

# WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

**The past, like the future, is indefinite and exists only as a spectrum of possibilities.**  
— Stephen Hawking

**Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.**  
— Søren Kierkegaard

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

**You can't hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree.**  
— Malcolm X

**For Man to tell how human life began is hard; for who himself beginning knew?**  
— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

**Destiny is a name often given in retrospect to choices that had dramatic consequences.**  
— J.K. Rowling

**We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities  
... still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.**  
— Charles Darwin

**Nothing can have as its destination anything other than its origin.  
The contrary idea, the idea of progress, is poison.**  
— Simone Weil

**The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past,  
and every sinner has a future.**  
— Oscar Wilde

**Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.**  
— George Orwell

**Tradition is the illusion of permanence.**  
— Woody Allen

**From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back.  
That is the point that must be reached.**  
— Franz Kafka

**Everywhere I go I find that a poet has been there before me.**  
— Sigmund Freud

**I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun.**  
— Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

**I think that when you get dressed in the morning, sometimes you're really making a decision  
about your behavior for the day. Like if you put on flip-flops, you're saying:  
"Hope I don't get chased today. Be nice to people in sneakers."**  
— Demetri Martin

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 this year's theme **The Past Is Prologue** 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 the past, present, and future, origin stories, evolution, genetics, psychoanalysis, progress, myth and mythmaking, fate and destiny, nostalgia, cultural construction, destruction, and reconstruction, reformation and restoration, hegemony, the canon, the new, revolution, the American Dream, family, childhood and coming-of-age, identity, memory, hindsight, tradition, plans and schemes . . .

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. (*Macbeth* 5.5.19-23)

## Student Conference Coordinating Committee

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Many thanks to the faculty and staff who have played an integral role in the success of the Thematic Option Research Conference with special thanks to Vice Dean Steve Lamy for his ongoing support and encouragement.

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# Us vs. Them

Moderated by Professor Paul Lerner, Department of History

Tuesday, April 14  
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.  
Scriptorium

**Remaya Campbell**

## **“The White Man Marches On”: The Roots and Lasting Effects of Racism in the American Suburb**

Though some history books will not explicitly express the United States’ historical propensity for institutionalized racism for fear of appearing unpatriotic, the evidence of these lingering attitudes thrives throughout the nation in pseudo-peaceful hamlets known as suburbs. These seemingly pleasant neighborhoods and towns, with their evenly-cut grass lawns, picket fences, and nuclear families, are visual representations of the American dream: the freedom to live in peace and the opportunity for upward mobility. Yet an examination of the film *American History X* along with current suburban demographics reveals that below the surface, the ideal suburban lifestyle is reserved for a select few, and the segregation that defined the suburbs at their birth still holds considerable power. Drawing from the turbulent experiences of a repentant Neo-Nazi in *American History X* and from the historical insight of Dr. David L. Chappell’s “Did Racism Build the American Suburb?”, I will argue that the racism present in modern suburbia is a result not merely of the suburbs’ roots as tools for division, but also of generational inheritance.

**Nathaniel “Lance” Fishman-Smith**

## **“The Only Thing White About That Child Is Her Color”: Self-Construction of Identity in *Of Love and Other Demons***

In Gabriel García Márquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons*, seemingly white 12-year-old Sierva María, neglected and mistreated by her parents from her premature and unusual birth, takes after the black house slaves that raised her to the point where one may wonder whether or not she has truly constructed a black identity for herself. If one can apply Judith Butler’s ideology in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” to racial identity, signifying that gender identity should be defined solely based on how one “performs” gender through action, then García Márquez gives plenty of reason to believe that Sierva María has successfully done just this. Unfortunately, Sierva María gets into trouble by emulating or embodying many characteristics that are attributed to blacks in the story after being put under enormous familial and societal scrutiny when a rabid dog bites her. Even if Sierva María does legitimately redefine her own racial identity, she does not prove that it’s necessarily in her best interest to do so in a particularly prejudiced society. If it actually is possible for one to do so and still thrive in such a world, Sierva María does not maintain the balance between authenticity and adaptation to reality necessary to achieve that success.

**Adrian Hernandez**

## **Alienation: The Final Frontier**

This essay discusses how the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode “The Outcast” both criticizes conformist ideology by illustrating when conformist thinking goes awry, and synthesizes the classic “us vs. them” conflict by insisting the disenfranchised and alienated in society band together to combat oppression. The essay mainly draws from culture theorist Donna Haraway’s book *When Species Meet*, analyzing how “the same” (those who conform to society’s values) repress “the others” (those who chose atypical, unpopular ideologies) to maintain power and self-certainty, often eradicating “the same” in the process. Although it seems *Star Trek*’s grim conclusion—one in which a main character receives brainwashing and electroshock treatment for rebelling against the system—discourages “the other” from rebelling, the newfound unity and understanding Commander Riker and Lieutenant Commander Worf develop in their rescue attempt in the episode’s conclusion suggests otherwise.

**Rachel Udabe**

**Food for Thought:  
The Lack of Desires in Kafka's "The Hunger Artist"**

Some people live to eat. Others just eat to live. The protagonist in Franz Kafka's short story, "The Hunger Artist," does neither. Not only does he dislike eating, he refuses to consume food altogether and makes his glorified fasting into his profession. In conjunction with his aversion to food, he also avoids forming meaningful relationships with anyone. With the lack of physical and emotional nourishment, the hunger artist ultimately withers away. His example demonstrates the necessity of responding to our innately human desires. Respecting those desires is required; without them, one would literally and figuratively fade away. Further, basic human needs should be embraced because they mark the divide between animal and human. Sometimes we may be too busy to eat or too tired to interact with others, but, unlike the hunger artist, we must respond to our desires eventually in order to thrive and be fully human.

**Ailish Ullmann**

**Men Behind Masks**

In a sense we all wear different masks, as we project certain aspects of our personalities to different peer groups and cultivate our image online. Yet increasingly the real mask of anonymity is becoming an essential tool for activism. *V For Vendetta* presents a vision of an over-censored, over-regulated British society that calls to mind the wreckage of an oppressive monarchy of the past and the expanding police state of our future. Leading the citizens of this dystopian Britain toward revolution in *V For Vendetta*, V insists that his Guy Fawkes mask serves as a symbol of hope and freedom, and makes the quest for justice about more than any one man. Yet while other characters hide behind their own false veneers of submission, the question becomes whether the mask is a symbol of inspiration, or nothing more than a façade for cowardice. And as the Guy Fawkes mask of *V For Vendetta* has been embraced by real-world activists such as the hacktivist group Anonymous, there is no single person to reward or blame for their collective actions. The mask thus becomes a powerful tool for revolution: both a faceless scapegoat for the state and an unconquerable hero for activists.

# Great Expectations

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd, School of Philosophy

Tuesday, April 14  
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.  
Carnegie

Jeremy Bradford

## **Willful Incoherence: How *Night* Shocks Us When Other Holocaust Texts Don't**

Among scholars of Holocaust texts, it is almost universally held that any effort to accurately depict the Holocaust inevitably downplays its tragedy. In her doctoral dissertation, Holocaust scholar Jay Ladin writes: “[T]he act of narration domesticates horror, transforming unthinkable acts of violence and unspeakable torment into orderly arrangements of villains and victims, subjects and predicates . . .” Ladin asserts that the inherent flaw in turning Holocaust experiences into stories is that all Holocaust stories invariably become generic narratives in the mind of the reader. However, is this true? I contend that there exists at least one Holocaust text that successfully transcends the generic. Considering Ladin’s critique while analyzing Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, my paper points to stylistic and syntactical choices made by Wiesel that starkly differentiate his text from the typical narrative. I argue that, by emphasizing the senseless, indiscriminate, and viscerally horrible nature of his experiences, Wiesel succeeds in achieving the effect Ladin claims cannot be achieved, and illuminates to us that nothing about *Night* is of the ordinary or generic and that everything about *Night* is powerfully unforgettable.

Mary Coates

## **A Marxist View of Marriage in *What Makes Sammy Run?***

This essay explores how Budd Schulberg’s subtle focus on marriage in his novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* portrays stereotypical views of marriage in regards to gender and social status using Marx’s view on ideology to examine to what extent societal norms of marriage are inescapable. Although there is one at least partial exception to marriage stereotypes in the novel in which the woman is more successful than the man and the marriage is not simply a way to improve their social or economic status, the couple still ends up conforming to at least some of the societal norms of the time, namely getting married at all. Schulberg’s depiction of marriage reflects the restrictions of the time in which he was writing, but it also suggests that the conventional expectations of marriage do not have to persist in the future.

Pooja Dhupati

## **“Long Ago We Had Two Sexes, As You Do”: Perpetuating the Hegemonic Instance of Gender in *Star Trek*’s “The Outcast”**

The widely influential television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* seems quite liberal for its time in its episode “The Outcast” as it attempts to expand popular culture’s perceptions of gender and sexuality. Soren, a member of the androgynous humanoid race known as the J’naii, confesses to Captain Riker that she is attracted to him and identifies as female—both of which are viewed as sexual perversions in her society. As she explains the persecutions and forced psychotherapies that those who identify as male or female must endure in her culture, it becomes clear the allegory this serves to our society’s heteronormative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. However, as she further defines her gender description by her sexual attraction to males, she conflates the definition of gender with its normative expression, which, as Judith Butler explains in *Undoing Gender*, functions to inadvertently reconsolidate the power of the norm to restrain the “thinkability of its disruption.” Thus while the purpose of producing “The Outcast” seemed to call attention to the necessity of deconstructing limits placed by our society’s perceptions of gender and sexuality norms, through the lens of Butler’s theories it is apparent that this episode rather served to reinforce the very bounds it aimed to break—all under the dangerous façade of progressivism.

**Mohini Narasimhan**

**Gender: A Disappearing Act**

It has become common to recognize lust or love in novels through acts in accordance with gender roles, such as when a male character expresses “chivalry” towards a woman, or when a woman acts “feminine” in reciprocation to a man’s advances. These perceptions that we make often go unnoticed, but are what we use to define romance. Jeanette Winterson, in her novel *Written on the Body*, strips the narrator of gender, yet still manages to convey the powerful feelings of attraction in the narrator’s relationship. This result supports Judith Butler’s argument that without performativity and the construction of gender through a “stylized repetition of acts,” gender becomes illegible. I argue that Winterson is able to break down gender construction but still maintain her love story through poetic prose, text centered around the narrator’s lover, and the juxtaposition of actions associated with masculinity and femininity.

**Kevin Shi**

**A Vacuum of Self:**

**Sierva María in *Of Love and Other Demons* as Defined (and Limited) by Rebellion to the Past**

Although we tend to think of rebellion as freeing, rebellion always depends on that which it rebels from in order to define itself. In Gabriel García Márquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons*, the character Sierva María is constantly rebelling from her past and the external expectations placed upon her—and in doing so, is dependent upon them to form her own identity. Using Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of self as that which we “become” rather than “be,” this paper posits that Sierva María’s self is a non-positive object, defined by what it is not rather than what it is. Her blind rebellion against her past is in many ways more limiting than liberating, and though she is wild, antagonistic, and unruly, Sierva María is still bound and shaped by the very people she rebels against. Ultimately, Sierva María serves to prove that the pursuit of identity must be active rather than reactive, constructive rather than destructive: only then can she truly be free.



# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Moderated by Stephen Pasqualina, Department of English

Tuesday, April 14  
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.  
Gutenberg

**Oliver Gray**

## **The Fabric of Difference in *War of the Worlds***

In *War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells introduces martian invaders as a means of dismantling Great Britain's military prowess and system of imperial dominance over much of the world, thus distorting the perceived superiority of the white man and the validity and desirability of our previously-accepted "mythical [norms]" (Lorde). Similarly, in "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Audre Lorde calls us to recognize the inherent "differences" that exist between us all in the areas of age, race, class, and sex as a means of understanding the vast sweep of humanity's diversity, and, more importantly, as a means of tearing down the context of our preconceived notions of superiority. Together, these texts work in unison in attempting to create "new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference," patterns that would have us recognize even the seemingly minute, microscopic regions of our social arenas as not irrelevant, but instead a means of understanding the vast array of diversity within our world—for, as *War of the Worlds* shows us, saviors come in the most unlikely and microscopic of forms.

