



# DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL  
THEMATIC OPTION  
RESEARCH CONFERENCE  
APRIL 15 AND 16, 2014



# DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

**“We lose ourselves in what we read, only to return to ourselves, transformed and part of  
a more expansive world.”**

- Judith Butler

**“All extremes of feeling are allied with madness.”**

- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

**“Our real discoveries come from chaos, from going to the place that looks wrong and stupid and foolish.”**

- Chuck Palahniuk

**“Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t.”**

- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

**“There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are  
the doors of perception.”**

- Aldous Huxley

**“And you? When will you begin that long journey into yourself?”**

- Rumi

**“Deep experience is never peaceful.”**

- Henry James

**“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”**

- T. S. Eliot

**“I shouldn’t precisely have chosen madness if there had been any choice, but once such a thing  
has taken hold of you, you can’t very well get out of it.”**

- Vincent van Gogh

**“Thinking of a series of dreams  
Where the time and the tempo fly  
And there’s no exit in any direction  
‘Cept the one that you can’t see with your eyes”**

- Bob Dylan, “Series of Dreams”

**“The time has come,” the Walrus said,**

**“To talk of many things:**

**Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—**

**Of cabbages—and kings—**

**And why the sea is boiling hot—**

**And whether pigs have wings.”**

- Lewis Carroll, “The Walrus and The Carpenter”

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

The Thematic Option conference provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to enrich their academic experience by publicly presenting their ideas and research. In response to a general call for papers, Thematic Option students developed topics under the theme "Down the Rabbit Hole" 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 illusion, hallucination, imagination, obsession, ambition, love, lust, chaos, confusion, mystery, conspiracy, cultural construction, anthropomorphism, transformation, altered states, drugs, body and soul, the mind, politics, faith, technology, social media, the unknown, absurdity, insanity . . . remember Alice's refrain: "Curiouser and curiouser!"

## **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.

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# Back to the Drawing Board

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd, School of Philosophy

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

William Alexander

## Just Having Fun: Sexuality and Subjugation in *Thelma & Louise*

The 1991 film *Thelma & Louise* casts sex in a profoundly negative light. The prominent sexual situations ultimately become traumatic and damaging to the two protagonists. In the turning point of the film, Thelma and Louise's visit at the Silver Bullet bar, the male and female characters mention the keyword "fun." Thelma and Louise state their ambition to have "fun," but Thelma's rape by the seemingly friendly Harlan demolishes any chances of sex being anything resembling "fun." The film uses this obvious disconnect between Harlan's idea of "fun" and Thelma's to imply that sexuality is ultimately non-feminist, and that women who want liberty and dignity must avoid sex entirely. This overall anti-sexual, extremist message of the film ultimately shows that *Thelma & Louise* fails to advance women's rights.

Sonia Blough

## "I answered the call, bro": Exploring Identity and Terrorism in *Four Lions*

In Christopher Morris' *Four Lions*, Omar, a British Muslim of Pakistani origin, struggles to define his identity and commits to Islamic terrorism despite his questionable Muslim ideology. Grounded in Dominique Moïsi's *The Geopolitics of Emotion*, this paper evaluates how the clashing civilizations presented in *Four Lions* create a culture of humiliation that leads to violent action. Morris' terrorists connect with each other despite their ethnic differences because they share mutual feelings of humiliation. Omar perceives Western culture as a force that subtly controls and humiliates him, and he chooses terrorism to prove that he still has control over himself. Omar's final act of terrorism is not ideological, but instead a result of the growing Islamic culture of humiliation that supersedes geographical, national, and political boundaries.

Cristina Gago

## The Nesting Doll Effect: Piecing Together the Layers of Culturally Molded Women

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* magnifies the relationship between gender and sex within the singular female figure through the interpersonal relationship between Dana and Alice. The distinction between gender, a product of culture, and sex, a product of biology, in Judith Butler's proposed female script or performance serves to display the universal struggle to achieve an internal balance. Related by more than genetics and circumstance, Dana and Alice affect each other's development, co-evolving to fulfill the role of "wife" as a pair, and irrevocably form a symbiotic relationship with one another as a result. This coevolution, serving as a survival mechanism, eventually results in their downfall once they are separated by time and space. Ultimately, this relationship, this magnification of sex and gender within two physically distinct but intrinsically bound characters of *Kindred*, serves to emphasize the fundamental connection, the inevitable conflict, and the resulting codependence of sex and gender within every woman.

Amy Hutto

**Straddling the Line:  
Balancing Embracing Cultural Identity and Assimilation**

This paper engages two of Sherman Alexie's short stories, "Class" and "Dear John Wayne," with discussions on Native American stereotypes and assimilation into mainstream white society. With the definition of "Indian" coming from numerous outside (white) perspectives, it commonly devolves to a stereotype, which Indians are compelled to adopt. Their only other choice is to assimilate to white society, as the character in "Class" does. Where this false dichotomy allows no room for an answer, Alexie's "Dear John Wayne" offers a solution in embracing identity in a manner that takes the best from both of these lifestyles while denying harmful stereotypes.

Elana Zeltser

**Looks Can Be Deceiving:  
External Appearances Versus Internal Desires in Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat***

In his 1944 film *Lifeboat*, director Alfred Hitchcock visually portrays his protagonist Connie Porter as a striking, pampered woman, despite the fact that she is stranded in the middle of the ocean. By highlighting her beauty, Hitchcock mounts expectations that her behavior will also be quintessentially feminine. Renowned author Virginia Woolf refers to this unrealistic ideal of femininity as the "Angel in the House" in her 1931 speech "Professions for Women." Faced with death, both Woolf and Porter find the strength to subvert overpowering stereotypes, acting in ways that are often deemed masculine. By contrasting delicate visual effects with aggressive actions, Hitchcock emphasizes Woolf's argument that instincts and desires are strong enough to ultimately override culturally ingrained expectations.

# Doomed to Repeat It

Moderated by Professor Heather James, Departments of English  
and Comparative Literature

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

**Marissa Di**

## **Knowledge and Choice: Timeline Creation in *Kindred***

The nature of time is a continuously studied subject in human knowledge and physics; its fictional counterpart, time travel and its implications, is often explored in the narratives of science fiction. Octavia Butler's *Kindred* relates the story of Dana, who travels back in time to the antebellum South in order to maintain the integrity of her genealogy and meets her ancestors on a plantation in the process. The mechanisms and consequences of this time travel device allow for multiple timelines, which are created by the choices that Dana makes while she is in the past. The multiplicity of possible and concurrent timelines that arises from Dana's return to her ancestral history suggests that the time travel is a means of empowerment for Dana. However, her unawareness of the extent of this empowerment mirrors the lack of knowledge and power that people in disenfranchised groups, particularly the slaves on the plantation, have from their positions in an oppressive society.

**Liam Duffy**

## **Visual Verisimilitude: Truth and Storytelling in Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home***

From TV advertising to newspaper photographs, we are immersed in visual storytelling everyday. Yet, how do we know that the stories we visually perceive every day are true? More specifically, how does the appearance of truth in visual forms of storytelling differ from truth in written forms of storytelling? To explore these questions, I looked at Allison Bechdel's autobiographical graphic novel, *Fun Home*, through the lens of Tzvetan Todorov's discussion of truth and written language in "Introduction to Verisimilitude." Bechdel's story appears to present its own answers to Todorov's questions regarding storytelling and truth. As a result, Bechdel's novel presents a set of ideas—equivalent to Todorov's theory—regarding written truth in the visual medium of storytelling. Thus, Bechdel's novel viewed through the lens of Todorov provides a starting point for understanding what gives visually told stories the appearance of truth or falsehood.

**Greg Feingold**

## **Time Out Of Mind**

Narratives have been questioning the continuum of history for millennia. However, there is a dichotomy between our view of time and history. Contemporary society views history as a theoretical construct, able to be shuffled like a playlist on iTunes. However, we view time as real, personal, and running in one direction. We choose how we view time and history in an effort to control our destinies, while in fact this control is elusive. The only control we can wield over time is to go "down the rabbit hole" through an altered state of consciousness. My paper uses analysis of the film *Donnie Darko* and a theoretical lens to investigate the divide between time and history.

**Matt Ruehlman**

**All You Need is Love:  
Julian Barnes and Circular Reading**

As Julian Barnes puts it in his 1989 novel *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, “history just burps, and we taste again the raw-onion sandwich it swallowed centuries ago.” To Barnes, history is not a sequence of events but a repetition of the same disaster again and again, in an endless circle. This paper explores this idea of a circular approach to history. I look at the text—which is, in itself, a history—in two lights. First, I read the novel in the typical linear style, looking at the novel as a series of progressive chapters leading up to one final conclusion. Then I read the novel in a circular fashion, letting events and ideas in each chapter intersect and overlap with other chapters in all directions. Specifically, I overlap one of the final chapters of the novel with the very first chapter—the story of a woodworm lost at sea. In doing this, I apply the idea of circular reading by allowing the theme of love, explored in the very end of the novel, to be explored in the very first chapter. By doing this, I prove that the woodworm’s story, which seems to be pessimistic and hopeless, is actually a cautionary tale about the need for love in one’s life—because without love, one will become swept up in the endless cycle of disaster that is the history of the world.

**Nick Whetstone**

**Hemingway’s People Problem**

*While I had been angry I had demoted him from Scott to Fitzgerald.*  
- Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

This may seem like simply a statement of how to address one’s friend, but for Ernest Hemingway, it represents a larger view of the world in which real people become his intellectual property. This statement alone reveals that Hemingway’s friends are hierarchically ranked, and the ranking fluctuates based on his mood. In his memoir/novel, *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway embraces an artistic liberty that allows him to draw on his real experiences with people to create a story. But Hannah Arendt might take issue with Hemingway’s liberties. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt refutes the contention that anything can be made, or “fabricated,” from human affairs. Because there is such a fine line between fiction and reality in Hemingway’s text, and because he operates in a way that allows him to manipulate and even possess the people around him for the purpose of fabrication within his writings, he fails to recognize his connection with, in Arendt’s words, the “web . . . of other men.”



