis Siegel

“I don't give a damn about my reputation”: Irony as a Defense Mechanism in *Freaks and Geeks*

In a sea of beautiful faces and unrealistic plotlines shown on television at the turn of the century, cult classic *Freaks and Geeks* was arguably the most realistic TV depiction of high school of its time. As part of this realist aesthetic, the show portrays the irony that, as David Foster Wallace has noted, dominated so much of the US culture in the early 2000s. The freaks ironize the high school hierarchy around them while the geeks use humor to deflect against the mental and physical bullying they face. Theorist David Foster Wallace argues, “irony, poker-faced silence, and fear of ridicule are distinctive of [those] features of contemporary U.S. culture… Irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and at the same time they are agents of great despair and stasis in U.S. culture.” Foster Wallace sees irony as a tool to avert vulnerability or ridicule. People avoid expressing sincere emotions, which might allow others to pass judgment on them. My paper will examine how ironic humor functions as a coping mechanism for these freaks and geeks and whether this defense mechanism prevents the high schoolers from enacting change. Wallace writes that irony was originally meant to free humans from the hierarchical structure that binds us, “but irony’s singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks.” My paper will explore whether irony prevents these freaks and geeks from expressing their feelings in earnest and renders them incapable of progress.
Breaking Boundaries in *Breaking Bad*:
Modern Manifestations of America's Fascination with the Frontier

The main character of the television series *Breaking Bad*, Walter White, is a victim of a twisted, modern day manifestation of the American dream. As the series progresses, Walter is transformed from a middle-class suburban father to a ruthless drug dealer. This paper examines the relationship between Walter's transformation and warped American ideals. A scholarly work that informs my understanding of the essentially American ideal of colonization is Paul Virilio's novel *Speed and Politics*, which describes the effects of endocolonization. Virilio explains that endocolonization is a phenomenon that began once Americans had colonized all of the physical land of the United States and turned instead to frontiers of a different nature. In Walter's case, his dream of supporting his middle class family is pure but he must achieve this dream by transcending the dark frontier of the drug trade. The greater Walter's desire to achieve his dream of the ideal suburban family, the more entangled he becomes in a web of crime, murder and deceit.

Helen Anne Kennedy

*Into the Wild:*
Where One Never Won

In Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless looks like a rebel. He leaves the comfort of his upper-middle class home, burns his money, and hitchhikes across the U.S., hoping to transcend bourgeois values and transform himself into a self-reliant revolutionary. Through the works of his role models, Jack London and Henry David Thoreau, Chris forms his life doctrines. He attempts to find intellectual immortality through "truth," as Thoreau defined it, by living a life of solitude. Chris becomes so overly confident in his ideals that he gains an air of superiority as he believes he leads an enlightened lifestyle. Even more, Chris yearns to convert others to this lifestyle by proving its merit through written documentation. The problem, though, is that his own ego prevents him from realizing his radical dreams. By dying in the process, Chris' supposedly superior lifestyle is demolished. It is only through Jon Krakauer, in writing the story, that Chris' idealized way of living is reborn and his individuality is exalted.

Annie Lloyd

*“Are You There God? It’s Me, Lenny”:*  
God as the Absence of Truth in Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*

“Did God really kill himself?” Denis Johnson's *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* surrounds Leonard English, the man who asks this question as a result of his own failed suicide attempt. English spends the novel searching for an answer behind the disappearance of Gerald Twinbrook. Yet, while losing his ties to reality, he simultaneously grapples with his relationship with God. English asks, “But how do I know you're God?” and responds himself with “Because I'm all that's in front of you, and all that's behind you is gone.” This ultimate chaos reflects a man who lives in a world where reality and delusion are inextricably linked. In his analysis of the effects of simulation, Jean Baudrillard describes how “[simulation] is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.” Hyperreality is best exhibited by English's vision of a speaking, but dead, Twinbrook, and is grounded in English's encounter with Twinbrook's real corpse. In this paper, I will deconstruct how English's inability to uncover his own truth and sanity comes from God's role as a replacement for an unattainable truth.
Michelle Prestholt

Unraveling Epic:
Slaughterhouse-Five and Breaking the Epic Tradition

There is no heroic glory to Billy Pilgrim, the bumbling, accidental soldier of Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five. Haplessly finding himself in the middle of World War II, Billy is shoeless next to the armor bedecked Achilles and weaponless beside an ax-wielding Ajax. Vonnegut purposefully looks back on the epic tradition with its acute glorification of battle and warriors throughout his antiwar novel, not to uphold it but rather to thwart it. Vonnegut subtly incorporates various distorted archetypes and imagery from epic literature, from The Aeneid to The Three Musketeers, twisting epic constructs, and decomposing the classical deification of the warrior to a shockingly human portrayal of the typical soldier. This essay examines how Vonnegut’s deconstruction of the epic tradition strips war of its false splendor and effectively accentuates his antiwar message.