**Carlyn Greenwald**

## **Alas, Poor Villain: Understanding the Role of Tragic Backstory in *Sherlock's* "A Study in Pink"**

Sometimes, all it takes is an "I did it for my kids" and the monster on screen becomes the person next door. In *Sherlock's* first episode, "A Study in Pink," the killer, a cabbie named Jeff, is presented as the "evil" foil to Sherlock, but after relaying a tragic backstory of terminal illness and a father's love for his children, Jeff changes from a villain to a remarkably sympathetic character. Philosopher Amelie Rorty proposes that the words "figure" and "person" represent different types of humans that inhabit literature, where a "figure" is one whose choices are defined by his circumstances, and a "person" is one who makes active choices regardless of circumstances. Through this lens, backstory transforms Jeff from a figure to a person. *Sherlock* writer Steven Moffat utilizes the tragic backstory trope to directly gain the audience's sympathy for his serial killer. Moffat portrays Jeff as a victim of circumstance, and satisfies the viewer's curiosity to understand why a serial killer kills. More than that, though, Moffat invites viewers to step into Jeff's shoes to see if they'd make the same morally questionable decisions Jeff makes. Ultimately, Jeff's sympathetic backstory pushes viewers to consider why they can disassociate enough to sympathize with fictional villains, but not real ones.

**Madelina Pratt**

## **The Bloody and Broken, the Bent and Beautiful: An Analysis of Free Will and Ontological Morality in *Pan's Labyrinth***

The screen darkens and the sound of a sickening crunch fills the room. We convulse in gaping horror as we watch a man in military uniform brutally murder a youth in humble rags with a broken glass bottle, leaving unrecognizable what was once human. Our abhorrence then melts into delight as we watch a small child press her cheek gently to her mother's womb, whispering stories to her unborn brother. The 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth* rips away the façade of human happiness, exposing the oozing goriness of man's deepest fears and most detestable evils while also depicting the great capacity for love in the human heart against the setting of the Spanish Civil War. The film parallels the lives of two individuals from starkly contrasted moral paradigms living in the bloody wreckage of a failed guerilla rebellion where a militant government has authorized harsh punishment and regulations to keep dissent at bay. A paragon of innocence, the child Ofelia seeks desperately to serve her ailing mother, protecting rebel spies, loving with pure intentions, and even losing her life to protect her dear "hermano." In revolting contrast, the zealous Captain



sadistically mutilates and violently massacres fellow men under the pretense of quelling rebellion by eradicating the “hijos de brutos” guerilla fighters. Both Ofelia and the Captain are born of mankind, yet presented with the same circumstances choose differently. Why do some people, like Ofelia, choose love while others, like the Captain, choose evil and death? How can men, born of the same womb and raised in the same world, come to two radically different conclusions about morality, and do we know enough of our past and prologue to rightly judge one moral paradigm as superior to another?

**Julia Tang**

**Monsters of the Past:  
*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Horror’s Reflections of Reality***

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* presents a horrific version of an America that is a reflection of the attitudes seen within the tumultuous period of 1970s America in which it was released. In his essay, “Introduction to the American Horror Film,” film critic Robin Wood introduces the idea of “the Other,” and argues that the Other is what “bourgeois society cannot understand or accept but must deal with,” either through destruction or assimilation. In the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Wood argues, the Other is the cannibalistic family who are themselves the victims of an industrial capitalist system; they embody what he considers “Other”—they are the proletariat, they have differing ideologies, they are outsiders—all of which are a result of capitalism. However, the interpretation of the film can be extended beyond Wood’s critique of capitalism. The perverted representation of the family and the worker in the film show a twisted version of normality so absurd that it parodies American values such as the family, the worker, and the American dream, and in doing so, criticizes them.

**Samantha Tsai**

**“Thirsty for More”:  
*The Origins of Our Perceptions of Brutality in Home Alone***

The Romantic view of children is a newfound perception that arose around the 1700s—a view that established children as intrinsically pure, and therefore separate from “corrupt” adults. *Home Alone*, on the other hand, is a lively comedy about a little boy named Kevin who wards off a pair of hapless robbers when his family accidentally abandons him at home during the holidays. The film is a Christmas classic, seemingly manufactured for pure entertainment. Upon closer examination, however, foundational principles about children quickly emerge: Kevin, while young, demonstrates an enormous capacity for brutality. But the audience leaves the movie theater with no qualms. Why do we find it acceptable for Kevin to display this blatant show of sadism? My paper presents two factors that affect our perceptions of Kevin’s brutality—the Romantic view of children, and the cinematic portrayal of Kevin as a Romantic child. I argue that, while *Home Alone* may seem like an uncomplicated Christmas movie, the film actually enables us to scrutinize our own perceptions of our own children; it enables us to learn the importance of drawing our own conclusions from our own observations, instead of blindly following societal preconceptions.

# No Escape

Moderated by Professor William Handley, Department of English

Tuesday, April 14  
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

**Melissa Chen**

## **The Synthesis of Women Into Their Homes and Male Ideals**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent of suburban women's conflation to their environment and how influences from their male counterparts shape their personalities. I explore both the corporal and spiritual aspects of female conflation with the home and male dominance by analyzing characters from director Sam Mendes's *Revolutionary Road*, a film in which housewife April Wheeler literally blends in with her home's interior and natural environment. I explore how April dresses to blend in with her home interior and natural environment. Furthermore, I explore how this behavior is indicative of how other suburban women like April dress for men's approval as good housewives. While initially enchanted by a quaint home in the suburbs, April ultimately dreams of a life in Paris with her family, a world away from their neighborhood's stifling uniformity. Finally, I ponder the role her husband Frank plays in April's construction of her spiritual selfhood. April and Frank are initially seen as poster children of the suburbs but their lack of conformity makes them suspect. This denial to conform hints that the suburbs have an acknowledged dark side that is delicate to exposure. The American Dream in *Revolutionary Road*, finally, is really tied together by a taboo acceptance of deep depression under thickly-coated idealism.

**Kimberly Rogers**

## **External Factors Shaping Identity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man***

How free are we to shape our own identities? Jean Paul Sartre's strain of existentialism attributes ownership over identity to the individual. Without a predetermined form dictating identity, individuals are free to shape their own, and others', perception of themselves. While inspiring, this theory of identity neglects certain constraints. By viewing James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* through an existentialist lens, it is possible to consider how the biracial narrator "becomes" within the context of racial polarity. However, the novel presents important complications to Sartre's theories by illustrating the narrator's struggles as he attempts to fit into the black-white dichotomy of the Reconstruction Era. Especially within the context of a highly racialized America, Johnson's novel demonstrates how social prejudices and expectations limit individual agency. Johnson's novel qualifies the existentialist view by showing ways in which existentialism neglects to consider the social forces that inhibit self-determination.

**Shelby Simonich**

## **Uprooting Yankee Roots: The Exploration of American Identity in *Giovanni's Room***

Personal identity is often built from elements of one's past. Unfortunately for some, it is difficult to erase that which has been recorded in history. For protagonist David in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, this creates the core struggle in an expatriate life centered on defining who he is. Baldwin presents a possible explanation for David's dilemma in his essay "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American," in which he contends that the term "American" has no real meaning. I argue that being American does mean *something*. Although Baldwin may be correct in asserting that it is an ambiguous identity, it is still an identity. Baldwin in fact demonstrates through David that American heritage represents a vital part of a person's sense of self. For David, it seems that as far as he goes, he cannot shed his ties to his homeland. David's affiliation with the country of his birth is a bond from which he cannot escape. Try as he might, he can never truly break away from what was built in the short but formative time he spent here. Perhaps, then, our past is not merely prologue, but an integral part of the present.

**Maddy Vogel**

**You Can't Outrun Your Past:  
Anti-Semitism in *What Makes Sammy Run?***

In the America of Budd Schulberg's novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, anti-Semitism is a dominant ideology that Shmelka Glickstein and the Jewish immigrant population struggle with. The period's anti-Semitism illustrates Marx's theory that the dominant class in a society establishes and imposes upon the proletariat an ideology that maintains the status quo, a status quo that keeps the Rivington Street residents on Rivington Street and places limitations on anyone trying to reach beyond their social class. This paper argues that Sammy Glick attempts to fight against the anti-Semitic ideology to try and find success away from impoverished Rivington Street in glamorous Hollywood, but by fighting the anti-Semitic stereotypes put in place by the dominant class, he only reinforces them. Sammy ends up destroying his free will by enslaving himself to the dominant class, the exact thing he was trying to outrun.

**Bartow Weiss**

**Bureaucracy in Video Games:  
Catalyzing Revolution**

In *Papers, Please*, a videogame reminiscent of Soviet-era communist bureaucracy, you play as a border inspector tasked with checking the travel documents of people attempting to enter your country. As a human cog in a vast administrative machinery, *Papers, Please* challenges you to conform to the monotonous routines and impoverished conditions of oppressive bureaucratic regimes, as you perform your repetitive tasks. It's easy to get caught up in perfecting your execution of the tasks the game presents, as you try to avoid mistakes, catch people with improper documents, and provide for your family at home. But in so doing, it is also easy to lose sight of the broader implications of performing this work. Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* articulates what she calls the "banality of evil," and demonstrates the consequences of submitting to these kinds of bureaucratic systems. Yet how can we resist, when bare survival depends on the meager rewards of submission, and even the slightest rebellious act is punished? I argue that *Papers, Please* provides an experience so horrible that it instigates its own rebellion, a claim that should remind us of all the real-world bureaucracies that don't.

# What You See Is What You Get

Moderated by Professor Daniel Richter, Department of Classics

Tuesday, April 14  
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

**Emma Dyson**

## **The Pornographic Aesthetic: Morality and Sincerity in Contemporary Pornography**

David Foster Wallace's essay "Big Red Son" presents the adult video industry as a hellscape of commercialism and aggressive marketing. And in a way, that's what it is. Pornography can be an odious expression of commercialism, and is often condemned as misogynistic for its objectification of women. But this stigma is to some degree unfortunate, as it obscures pornography's potential as a moral and aesthetic object worthy of analysis. Contemporary online porn videos, like those discussed in "Big Red Son," are reflections of the society producing them; more artistic works, like the Marquis de Sade's famous *Justine*, deploy the obscene as a means of social critique. This paper examines pornography's transgression of social norms, as well as its continual transgressions of the ever-changing norms it creates for itself. I contend that pornography must react to the prevailing cultural attitudes toward sex, even as it unconsciously shapes those attitudes. Modern pornography, I argue, is an art form—one of the last art forms free of irony or self-awareness, and thus the ultimate expression of sincerity.

**Brianna Johnson**

## **The Performance of Privilege**

As RuPaul once said, "We are all born naked and the rest is drag." In Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary about Harlem drag culture, *Paris Is Burning*, it is clear how this statement pertains to Judith Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender: biologically male individuals don makeup and affect vocal changes in order to become more feminine. But Butler's idea that "acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way" can also apply to privilege. The Harlem ball participants, mostly poor gay black men, often seem entranced with the privilege they don't have, but by showing that privilege can so easily be performed, it questions that privilege's reification. Gender and privilege are only real to the extent that they are performed, both in drag culture and in reality. However, the privileged don't realize that they are performing their own privilege, and that seems to be what differentiates drag from real life: the awareness of its own performance.

**Casey Klecan**

## **Figuring Humanity: On Blindspots in *Serial***

Adnan Syed murdered Hae Min Lee. Or at least, that's what the jury thought. The infectious *Serial* podcast, part true-crime thriller, part documentary, tracks the sinister, the innocuous, and the strange as host Sarah Koenig works to clear up the 1999 case's muddled record. Despite her claims of objectivity, Koenig portrays Syed as the most complex person in the case, resulting in a narrative that leans in his favor. Applying Amelie Rorty's taxonomy "Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals," I want to suggest that Adnan is the only "person" in a narrative full of characters and figures. I use Rorty's distinctions between figures, characters, and persons to demonstrate how Koenig emphasizes Adnan's humanity while de-emphasizing that of the other major players. I also discuss how Koenig's positionality as an Adnan sympathizer problematizes the attention *Serial* has drawn to the plugging of the justice system.