# On the Outs

Moderated by Professor Lawrence Green, Department of English

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

Logan Austin

## **The Soon-To-Be Ghost Towns: Intellectual Alienation in *The Lonesome Crowded West***

In their 1997 album *The Lonesome Crowded West*, Washington rock band Modest Mouse presents a bizarrely twisted travelogue of the American West at the turn of the millennium, the cowboys and buffalo of the romanticized west giving way to a soulless, commercialized wasteland. The disillusionment of the West gives lead singer and lyricist Isaac Brock a powerful sense of alienation from his home, making him resemble what critic Edward Said calls an intellectual in exile. This alienation drives Brock into his nomadic travels and away from lasting connections with any person or place. In my essay, I examine how Brock's constant state of motion ironically proves to be its own sort of imprisoning stasis – thereby perpetuating his worship of the intellectual exile archetype and his attempts to live as such.

Jinny Choi

## **Nowhere to Belong: Sherman Alexie's "Class" and the Challenges of Assimilation**

In Sherman Alexie's short story, "Class," the dominance of white culture in America pressures non-whites to compromise their ethnic identity and instead take up one that is hailed as "normal." Queer theorist Sara Ahmed's notion of the establishment of the white orientation as the standard one distorts self-value and pushes people to burrow into whiteness to find a sense of belonging. It becomes clear with sociologist Milton Gordon's studies that complete assimilation into the white world is limited and that Edgar, the Native American protagonist, can never truly belong there. Edgar is stuck between two worlds, having moved away from his Indian heritage yet not completely immersed in the white world. This paper examines the conflicting identity non-whites forge in white America and how the hegemonic society frustrates people's attempt to find a home.

Joshua Guerra

## **The Closeted Mr. Ripley: The Relationship between Masculinity and Success in *The Talented Mr. Ripley***

This essay discusses how *The Talented Mr. Ripley* can be used to analyze the obsession with masculinity and the concept of homosexuality as taboo in American society during the 1950s. Using the protagonist Tom Ripley's relationship with the wealthy Dickie Greenleaf, this paper analyzes the correlation between Tom's attempt to climb the social ladder, affirm his masculinity to those around him, and desire for (and to eventually be) Dickie. Dickie encapsulates everything Tom desires, including financial success and unflinching masculinity. This paper thus examines the different types of desire Tom grapples with, as well as the psychological impacts (shown through his actions) of feeling like an "other," both socially and sexually, in a society that reinforces these feelings of inferiority.

Andrew Priebe Morris

***Into the Wild:***  
**A Narrative of Courage, Loss and Men's Accessories**

*Into the Wild* tells the story of Chris McCandless, a young man who courageously flees society to find solitude, truth, and bliss in the Alaskan wilderness. The film adaptation of this story, directed by Sean Penn, primarily testifies to Chris' remarkable achievement, but this essay shows that the film also demonstrates his most tragic failure—his inability to appreciate the people he leaves behind until he starves to death in Alaska. Chris' watch and belt, which are highlighted in numerous scenes of departure and despair, symbolize the human cost of his uncompromising devotion to entering the wild. This reading will reveal the most convincing moral of this true story: that although the joy of good company is easily taken for granted, life is never quite the same without it.

Shelby Rosenberg

***The Woman Warrior:***  
**Black Sheep, or Sheep Painted Black?**

*Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world  
the emigrants built around our childhoods fit in solid America.*  
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

Maxine Hong Kingston employs non-traditional storytelling methods and openly questions the nature of truth in her memoir, *The Woman Warrior*, in order to create a new twist on the narrative of cultural integration. In doing so, the Chinese-American author attempts to distinguish her story from the canon of immigrant literature about the American experience, thereby lending resonance to her own experiences. Kingston's retrospective, conversational style makes her a typical postmodern author, according to literary theorist Linda Hutcheon's definition of the convention-defying movement in her essay "Beginning to Theorize Post-modernism." While Kingston's distinctive approach to story-telling is undoubtedly postmodern, the story itself fuses with the archetype established by its predecessors: the struggle between clashing cultural traditions, the intergenerational tension between those who emigrated from the "homeland" and their American-born children, and the ultimate conclusion that each culture plays an undeniable—though not easily explainable—role in shaping the individual. *The Woman Warrior* is an old story masquerading as a new one, and in refusing the archetype, Kingston paradoxically re-inscribes it. In doing so, she proves that the truly "unique" immigrant account, is as elusive in literature as it is in reality.

# Tell It Like It Is

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp, Department of English

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

Miriam Bedrin

## Reproduction in *Aliens*: A Gendered Conception

In his movie *Aliens*, James Cameron depicts parenthood as having two distinct components: reproduction and motherhood. The movie represents reproduction as parasitic and grotesque through its portrayals of Aliens using humans as reproductive hosts. The film also emphasizes that reproductive duties need not be delegated to any particular gender, as the Aliens will use any human that has a chest cavity as a host. Cameron, however, depicts motherhood, the nurturing aspect of parenthood, as distinctly gendered. The three motherly figures in the movie, Ripley, Newt, and the Alien queen, are all feminine women. Masculine characters do not serve as mother figures in the film, implying that motherhood and femininity exist together. Adrienne Rich's essay "The Primacy of the Mother" expands on the idea that, throughout history, womanhood and motherhood have been viewed as linked, with women assumed to be compassionate by nature. *Aliens* demonstrates that despite people of all genders having the ability to reproduce, the burden of motherhood usually falls upon women.

Ben Kadie

## Inflicting and Withstanding Violence as Self-Help in *Fight Club*

When it hit movie theaters on the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Fight Club* swiftly grew into a cultural elephant. In the film, the character Tyler Durden preaches violence as a radical tool for male self-empowerment and growth. According to Durden, inflicting and withstanding violence can be a reclamation of power over one's own body, opposing government and corporate authority. This essay examines the ethics of Durden's philosophy of violence, noting its similarities to real-world BDSM sexuality, and ultimately finding that Durdenism can only be acceptable to the extent that it is consensual. The essay also asks to what extent *Fight Club*, a work of popular literature, advocates for Durdenism. Ultimately we find that the film presents Durdenism as a viable project for self-improvement that's designed to self-destruct.

Catherine Virginia Moore

## The Machine In The Garden: Manifestations of Society in Christopher McCandless's Wild

*The sudden appearance of the machine in the Garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image. It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counter force to the myth. Since 1844, this motif has served again and again to order literary experience.*

- Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*

This paper explores the presence of the image of the machine, represented by the bus, in the film *Into The Wild*. Within the film there exists two contrasting representations of the machine, the bus and the old car. Christopher McCandless rejects the car as a symbol of corrupt society, but embraces the bus as a gift of shelter in the wild. The car and the bus represent his desire to free himself of civilization, yet his reliance on civilization for his position in nature. Through analyzing McCandless's interactions with the car and the bus, this paper serves to answer the question: Did Christopher McCandless truly go into the wild? Is it possible to completely escape society?



Pournami Rajeev

**Living in Ruins:  
Destructive Creation in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle***

In Shirley Jackson's novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Mary Katherine Blackwood must protect her private, internal space from the external influence of the hostile village. Merricat manages to remain secure for several years by marking her property with an idiosyncratic system of symbols that only she can decipher. However, when her sister invites her cousin Charles into the Blackwood mansion, he tries to reestablish the old patriarchal order that Merricat has worked hard to dismantle. By reading Jackson's novel through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's essay "The Production of Space," I will argue that Merricat purposefully sets fire to her house because, as Lefebvre argues, the only way to truly combat the repressive patriarchal system that Charles represents is to physically destroy the symbolic values the mansion holds for him specifically. Although in doing so Merricat risks sacrificing the material security of having a roof over her head, her property no longer holds value to anyone but herself. Thus, she finds a way to indefinitely protect herself.

Anya Salnikova

**Nella Larsen's *Passing*:  
Triple Consciousness**

This paper explores W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, and how Larsen seems to extend the concept to triple-consciousness for African American women. Double consciousness is the idea of African Americans perceiving and judging themselves not only by their own personal beliefs, but also by the way white people would judge them. For an African American woman, however, this fracturing of consciousness intensifies because of the limitations that a woman in the 1920s encountered, aside from the racial aspect. In *Passing*, Nella Larsen suggests that African American women passing as white are a special case of this triple-consciousness. In order to deal with these three-sided judgments, Clare and Irene, though to different degrees, both use their ability to pass to their advantage. Through Clare's and Irene's examples, Larsen reveals the limitations of understanding discrimination only on the basis of race, as in Du Bois's double-consciousness. Instead, Larsen introduces the aspect of gender as an overlooked yet crucial part of self-perception.

# Two Truths and a Lie

Moderated by Lauren Elmore, Department of English

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

**Sarah Green**

## **The Fiction of Reality**

In her memoir, *The Woman Warrior: A Childhood Among Ghosts*, Maxine Hong Kingston presents the reader with the paradoxical fact that truth is not the same as reality. This essay, "The Fiction of Reality," will investigate Kingston's denial of the necessity of reality in the telling of her true story using Linda Hutcheon's essay, "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism." Hutcheon's essay, in part, describes the way in which postmodernists reject conventional structure and see history and fiction as human constructs. Drawing from the definition of postmodernism provided by Hutcheon, this essay will use the chapter "White Tigers" from *The Woman Warrior* as a case study for Kingston's method of presenting truth through fantasy. By emphasizing Kingston's conscious rejection of reality, the essay will demonstrate that reality is a human construct that is unnecessary to achieve truth.

**Christine Jarjour**

## **The Will to Truth: An Exploration of the Epistemophilic Urge in *The Virgin Suicides***

In Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, the narrators collect narrative and investigative evidence to justify a flawed conclusion of the titular girls' story. In creating "a story they can live with," a gap forms between the tangible evidence they collect and the intangible conclusions they draw from it, which they fill with their own interpretive framework. The boys' interpretation of the evidence comes from what Debra Shostak calls an "epistemophilic urge," which consists of both their motivation for telling the sisters' story and what they hope to achieve from telling it. I argue that their motivation is a desire to objectify the girls in order to subjectify themselves; in other words, they use tangible evidence to reconstruct the girls' world and then place their own psyches in it. What they hope to achieve is the sisters' knowledge of death. The boys believe that if they create a story in which they occupy the central role, then they will gain the power and knowledge they thought the Lisbon girls had. However, because their version of the story does not correlate with reality, they ultimately realize that they have no power outside of the world they created.