Austin Patrick Reagan

The Way We Were

As with virtually every aspect of American society, the American Dream itself has changed and evolved with the years. Though literary critics frequently discern the corruption of the American Dream as the primary theme underlying F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, I suggest something a bit different. While the Dream in Gatsby manifests itself in the form of liquor, revelry and reckless pleasure, such hedonism masks a deeper, collective ambition: the forging of a new, American identity. Post-war culture bred a generation of Americans bent on distancing itself from the status quo and establishing a new order. In studying the 1920s—through both a literary and historical lens—I’ve gained a better understanding on the binding priority behind a culture in which priority seemed otherwise absent. I argue that although the individual actions of people may have driven a wedge through genuine social bonds, such actions had the aggregate value of establishing a new frontier for American culture and that oh-so-elusive Dream.
Who Cares?
Moderated by Vanessa Carlisle, Department of English

Taylor Beach

The Things We Don’t Hear

Colonel Joll thinks all torture progresses systematically: “. . . first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth.” His methods for torture, here described in context of interrogation, reveal the universal steps of pain in J.M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians. Our narrator—the magistrate—experiences each step of this progression as he faces the facts of his surroundings and learns more about the barbarian girl. By focusing on Coetzee’s unique language, we can follow the magistrate as he moves from lie to break to truth. I will explore the idea of perpetual pressure by analyzing Coetzee’s unique mastery of purposeful omissions. These omissions will begin the discussion by identifying the truths that he fears; they will lead us to the details he is afraid to face and the themes he is afraid to tell us. We will watch as he is pressured by the barbarian girl and a changing political climate. Finally, we will watch him realize that his idealist naïveté has blinded him to the horrors that other men have sown. These horrors, and not the barbarians, ultimately ruin his settlement.

Valen Crain

Sebald’s Indeterminate Identity

This essay explores concepts of identity in Austerlitz by W. G. Sebald. In Austerlitz we find a world of blurred boundaries; fact, fiction, history and imagination are rarely differentiated between, as discussed in Lewis Ward’s “A Simultaneous Gesture of Proximity and Distance: W.G. Sebald’s Empathic Narrative Persona.” This pervasive sense of borderlessness establishes the salient argument of the work: Sebald’s narrative breaks down the barrier between the individual and the society that surrounds him. To the author, the individual can be separated from neither the culture nor the cultural history surrounding him or her. At the murky edge of distinction between the realm of dreams and that of reality, Sebald obliquely shifts this discussion towards a temporal issue: the cultural consequences of the Holocaust.

Zach Dunn

“We Believe in Nothing”:
The Threat of Postmodern Nihilism in The Big Lebowski

Say what you like about the tenets of National Socialism, Dude, at least it’s an ethos.
-Walter Sobchek, The Big Lebowski

Joel and Ethan Coen’s The Big Lebowski thrusts The Dude, its washed-up slacker protagonist, into the center of an incredibly complex detective story. Along the way, the Dude meets a plethora of intriguing characters that all showcase their own brands of postmodern detachment. In dealing with characters like the hedonistic porn magnate Jackie Treehorn, the wealthy, Transatlantic-speaking Maude Lebowski, and the German self-proclaimed nihilists, The Dude is put in constant contrast with ironic individuals. This is what makes The Dude such an effective hero: he is completely genuine in his actions and beliefs. He truly loves drinking White Russians, listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival, bowling, and his rug. The Dude emerges as a beacon of sincerity as his adversaries seem bound to a cycle of uncaring nothingness. My paper will explore how The Dude’s genuineness sets him apart from the self-obsessed ironists that surround him. Throughout his adventure, The Dude always believes in something, even if it is...
just bowling.

Vivian Rotenstein

**Intimacy or Isolation:**
*The Role of Intimate Relationships and the Physical World in Shaping Artistic Identity*

Can an artist thrive in isolation, or does discarding the stereotypical notion of an “artistic community” thwart the artistic spirit? André Gide’s *The Immoralist* rejects the idea of not only friends and family, but of all intimate relationships, arguing how such ties bind the aspiring artist to a set of societal norms, specifically to the norm of heterosexuality, thus stifling creativity. Gide’s novel argues how labeling sexual orientation interdicts the artist’s freedom. However, the artist’s relationship to his physical world is devoid of all complications that relationships with others present. In Gide’s novel, Michel’s emotional reaction to the surrounding environment is experienced without inhibition or judgment. Gide conveys how only by freeing oneself from emotional entanglements and the restrictions inherent in intimate relationships, and instead focusing on the timelessness and ease of the sensory world, can one develop his artistic potential to the fullest.

Adrienne Visani

**Tying the Knot:**
*The Paradox of Suburban Masculinity in Revolutionary Road*

*I wouldn’t be surprised if he knocked her up on purpose, just so he could spend the rest of his life hiding behind a maternity dress.*

–John Givings, Revolutionary Road

Sam Mendes’ film *Revolutionary Road*, an adaptation of Richard Yates’ novel by the same name, plops a young, hopeful couple into the barren landscape of 1950s suburbia. The husband, Frank Wheeler, is reduced to a faceless cog in the corporate machine and resents being the “dumb” husband in his domestic life. But despite his anxieties about mediocrity, he ultimately refuses to reroute his life when his wife April suggests they leave suburbia and move to Paris. Why can’t he leave? Sociologist Barry Schwartz argues that 1950s suburbia was a feminine construct; it was a symbol of domesticity, child-rearing, and passivity. But in *Revolutionary Road*, suburbia caters to the masculine psyche as much as the feminine. Frank uses the physical remoteness of the suburbs to separate home life from the corporate arena, and he is comforted by the boundaries and rules prescribed by both the suburbs and his dull job. In the end, he cannot risk choosing his own path, and April supplants him as the film’s prototype of traditional masculinity—she becomes active while Frank takes comfort in passivity.