**Spencer Lepow**

**An Insight to Paul Thomas' Juxtaposition of Sound and Visuals in *There Will Be Blood***

This essay concerns the methodology behind music extension in Paul Thomas's *There Will Be Blood*. After first an initial viewing of the movie, the extended length even sustained building of tension in the soundtrack past the climax of scenes was readily apparent. The aim of this essay is to follow a close viewing of two scenes in particular to discern the effect of this stylistic choice. In the first, the protagonist's son, H. W. Plainview, goes deaf following an oil rig explosion. The second shows the subsequent actions Daniel Plainview takes following his rejection of Standard Oil's massive offer. John Beck's conclusion to *Dirty Wars* serves as a framework to best contextualize how Thomas's style creates the sentiment "what's past is prologue." Through the examination of these two scenes under the Beck's lens it becomes apparent that Thomas uses traumatic experiences to drive the future by employing a clash of visual and auditory senses.

**Madelaine Wood**

**A Lingering Presence:  
The Visual Representation of the Past in Joe Wright's *Atonement***

In Joe Wright's 2007 film, *Atonement*, based on Ian McEwan's novel of the same name, the past is hardly past. Time does not elapse—events do not fade into memories, the present does not become the past. Instead, time lingers, unwavering, a constant reminder that what has been done cannot be undone. This lingering presence is distributed throughout the film's many complex layers; however, this paper focuses specifically on the way that Joe Wright's visual style depicts the past as a constant presence. Throughout the film, which spans five years, Wright uses repetitive imagery, composition, and camera movements to evoke scenes from one specific summer night in 1935, the night on which a devastating and life-altering mistake was made. In this way, the past never truly becomes the past, both for the characters and the audience. In conjunction with analysis of the film's mise-en-scene, the author uses selections from Kali Tal's book, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, to argue that the consistent representation of the past as present prevents the characters from healing and ultimately renders the protagonists' search for closure futile.

# Ties That Bind

Moderated by Professor Bruce Smith, Department of English and  
School of Dramatic Arts

Tuesday, April 14  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Scriptorium

**Justine Breuch**

## **Everything Is Nothing and Nothing Is Everything: Suburban Nihilism in *American Beauty***

With its white picket fences, consumer excess, and heightened superficialism, suburbia provides the ideal breeding ground for nihilism, or the devaluation of all values. In Sam Mendes's *American Beauty*, Lester, the middle-aged suburbanite entering his mid-life crisis, goes through the motions of a life that bears no real meaning and finds himself lost within the emptiness of his experiences. To usurp control of his valueless existence, he turns to an act of rebellion: choosing to pursue nothing but the whim of his desires. Conversely, Ricky, the film's peculiar boy next door, rejects suburban values, yet still lives in a world of his own constructed values. In this way, Lester exemplifies a life plagued by what Nietzsche refers to as a pervasive illness, or nihilism, while Ricky moves beyond nihilism to a form of self-mastery. Using Nietzsche's call to revalue all values and find meaning in the meaningless, I will examine how the contrasting reactionary philosophies of Lester and Ricky may validate Nietzsche's theories. Additionally, I will evaluate the impact of nihilism on one's relationships and overall happiness within the context of the suburbs and dispute suggestions that suburban nihilism ends with a consciousness of its meaninglessness. Instead, I contend that suburban nihilism allows for an unparalleled liberation to define one's own existence.

**Caleb Hudson**

## **Better Backwards Than Forwards**

What does it mean to be in love? A perplexing question many ask, yet few answer. In Aimee Bender's view, lovers should be like animals—literally. As a result of reverse evolution, Ben, the lover of the protagonist in "The Remember," devolves to ever more primitive animal forms. With each digression, the lovers grow increasingly more intimate. In this strange transformation from human to beast, Bender suggests that too much forward thought hinders closeness between people. "Better Backwards than Forwards" attempts to define a love that defies time, space, and reality.

**Beatrix Lu**

## **Nanapapa, Nanapush: Performing Parenthood in *Tracks***

We often take our parents for granted, assuming that they will always be there to love us and take care of us. Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* explores the notion of parenthood through the Judith Butler's theory of performative identity. For Nanapush, an elderly Native American man, parenthood is not "stabilized, polarized . . . discreet and intractable." Nanapush's belief manifests in his odd relationship with his two wards: Fleur, an eccentric girl whom he rescues from a snowstorm and Lulu, Fleur's even wilder daughter. Regardless of the stark generational differences and the lack of biological relationship, Nanapush acts as a father to the two women, attempting to shield them from society and perform the traditionally paternal act of giving his daughters away in marriage. Ultimately, Nanapush's actions are driven not only by his kindness but also by his desire to atone for his previous failure to save his own biological daughter. Thus, Nanapush's tragic past serves as "prologue" for his interactions with Lulu and Fleur, proving that parenthood isn't an inherent biological behavior but rather a consciously chosen performance of love and affection.

**Caroline Moore**

**Rising from the Ashes (Charred):  
The Cycle of Destruction and Creation in Claire Vaye Watkins's "The Archivist"**

Cormac McCarthy once said that only “in the world’s destruction [is it] possible to see how it was made.” In the book *Dirty Wars*, theorist John Beck echoes this sentiment, asserting that (re)formation is engendered by demolition in what McCarthy calls the “ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be.” However, darkly demiurgic forces do not merely dissolve when their work is done, but rather become subsumed into the object of their creation. For Nat, the protagonist of Claire Vaye Watkins’ short story “The Archivist,” a caustic past serves as prologue to inner torment. She clings to toxicity in order to remain whole, terrified of the self-severing that accompanies loving another. But when an unplanned pregnancy forces her to confront her parasitic fear, she must ask whether her child has a chance at evading suffocation, of rising like a phoenix from the ashes, escaping unscathed, glistening, and triumphant. In my paper, I will address this question alongside the antithetical characterization of destruction as an architect of creation. Can elemental revision—of a person, a political structure, a nation—occur peacefully, without violence? Can one escape a destructive past, or will it forever remain a fundamental and corrosive component of identity?

**SarahBelle Selig**

**From Infant to Inmate:  
Freud and the Child in *Heavenly Creatures***

“It is indeed one of the most important social tasks of education to restrain . . . the sexual instinct,” Sigmund Freud writes. Since Freud’s time, many scholars would agree with his theory that proper child development should exclude extensive sexuality. But what about the outliers? How do we define the normal child, and how does our society deal with those beyond that definition? What are the consequences of accepting Freud’s process of child development, or in other words, enlisting the past as prologue and using traditional views to explain the modern child? Using Freud’s arguments as a critical lens, my paper will analyze the process of development as demonstrated by Peter Jackson’s *Heavenly Creatures*, the story of two girls whose friendship takes a murderous turn. As the relationship becomes “abnormal,” several characters step in to help control the girls’ attachment to each other. As the ending suggests, Jackson’s demonstration of the negative consequences of these interventions offers criticism of subscribing to Freud’s theory, and my paper will work through this reproach in hopes of shedding new light on our flawed social construct of the “normal” child.



# Coping Mechanisms

Moderated by Brianna Beehler, Department of English

Tuesday, April 14  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Carnegie

**Sanika Bhargaw**

## **The Ethics of Fictionalizing the Past in *Atonement***

People say the past can't be rewritten. But in the 2007 film *Atonement*, the main character Briony does just that—she writes a novel narrating a traumatic event in her childhood that she had a hand in causing, but creates a fictional happy ending. My paper argues that any fictionalization of the past is problematic in several ways. Briony's novel, while an attempt to atone for the trauma she caused, limits her ability to truly atone because of its fictional elements—she does not own up to the full truth. Changing the narrative also implies that fictionalization can fix part of the problem. However, this allows both Briony and her readers as well as us as audience members to overlook the horrifying truth and the extent of the harm caused. Most problematic, this fictionalization speaks to our tendency as humans to value a hopeful ending and the message that trauma can be overcome. This tendency applied to traumatic events in real life becomes troubling—if we can ignore the truth in favor of a more hopeful story, we limit our ability to understand, learn from, and eventually prevent real trauma.

**Maddi Eckert**

## **Generation Y's "Decomposition": A Destruction of the Status Quo in *The Cement Garden***

Ian McEwan wrote his 1978 novel *The Cement Garden* during a transformative time for gender identity—a time when revolutionary thinkers such as Judith Butler proposed more fluid concepts of gender that began to eclipse gender binaries and the Freudian notion of the Oedipal Complex. In the novel, four newly orphaned children are forced to adapt to life without their parents, and they adopt unconventional gender roles in the process. Many readers may interpret *The Cement Garden* through a traditional lens of gender binarism: Cristina Ionica, for example, labels the destruction of traditional roles as a "decomposition" of societal norms and a reversion to less civilized times. I, however, take a different approach: while I do agree that the novel's "decomposition" signifies a rejection of traditional gender identities, it is not a rejection of society as a whole. Instead, I argue that *The Cement Garden* provides a lens for my generation's changing views on gender. This "decomposition" is not a reversion, then, but rather a refusal to conform to constricting gender standards that once reigned.

**Yuna Lee**

## **Framing the Present: The Necessity of Prologue and Epilogue**

Time is not merely a tag that bookmarks our present existence; it is a continuum comprised of past, present and future. In his essay "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American," James Baldwin asserts the equivalent importance of each component in molding the human experience. The present is informed by the past, which carries "a sense of the mysterious and inexorable limits of life." The future elicits a sense of anticipation—"a new sense of life's possibilities." My essay considers the influence of the past and future on the human's present experience through the lens of *Giovanni's Room*, a novel also authored by Baldwin. Through the struggles of his protagonist David in coming to terms with his homosexuality, Baldwin contends that the present is only worthwhile when accompanied by an appreciation of the past and anticipation towards the future. The past is our prologue, the future our epilogue; the present necessitates both.

Susan Lin

**Buried Sweaters:  
Requiem for the Past**

Do even survivors return from war? How do our pasts construct our preconceived notions of the future? In her short story, "What You Left in the Ditch," Aimee Bender explores the life of a woman whose husband returns home from the war without lips. Although her husband technically returns with his life, the woman finds herself unsettled by how their post-war future together is neither the great tragedy or miracle she had anticipated. Instead, it is an uncomfortable medium that defies the expected in a mundane way. Using this struggle, Bender explores what it means to love another person and how sometimes in doing so, we learn to let go of all desires for a better past or future.

Sarah Elizabeth Shaffer

**How to Un-Make a Monster:  
Peter Chelsom's *The Mighty* Through the Lens of Disability Advocacy**

In "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," noted movie critic Robin Wood suggests that we are all responsible for the creation of monsters. Through stories and stereotypes, society represses, rejects, and makes other anybody too far off the norm. We are careful to separate "us" from "them," and all those unlucky enough to fall in to the "them" category are then painted as odd distortions of humanity that are one-sided at best and threatening at worst. In other words, they are made monsters. Texts such as *Disability Worlds* by Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp put forth the idea that Wood's theory is especially true in the case of the disabled: the stigmatization and exclusion of disabled people is due much less to any physical or mental imperfections than it is to a society into which they have not been invited to fully participate. Making a monster is much easier than one would think; the far greater challenge is to un-make one. Peter Chelsom's *The Mighty*, explored through a lens crafted from disability advocacy and studies on inclusion, is a brilliant example of the possibility of achieving this daunting task through interweaving advocacy and awareness with story in a way that not only captures minds, but opens hearts.

**Lisa Ann Johnson**

**Courage to Speak:  
The Power of Personal Narrative in *The Things They Carried***

Scholar Michael Selig has argued that narratives focused on individual soldiers' struggles to survive distract readers from critical commentary on the Vietnam War. However, Tim O'Brien's collection of short stories, *The Things They Carried*, demonstrates that personal narrative has the ability to strengthen political commentary. One of these stories, "Speaking of Courage," examines a veteran's return to a patriotic, but willfully ignorant, town. Using the private struggle of one veteran enables O'Brien's implication of the reader in his critique of the society that allowed the United States to involve itself in what he terms the "wrong war." His fictional narratives help to build cultural memory by allowing readers to relate to one specific wartime experience and see that experience as a consequence of widespread American apathy. This new cultural memory is necessary if we are to appropriately weigh the wastes of war as we consider the costs of future armed conflict. Rather than getting mired in a debate about what could have altered the past, O'Brien encourages us to accept the past for what it is—a set of lessons to consider as we face the future.