**Anya Kolesnikoff**

## **Talk Dirty to Me: The Creation and Function of Language in *A Clockwork Orange***

This paper explores how the creation and use of the fictional language Nadsat in the novel *A Clockwork Orange* affects the readers' understanding of and involvement in the story. Through a close reading of specific passages within the novel, I aim to shed light on how reader expectations in terms of language influence readers' perception of the story and how the narrative arc is related to language itself. In addition to gaining a better understanding of the text, I hope to examine why authors make the choices they do in terms of language. While literary analysis often focuses on stylistic elements of language, this paper will instead examine how the language itself affects the reading experience.

Kevin Korb

**There Is Inherently No Truth In My Paper:  
A Study of Objective Knowledge in Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters***

What if even the title of this paper is a lie? The very act of human perception births an insurmountable bias. Objectivity is not achievable. Julian Barnes' 1989 novel, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, perhaps best defined as an episodic saga that questions the reliability of history while playing with a fetish for woodworms, takes the reader on a journey through time, and teaches its pupil to examine the past with a critical eye. In my paper, I argue that Barnes, through his playful anecdotes, questions the infallibility of historical texts with regards to their portrayal of the past. This construction is partial; unable to be wholly objective due to bias in the recorded subject matter. Despite its unobtainability, in his chapter entitled "Parenthesis," Barnes urges a pursuit of the limit to objective truth through a synergy of historical resources and the admission that one hundred percent objectivity cannot be obtained. Until this desire becomes reality, we, mankind, will be plagued by an inherently flawed version of our past.

Lena Melillo

**The Novel is Where The Heart Is:  
The Creation of a "Home" in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five***

In his book *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno, a philosopher forced into exile during World War II, argues that "The writer is not allowed to live in his writing." Kurt Vonnegut, a product of the war himself, does not follow Adorno's rule. In fact, if Vonnegut lives anywhere, it is in his writing, namely *Slaughterhouse-Five*. While a novel about aliens and time travel may not seem like the ideal place for a writer to live, it is this absurdity that allows Vonnegut to create a universe in which the traumas and brutalities of World War II are alleviated. This paper explores just how Vonnegut lives in his writing as well as the ethical implications of doing so in the context of Adorno's observations of war and writing. While Adorno believes one must never be settled, even in writing, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* becomes a carefully constructed home, in which Vonnegut can live more or less comfortably.



# Cause + Effect

Moderated by Professor William Handley, Department of English

Tuesday, April 15  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Scriptorium

Alaina Hartley

## Nostalgia and Revolution

What does it mean to blast the world free of history? For Tyler Durden, the antihero of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, it means saving the world. Tyler creates the paramilitary Project Mayhem to help him rupture history and recover a lost Golden Age. Therefore, Tyler demonstrates that revolutionary change requires historical consciousness, and yet, he threatens to quash any subsequent revolutionary potential in attempting to destroy history in the process. By reading *Fight Club* through the lens of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history, I will argue that Project Mayhem fails because Tyler ultimately becomes more concerned with his own story than changing the course of history.

Kyle Hrabe

## Navigating the Unknown in Sherman Alexie

My paper looks at the disorienting nature of Sherman Alexie's short story "The Toughest Indian in the World" through Sara Ahmed's theoretical lens of queer phenomenology. From the ambiguous origins of the unnamed protagonist and his life on the Indian reservation to his later unsatisfying and distancing adult life in Spokane, Washington, it is obvious that he lacks direction—as Ahmed would say, a clear lifeline. Unable to find a path for his life so far, the protagonist reverts to an emotional adolescent state and attempts to find himself the way most teenagers do: through sex. A queer sexual experience with an Indian hitchhiker helps rattle the narrator's world to the point that he can start following a line different from the one he has travelled so far. Sometimes it takes being lost in order to find one's way back home.

Avalon Igawa

## Just One of the Droogs

*A Clockwork Orange* is a novel of unbelievable violence set in a futuristic dystopia. In his work, Anthony Burgess implements the slang-type language of "nadsat," filtering our perception of the violent actions performed by the main character, Alex, and forging a connection with a reader that could otherwise be deterred from continuing the story. As explored by Robert Evans, Burgess uses "nadsat" to establish a culture of youth parallel to our existing youth communities. The reader not only becomes a part of this social group with an understanding of the language, but is simultaneously initiated by Alex, who speaks to the audience as if we are companions on his journey. This paper examines the tools used by the novel. First, the actual language of "nadsat" and its effect on our perspective as well as the culture it creates and emulates. Second, the narrator's communication with the reader and the relationship it forges. Concluding his account, Alex acknowledges our participation and we come to question what we consequently became a part of by engaging with such a character. Did we have an obligation towards our immoral narrator? And ultimately, when faced with disturbing stories, why do we read on?

Benjamin Jones

## This is How a Forest Dies: The Insatiable Human Appetite and its Inevitable Consequences in "The Bear"

As Leo Marx describes in "The Machine in the Garden," the theme of the pastoral and its inevitable disturbance by the industrialized world is a persistent theme in American culture and literature. Faulkner's "The Bear" appears to

follow this pattern to a tee, but the story in fact goes far deeper in its complication of Marx's premise. In this paper, I argue that the intrusion of the machine's alarming progress is not an external disturbance of the characters' paradisiac camp on the edge of the wilderness, but is actually inherent in the ideas and drives of the men themselves. The result of this tendency is the destruction of not only natural resources, but also of the psyche of the man who carries out that very exploitation.

Sara Krevoy

**Tearing the Veil:  
Ambiguity of Race in Nella Larsen's *Passing***

In *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*, W.E.B. Du Bois addresses a cultural confusion within the African American community as a people existing in a society that rejected them for a large part of its history. In an effort to reconcile a collective identity that both establishes a place in American society while maintaining distinct roots to their heritage, the African American psyche divides into a "double-consciousness." In this state, Du Bois argues, the individual is constantly pulled between two identities residing within a single body. As a black man living in a prejudiced America, Du Bois describes a feeling of being "shut out from their world by a vast veil," yet having "no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through," leaving the barrier of race tacitly intact. This essay analyzes the role of central characters in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield—categorically 'black' women whose physical appearance allows them to enter white society—in presenting an opportunity to cross over Du Bois' veil. Larsen uses these women's relationships and experiences to provide a counter to Du Bois' argument, exposing race as social construct easily undermined by the diversity of the human experience.

# More Power to Ya

Moderated by Nathan Pogar, Department of English

Tuesday, April 15  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Carnegie

Ara Ellison

## Fascism and Femininity in *V for Vendetta*

From the start of his graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, Alan Moore hyper-sexualizes his female characters. Moreover, he portrays these women as content in their dependency on and degradation by men. As V takes Evey under his wing, she becomes more reliant on V's revolutionary ideas and less on her own experience. Like V, she comes to symbolize an idea rather than a fleshed-out human. Similarly, Rosemary remains emotionally and physically dependent on her husband until his death. Her subsequent job as an exotic dancer brings her further from a state of autonomy and self-worth. Additionally, the novel's illustrations often mock these characters' attempts to combat the graphic novel's misogynistic mentality. Overall, Evey and Rosemary seem unable to escape the influences of dominant male presences in this novel—those linked to the fascist regime as well as to V himself.

Sarah Jones

## Sketching the Sexes: Gender Systems in *Princess Mononoke*

*Perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal.*  
- Judith Butler

Feminist theorist Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity describes gender as a conglomeration of acts and attributes that are either considered "masculine" or "feminine." These gender roles are connected through a network of relationships called a gender system. In Hayao Miyazaki's film *Princess Mononoke*, the primary village of Irontown has a unique gender system, for, while in the other villages men and women fill traditional societal roles, in Irontown, men and women do not, sometimes even occupying the same roles. In this essay, I will describe how Irontown's gender system has come to be and its implications. In the village of Irontown, the women do not perform stereotypical feminine roles, preventing the manifestation of the traditional masculine-feminine gender dichotomy and its associated male-dominated sex hierarchy, allowing for a seemingly radical gender system, which, unfortunately, rarely exists outside of Irontown, if at all.

Amanda Kang

## The Expansive Yonic Imagery of *Mrs. Dalloway*

*We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the negative.*  
- Helen Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*

The orgasmic imagery of lesbian desire in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* defies Freudian psychoanalytical theories of the yonic as symbolic of the feminine lack of the phallic, and of female desire as rooted in penis envy. Woolf's expansive characterization of yonic imagery, in the context of desire for another woman, redefines it as an independent symbol of desire, growth, and fulfillment.



Jeff Levine

### False Gender Dichotomies in *On The Road*

*On the Road*, by Jack Kerouac, is commonly regarded as incredibly misogynistic. But what if there are actually hidden female characters that offer a way out of this perception? I argue that Kerouac subverts the virgin/whore dichotomy that most prescribe to him through his portrayals of Jane Lee and Terry. Moreover, that society's fixation with this objectification of women in Beat literature has had long-lasting impacts on the way we view gender. In order to change the gender paradigm, we must first stop simplifying the role of women in novels such as *On the Road*, and look at how all the female characters responded to the 1950s counter-culture movement, not just the ones we want to pick and choose, such as Marylou and Camille.

Cooper Nelson

### Constance, or Conrad: Gender in Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*

Director Alfred Hitchcock isn't known for his progressive portrayals of women in his films—which is why the character of Connie Porter in his 1944 picture *Lifeboat* is so intriguing. Trapped on a lifeboat with seven other individuals after a shipwreck, Connie alters herself to get what she wants: power. Seductive as an ingenue in one scene and strong-willed as an army general in the next, Connie has learned how to act feminine, she's learned how to act masculine, and she's learned how to manipulate others by oscillating along the spectrum. This paper uses Judith Butler's ideas from her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" to examine Connie's conscious exploitation of both traditionally male and female behaviors. Connie demonstrates Butler's idea of gender as a performance, an illusion perpetuated and believed by those who learn appropriate gender-normative behaviors. Connie Porter, a reporter as perceptive as she is exploitative, knows how to use these behaviors to her advantage; she deliberately employs them not only to survive, but to maintain power over her fellow lifeboat captives.

# My Own Worst Enemy

Moderated by Lisa Lee, Department of English

Tuesday, April 15  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Gutenberg

Ameet Eini

## Lose Everything: A Tutorial in Self-Discovery

Going down the rabbit hole is a dark experience, but from that darkness emerges revelation. David Fincher's *Fight Club* serves as a case study for how self-destruction can lead to self-discovery. Disillusioned by consumer culture, the narrator's angst escalates to the point where he needs to free himself from the constraints of mainstream society: he self-destructs. This essay will analyze Tyler Durden as the imagined embodiment of the narrator's self-destructive habits: namely, as Tyler becomes more destructive, the narrator moves closer to finding himself. Once the narrator hits rock bottom, he realizes that his enlightenment was dependent on Tyler's destruction, and the audience realizes that self-discovery and self-destruction do, in fact, go hand in hand. Paraphrasing the words of Mr. Durden: it's only once we've lost everything that we're free to do anything. As we jump into the rabbit hole alongside Tyler Durden, we attempt to understand the universal need for self-discovery. In Tyler we trust.

Andre Gray

## What's Mine Is Mine

This essay defends the peculiar Blackwood family of Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, using the ideas posed in Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* to interpret their behavior in terms of a discussion of property rights. Merricat's relationship with objects, though obsessive, draws from a mysticism that is inherent within the treatment of ownership as natural law, and the values we place on such ownership, sentimental or otherwise. Painted in this light, the Blackwood family is normalized. They become nothing but average homeowners, victims of the village's unjust vandalism. Their violence, far from mad, is a justified protest against threats to their personhood. As a secondary effect of this investigation, the abstract principles of ownership and property rights are freshly scrutinized, and their legitimacy is called into question. If Locke's natural law is enough to justify the apparent "difference" of the Blackwood family, then what does that say about the soundness of these natural claims, so often taken for granted?

Elizabeth Kanovsky

## "Time's up, Frank said": Revolution in *Donnie Darko*

In Richard Kelly's celebrated cult classic *Donnie Darko*, Donnie tries to use dissension and vandalism to transform the status quo in his homogenous and repressive hometown of Middlesex. When his efforts fail to create serious change, Donnie destroys the nature of history itself; he reverses time and returns to the beginning of the film's narrative. However, Donnie does not simply restore the town to its previous state; instead, with one small adjustment, he initiates an alternate trajectory to ensure that Middlesex will never be the same. Donnie thus fits into the role of Walter Benjamin's "historical materialist," as he "blasts open the continuum of history" in a rebellion against tradition. Although this time travel cancels his other revolutionary acts, the film is not a critique of these efforts. Rather, it demonstrates how difficult it is to create truly transformative change—so difficult, in fact, that Donnie has to rip open the fabric of time in order to do so.

Jennifer Morgan

**Cheers and Namaste:  
Drinking in *The Dharma Bums***

In *The Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac writes about the lifestyles of the poets and writers of the 1950s. The novel's characters, like the author and his friends, adopt a uniquely American form of Zen Buddhism that includes traditional communion with nature, but also immense amounts of alcohol consumption. Although prohibited in traditional Buddhism, the heavy consumption of wine in *The Dharma Bums* is consistent with a fundamental philosophy held by the Zen Buddhists of the Beat Generation: the desire for nonconformity and the freedom of thought to write creatively. Even though Kerouac himself ultimately dies prematurely from these excesses of alcohol, he rationalizes its use through the novel's characters, exploring the many reasons for their adoration of wine: most notably, its ability to free them from social conformity and to ignite their creative energies.

Kathleen Park

**Can We Create from Chaos?:  
Buxton, Barnes, and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters***

How can catastrophe become art, confusion become order, and chaos become creation? In *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, Julian Barnes presents a whirlwind of scattered stories that mimics our real world's chaotic past. As readers of this history, we are confronted with a series of arbitrary events and left to make sense of it all. To literary critic Jackie Buxton, this narrative disorder sends a bleak message, showing humanity to be helpless in a sea of uncertainty. But to understand the intricacies of Barnes's work, we must delve deeper, past oversimplifications, into the twists and turns of *A History of the World*. In this paper, I show that Barnes actually exerts remarkable control over his vision of history and demonstrates the possibility of historical agency. Disorder need not overwhelm us; rather, it is through the very pursuit of chaos that we gain power over events we cannot control. Through acts of authorship we become like Barnes, able to give meaning to the meaningless, create art from chaos, and become the writers of our own histories.

Sivani

**Terrorism:  
The Only Solution in the Absurd World of *Four Lions***

In Christopher Morris's satirical piece *Four Lions*, the characters have no clear motivation for becoming terrorists. They treat terrorism like a new, exciting hobby; it seems that they have nothing else in their lives from which to derive a sense of meaning. Through this, Morris's film suggests that an act of terrorism is primarily an attempt to revolt against the meaninglessness of the world—the utter absurdity of it. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus refers to the “absurd” as the conflict between humans' search for meaning and the universe's fundamental meaninglessness. He notes the three ways humans deal with such absurdity: either through suicide, religion, or acceptance. Omar and the other characters employ both suicide and religion as literal weapons against the bizarre world in which they live, but it is Camus' belief that accepting the world's meaninglessness is the only way to live life to satisfaction. This paper will study the characters of *Four Lions* to reveal that what propels a person into terrorism may all boil down to the simple, debilitating fear of what cannot be controlled or understood—the failure to accept the crushing ambiguity of the universe.



# Owning It

Moderated by Ash Kramer, Department of English

Tuesday, April 15  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

Aliza Noor Khan

## **“Brown Girl, Brown Girl, Turn Ur \$hit Down”: How M.I.A.’s Monoculturing of the “Third World” Resists Western Cultural Imperialism**

This paper focuses on Sri Lankan-British rapper/singer M.I.A. and her use of “Third World” iconography for her own artistic functions and particularity. M.I.A.’s song “Boom Skit” demonstrates how she both uses and manipulates the West’s one-tone narrative about marginalized cultures from around the world, exemplified by her culling of the “Kony 2012” campaign. By examining the lyrics of “Boom Skit,” Edward Said’s work on “resistance culture” from his seminal book *Culture and Imperialism*, and *New York Times* writer Lynn Hirschberg’s critique of M.I.A., I argue that M.I.A.’s monoculturing of Third World identities and experiences—and subsequent lampooning of them—is not merely appropriative, but is a sentient act of rebellion against how the First World views the Third World.

Kayla Kopczynski

## **Nice Monsters and The Enemy Time**

This essay discusses how *Sweet Bird of Youth* can be regarded as Tennessee Williams’ attempt to comment on the tragedy of fleeting time. Williams bombards his audience with two monsters as protagonists: one, a fading movie star, the other, a condemned sexual deviant. But by the end of the play, these two monsters emerge from their rabbit holes of destructive self-obsession and show evidence of humanity. The concepts of lost time and future insecurity at work in Williams’s play draw from Walter Benjamin’s notion of history. The ending of *Sweet Bird of Youth* can be seen as Williams’s proposed reconciliation between past ambition and dreams that have become unattainable. Although time passes, and beauty and innocence fade, there is a certain nobility in this transience. That nobility, as *Sweet Bird of Youth* suggests, is the nobility of being human and having to make the most out of the short time we have to live.

Max Novak

## **When Greed is Good: *The Great Gatsby*, *Wall Street*, and Wealth in America**

Though F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is undoubtedly a 1920s period piece, its themes—notably money, class, and the American Dream—seem general enough to be applied to a modern context. The question then remains: can the message of Fitzgerald’s early 20th century text be true of today’s post-WWII age of corporations and globalization? In Oliver Stone’s 1987 film *Wall Street*, we find a similar, but updated version of Fitzgerald’s message. Stone also provides us with a Gatsby-esque taste of success in America: luxurious parties, huge mansions, and beautiful women. But this time, these luxuries are available to anyone if they are ruthless enough to take them. Stone has altered the Gatsby narrative by presenting an America where the landed and moneyed class no longer defines wealth, and rather the pursuit of money defines its seekers. In this way, wealth is separated from place, class, and the individual, making it possible for greed to be good, and for the ends to justify the means.

Laura Reilly

## **Not Yours!**

*Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*  
- Genesis 1:28

What I hope to illuminate in my essay is the key factor distinguishing dominance and dominion. While the word dominion connotes an idea of sovereignty and suggests that men serve as governing stewards of the earth, the term dominance imposes an aspect of power, command, and even abuse. Using William Faulkner's *Big Woods*, I identify ownership—or the idea that people can claim, possess, and exploit—as the factor causing man's interaction with nature to be destructive, absurd, and downright impossible. Through an examination of ownership, I differentiate instances of dominance and dominion to show that man can achieve this positive relationship with nature by relinquishing possession.

**Minerva A. Solis-Rubio**

## **The Big Fight: Capitalism vs. Tyler Durden**

The fight to become legendary is at the forefront of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*. Upset at his lack of authority in a capitalist society, Tyler Durden forms Fight Club as a revolutionary movement meant to undermine the power of elitist members of society. As Fight Club evolves into an institution, Project Mayhem consequently comes to reflect Tyler's growing ambitions for power. This paper will explore the similarities and differences in the ideologies of Tyler Durden and in capitalism, so as to expose Fight Club as another “father figure” ideology seeking to control, not liberate, history.

# Wish You Were Here

Tuesday, April 15  
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

Nadja Barlera

## Wandering Woman

*It was a silly, silly dream being unhappy.*  
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Clarissa Dalloway's relationship with Sally Seton is the driving force of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. As Clarissa becomes increasingly dissatisfied with her asexual marriage and longs for the lost love of her youth, she occupies herself with seemingly trivial matters. She spends her time throwing parties hoping that one day Sally will wander into one of them, or at least that she will be able to recreate that lost happiness. Clarissa's parties are also a distraction; she creates a sort of wonderland of social activities, purchases, parties, and walks through the city that can, in fact, be interpreted as small acts of rebellion. In longing for a relationship outside of societal norms Clarissa becomes involved in the lives of the people of London. Woolf thus shows that in order to find our own identity we must often transgress: become at once insiders and outsiders, both part of others and apart from them.