**Jamie Kwong**

**A Water Gun, *The Brady Bunch*, and Marx:  
Analyzing Social Backgrounds in *To Die For***

This paper analyzes the working class upbringing of Lydia Mertz in Joyce Maynard's novel *To Die For*. It suggests that because Lydia grows up as a working class daughter, she becomes vulnerable to dominating figures in her life, reflecting Marx's notion that the dominant class exploits the proletariat. The presence of two dominating figures in her childhood, the paper argues, not only portrays Lydia's naïve notion of normalcy but also makes her easily manipulatable. The novel's protagonist takes advantage of that fact, their relationship demonstrating that Lydia responds to dominant figures only submissively and passively. Emphasizing that Lydia is subject to these dominating people because of her working class status, I suggest that Maynard's portrayal of Lydia supports Marx's ideas about class and exploitation. Maynard puts a personal—albeit tragic—face to Marx's impersonal concepts.

**David Manahan**

**Living in the Moment:  
Methods Used to Influence Thoughts and Uphold the Status Quo**

This paper analyzes thought repression as a means to control and oppress populations in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In the novel, an ideological apparatus has been implemented that promotes values of pleasure and immediate gratification. Drugs, sex, and games are crammed into every free minute available to the people, keeping their thoughts focused on the immediate present. Without the ability to plan ahead or to reflect upon the past, there can be no change. Without change, the inhabitants of *Brave New World* cannot do anything but accept and advocate their dystopian society. Despite this novel being fictitious, *Brave New World* has characteristics and institutions found in our reality. There are obvious examples like propaganda, which is used in democratic and tyrannical regimes alike to influence thoughts. Indirectly, religion and sports are also tools used to brainwash and distract suppressed peoples from what really matters. The power and the ability to think is too valuable for anyone to give up.

**Hallie Martin**

**Homosexuality Becomes Gay:  
How Camp Complicates Horror's Lens of Homosexuality in *The Bride of Frankenstein***

In "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," film critic Robin Wood defines horror films as portrayals of a "repressed wish . . . so terrible that it must be repudiated as loathsome." This "repressed wish" includes any desire that goes against our predetermined roles in an ideal "monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalist" society. According to Wood's definition, horror films reject this desire by projecting it onto a repulsive, horrifying cinematic experience in a process called "Othering." Horror-comedy *The Bride of Frankenstein* complicates Wood's definition of Othering by infusing horror with camp. The film's director, James Whale, was openly gay throughout his career, something that was very unusual in the 1930s. Consequently, many viewers interpret his use of camp as having a gay subtext. Typically, homosexuality, a topic often considered "terrible" and "loathsome" at the time of the film's premiere in 1935, would be projected as such. However, *The Bride of Frankenstein's* allusions to homosexuality are softened by humor and ironic dialogue. Rather than shrieking in fear, we laugh along with the film's gay insinuations. Camp brings the "repressed" to the surface so that we can enjoy it, rather than, in the case of the classic horror film, reject it. Perhaps by causing us to laugh along with its campy insinuations, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, whether intentionally or not, urges us to embrace gayness.

**Kristie Tu**

**Recovering a Modern "Happily Ever After" from Aimee Bender's "Loser"**

Known for her surrealist fiction that effortlessly weaves spectacular strangeness into ordinary life, Aimee Bender is an author accustomed to defying traditional expectations. Instead of transporting readers to a typical fairy tale, in her short story, "Loser," Bender takes us to a deeply saddening universe of loneliness, rejection, and personal failure. Through analysis of Bender's masterful storytelling, however, it is understood why this reversal is set in place: to propel readers to genuinely empathize for our hero, the Loser/Finder, as he tries to reconcile with loss and loneliness. Focusing in on this relationship between an emotional story and its ability to move an audience, my paper showcases how a fairy tale does not necessarily need to provide a happy ending. It is the way readers are compelled to emotionally respond that is the true modern magic.

# Chaos/Control

Moderated by Professor Kate Flint, Departments of Art History and English

Tuesday, April 14  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

**Amanda Chung**

## **On the Strangeness of Death and Dreaming**

What experiences comprise a dream state? What conditions constitute death? In philosopher Hélène Cixous's 1993 book *The School of Dreams* and author Banana Yoshimoto's 2001 novella *Night and Night's Travelers*, the answers to these questions dwell in the concept of immediacy. For in both dreams and death, there is no recognizable transitional state; one is instantly moved from consciousness to reverie, or from the physical world to whatever world exists beyond this one. This essay is by no means an existential revelation about the meaning of life, but rather an exploration in themes of voyage, transformation, and what it means to be alive even if not physically present.

**Maya Harmon**

## **Redirecting the Past: Autobiographical Film and Ideology in *Americana***

David Bell, the protagonist of Don DeLillo's *Americana*, is living the American Dream. Handsome, loved by women, and a successful television executive in a Manhattan office, he nevertheless remains unsatisfied. David's life is a constant competition, with each victory only being the precursor to the next battle. Working behind the scenes in the media industry reinforces David's sense that the American Dream is an ideological myth, a fable he's grown up hearing, and this leads him to obsess over his own past. The flashback descriptions of David's suburban childhood become the prologue for an experimental, semi-autobiographical film he feels compelled to direct in the second half of *Americana*. Filming in a small town in the Midwest, David neglects all responsibilities and eventually loses everything: his job, his friends, and his sense of himself. This paper thus explores how David's attempt to redirect his childhood is an attempt to free himself from the ideology of success inherent to the American Dream. Ultimately, David's endeavor to redirect his past fails, with complete exile from society now his last chance of escape. However, this is hardly successful either, leaving David unsure of what the future will bring.

**Michael O'Krent**

## **Hookup Culture, Predicted: Sexuality and Sociology in *Brave New World***

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley predicted that industrialization began a shift in values toward unbridled hedonism. A notable facet of the characters' hedonism emerges through their sexuality. The people of *Brave New World* are expected to engage in regular noncommittal sex with multiple partners. Sexuality thus functions only to give pleasure, even to the extent that the World State has abandoned the family unit and sexual reproduction as categories of social organization. Paralleling Huxley's premonition, modern sociologists theorize "hookups" on college campuses as performances of "sexual scripts" that prescribe sexual behaviors along gender lines. The sexual expectations imposed on fictional characters like Lenina Crowne mirror the behavior of many sexually active young adults today. Modern sociologists have also begun to recognize the learned hedonism in sexual habits like hookups. Thus, fiction and reality both presuppose hedonism by representing sex only as a means to physical pleasure, devoid of deeper meaning. *Brave New World* has become a near-literal sexual script that modern college students enact. In this paper, I argue that Huxley's premonition has thus proved an apt prologue to modern sexual culture.

**Ava Polzin**

**Becoming María Mandinga:  
The Value of Self-Definition and Its Journey in *Of Love and Other Demons***

Sierva María lives in the shadow of her biological family's unhappiness and neglect, seeking solace in the company of slaves her parents keep. Adopted into the freedom of their tradition, she creates an identity for herself: María Mandinga. This is the first step toward Jean Paul Sartre's idea of "becoming," a process of self-discovery and self-definition that counters its only alternative: mere existence. With her history what it is, Gabriel García Márquez's protagonist does not have an easy road to having "become," but to have "become" is inevitable, the process of "becoming" the only thing truly dictated by her previous (and to some extent, ongoing) circumstance. As in most stories, the past's prologue offers little more than context and informs little more than the course to a determined finish, the end itself remaining much the same. And as Sartre conveys, the final realization is the truest, most important part of "becoming."

**Andrew Turpin**

**The Sick and the Doomed:  
Illness and Predetermination in *The Others***

The characters of *The Others* are a sad bunch indeed; all are sick in a myriad of ways, and all are doomed. This sickness is expressed in many different ways, from the mental illness of the mother to the extreme photosensitivity suffered by her children. The movie is filled with attempts by the characters to combat these maladies. The mother battles through with the liberal application of religion. Her children hide behind curtains that veil them from the world. But religion cannot explain what happens to them as curtains are torn down, spreading poisonous light throughout their sanctuary. Despite all the characters' efforts to fight their fate and forge their own lives, *The Others* conveys in a brutally direct way how forces beyond our control are what shape us into who we are.

# Blurred Lines

Moderated by Professor Edwin McCann, School of Philosophy

Tuesday, April 14  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

**Michael Boyle**

## **“The Myths Were in Place Before Nightfall”: Dave Cullen’s *Columbine* and the Media’s Desire to Narrativize**

On April 20, 1999, two teenagers walked into their high school and murdered thirteen people. In the hours that followed, media outlets from around the world swarmed Columbine, Colorado with one pressing question: Why? By the following day, the media had an answer. They reported that the shooters were targeting jocks as part of a group called the trench coat mafia. However, in Dave Cullen’s *Columbine*, we see that this report, like so many others about the shooting, had little basis in fact. By looking at the events depicted in *Columbine* through a lens created by Hayden White in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, I have investigated the origin of these rumors. White describes the practice of “narrativization,” in which the past is retrospectively edited to create a better story. I examine why, when it came to Columbine, the media tended to narrativize rather than narrate. I explore the negative effects of such revisionist reporting, and ultimately present an alternative path for the media in the wake of such a jarring, tragic event.

**Aisha J. Counts**

## **Palindrome: *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* as Prologue and Epilogue to History and Myth**

Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* serves as both prologue and epilogue to the continuous reconstruction of Billy the Kid at the hands of history and myth. Billy the Kid has become the myth of the American West, a historical figure whose reconstruction over time has turned him into legend. In John Beck’s *Dirty Wars*, his chapter “The Prehistory of the Permanent War Economy” explores the ability of literature to construct such history, focusing specifically on the function of epilogue and time. Beck asserts, for example, that the epilogue of *Blood Meridian* demands “we read the novel back through this final puzzle.” Ondaatje’s entire work functions as an epilogue to the reader’s pre-knowledge of Billy the Kid. Beck’s theories thus reveal that Ondaatje’s text must also be read backwards, and applied to the history and myth of Billy the Kid.

**Andrew Geoly**

## **The Past Is Play-Dough: An Analysis of Malleability in Memory in Victor LaValle’s *The Devil in Silver***

*The Devil in Silver* by Victor LaValle depicts a wrongfully incarcerated patient inside of a modern mental hospital in Queens, New York. As memory plays an integral role within the novel, I plan to read the text with a lens informed by the theories of malleable memory and mental sets, as understood by psychologists Elizabeth Loftus and Frederic Bartlett. Mental sets can be understood as the rigid process of problem solving based on past successes, memories, and biases. Mental sets are definitively fixed. A fixed mental set causes a person to continually face novel challenges with the same approach, regardless of functionality. The opposite of a mental set, cognitive flexibility, on the other hand allows a shift in one’s approach. LaValle portrays the struggle of patients to survive in a system that profits from their suffering by perpetuating their stay and exploiting them. Patients in this exploitative system must develop cognitive flexibility in order to survive. I propose that within the context of the novel, the malleability of memories enables characters to loosen mental sets and readily adapt to their environment. Consequently, characters that can alter their approach to problems can find purpose and agency in a system that depends on their subjugation.



**Selene Klasner**

**Where Film Falls Short:  
Capitalizing on Commercial Contentment in *Jakob the Liar***

As we move farther and farther in time from the Holocaust and its survivors die, its remembrance becomes even more difficult. To keep this horrific past alive in the present, we must rely on proper, exact, and disciplined retellings of the events. But as we lose the firsthand survival account, how can we do this? Perhaps we need to rely on fiction. Yet we must take great care in the way these stories are told. In her paper, "Representing the Holocaust: The Case for History," Holocaust historian Inga Clendinnen outlines the pitfalls to which fiction and especially film can fall prey when trying to represent the Holocaust. Filmmakers capitalize on what they know will please an audience, vulgarizing the events and all but ignoring the truth. My paper examines one such film: Peter Kassovitz's *Jakob the Liar*. The film follows Jakob, a Polish Jew, and his attempts to bring hope to the people of his ghetto through news of the war and outside world. The film exemplifies the shortcomings Clendinnen describes, comforting the viewer with familiar characters, relationships, and particularly an overdone hopeful ending, instead of attempting to convey the complex and accurate horror of the Holocaust.

**Lucia Riera**

**Fact or Fiction?:  
Analyzing Production Elements in *Serial***

Anyone familiar with the opening credits of *Serial* knows the chilling suspense and anticipation created through a simple thirty-second musical prologue. The thorough investigation of a murder that occurred over fifteen years ago would be an impressive feat of journalism; however, when that story is then produced as an episodic podcast the ethical line between entertainment and investigative journalism blurs. *Serial*, the recently released podcast, comes close to distorting reality for the sake of entertainment. In fact, *Serial* illustrates Barthes's understanding that "the Text is experienced only in the activity of production." As the narrator Sarah Koenig delves into the murder case of eighteen-year-old Hae Min Lee, she turns the murder into a form of narrative text. However, the narrative Koenig creates is not necessarily the truth. I discuss the relationship between Koenig and her audience, especially concerning how the audience experiences and engages with the text through the podcast's unique production style. Koenig's use of music and serialized structure creates a narrative reminiscent of detective fiction. The dangerous similarity between aspects of *Serial* and detective fiction makes it possible to misinterpret *Serial* as a work of fiction, which causes it to dance the line between fact and fiction, ethical and unethical.

# Eye of the Beholder

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Scriptorium

**David Phillip Fishman**

## **The Broken Watch: Temporality and Responsibility in *Watchmen***

Alan Moore's *Watchmen* introduced readers to a superhero of unmatched power: Dr. Manhattan. While he can manipulate matter and space at will, Dr. Manhattan's unique perspective of time alienates him from humanity. He experiences all of time simultaneously, with no distinctions between past, present, and future. In showing us this perspective, Moore negates any sense of responsibility or autonomy stemming from a linear perception of time. Dr. Manhattan struggles with his knowledge of a predestined future, and his inability to change the course of future events. His immense power, ironically, leaves him feeling more powerless than the rest of us. Dr. Manhattan eventually abandons not only the United States, but the entire planet, completely disavowing any responsibility toward humanity in the face of history's unalterable outcome. Meanwhile, we continue fighting to improve this outcome, which directly opposes Dr. Manhattan's fatalism but is only possible due to our ignorance of the future. And yet, if Dr. Manhattan's foreknowledge of the future is correct and unalterable, our struggles are ultimately as fruitless as his strategy of abandonment.

**Caitlin Greenho**

## **The Timeless Vortex of the Desert**

When thinking of the word "desert," what comes to mind? Common answers are "empty" or "wasteland." Do these associations allow desert culture to exist the way it does—overlooked and isolated? It is no secret that many strange occurrences, ranging from the drug trade to nuclear testing, take place in the desert. Perhaps it is because it is easy to keep secrets in a place rejected by pop culture. Claire Vaye Watkins in *Battleborn* reports on cultures that could not possibly exist outside of the desert's vortex. The peculiar stories she tells, particularly "Man-O-War," demonstrate that isolation forces desert dwellers to exist in a nearly timeless vortex, which in turn alters their way of life. In his conclusion to *Endless War*, John Beck analyzes why the desert exists as a distinct "other." Beck's observations will be used to break down "Man-O-War" in order to present the argument that the desert landscape permits its residents to exist in an unchanging and mysteriously separate realm.

**Medeeha Khan**

## **The Power of Narrative Spin: The Mayhem of Stereotypes in *Serial***

Equality! Justice! A new era devoid of the plague of racism has risen. Or has it? The podcast *Serial* has evoked this question, which I explored in the context of Bonilla-Silva's notion of color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva delineates an insidious form of racism that penetrates our consciousness even as we may believe that we are not influenced by racial prejudice. We would like to think that we are exempt from the influences of the media; however, a close analysis of *Serial* episodes two and seven demonstrates that neither the narrator nor we are immune to the influences of color-blindness. From episode two, "The Breakup" where Sara restricts the discussion of race to that of unfavorable stereotypes, to episode seven, "The Opposite of the Prosecution," where she exhibits skepticism towards the factor of racial bias, it is evident that vestiges of color-blind racism continue to impact the entertainment industry (for, ultimately, *Serial* is entertainment) as well as listeners.

**Samantha Sharkoff**

**Remembering the Dead:  
An Analysis of Narrative in Bringing Back the Dead in Tim O'Brien's "The Man I Killed"**

What do we owe the dead—especially if we don't know them? My paper answers this question by closely examining Tim O'Brien's short story "The Man I Killed" from his fictionalized Vietnam War memoir *The Things They Carried*, and putting it into conversation with critic and historian Hayden White's analysis of narratives and their purposes and dangers. In the short story, O'Brien develops an elaborate backstory to the soldier he killed by taking small observations of the man and then extrapolating on them. My paper argues that by creating a narrative of the dead man's life, O'Brien does not pay homage to the man, but rather, helps himself cope with the guilt he feels—instead creating a narrative not to capture the life of the man but to save himself.

**Cole Sullivan**

**Class as the Basis for Social Taste in *What Makes Sammy Run?***

After the eponymous protagonist in Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* rockets out of poverty to become a successful Hollywood executive, he attempts to change his outward appearance to match his newfound class status. This paper will argue that Sammy's transformation closely aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's assertion that class forms the basis of social taste. Through his clothing—specifically his shoes—and his behavior, Sammy attempts to fit in with a higher class. Sammy's *habitas*, his outward appearance and displays of taste, adjusts as he changes social classes.

# Don't Look Back

Moderated by Samantha Carrick, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Carnegie

**Dezi Gallegos**

## **Our Pain: Compassionate Narrativization in *The Virgin Suicides***

The word “compassion” can be broken down into the derivatives *com* (“together with”) and *pati* (“to suffer”). Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides* exemplifies compassion: not through deeds, but rather through the perfect unity of its multiple narrators. *The Virgin Suicides* is the story of a group of boys that fall in love with the attractive, ethereal Lisbon sisters. Their love story is abruptly ended when the sisters conduct a mass suicide, and the novel consists of the grown boys’ retrospective analysis and summary of the lead up to the girls’ deaths. In my paper, I will draw upon Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* to define narrativization—the process of drawing a narrative out of a series of events that do not necessarily yield one—and argue that *The Virgin Suicides* provides a critique of narrativization. Rather, it espouses compassion and connection as a means of coping with trauma. A novel that pivots on a group’s inability to understand the extent of another’s pain may seem an unlikely choice for a paper about compassion. And yet I argue that *The Virgin Suicides* is the perfect candidate, for in its unified narration it exemplifies “suffering together.”

**Clarissa James**

## **Our Wounded Nature**

“Mission: to be where I am.” Swedish poet and Nobel laureate, Tomas Tranströmer, asks his readers to be aware of the present moment and to make something of it. Yet, much of Tranströmer’s work is most fully appreciated by recognizing its historical allusions, as well as its role in Tranströmer’s life. One such poem is “Kyrie”: a title loaded with historical significance. Meaning “Lord” in Greek, *kyrie* is used almost exclusively in the religious invocation “Lord, have mercy;” which can be traced back to pagan, Jewish, and Christian appeals to God in the midst of suffering. As the Roman Catholic missal explains, “Kyrie is the long cry of our wounded nature.” Tranströmer, a self-proclaimed history enthusiast raised in Catholic traditions, would have been aware of these historical and theological implications. In the poem, he makes use of the word “kyrie” in a similar plea. Events and spiritual experiences in Tranströmer’s own life impacted this poem and contribute to our understanding of it. The points of convergence between the pasts of Tranströmer and the word “kyrie” are where the fullest meaning of his poem “Kyrie” emerges and his uniquely optimistic message of hope in the midst of strife becomes clear.

**Amanda Keys**

## **The Alternative Narrative Trauma: Melding Past with Present in Wiesel’s *Night***

What gives power and purpose to the personal narrative? According to some trauma scholars, personal narratives about trauma are meant solely to serve as coping mechanisms. Scholar Kali Tal argues that due to the inherent separation of the writer and reader of such traumatic experiences, these narratives cannot alter the personal beliefs of a reader who did not experience the actual trauma. However, Elie Wiesel’s powerful Holocaust memoir *Night* presents an alternative narrative structure that challenges Tal’s arguments. My paper demonstrates that Wiesel’s use of a nonlinear storyline melds his past and present together to bridge the gap between cause and effect. In order to impact the reader, he takes care to intertwine events of past and present to establish the past as a haunting influence, a constant reminder of the significance of even the most seemingly inconsequential decisions. Wiesel effectively

moves beyond the personal level of the narrative, using these techniques to guide the readers' perspective in a manner that begins to shift personal myths, deepening their understanding of why learning from and acting upon trauma is necessary.

**Kenneth Lee**

**Snow on a Worn Trail:  
The Past Left Behind in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks***

As we look back on our past, it seemingly disappears. As time moves on, our grasp on our past seems to fade and yet, the past will always remain to help us straighten our course. In *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich weaves the story of two Native American women by the names of Pauline and Fleur, who lived during a time where Native Americans had the choice to cling to the old ways, or leave them behind and assimilate with the society of the white man. The narrator, Pauline, attempts to escape her past, using it to reform herself, in hopes of solidifying a legacy for herself is starkly different from the feared Fleur, who clings to the old ways of life and the past of her ancestors. This paper explores the relationships these women had with the past and how it ultimately becomes their prologue, to tell the story of how they came to reach their future.

**Nathan Myers**

**Revolving Door:  
Cycles of Past and Present in *Breaking Bad***

The character of Jesse Pinkman in Vince Gilligan's television series *Breaking Bad*, is a man who is inextricably bound by his past. It is one rife with drug abuse, murder, and other heinous crimes; and yet, his ability to contemplate and learn from his past is that which ultimately leads to his apparent salvation and a second chance. John Beck posits in his book *Dirty Wars* that "This imagining of a past that is also a future . . . characterizes something of the extent of contemporary anxieties." Using Beck as a lens and Pinkman as a literary device, this essay explores the nature of the past and its use as a tool to guide the present. Certain key moments in Jesse's life, such as the death of his girlfriend and his obsession with carpentering a small wooden box, are replayed in flashbacks throughout the series, giving Jesse's development a feeling of coming full circle. We see that the past is not only a static snapshot of what has already come, but also something which is inherently folded into the present because of how crucial it is to enacting change within the future.

# More Than Meets the Eye

Moderated by Corinna Schroeder, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Gutenberg

**Michael Cassutt**

## **White Reporter Privilege: Examining the Racial Bias of *Serial***

Sarah Koenig's *Serial*, a piece of investigative journalism, analyzes the complex details (or lack thereof) surrounding the 1999 murder of Hae Min Lee, an 18 year-old senior in Baltimore County. The podcast focuses specifically on Adnan Syed, Lee's ex-boyfriend, who was charged with first-degree murder and given a life sentence. While the show is acclaimed for its riveting coverage of a true crime murder mystery, it has also garnered its fair share of critics, who continue to raise ethical questions. Perhaps none of these issues is more divisive than the potential racial bias on the part of Koenig and her creative team. Some claim that Koenig's lack of objectivity in her coverage of the show's racial dynamics has influenced listeners and propagated a stereotypical view of race. Others defend Koenig and praise her portrayal of these multifaceted individuals. I approach this thorny issue from a new perspective: I propose that *Serial* serves as just another example of "color-blind" discrimination in our media. Defined by Edward Bonilla-Silva, this concept asserts that racism is pervasive in our culture because it is so subtle. Instead of placing the blame on Koenig specifically, I step back and view the podcast in a social context.