Abigail Eineman

## In the Clouds: Escapism and Remembrance in *The Handmaid's Tale*

*The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living.*  
- Cicero

This work explores the unorthodox use of flashback and nonlinearity in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, specifically giving escapism a positive, even life-saving, function at odds with psychological thought. Offred, the protagonist, uses memory to preserve her self, which I argue is also her *noumenon*, her knowledge of what she is beyond her physical being—which has had its agency stripped by a masculine oppressor. Although Offred criticizes herself for keeping her head in the clouds, I attempt to explain that mental escapism is actually a valid way to protect one's incorporeal identity and autonomy in cases of physical domination by an oppressor. Furthermore, memory enables a past version of oneself to exist in the present, a disassociation which removes the importance of the physical body and thus reduces the oppressor's power.

Jennifer Frazin

## Child's Play: Psychology and Pop Culture in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"

Freud's famous linkage between daydreaming and children's play strikes an eerie resonance with Walter's compulsive daydreaming in James Thurber's iconic short story "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." According to Freud's "pleasure principle," fantasizing develops during child's play and continues through adulthood as daydreaming. Now, as an adult, Walter has regressed from daydreaming and seems once again back in the throes of childlike fantasy; his excessive daydreaming puts him in danger and hinders him from completing even basic tasks, pointing to a kind of mental regression. Yet, as outlandish as his situation seems, Walter's condition reflects several prominent facets of Depression-era culture. The general public suffered from an obsession with fantastic heroes and fears of disappearing into a homogenized populace—a growing "mass culture" in which the individual was absorbed into the larger collective of American society. Important matters and world change were left to far-away leaders and the fictional superheroes of comic books and radio shows, establishing "heroism" as a distant, unattainable state of being. This

essay explores the manner in which narrow social constructions of heroism undermine Walter's value as an average American adult, entrapping him in a psychological second childhood.

**Mimi Gualtieri**

**Wakey, Wakey, Eggs and Existentialism:  
History as Fiction in Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters***

Julian Barnes is the kind of man that keeps you up at night. His novel *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* poses each chapter as a different iteration of the same story, challenging the reader's perspective of what constitutes history. But even within singular chapters, it becomes difficult to determine whether our perceived reality is just an elaborate dream. This ambiguity between the dream world and reality leaves us no choice but to reject the idea of a singular reality altogether. By exploring events as dreams, Barnes concludes that a true sense of awakening is an unattainable goal. We may be living the dream, but it soon morphs into a nightmare when we realize we can never wake up.

**Genevieve Parkes**

**Real vs. Ideal:  
The Paradox of Nature's Utopia**

Stemming from Emma Goldman's anarchist theory, this paper explores the difficulty of attaining the ideal in the real world. Goldman's anarchism strives to establish a perfect society with "free access to the earth" for all. This promise resonates with Pammy from Don DeLillo's *Players*, who looks to nature as a solution for postmodern boredom. Dissatisfied with reality, both women seek the utopia of nature—a place that promises tangible happiness away from the evils of society. Their transcendental utopia is captivating, yet this paper demonstrates its paradox and investigates the implications of their femininity in their solution. They look to the physical world as a solution to their discontent, yet at the same time the harshness of reality is what keeps this imagined paradise out of reach. I confront the irrationality of Goldman and Pammy's attempts to accomplish the ideal through romanticizing the real, since their solution prevents its own fulfillment.

# It's a Man World

Moderated by Professor Roberto Diaz, Departments of Spanish and Portuguese  
and Comparative Literature

Wednesday, April 16  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Carnegie

Francesca Conterno

## Closing the Gap Between Purity and Promiscuity in *The Virgin Suicides*

The boys that narrate Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* view the Lisbon sisters dichotomously: they believe that the sisters' supposed promiscuity is bursting at the seams of their virginal purity. This belief drives the boys' long-lasting fascination with the sisters, urging the boys to challenge the purity of the girls in favor of a sexuality that seems to lie just below the surface. Of course, for the boys to disrupt this purity would mean to lose the mysterious sexual dichotomy that seems to define the Lisbon sisters—the fascination that the boys feel would subside. However, the boys are able to avoid facing this reality because they are sufficiently distanced from the actual living and breathing Lisbon sisters. In this paper, I argue that this distance leaves the boys free, instead, to revel in their self-serving understandings and assumptions about the girls.

Kristen M. Garrett

## Femi-nation: Alienation through gender in *Zero Dark Thirty*

Maya, the protagonist in Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty*, is not only unlikable, but alienating: a term used, in this case, as reference to German playwright Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation. Brecht states that "the audience [should be] hindered from simply identifying with...characters," so that the audience can focus on the greater social issues that the piece presents, rather than becoming engrossed in the character. What is interesting about Maya's character, however, is that she wouldn't be alienating if her character was male. Her actions are only alienating when viewed through our societally held norms of femininity: namely, that women should be empathetic, emotional, and sexual. As a result of this Brechtian alienation, the film is not a film about Maya, but rather the larger social issues of the time: gender politics and morality of war.

Claudia Hellström

## Virginia Woolf and Nancy Armstrong: Two Feminists, One Argument

In her 1931 essay "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf argues that the only way women can achieve equality is by 1) each overcoming her own personal Angel, and 2) being able to speak their minds without shocking their audiences. Woolf admits that she could not overcome this second obstacle, but she does defeat her antagonistic Angel, just as Lily Briscoe frees herself from the influence of the traditional Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*. Sixty years later, scholar Nancy Armstrong challenges the central tenets of feminism by claiming that the tactics and arguments of her predecessors make them unwitting instruments of their own repression. Although it may seem that Armstrong is betraying Woolf and her feminist ideas, in fact, through her argument Armstrong is actually following the trail that Woolf laid out for all of the feminists that would come after her. My paper argues that Armstrong's ideas are a continuation, not a contradiction, of Woolf's original argument, and that this is indeed another victory for the ongoing feminist movement.



Timothy Nguyen

**Matriarchal Irontown:  
*Princess Mononoke's* Other Great Society**

Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* is the quintessential story of evolution, one in which a progressive contingent of outcasts threatens to destroy the order of the long-standing society. While most viewers remember the movie for the luscious Great Forest, the other great society, Irontown, is perhaps just as intriguing. In Irontown, all the power pivots towards women, all centered on the leader of the village, Lady Eboshi. Using Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence" as a framework of discussion, I found Irontown's matriarchal society to engage with so many ideas of feminism, or at least, at first. Primarily, the two points in this essay that Irontown engages with are the idea of "compulsory heterosexuality," which discusses the subliminal oppression of female sexuality by male heterosexuality, and "lesbian continuum," which engages with the idea that all women exist in a continuum of conscious desire to explore the inner life of fellow women. Ripe with genuine camaraderie amongst the women yet implicit and subliminal in its connection with patriarchy, this society ultimately does promote the lesbian relationships of Rich's continuum. These relationships, although not sexual, promote relationships of genuine connection amongst women that Rich describes in her essay.

Minnie Schedeen

**A Male Speed Bump in the Female-Driven *Thelma & Louise***

In *Thelma & Louise*, the two titular characters dominate the screen for a majority of the run time. There is hardly ever a scene when neither they nor any other woman is present. However, the interrogation of J.D. presents a hiccup within this otherwise female-driven film. Here, J.D. portrays a man trapped and attacked by other men – particularly Investigator Hal Slocumb. Throughout the scene J.D. assumes the role of the woman as he is assaulted and, in one case, "raped" by the detective. This aberration of gender in the film also explores the possible assaultive nature of the camera. We see that the camera has a need to enforce objectification—regardless of gender—and subordination. As J.D. attacks, shields, and defends himself in a bevy of different fashions, he emphasizes the assaultive and ever-present nature of the male gaze.

# Making Up Is Hard to Do

Moderated by Christopher Santiago, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16

5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.

Gutenberg

Sarah Allen

## **The Powerlessness of Billy Pilgrim: Religion and Agency in *Slaughterhouse-Five***

*We're terrible animals. I think that the Earth's immune system is trying to get rid of us, as well it should.*

- Kurt Vonnegut, "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart"

Even after witnessing the bombing of Dresden, Kurt Vonnegut maintained his faith in God. Yet his faith in humankind was not so enduring. In his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut attempts to reconcile his faith and his doubt through the parallel between protagonist Billy Pilgrim and Jesus Christ. Billy's fatalist gospel and non-linear perspective of time strips Christ of his autonomy and turns his sacrifice into a preordained outcome. When faced with fatalism, Christian theology becomes meaningless—Christ did not choose to die, but merely embraced the inevitable, just as Billy resigns himself to his own death. In this essay, I argue that *Slaughterhouse-Five* identifies this conflict between divine intervention and free will, but allows readers to decide whether God or random chance determines their futures.

Daniel Gavidia

## **The Beat Family: Relationships and Counterculture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road***

This essay discusses the family dynamics present in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. The male characters in Kerouac's novel—the Beats—have a concept of family that clashes with the nuclear family ideal of the 1950s mainstream. For the Beats, family must include both homosocial and heterosexual relationships. The Beat "homosocial family" consists of male friends and offers the Beats ease, fun, and a sense of male superiority. The Beat "heterosexual family," on the other hand, consists of female lovers and marriage, and satisfies the Beats' need for autonomy, as understood by Elaine Tyler May in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. The sharp differences between these two "families" result in conflict. Ultimately, the Beats must choose one over the other.

Zane Grace

## **Fitzgerald's Irish Heritage: The Green Light as a Symbol of Nostalgia**

This paper uses biographical information about F. Scott Fitzgerald to argue that the green light within *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald's personal nostalgia for his Irish heritage, lost to the American melting pot. This reading is supported by the light's green color and Fitzgerald's subtle inclusion of the long-standing rivalry between Ireland and Scotland through the antagonist's Scottish surname (Buchanan) and color symbolism throughout the novel which sets green and blue at odds (the national colors of Ireland and Scotland, respectively). Combining this biographical interpretation with existing interpretations – that the green light represents love of wealth, Gatsby's longing for Daisy, and a conflict between Eastern and Western values – frames the green light principally as a symbol of nostalgia. Furthermore, the green light's function as a lighthouse corresponds with the naval imagery in the final lines of the novel, suggesting that nostalgia is the guiding force behind human progress. Gatsby's death and ultimate failure indicate Fitzgerald's critique of attempts to recreate the past, yet Fitzgerald simultaneously recognizes the inevitability and strength of nostalgic influence, as evidenced by *The Great Gatsby*'s closing lines and Fitzgerald's own nostalgia for his Irish heritage.

Celeste McAlpin-Levitt

**“Dog the Devil,” Dog the Prophet:  
Lion the Hunting Dog as a Symbol of The Natural and Industrial Hybrid in Faulkner’s *Big Woods***

When the stray dog Lion forces his way to the front of William Faulkner’s hunting tale *Big Woods*, having risen out of some dark warren or den, he causes quite a stir. “I’d rather have Old Ben himself in my pack than that brute. Shoot him,” declares Major de Spain. “Good God, what a wolf!” General Compson cries out. While Lion’s monstrous size and strength disturbs the hunters, it is not the central catalyst for this commotion. At a more basic level, Lion disturbs by defying the hunters’ and the reader’s attempts to categorize him. He is at times in tune with nature, primeval and alienated from humans, and at others with industry, a domesticated killing instrument. This paper explores how *Big Woods* challenges the cliché literary formula of the pastoral versus the mechanical. I propose that the presence of Lion as a shared symbol reveals that nature and industrialization are coalescing, rather than conflicting, states of mind. Faulkner reveals that these traditionally opposing forces are even capable of achieving a symbiotic, productive relationship. However, the result of their marriage is burdened with the brutality of the wild and the city, and is frightening to behold.

Kathleen Morris

**Glass Houses:  
Questioning the Foundations of Community through the Gothic Looking Glass**

*Every man must fear the witness in himself who whispers to close the window.*  
- A.M. Rosenthal, *Thirty-eight Witnesses: The Kitty Genovese Case*

Alice Munro’s “Open Secrets” (1994) offers an unsettling portrait of small town life. When newcomer Heather Bell goes missing, the town of Carstairs ignores—and even implicates—the young teenager in her own disappearance. The reader never hears Heather’s side of the story; her voice is drowned out by the townspeople, who label Heather as a troublemaker and use her as a foil to strengthen their own fragile construction of community. But why is the community so quick to blame Heather? By analyzing “Open Secrets” through the lens of sociologist Georg Simmel and the feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, I will argue that Heather presents a threat to the lifelong residents of Carstairs because her status as an outsider gives her the potential to critique the status quo. Ironically, the townspeople’s response to her disappearance undermines the community’s facade of unity by asking the question: is collective identity and security based only upon the marginalization of an “other”?

# Stuff of Life

Moderated by Michelle Brittan, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Laurentian/Sumerian

Abigail Coleman

## Opposed States of Mind: The Pastoral Conflict in William Faulkner's *Big Woods*

In his essay, "The Machine in the Garden," Leo Marx remarks on the pastoralist conflict inherent in American culture. While Americans love the idea of nature, we can't seem to repress our urges to conquer and destroy it. This issue is especially worrisome for pastoralists—Thoreau's backwoodsmen—who exist at the border between nature and man. Their position provides a paradox; these "backwoodsmen" are able to develop an exceptional intimacy with nature, but are also at the forefront of society's imminent destructive processes. Characters of the backwoods, who populate the stories of William Faulkner, must come to terms with the pastoralist conflict. In his short story "A Race at Morning," Faulkner separates Marx's "opposing states of mind"—the nostalgic human affinity for nature and the knowledge of its imminent destruction—into two different characters, namely, a Mister Ernest and his young, unnamed ward. By drawing this clear distinction between what Marx describes as the "strong urge to believe in the rural myth" and the "awareness of industrialization," Faulkner defines and dissects the pastoral conflict, illuminating the paradox of the backwoodsman.

John-Peter Jupiter

## Dolores in Humberland: Absurdism in Nabokov's *Lolita*

In a 1966 interview with *Vogue* magazine, Vladimir Nabokov said of Lewis Carroll, "I always call him Lewis Carroll Carroll, because he was the first Humbert Humbert." As evidenced through the plethora of references to Carroll that he included in his work, it is clear that Nabokov was fascinated by both the life and work of the famous author. This paper delves into the connections between Nabokov and Carroll through examination of the novel, *Lolita*. Long known to be a hybrid text, taking influence from a number of literary sources, Nabokov's novel is filled to the brim with a number of (largely ignored) references to Carroll. These allusions set up Humbert's story as an allegory for Carroll's life, eventually coming to the conclusion that they are both dark artists, using prose to capture and immortalize their twisted childhood fantasies. Through exploration of these allusions, this paper aims to provide a new reading of Nabokov's masterpiece that will open up new avenues through which to approach it.

Paige Schwimer

## Cracking Clarissa's Code: The Paradoxical Nature of Understanding

"What is this terror? What is this ecstasy?... What is it that fills me with this extraordinary excitement?" Peter Walsh asks himself as Clarissa Dalloway approaches him at the end of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although Clarissa Dalloway seems to express herself freely, those that she comes in contact with consciously struggle to understand her. As they seem to gather more information leading to full comprehension of Clarissa Dalloway, an all-encompassing understanding of her as a whole becomes more and more elusive. This essay will discuss the paradoxical nature of one's attempt to understand the entirety of a complex subject, such as a city or an individual. I will first establish Woolf's comparison of Clarissa to the city of London as a platform on which to explore these attempts to reduce the knowledge of multifaceted subjects into concrete thoughts. I will then explore Woolf's narrativization of Clarissa in order to show that these discrete bits of knowledge can reveal many true aspects of the city or individual, but are essentially meaningless in understanding the entirety of such a city—much less something as baffling as a human being.

Linyan Tian

### **Jazzing Sexuality in *The Talented Mr. Ripley***

In a memorable scene in the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Herbert Greenleaf drawls in raspy tones, “To me, jazz is just noise. Insolent noise.” Contrary to Mr. Greenleaf’s assertion, jazz in the film takes on a much more dynamic role than simple background noise. I will explore how the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, by director Anthony Minghella, subverts heteronormative gender roles through use of two components: soundtrack and setting. The film utilizes jazz and Europe in order to queer the sexualities of the main characters, Dickie and Tom. As both jazz and Europe represent realms where boundaries are blurred, they reflect how Dickie and Tom’s sexualities similarly are blurred, and do not follow traditional heterosexual norms. I argue that Minghella demonstrates how Dickie’s sexuality is indicative of his rebellion against his patriarchal WASP background, while Tom’s handling of his own sexuality shows how he embraces and wants to be a part of the very patriarchal structure Dickie desires to leave behind.

Amy Zhao

### **The Business of Ambition: The American Dream in Native American Culture**

The American Dream is infamous. It means making a name for yourself. The Native American Dream, however, is very different. The Native American Dream is one that aims to advance the Native American community as a whole. In Sherman Alexie’s directorial debut, *The Business of Fancydancing*, Seymour Polatkin is seen as an outcast from the Spokane reservation for his ambition and desire to live a life beyond the reservation. Using both Alexie’s own commentary on his life and the film and David L. Moore’s discussion of the American Dream for Native Americans, I will explore three different mediums of music, dance, and writing, which are used in the film, and how Alexie shows that forms of art can either further the Native American Dream or impede it. Alexie argues that music and dance further the Native American Dream because they are communal forms of art; however, writing is a selfish act and therefore impedes the Native American Dream. Although writing is a selfish act in the film, I will also explore how Seymour Polatkin’s writing differs from Sherman Alexie’s writing and how one advances the value of community while the other is only a representation of the American Dream.



# There Will Be Blood

Moderated by Samantha Carrick, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

Madeline Hinck

## Human Nature's Mad Hatter: *Mrs. Dalloway* and Insanity in the City

*All extremes of feeling are aligned with madness.*  
-Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Is Septimus Warren Smith insane? Septimus hears people talking behind his bedroom walls and sees “an old woman’s head in the middle of a fern.” Yet wherever Septimus looks, he also sees beauty. Through the allegedly insane eyes of Septimus, London has never looked more beautiful—or sinister. So is Septimus insane, and how can readers evaluate “sanity” and “insanity”? Septimus Warren Smith’s narrative leads us to ask what we ought to do with those who don’t fit the status quo. After experiencing the “insidious” fingers of the European War, something isn’t quite right with him. What now would be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder tortures Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*. His doctors want him sent away from the city, yet his wife wants to be with him. The only person who seems to lack a voice is Septimus. Woolf’s novel thus implies a difficult question: Which causes more harm—Septimus’s doctors or the war? Through Septimus, Woolf provides insight into “human nature” in post-war London, revealing that the “insane” are often victims of circumstance. Finally, Woolf suggests that humanity in peacetime may be more dangerous to the individual than a war.

Caolinn Mejza

## Time Travel in *Slaughterhouse-Five*: Better Than Booze, Drugs, and Therapy

This essay discusses how *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be regarded as Kurt Vonnegut’s attempt to communicate the physical and mental toll war takes on people. Vonnegut restructures the chronology of the novel so that the main character, Billy Pilgrim, is time traveling between moments from his life, not because he wants to, but because his mind is forcing him to in order to cope with the effects of World War II. Literary critic Arnold Edelstein believes Vonnegut uses the absurdity of time travel to illustrate the absurdity of war, and this paper incorporates Edelstein’s insight in order to examine time travel, not as an aspect of Billy Pilgrim’s narrative to be taken literally, but rather as a metaphor for the damage that war causes.

Pablo Pozas Guerra

## A Beautiful Revolution: An Analysis Of The Aestheticism of Destruction in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*

“This how-to stuff isn’t in any history book,” explains the narrator in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* as he relays the three ways to make napalm. But even if history books included recipes for destruction, what would we do with them? After all, readers of *Fight Club* gain access to this information when the narrator shares all the how-to stuff he’s learned from his alter ego Tyler Durden, and yet, while the legend of Tyler Durden and fight club have endured, the paramilitary organization Project Mayhem has had far less impact. In the following paper, I argue that Project Mayhem fails to call us to revolutionary action because Tyler Durden’s offers a hollow message—attractive, but ultimately meaningless. Nevertheless, the movement maintains a characteristic aesthetic appeal, and perhaps, I propose that it still has the chance to develop into something more meaningful by undergoing a radical revision of its purpose. It is highly uncommon for a revolution to get a second chance; however, Palahniuk allows Project Mayhem the opportunity to do so by ending the novel with, “We look forward to getting you back.”