**Neda Davarpanah**

## **Imagined Innocence: Deconstructing the Virgin Archetype in *The Virgin Suicides***

*We had a lot of time to watch . . . the five glittering daughters in their homemade dresses,  
all lace and ruffle, bursting with their fructifying flesh.*  
— Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*

The anonymous men who narrate Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* exemplify the anachronistic worldview that brings about the decline of the American suburbs. Throughout the novel, the narrators regard the five Lisbon sisters as a single entity, objectifying them as icons of innocence and symbols of sex. Like the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome, the Lisbon girls' virginity is tied to the virtue of their neighborhood. In *The Purity Myth*, contemporary feminist Jessica Valenti writes that this expectation guarantees that women's "perception of themselves is absolutely dependent on their sexuality." In Eugenides's novel, the narrators view the Lisbon girls as untouched objects of desire. They detach the girls' physicality from their identities, in order to preserve the notion of the girls' purity in the face of their rebellion. The unique rebellion of Lux Lisbon is the only one that manifests sexually; yet she and her sisters are united in their desire to permanently escape the ever-watchful eyes of their neighbors. By choosing death over lives of confinement, the Lisbon sisters symbolize the imminent implosion of society's patriarchal value system.

**Audrey Looby**

## **A Living Nightmare: The Past's Influence on Septimus' Visions in *Mrs. Dalloway***

Carl G. Jung believes that humans use symbols to communicate the unexplainable—and what could be more unexplainable than the human subconscious? Dreams are often thought to be the way the subconscious converses—through symbols—with the conscious mind, and the same can be true of daydreams. Usually, daydreams are the workings of the conscious mind, and are more easily understood and controlled. That is, of course, unless you are Septimus Warren Smith, from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. A veteran of World War I, Septimus became plagued by visions and terrifying thoughts after the death of his commanding officer and close friend, Evans. On first glance,

the visions seem to be just the ravings of a broken man, with no seeming connection to anything in particular, but on closer inspection, they resonate back to the suppressed horror of Evans' death. Septimus' visions are actually a result of his subconscious' attempts to bring back memories of the war. Without knowledge of his past, the fantasies Septimus experiences would have no apparent meaning.

**Alex Melnik**

**Black and Wack:  
Exploring the Dual Stigmas of Race and Mental Illness in *The Devil in Silver***

The social and economic implications of racism—including segregation and discrimination in the workplace—are not a new topic. However, the psychological implications of racism have only recently been explored, resulting in the unsurprising conclusion that an association exists between racism and rates of mental illness. Institutional racism already creates barriers for receiving mental health treatment, but what many people do not realize is that interpersonal racism, that is, racism between individuals, causes mental harm, even if the racism is only perceived. In other words, minorities who believe they will be discriminated against, even if said discrimination does not occur, have a higher incidence of mental illness. Victor LaValle's *The Devil in Silver* illustrates how this issue becomes even more complex with people of color who have mental illnesses to begin with. These minority group members are affected by a "dual stigma"—the synergistic effects of the combined discriminations resulting from racism and the mental health stigma. LaValle's work takes place within the confines of New Hyde mental hospital and includes characters like Coffee, a Ugandan man staying in the United States on an expired work visa, and Xiu, a Chinese woman trapped in "immigration limbo." Through these characters, LaValle sheds some light on the intersection of stigmas and the barriers mentally ill people of color seeking treatment must face.

**Charlynn Yeung**

**Bloody Communion:  
Christianity and American Violence in the West as Seen in *Blood Meridian* and "Endless War"**

Religion has been the sweeping force behind many of history's most significant, although sometimes cataclysmic, events. Christian undertones and the religious theory of Manifest Destiny has served as the foundation for and precursor to America's violent and widespread expansion to the west. Exploring this relationship between religion and violence in "Endless War," John Beck discusses the cycle of war in the establishment of state parameters as it exists in history and in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. The company of men in McCarthy's novel justifies murder as a religious rite, killing and scalping Indians and Mexicans to fulfill Manifest Destiny. Looking closely at Christianity's role in western expansion, we can begin to analyze the hypocrisy behind the religious justification of Manifest Destiny. Religion therefore, unfortunately, acts as the prologue to and driving force behind the bloody past of American expansionism and America violence in the present.



# Who Am I?

Moderated by Professor Hilary Schor, Departments of English,  
Comparative Literature, and Gender Studies, and Gould School of Law

Wednesday, April 15  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

**Julianna Coleman**

## **Subduing the Propulsion into Modernity: The Limited Influence of Name on Identity**

In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Judith Butler labels gender as a “performance,” rather than an “expression.” Unlike one’s sex, which expresses biological fact, the performance of gender reflects one’s internal perception of his/her identity. This distinction between performance and expression appears in Louise Erdrich’s novel *Tracks*, but with respect to another component of identity—one’s name. Nanapush, an Anishinaabe tribal elder, finds himself surrounded by fragmentation and erosion—of his tribal and familial land, family members, and cultural traditions. He attempts to restore this fragmentation by “performing” his name to continue his bloodline. Believing that names can reflect more than just heredity, Nanapush names his adopted granddaughter “Lulu Nanapush.” However, Nanapush’s performance of his name, alone, cannot restore any unity. Lulu must also perform the Nanapush name by remaining connected to the tribal and familial traditions that Nanapush initially wishes to preserve. The friction that develops between these simultaneous dual performances—Nanapush’s performance of his name and Lulu’s performance of her identity—renders Nanapush incapable of restoring unity through the continuation of his bloodline. We ultimately realize that just as the performance of gender is, according to Butler, “ontologically necessitated,” so is the performance of one’s identity.

**Lian Eytinge**

## **Through the Eye of the Beholder: Examining Race in *The Long Fall***

Race is a main issue in many of the stories in today’s news. One piece of literature that reflects these recent racial issues is *The Long Fall*. From African-American writer Walter Mosley, *The Long Fall* is a recent literary narrative that brings together a modern commentary of race and the genre of detective fiction. In this novel, Leonid McGill uncovers the murders of four young black men while running into different forms of racism found in the contemporary United States. When investigating, Leonid faces blatant prejudice for the color of his skin, but other times such prejudice is more subtle, an invisible form of racism. In *Racism Without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva looks at several forms of racism including explicit racism and institutionalized, color-blind racism. By looking at two different encounters of racism in the novel, I will address how racism is both institutionalized and explicit in today’s society and how placing race in the medium of detective fiction impacts readers. I argue that the issues surrounding color-blind racism are more approachable when placed in detective fiction, thereby instigating conversation. While racism hinders protagonist Leonid McGill in his detective work, I believe that *The Long Fall* actually helps readers learn more about what race in America means today.

**Michael A. Perez**

## **Misrepresenting and Misgendering: Queer Questions About *Star Trek***

In its time, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* did its best to give a voice to the queer community in the episode “The Outcast,” but its attempt only reinforced heteronormativity and the gender binary. The episode tells the love story between Commander Riker and Soren, a member of an androgynous race known as the J’naii. Soren experiences oppression because she identifies with a gender, which defies her society’s norms. In the 1990s, when the episode first aired, this would have been one of the common viewer’s first, and possibly only, encounters with LGBT characters in

television. The episode is a “prologue” to the media’s present attempts at addressing issues of LGBT rights. However, how does it represent those people who are uncomfortable with their biological sex, aren’t heterosexual, and/or don’t fit into the gender binary? Although “The Outcast” attempts to expose audiences to LGBT subjects, it ultimately presents a heterosexual coupling and falsely portrays Soren’s queer identity as being correctable. Through the lens of queer theorist Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender*, I will examine how this portrayal fails to voice the issues of the queer community and further impedes viewers’ understanding of such people.

**Caroline Reynolds**

**Clearing the Slate:  
Exile in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

John Locke believed people are born as blank slates, onto which knowledge and personalities are laid by education and experience. James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* tells just such a story of education, as we follow Stephen Dedalus’s development from his first memories on through university. By the end of the novel, Stephen determines that literature is his life’s calling, and decides he must exile himself from both his native Ireland and faith in the Catholicism, even while he hopes his writing will promote Irish nationalism. This forces us to ask whether the events of the novel alone determine Stephen’s devotion to literature, or if this is an innate quality of his personality. We must also then ask why Stephen feels he can only support Ireland by leaving it. I argue that Locke’s *tabula rasa* is not so much Stephen’s natural condition at birth, but instead an escape from the limitations imposed by Roman Catholicism and British colonialism, and this paper thus explores the possibility of wiping the past clean to start anew. Stephen’s pursuit then raises another question: are we born a *tabula rasa*, or are we meant to search for that clean slate?

**Ian Scott**

**Be a Mensch:  
Societal Impact on Definitions of Manhood Expressed in *What Makes Sammy Run?***

This essay discusses the role that Jewish definitions of masculinity play in Budd Schulberg’s novel *What Makes Sammy Run?*. More specifically, it will argue that the four different words for man in the Jewish tradition (Enósh, Adám, Ish, and Geber: words with drastically different connotations), though never directly referenced in the text, inspired Schulberg as he wrote this novel and attempted to encapsulate them in English terms. He does so to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of what it takes to be successful in anti-Semitic, anti-feminist America in the 1930s. Each character in the novel, nearly all Hollywood and New York Jews, would have had at least some knowledge of these Jewish definitions of manhood; therefore, knowledge of these terms is imperative in understanding the novel as a whole. Finally, I will argue that elements of each character’s upbringing (in this Jewish environment) led them to be a specific type of man.

# Role-playing

Moderated by Stephen Pasqualina, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

**Esty Bharier**

## **Knock, Knock . . . David, Will You Come Out of the Closet?: A Homosexual's Self-Acceptance in *Giovanni's Room***

Is our identity defined by society or by accepting our true self? In the introduction to *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin writes: "The question of who I was had at last become a personal question, and the answer was to be found in me." Baldwin's travels in the 1950s to escape social intolerance and to understand himself better lead him to conclude that the quest is actually an inner journey. By showing the parallel between Baldwin and his character David in *Giovanni's Room*, I explore the damage society inflicts on an individual's nascent self-realization and identity by imposing a rigid set of intolerant values. How can someone have healthy relationships with others if one's true self is rejected or repressed? Like the author, David travels abroad after struggling with what his family and society have inculcated in him as acceptable behavior versus his true nature as a homosexual. He reflects on his past relationships and experiences to try to come to a new understanding of his identity. Later, his relationship with Giovanni tests his comfort level with his own natural tendencies. This struggle wreaks havoc with his emotional stability and behavior, leading him to make poor decisions, destroying both his relationship with Giovanni, and Giovanni himself. David ends up alone and must start again, yet the ambiguous ending raises questions as to whether he has finally accepted himself. Has he resolved his inner conflicts so he can focus on being a loyal, loving partner? Baldwin shows how intolerance can cause sufficient psychological damage resulting in an endless cycle of self-destructive escapist behaviors and dysfunctional relationships. Perhaps accepting differences in ourselves and in others creates the prologue to a more positive society in the future.

**Natasha Fernando**

## **Guard Your Life: The Origin of Oppression in Prisons**

*In the Belly of the Beast* is inmate Jack Henry Abbott's account of being behind bars since childhood. Among many disclosures, he reveals that inmates live in fear of the oppressive power of prison guards. The guard actively ignores his coworkers' cruelty, gangs up to brutally beat prisoners, and fabricates evidence to pin nonexistent crimes on inmates. Where does such vile behavior originate? Abbott's account of the guards' behavior demonstrates the very nature of oppression: that oppression creates oppressors out of its victims. For example, guards coerce white prisoners into turning against black prisoners. This creates a new hierarchy of oppression below the prison guards, of which white prisoners are the tyrants. Prisoners and guards alike lose sight of the reasons for theirs and others' cruelty. Most importantly, this process confuses the victims' perceptions of where the abuse originated. The effect manifests in Abbott himself: ignorant of many of the true causes of prison brutality, he sees guards as purely, unequivocally evil. My paper will examine how the prison guard himself is a victim, and how his fear transforms him into one of society's worst monsters.

**Eun Soo Jackie Kim**

## **Men Watching Men: The Shifting Male Gaze in "They're Not Your Husband"**

Post-war suburban literature is dominated by a male gaze that views women as erotic objects and blurs their identity as individuals underneath the weight of male dominance. American writer Raymond Carver explores the male gaze and the resulting gender divide in his short story "They're Not Your Husband." The story's unemployed, insecure, and disoriented protagonist, Earl Ober, instead of searching for employment, is more concerned with transforming

his wife into a sexual object for other men to gaze at, a transformation that Earl feels will validate his destabilized masculinity. Ultimately, Earl becomes an object of ridicule as the gaze that he ardently fixes on his wife is turned on him at the end of the story, earning him the reputation of a “joker.” My reading of Carver’s “They’re Not Your Husband” underscores that the blatant objectification of women implicit in the male gaze actually invalidates, rather than affirms, masculinity. I conclude that men are the real targets of the male gaze, referencing Earl’s desperate attempts to prove his manhood.