Isabella Soehn

**Blind Violence:  
Sight and Aggression in *Bloody Sunday***

This paper examines how prejudice biases and misleads the senses—particularly sight—in relation to the violence of the British army against a mostly peaceful Irish march in Paul Greengrass's *Bloody Sunday*. I examine how both the rioters and the military willingly mislead themselves as to the intentions of other party, and uses Freud's discussion of criminals and authority in terms of violence in *Civilization and Its Discontents* to illuminate how intrinsic these misconceptions can be. The character's sight—which we often consider infallible and undeniable—becomes distorted: the protesters see disproportionate force from the military and the military see disproportionate violence from the marchers. Ultimately these projections reveal how humans accept some and reject other forms of violence based on their bias about the aggressor.

Jacquie Teobaldi

**A Divided Hero:  
The Alienation Effect in *Zero Dark Thirty***

This paper examines *Zero Dark Thirty*'s role as a dramatic representation of a modern historical and political narrative, the "War on Terror." Through an analysis of the film's main character Maya Lambert, performed by Jessica Chastain, this paper will dissect the film's approach to addressing the most controversial aspect of the "War on Terror," the use of torture techniques by the CIA and other military and intelligence services. Utilizing dramatic theory, specifically that of Brecht and his "alienation effect," I will assess how Chastain's use of the alienation effect reveals her character Maya's evolving stance on the morality and effectiveness of torture as an intelligence tool.

# Because I Said So

Moderated by Professor Margaret Russett, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Scriptorium

Grace Goodrich

## Not What You Said But How You Said It

This essay serves to explore how Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* emphasizes that there is no one or "right" way to ascertain the truth of one's own history, by evaluating the different ways of storytelling presented in the narrative and how they are all afforded equal weight. Although no formal literary analysis of the film has been published yet given its young age, my argument lies in opposition to independent blog posts and reviews, such as those from *The Globe and Mail*, *International Business Times*, that critique Polley's manipulation of dialogue, staging of clips, and "meta-filmmaking" techniques as a whole for appearing disingenuous and not conveying the objective truth. By researching what defines a documentary and a work of non-fiction, as well as citing critiques of other modern-day examples of meta-film, I examine how storytelling does not owe an obligation to the truth if there is value in the telling of the story itself, which is demonstrated by the characters throughout this film.

Kshitij Kumar

## Fatalities of Ideology: Understanding the Rationale of Irrationals

*You have your ideology and I have mine.*  
- Khalil Gibran

Christopher Morris' film *Four Lions* tells the tale of an amateur terrorist cell and its struggles to make a mark on the world, all in the name of Jihad. Within this cell are two leaders, Omar and Barry, with equally radical goals, but very different ideologies. This essay will examine the power of ideology to mold, filter, and even obscure reality to the point that perceptions and actions are no longer even remotely rational. This disconnect between objective reality and the leaders' subjective interpretations of reality results in frequent comic absurdity; a closer look, however, reveals the roots of their ideology and drives the audience to not only sympathize, but empathize with Omar and Barry. Morris' film urges the audience to open the dialogue about systems and necessary change, as it draws—and crosses—both ethical and rational lines throughout.

Rachel Polcyn

## Kickin' it with the Crazies: Psychological Complexities of Socially Imposed Oppression in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

*See how easily slaves are made?*  
- Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Knowledge of history often gives us the illusion that we can understand what oppressed individuals experience. We falsely think that in a similar position, we would never allow ourselves to be stifled. However, when faced with the wholly suffocating conditions of racist and sexist environments, it is much easier than we might think to fall into compliance with a system that contradicts our beliefs. In Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Dana, a 20<sup>th</sup> century African American woman who is unwillingly drawn into the Antebellum South, struggles to resist assimilation into a misogynistic culture of racially-based oppression. This social structure forces Dana to acknowledge that her agency rests in the hands of her male oppressors. In her continued efforts at improving female lives on the Weylin Plantation, Dana is reminiscent of the revolutionary feminist described by bell hooks in her essay, "Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics." The only way for Dana to survive is to redefine her notion of socially acceptable

actions, working within the system to escape it. This paper examines an oppressive nineteenth century society in the context of its psychological impact on a modern individual and argues that Dana's fluidity of perceptions and social permissibility lies in the persistence of the human spirit under extreme conditions.

**Kathryn Riccitiello**

**Acting the Parts of Man and Woman with Great Vigor:  
Examining Gender Performance in *Orlando***

This paper examines how the title character in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* exemplifies and adds to Judith Butler's assertions about performativity in the essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." Orlando affirms that gender is a socially and culturally imposed charade rather than an expression of some inherent inner truth—this affirmation manifests itself in Woolf's explorations of the dichotomy between nature and society (i.e. the apparent absence of human gender in the wilderness vs. the highly gendered conventions of society), the function of clothing and outward gender expression, and the characters' expressions of emotion. Butler argues that gender performance is compulsory, but when Orlando switches gender and sex, the performance is foreign and Orlando must learn to adapt to what would normally be compulsory. Orlando's navigation of compulsory gender performance enhances Butler's theory by examining how someone thrust into another gender might experience gender performance.

**Arielle Sitrick**

**It's All a Matter of Perspective**

In the introduction to *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess distinguishes his novel from Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation: his version is a novel, in its very nature questioning normality by showing that rules and people change, while Kubrick's take, with the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter omitted, is a fable. Throughout the novel, Alex is forced to realize that societal conventions and labels often seem more solid than they are. Only when he can disengage from his unreal loyalties to class and see people as individuals, can Alex grow up, as Pete, his old "droog" (friend in the slang language, *Nadsat*) seems to have already done. Kevin Womack argues that Alex's pseudo-self, constructed from a dysfunctional interpersonal unit, explains his "self-indulgent abuse of drugs, music, and violence," but I would venture further to say that Alex's "pseudo-family," in essence the entire environment he inhabits at the start of the story, lacks the "plurality of voices" necessary for him to mature. It isn't until he is forced to listen to a plurality of voices that he's able to begin maturing from a *nadsat* to an adult. Kubrick's abbreviated version fails to acknowledge the transformation that Alex undergoes and keeps him, and the narrative itself, in a perpetually static state.

# I Think, Therefore I Am

Moderated by Samantha Carrick, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Carnegie

Sean Avanish Craig

## Rebellion: Transforming Man into Nothing

Based on Paul Greengrass' *Bloody Sunday*, my paper delves into the transformation of Gerry Donaghy from the stereotypical self-confident adolescent rebel in search of a cause into an unsure victim of the State. As we follow Gerry's journey through *Bloody Sunday* we relate to him as the everyday man who is neither a protagonist nor an antagonist. Sigmund Freud describes the complex nature of the human psyche in *Civilization And Its Discontents*, helping us to understand Gerry's emotional transformation throughout *Bloody Sunday*. Freud's psychoanalytic approach to violence and innate human nature urges us to recognize and interpret our feelings for Gerry when he meets his utterly tragic demise. Tumbling down the rabbit hole with Gerry Donaghy, we witness firsthand the clash of individuals in history, as well as their significance when trying to understand the impact of an event as monumental and detrimental as Bloody Sunday.

Jordan Lopez

## A Farewell to Humanity in *Goodbye to Berlin*

*No. Even now I can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened ...*  
Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*

When reality starts to seem increasingly unreal and life begins to spin terribly out of control, how does one cope? How does someone react to seeing every familiar piece of his existence fade away before his very eyes? Christopher Isherwood's memoir, *Goodbye to Berlin*, details Berlin's transformation from a laissez-faire paradise of intellectuals, libertines and eccentrics to a fear-ridden and oppressive ghost town besieged by the Nazis. As Isherwood recounts the disintegration of old Berlin, an incredibly intimate portrait emerges of how everyday Berliners cope with being violently dragged down the Nazi "rabbit hole." This paper analyzes the reactions of ordinary people to extraordinary circumstances in order to reveal what happens to human tenderness, individuality, and compassion when such expressions of humanity can cost you your liberty and—in some cases—your life.

Robert Smat

## Masked Motives

Throughout Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, V represents a recovering melancholic who has managed to escape his memories and has progressed into mania. As readers, we do not see this transformation literally, but metaphorically through Evey and Finch's own movement towards mania. V attempts to disconnect himself from his past; V's destruction of government buildings and London itself fuels his psychological state and further separates him from his mourned objects of the past. Even in quiet moments, David Lloyd's illustrations capture V's carefree nature, cementing it in a character who never shows his own face, yet somehow still communicates what facial expressions normally would. But, this façade crumbles when V encounters an old movie poster laden with warm memories of the past. V plummets back into melancholia upon seeing the poster, an unraveling of his tight grasp of mania and an ultimate undoing of the character that he has built. This scene threatens to destroy the psychological conclusions made thus far, unless we examine the original psychological facts. Perhaps this scene supports V's mania instead of dismantling it entirely. Maybe this scene demonstrates humanity to psychology's flipping light switch of emotions. Ultimately, the scene confirms that V is a human with mania, not an automaton.



### A Rabbit Hole of Self-Actualization

*Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth . . .  
the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.*  
- W.H. Murray, quoted in Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art*

The relationship of initiative and fate defies a simple explanation. A hot topic with many best-sellers vying for the floor, one can feel lost among multiple branches of psychology, New Age thought, and a slew of self-help. Still, most approaches to this paradox attempt to force a binary: empiricism *or* mysticism, internal *or* external mechanisms. My longstanding curiosity has led me to two groundbreaking texts in positive psychology—John Haidt's *The Happiness Hypothesis* and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*—as well as Rhonda Byrne's New Age blockbuster *The Secret*, and the self-help of Stephen R. Covey's pragmatic *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. By cross-examining these leading works, I seek to integrate their perspectives. I contend that we need a recursive understanding: *as within, so without—and back again*. Improvements in one's internal state (such as effective goal setting or cognitive-behavioral therapy) alter one's fate through a positive feedback loop. This self-fulfilling prophecy changes one's relationship to the outside world—and potentially, the workings of the world itself. By not denying or fetishizing fate, we bypass the debate of the “Law of Attraction” vs. a “mystical placebo effect.” Ultimately, we follow an interaction of synchronicity, selective perception, and creative flow—forging a new reality in the journey to self-actualization.