**Lindsay Lauder**

**“A Beautiful Woman with a Brain is an Absolutely Lethal Combination”:  
The Femme Fatale and Feminism in *Brick***

Rian Johnson’s 2005 film *Brick* has been credited with breathing new life into the convention-ridden film noir genre. Johnson’s decision to transpose the classic detective noir story into a high-school setting, complete with comic parents and teenage drug lords, led critics to celebrate *Brick* as a progressive neo-noir that reflected its contemporary era. This essay contests this assertion through an analysis of Laura, the film’s femme fatale. My presentation also employs Judith Butler’s ideas of gender being a performance act to unpack Johnson’s depiction of Laura’s “true self” and its implications for the film’s portrayal of the female gender. Ultimately, I argue that far from challenging the traditional archetypes of noir films and thus, presenting a contemporary understanding of gender, Johnson’s characterization of Laura in *Brick* actually offers a regressive and diminished representation of women in the twenty-first century.

**Michelle Montepiedra**

**From Independence to Incest:  
How Restrictive Gender Roles Drive the Children of *The Cement Garden***

*Each way I turn, I know I’ll always try / To break this circle that’s been placed around me*  
— “Temptation” by New Order

Each family raises its young differently; every household has its own standards and idiosyncrasies. Gender norms, however, are pervasive throughout society and are somewhat universal. These norms, which have been constructed over a period of time, can affect the formation of identity during a child’s coming of age for the better or for the worse. The orphaned youngsters in Ian McEwan’s short novel *The Cement Garden* take on their personal growth as best as they can, but ultimately cross moral boundaries. The fluidity of the established gender binary obfuscates the unsupervised children, especially middle child Jack, who struggles to live up to the masculine ideal. I argue that gender performance, a concept introduced by gender theorist Judith Butler, combined with the uncertainty of their roles in their own household, steer their questionable decisions and ultimately bring about the novel’s shameful climax.

# Moving On Up

Moderated by Samantha Carrick, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Scriptorium

**Caroline Chen**

## **The Good Wife: The Quest for Modern Female Happiness in *American Beauty***

Is it possible for modern women to be both happy and successful? In Sam Mendes' Academy-Award winning film *American Beauty*, Lester and Carolyn Burnham are a married suburban couple raising their teenage daughter Jane. Underneath their carefully cultivated facade, however, we discover that their family is in a state of utter disarray: Carolyn hates Lester, Jane despises him, and Lester himself admits that he is, in fact, a loser. While it is easy to interpret Carolyn as a cruel, unsympathetic character, I contend that Carolyn is actually the film's most unfairly vilified, misunderstood character. While Lester falls victim to his own hedonism, Carolyn is a victim of society's male-dominated structure and its expectations. Denied sexual and personal fulfillment at home, Carolyn seeks gratification in her professional career, only to discover that work, too, will not grant her the fulfillment she desires. In all her endeavors she finds that her happiness is dependent on the men in her life—Lester's at home, and a rival real estate mogul's at work. Consequently, she has no outlet or means of expressing her frustration. Carolyn's animosity towards Lester is not directly because of his actions, but because it is socially acceptable for him to pursue his own happiness while she cannot. In this paper, I will argue that the oppressive, socially-constructed domestic narrative overpowers females' individual pursuits of happiness. Carolyn Burnham is emblematic of the many working wives—modern women—who find themselves trapped and powerless in a patriarchal society.

**Sara Doyle**

## **Let's See How Far We've Come: Navigating Race Relations in *The Long Fall***

If you thought the days of segregation and prejudice were behind us, you might need to think again. This paper examines how Walter Mosley forces the reader to evaluate his or her own understanding of race relations in the United States. It also sheds a light on the way society tends to minimize the still relevant issue of racism, as explained by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's theory of color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva describes this ideology as a new form of racism in which people explain racial inequality by citing nonracial factors. Through his African-American male detective Leonid McGill in *The Long Fall*, Mosley establishes a complex look at contemporary racial tensions. Because people do not display their racism as overtly as in the past, McGill experiences far more ambiguities in his daily interactions with characters of different races. This paper will demonstrate how Mosley invites the reader to question his or her own opinion on the social progress, or lack thereof, we have made towards racial equality.

**Lauren Kuhn**

## **Two Steps Forward, Three Steps Back: Progress in the Society of *Brave New World***

The society portrayed in *Brave New World* is certainly much more technologically and medically advanced than our own. In terms of society as a whole, however, its progress is questionable. Women are essentially viewed as purely objects of sexual pleasure, the citizens self-monitor their behavior, and the children are interpellated with morally questionable messages about social hierarchies and the status quo. Thus, while significant advances in science have been made, it is debatable whether or not we can view Aldous Huxley's invented society as progressive. Even though this is a work of fiction, the contrasts between scientific and social progress are at odds, and it is important that we as readers do not overlook the subtle differences in types of progress. My paper examines how *Brave New World* defines

progress, and whether progress is always as positive as its connotative meaning might suggest. Are some kinds of progress more valuable than others, and, if so, which ones are the most valuable?

**Amanda Miller**

### **The Kids Are Our Present**

Science fiction as a genre allows us to create imagined pasts, presents, and futures in order to expand the realm of possibility. Ursula K. Le Guin sets her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* in a fictional future, which in turn designates our present as this novel's ancient past, as science fiction theorist Frederic Jameson explains. Earthly emissary Genly Ai's main goal is to incite progress on the planet Gethen. But to the Gethenians, progress is almost an entirely foreign concept. Resisting progress in favor of maintaining an old way of life closes people off to future possibilities. But could the same be said for the exact opposite—looking *too far* into the future? This paper examines the importance of the present, and how easy it is to neglect in favor of focusing too much on the past or future.

**Helen Silverstein**

### **Have We Already Entered a Brave New World?: The Significance of Understanding Shakespeare Today**

Science fiction stories often include “normal” people within their dystopian worlds as proxies for their readers. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley intends for John “the Savage” to be that “normal” character. John stands in contrast to the citizens of the World State: where the Fordians praise consumption and unlimited happiness, John embodies repression. Huxley gives John a source material that he expects readers to recognize fully—while the World State bans some literature, like the works of William Shakespeare, to keep its citizens consumers, John has made Shakespeare's plays his moral code. Despite Huxley's best intentions, John seems as foreign to us as he is to the Fordians, because today's reader is not fluent in Shakespeare. We identify Shakespeare as who John is quoting, but we are not familiar enough with Shakespeare to recognize the context of the quotations. Without a comprehensive understanding of historic works in the humanities like those of Shakespeare, is our society dystopian? In my paper, I argue that even though we do not all read Shakespeare today, themes of his works are still prevalent in our own popular culture. We experience enough humanities today that we are not simply consumers.



# Lost and Found

Moderated by J. Michael Bennett, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Carnegie

**Alexander Chen**

## **Food, Fairies, and Facism: Dreams in *Pan's Labyrinth***

When we were young, the world was our oyster. Magic shaped the past and the present, the light vanquished the evil lurking in the night, and our imaginations, along with a few toys, enabled us to travel from playroom to places without boundaries. Carl Jung says that imagination helps us reach “innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding.” We have come to perceive the world as a place dominated by conflict and negativity, rather than of wonder and of dreams. But, the dreams we have can help us process and accept truths in accessible ways. Guillermo del Toro examines the function of dreams on the human ability to cope in his 2006 film, *Pan's Labyrinth*. Ofelia embarks on missions to reclaim her identity as Princess Moanna and return to her homeland. These missions allow her to escape the greater context of her mother's neglect and the violence associated with the Francoist government by removing her from the physical world and placing her into a metaphysical world. Ofelia ultimately reveals that the power of our dreams does not have to diminish as we age.

**Matthew Eighmy**

## **Heartstring Tug: The Persistent Physicality of Loss in Aimee Bender's "Loser"**

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.*  
— F. Scott Fitzgerald

In the short story “Loser,” from Aimee Bender's 1996 collection *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt*, a boy whose parents drowned in the ocean develops a magical ability for finding lost objects. Playing on all five senses to describe the boy's power—even conflating and intermingling them to produce a sort of synesthetic effect—Bender provides the reader every possible avenue by which to connect the outer world of sensation to the inner world of emotions. In the story, the boy feels missing objects physically as a pull, a “tug, light but insistent, like a child at his sleeve,” yet for all his years of yearning he can never sense or feel his missing parents. Bender thus explores the difference between locating lost objects and lost people, and examines the agony of being able to recall a person through memory but never to regain them physically. Bender employs a dramatic physicality to replace our cerebral conceptions of loss with its physical manifestations. She weaves this whimsically bizarre tragedy to tug at our hearts—like a lost object tugging at one's sleeve.

**Katya Lopatko**

## **Past as Present and Future: Memory in *Dreaming in Cuban***

As human beings, we are capable of simultaneously inhabiting three temporal planes. We live trapped in the present moment while ever conscious of the imminent future, all the while guided by the events that have transpired in the past. This reality imposes limitations on the willful construction of identity, which Jean-Paul Sartre emphasizes in his essay “Existentialism Is a Humanism”: “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.” In contrast, Christina Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* provides a multitude of characters whose lives unfold in accordance with choices driven by memory of the past. Each in her own way, the women of *Dreaming in Cuban* strive to shape their own identities, lives and futures, yet none can transcend the essential human condition: existing enmeshed in



past recollections. Whether it holds them hostage in bygone eras, compels fierce rejection, or elicits longing for the unknown, personal memory shapes Garcia's characters, as well as of our perceptions of the present and decisions for the future.

**Richard J. Podkowski, Jr.**

**Reliving the Glory Days:  
Nostalgia and the Mid-Life Crisis in *American Beauty***

The phrase "mid-life crisis" evokes a paunchy, balding man zipping along in a sports car or boat he cannot quite afford, attempting to stave off a sudden feeling of mortality. However, what if someone longed for their youth to the point that it changed their life at its core? This paper will analyze the ramifications of nostalgia on the human psyche as well as the negative impact of materialism on one's recollection of the past using Sam Mendes' film *American Beauty*, a tale of a suburban father who quits his job, uses drugs, and pursues a teenage girl in an attempt to recapture the happiness of his youth. I will argue that nostalgia is a powerful feeling with the ability to shape one's present, coming to the conclusion that it can have a negative impact if focused on the wrong things, but can also help someone realize what is truly important in life.

**Audey Shen**

**The Consequence of Reproductive Futurism on the Mourners of *Columbine***

*... a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children.*  
— Lauren Berlant

In the book *Columbine*, Dave Cullen retells the story of the infamous 1999 school shooting, and it became a tragedy that transfixed the country. Understandably, the nation primarily focused on the 12 adolescent victims, but why do we focus more on the loss of a child than the loss of an adult? In Lee Edelman's *No Future*, Edelman argues against "reproductive futurism," the idea that society has a predisposition to protect the all-pervasive figure of the Child because children represent the future. Even though it's natural to have an urge to protect our children, a big consequence arises when we tend to live our lives based off of the hypothetical future of the children: we disregard the real lives of those—including ourselves—living in the present. In *Columbine*, we see how this pervasive mindset affects certain individual's ability to recover from the shooting. Special rights are granted to those who lose their innocent child, whereas the rest of the victims' families lack the support and sympathy they need to properly mourn and recover from their loss of a family member.

# Shifting Focus

Moderated by Nike Nivar, Department of Comparative Literature

Wednesday, April 15  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Gutenberg

**Michaela Barsamian**

## **Progress Is Poison: The Futility of Striving to Improve the Future in *The Virgin Suicides***

Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* tells the story of five young sisters growing up in suburban Detroit, who all take their lives within the span of 13 months. The novel's narrators—who as boys were neighbors of the suicidal sisters—reflect on the many seemingly bizarre actions the adults in their community took as they struggled to deal with the girls' suicides. My essay will place *The Virgin Suicides* in conversation with Lee Edelman's book *No Future* in order to understand why the community Eugenides depicts reacts to the girls' deaths as it does. Edelman, a cultural critic, discusses society's obsession with an idealized, innocent Child figure, who it fanatically strives to protect. Edelman provokes his readers to shed their investment in protecting the mythical Child, arguing that their protective efforts often end up causing more harm than good to actual children. By looking at *The Virgin Suicides* through the lens of Edelman's ideas, we can understand that the novels' adults, and their bizarre actions, are not merely insincere or idiosyncratic—the products of one small, middle-class town—but instead are driven by a powerful (and all-too-familiar) cultural force.

**Blake Dewveall**

## **Gathering of the Wounded: Trauma, History, and Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides***

The creation of stories to overcome trauma and solidify identity is an area of increasing research, particularly in literary narratives. I argue that the response to trauma by the characters in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* reflects the various methods used to overcome trauma and articulate suffering. Families and other adults, who are portrayed as out of touch, navigate trauma through an escapist construction of suburbia, lurching inward into their well-landscaped homes and hiding a repressed past. The first-person plural narrator, framed as a chorus of childhood reflection, retells the story concerning the novel's suicides by clinging onto the past. The Lisbon girls of the novel themselves escape the "trauma" of suburbia via the most literal form of escapism, death, creating a cascade of sociological effects within their suburban community. Using experimental plot structure and a fragmented retelling of trauma, Eugenides exposes the reader to the complex and unexpected ways that trauma can be repressed and released.

**Laura Gouillon**

## **Therapeutic Manipulation: The Femme Non-Fatale in Rian Johnson's *Brick***

Literary critic Walter Jackson Bate brings to attention the fear that many artists and creators have experienced: What is there left to do in the arts? In Rian Johnson's neo-noir thriller *Brick*, Johnson addresses this question by deviating from generic conventions of film noir and presenting what I term a "femme non-fatale." In *Brick*, when high-school protagonist Brendan Frye tries to discover who murdered his ex-girlfriend Emily, he becomes tangled in a spiderweb of adolescent drug dealers, including Laura Dannon. In this presentation, I will argue that Johnson reinterprets the detective film by creating a strong female character whose actions aid the protagonist rather than solely attempt to bring him down. Though Laura portrays many of the typical femme fatale characteristics—air of mystery, independence, confidence, seduction and manipulation—her role in helping moderate conflicting social

relationships throughout the plot leads me to categorize Laura as a “femme non-fatale.” I argue that the characters’ ages and Laura’s downfall affect *our* interpretation of the gravity of these situations, but not the *characters’* own interpretations of their troubles.

**Martin Yi**

### **A Bug’s Life**

In Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa’s transformation from human to cockroach pushes the Samsa family to change quickly in order to accommodate his complete lack of utility. Much like a larvae entering into its pupal stage, the Samsa family enters into a period of rapid maturation, and Gregor’s metamorphosis serves as the cocoon in which the Samsa family matures from a dysfunctional family into an effective, self-sustaining unit. However, also like a cocoon, Gregor is discarded once his purpose has been served. By looking not at Gregor, but at the family as the focus of the novella, it becomes clear that Kafka presents a more metaphorical metamorphosis than the obvious physical one. By looking not at Gregor but at the family, it becomes clear that the novella isn’t about a man’s unfortunate demise, but rather a family’s transition from hopeless dependence to a newfound agency. In this manner, the past does become prologue, as the Samsa family seizes authorship of their present and their future at the end of the novella.

# Pulling Strings

Moderated by Chris Muniz, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

**Kelsey Borenzweig**

## **A Selective History: Dictatorial Tools to Control the Present**

*History is bunk.*  
— Mustapha Mond, *Brave New World*

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the World Controllers manipulate the past to control the present. Paralleling Louis Althusser's theory about repressive and ideological state apparatuses, the government in the novel hides all "unpleasant" historical facts from society. Citizens of this fictional world are not taught history, are forbidden from reading certain provocative books, and as a result, are generally ignorant of science and the humanities. The World Controllers believe that suppression of history is conducive to societal stability and thus societal happiness. While the reader perceives how damaging intellectual repression and superficial happiness can be, the easy ignorance appeals to citizens of the World State. However, happiness and stability are disguises used by the World Controllers to repress their citizens. This fictional government employs the ideology of historical censorship to maintain its power, illustrating that, when censored, the past can be used as an ideologically repressive apparatus.

**Cassidy Feltenberger**

## **Cullen's *Columbine*: How Cullen's "Before" Changes Readers' "After"**

In the wake of a disaster like the Columbine shooting, it is common for individuals and media sources alike to make rapid assumptions and succumb to stereotypes about the shooters while labeling them as society's "outcasts." As time proceeds, many of these initial assumptions come to be debunked by detailed narratives of the tragedies such as Dave Cullen's *Columbine*. In his narrative, Cullen struggles to find a balance between the duty to provide sufficient historical facts and the expectation of providing a thoughtful explanation of the tragedy to readers. My paper identifies the various ways in which Cullen sacrifices complete historical facts and knowledge in an attempt to increase his own credibility and provide the readers with an explanation behind the Columbine shooting. Through the scope of excerpts from Hayden V. White's *Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, this paper analyzes how these sacrifices affect the readers' ability to interpret the event and demonstrates how each of Cullen's constructs and decisions to omit or include historical fact change the readers' interpretations as *Columbine* unfolds.

**Hans Hinebaugh**

## **Progress City: Walt Disney's Prologue to Modern Urban Development**

In the 1960s, Walt Disney developed a plan for a city of the future, which he called EPCOT—an acronym for Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Disney presented a rough, preliminary outline for this city in a 25-minute short film, while he and his team of "Imagineers" purchased nearly 28,000 acres of land in central Florida to develop. Disney believed that a well-designed network of neighborhoods, businesses, parks, and residences interconnected by a system of monorails and moving walkways, could make EPCOT's residents happier than people in unplanned communities. Disney's utopian idea of urban design was decades ahead of its time, and this type of community planning is making a resurgence today. But we can see the dark side of social engineering in the controversial Los Angeles developments of Geoff Palmer, which use fortress-like architecture as a mechanism of

exclusion. This paper argues that Disney's "Progress City" was an experiment in large-scale social manipulation, and while this level of engineering and control of social space will be necessary for our future cities, we must remember planned residential communities are only as progressive as the intentions of the people designing them.

**Rachael McNamara**

**Fictional Journalism:  
How Storytelling Manipulates the Past in Sarah Koenig's *Serial***

When uncertainty dominates an event, we turn to narrative for explanation. Stephen Freissmann argues that narrative is a cognitive tool that helps us to understand how the world works. And the narrator controls how we experience a particular narrative. He or she filters the information, and organizes it to effectively communicate with an audience. This is exactly what Sarah Koenig does in her hit podcast, *Serial*, a twelve-part series that details the investigation and trial proceedings surrounding the 1999 murder of Hae Min Lee. This paper is an analysis of how Koenig's narrative structure affects how *Serial's* audience perceives the individuals and events involved in Hae's murder. I argue that the narrative strategies Koenig employs in her attempt to bring certainty to a decidedly ambiguous murder twist the truth of the case.

**Joy Okon**

**Cinematic Cynicism and the Willful Ignorance That Follows in *Jakob the Liar***

*If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story.*  
— Orson Welles

Comedic melancholy pervades Peter Kassovitz's *Jakob the Liar*, the kind that troubles Holocaust survivors and experts as it avoids any substantial commentary or lesson. *Jakob the Liar* could be seen as a sort of cinematic cynicism on Kassovitz's part, as if he opted to avoid any unsettling material because he thought his audience would not be able to connect with something they had never gone through. However, the flightiness of *Jakob the Liar* is a troubling template for future traumatic films: by ruling out the understanding, and consequently, sympathy of the audience beforehand, one makes a film that is detrimental to the education of future generations. With the help of Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, this essay will explore to what extent the cinematic elements within *Jakob the Liar* sponsor an irresponsible catharsis for its viewers, and how such responsibility sets a dangerous precedent for traumatic historical narratives for years to come.

# Paving the Way

Moderated by Amanda Ruud, Department of English

Wednesday, April 15  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

**Maiya Clark**

## **Fires and Futurism: Queer Theory in *Lord of the Flies***

In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman claims that all Western politics are based on “reproductive futurism,” the idea that society’s goal must always be the creation of a better future for its children. A result of reproductive futurism, Edelman says, is the exclusion of the “Queer,” a figure whose lack of reproductive purpose makes him an enemy to society’s goals. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* provides a controlled setting in which Edelman’s claims can be tested and their implications explored. The novel follows the story of a group of British schoolboys who, after being stranded on a desert island, divide into an organized, democratic society and a dissenting tribe of primal hunters. My paper draws parallels between the clash of these two groups and Edelman’s depiction of the Queer’s opposition to reproductive futurism. Through these parallels, I attempt to prove that while Edelman’s theories are true representations of society’s motivations, his polemical solutions fail to account for the positive—and necessary—effects of reproductive futurism.

**Kathryn Hawkins**

## **To Be Human**

This paper addresses the question of the difference between animality and humanity, even whether there is a difference at all. I approach this question through the lens of Etienne Balibar’s *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, Balibar defines humanity as the complete mastery over human nature, whereas in *Darwin* the non-human characters can at times be considered to possess the most humanity, and the lines between the two are carefully blurred, suggesting that humanity is merely a particular brand of animality.

**Yashashree Pisolkar**

## **Violence: Terrorizing the Past and the Future**

Shakespeare’s phrase, “what’s past is prologue,” is as much about the past as it is about what follows the past. While the past informs the future, the future validates the existence of an ancient time. Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* provides an opportune moment to explore how a violent past paves the way for a violent future. The epilogue is primarily where McCarthy comments on the plight of mankind following the history of mindless violence in the American West. McCarthy writes, “In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground . . .” While the man is shown to be “progressing,” McCarthy juxtaposes progress with scattered bones on the landscape. The man’s progress is tainted by the lives of the lost. The epilogue is enigmatic. It is ominous. And till the very end leaves us yearning for a resolution. McCarthy indicates that closure is hardly ever easy to achieve and mindless violence may be inevitable.

Agni Raj Singh

**The Scurf of Yesterday:  
The Significance of the Physical and Emotional Past in Jeunet's *Amélie***

*Without you, today's emotions would be the scurf of yesterday's.*  
— *Amélie*

This paper takes the conference theme, “What’s Past Is Prologue,” and applies it to Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s 2001 film *Amélie*. Not only does the past reinvent characters and grant new meanings to their lives, but it can manifest in any form, physical or emotional. The past thus becomes the “prologue” to a new “chapter one.” For each character, a radical change leads to a new phase in their lives. The film begins by physically presenting the notion of the past becoming a prologue, by using Dominique Bretodeau as a primary example, with other characters also discussed. Here, it is emphasized that the past does, in fact, enable characters to start a new “chapter one.” Further, regarding the emotional past shared by Nino and Amélie, this idea is shown to be as significant as any physical past explored in the film. Hippolito’s “scurf of yesterday’s” idea is broken down and applied to the notion of how the past shapes the present and the future of characters. Finally, the claims of the paper are reiterated upon, placing emphasis on the theme of the past being universally significant to the same level as in the movie and how *Amélie* does, in fact, treat the past as a prologue.

Melissa Ward

**“Obviously Doctor . . . You’ve Never Been a Thirteen-Year Old Girl”:  
The Suppression of Adolescent Female Identity in *The Virgin Suicides***

Told from an unconventional first person point of view by a group of neighborhood boys, Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides* dreamily captures the heightened emotions of adolescence. In the novel, the boys try to process and explain the suicides of the five mysterious sisters of the Lisbon family. Yet in their narration, the boys romanticize the girls through distorted memories and the projection of fantasy. In “Subverting Girls: Cultural Anxiety and Female Adolescent Sexuality,” Dr. Laura Eve Konigsberg discusses how “patriarchal expectations of adolescent girlhood as a space of innocence silence girls and exile them from their bodies into a liminal space where girls’ own stories become occluded.” *The Virgin Suicides* reinforces this idea by illustrating how the boys’ unreliable narration—colored by nostalgia, romanticism, and sexual desire—neglects and even purposefully ignores the psyches of the Lisbon girls, oversimplifying their adolescent development. This quixotic view of girlhood patronizes and suppresses female identity.