Mona Xia

### Nella Larsen's *Passing*: When Race Doesn't Have to Be Either Black or White

Nella Larsen's *Passing* centers around Du Bois' concept of “double consciousness,” wherein 20<sup>th</sup> century African Americans developed an acute, outsider's perspective of their race's image. However, Du Bois only explores this concept through a man's perspective and doesn't account for the complex dynamic between African American women and white society. White men don't shun black women but rather develop an ambivalent relationship where they view the women as subservient, yet are willing to have sexual relations with them. Irene and Clare are both resultant “products” of this intermingling and challenge a strictly divisive racial attitude. I explore how double consciousness shapes Irene and Clare's relationship. Irene is drawn towards Clare because of their shared racial ambiguity as black women who could possibly pass as white. However, the conflict in their relationship, from Irene's perspective, stems from their different racial decisions: Irene chooses to be African American, while Clare passes as white. Narrated from Irene's perspective, the external struggle between the two is a projection of the internal racial turmoil within Irene. Hence, the societal and internal aspects of Du Bois's double consciousness is fundamental to *Passing*'s nature as both a social commentary and a psychological analysis.

# Part of Your World

Moderated by Stephen Pasqualina, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Gutenberg

Kailin Chen

## In the Midst of the Traffic: The Physical Environment as a Window to the Self in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Do perceptions and thoughts mainly stem from an inner self, or are they constantly steered and changed by the environment? In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf suggests an entangled relationship, rather than an insurmountable barrier, between the private self and the physical environment. Clarissa Dalloway, the title character in the novel, has a heightened awareness of her surroundings; both nature, such as trees and water, and the urban area, such as taxi cabs and Big Ben, tremendously impact her thoughts, emotions, and behavior. At times, she even reaches brief moments of epiphany when she is most observant of the environment. Her experience suggests that self is not a completely individual concept, for it is bound to and greatly molded by the physical environment. This essay discusses how *Mrs. Dalloway*, contrary to what many critics say, is largely about the juxtaposition of the internal self with the external environment.

Sarah Collins

## Take a Walk on the Wild Side: The Battle of the "Id" in Nature

In James Dickey's *Deliverance*, four men take a trip through nature, bringing with them their overpowering subconscious as they recede further and further from civilization. With no superego society to keep them in check, the men reveal their primitive sides, unleashing what Freud coins as "libido" and "death drive." My presentation will uncover a timeline of events that exposes violence and sexuality in the novel, swelling until it reaches its zenith, yielding murder, rape, and lies. I argue that the men as desirous beings use their leave from the societal superego to exhibit undiluted "id" expressionisms, primarily in the form of violence and death drive. My case will declare that men, in specific circumstances, will reinvent their egos as ones composed essentially of primal urges and tendencies, as described in terms of Freud's work, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Lenara Litmanovich

## Snare of Preparation

T.S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock is Dostoyevsky's Underground Man without actually living underground and a Shakespearean antagonist who doesn't actually antagonize anyone. His thoughtful inaction freezes him in a hellish time continuum: paralyzed in the moment, ultimately imprisoned by what Leo Tolstoy called the "snare of preparation." Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" puts modernity on trial for creating urban environments that force cycles of meaningless interaction where life is a death in and of itself. According to Marshall Berman, as modernity develops it simultaneously "loses its capacity to organize and give meaning to people's lives." In the modern city, rigid structures move, move, and move people along like machines, forcing them to chug through life with something always missing. But is this inaction and lack of retrospection modernity's fault or ours? Prufrock internalizes the practices of modernity, and thus withers away as a thinking human. In this presentation I examine how the protagonist condemns himself by becoming the epitome of everything he hates about modernity. And who knows, maybe his "overwhelming question" isn't worth answering after all; if Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare have taught us anything, it is that the ones who ask are usually the ones to suffer.

**Will Pearson**

**Reality as Choice:  
Julian Barnes and Subjective Truth**

Truth is a choice. People must choose whether to believe or not to believe any fact or event presented to them. They base their belief on a number of factors: the source, their previous experiences and beliefs, or others' opinions. Julian Barnes considers this concept of truth in his novel *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. Barnes distorts absolute truth by writing his novel through contradictory accounts: two sources tell the same story in a different way. By presenting different believable versions of the truth, he makes the reader figure out what he or she believes happened in each chapter. This presentation focuses on one chapter of the book, "The Survivor," and closely examines the decisions the characters and the readers must make on what to believe and who to trust. Through his techniques, Barnes reveals the subjective nature of truth and, I assert, makes the reader just as much an author of his novel as he is.

**Becca Weber**

**Stop! Grab the Wall:  
Sexual Violation in the Enclosed Community of *The Virgin Suicides***

Walls segregate the suburb of Grosse Pointe in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* from the greater city of Detroit. Inside the confines, nature—most especially her trees—has been manipulated into carefully manicured landscapes by the humans who live there in a tangible expression of both the community's sense of entitlement to and regulatory power over the area. This ecocritical analysis lends insight into the mechanism by which the female members of Grosse Pointe are likewise manicured, regulated, and ultimately violated. The irony: violation's devastating results render the internal system of Grosse Pointe unsustainable, but the enclosing nature of walls makes it an environment very hard to escape.

# Reality Bites

Moderated by Brittany Miller, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16

7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Laurentian/Sumerian

AnnaLiese Burich

## **A Malchick Without a Cause: The Normality of Ultra-Violence in *A Clockwork Orange***

This essay discusses the paradoxical normality of Alex's ultra-violence in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess, in his introduction to the 1986 edition of the novel entitled "*A Clockwork Orange* Resucked," asserts that arbitrary violence is necessary for youth. This paper agrees that while *rebellion* is necessary for youth, the ultra-violence in itself is merely a product of Alex's times. For centuries, teenagers have rebelled against the adult world by forming their own culture; his motivations are the same as those of the greased hair and hot-rods of the 1950s when this novel was written, but his actions differ—because they have to. In the USSR-esque climate of this novel, society is already violent, mechanistic, and lawless. So to fulfill his normal teenage urge to assert his individuality, he cannot just be violent—he has to be ultra-violent.

Constance Chan

## ***Into The Wild:* The Absurd Necessity of Materialism**

Contrary to what its title might imply, Sean Penn's *Into The Wild* is not actually a film about escaping commodity culture to experience the wild. Instead, visual motifs such as trucks, trains, and backpacks reveal the absurd necessity for materialism. On one hand, protagonist Chris McCandless denounces materialism. In turn, Chris's deep-seated hatred of materialism—which, for him, represents deception and the unnatural—stems from his parents' lies about his identity as an illegitimate child. On the other hand, at times, Chris appears to embrace materialism, relying on material objects in order to travel and survive; he constantly drags a backpack full of material things and depends on man-made vehicles for transportation into the wild of Alaska. Even as Chris ventures into the wild, he is forced to drag society with him. However, this battle with society causes him to discover his true identity—his "right name." This paper will analyze how the film's visual motifs of backpacks and vehicles symbolize the absurd necessity of wrestling with one's ties to civilization—and how, ultimately, this struggle cathartically produces the realization of the genuine.

Julian De Ocampo

## **Just Playing: Applying Approaches from Game Studies to Don DeLillo's *Players***

This essay interprets the first chapter of Don DeLillo's *Players* through its systems of rules and interactions. Borrowing from approaches in game studies, I contend that the text relies heavily on DeLillo's manipulation of rules in a way. Specifically, I argue that *Players* can best be understood through cultural theorist Johan Huizinga's theory of the "magic circle." In *Players*, DeLillo explores the link between context and meaning by illustrating the relationship between a game, its rules, and its players. While the title clues the reader into the text's playful nature, DeLillo refuses to delineate the boundaries or rules of the game. Deprived of context, the reader is as alienated as the text's disengaged protagonists. Huizinga's theory reasons that play demands both perfect freedom and perfect order. *Players* adds a corollary to this theory, maintaining that without context, freedom and order only serve to alienate the individual. *Players* depicts life without context—as meaningless as playing a game without knowing the rules.

Jonathan Kumala

**Nonfiction is Fiction:  
Tvetzan Todorov and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood***

Do things “based on a true story” equate to the true story itself? This essay discusses how *In Cold Blood* can be regarded as Truman Capote's attempt to combine truth and storytelling into a ‘non-fiction’ account of a real-life murder. The concept of language manipulation in storytelling used here draws from Tvetzan Todorov's notion of verisimilitude. Although Capote conducted hundreds of interviews, took thousands of notes, and personally befriended the murderers, *In Cold Blood* ultimately cannot be “completely factual,” as author Capote boldly claims. In fact, since storytelling creates several degrees of remove from the truth, no nonfiction narrative can accurately reflect every detail, even if, like *In Cold Blood*, it aims for complete truth.

Maxwell Richman

**The Struggle for Recognition:  
The Manifestation of Pain in *Fight Club***

Fight club takes place in dark and damp rooms filled with the sounds of cracking bones and flesh pounding on flesh. On any given night of the week, men across the country get together and beat each other up until they are numb to their oppressively mundane existence. But is this really the full story behind this brutal practice? What is the narrator of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* hiding? In the following paper, I will argue that the discourse of fight club is a masquerade; under the guise of his alter ego Tyler Durden, the narrator fabricates a revolutionary rhetoric that claims to counter the emasculating effect of white-collar employment with the primal, hyper-masculinity of fight club. But within the narrator's hyperbolic complaint, the truth hides in plain view: fight club is the manifestation of a man who has yet to reconcile the pain of being abandoned by his father.



# You Don't Own Me

Moderated by Anthony Abboreno, Department of English

Wednesday, April 16  
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
Alexandria/Jefferson

Lorelei Christie

## *Fight Club:* A Handbook on Feminism Whispered by Muffled Voices

In his novel *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk seems to exclude the feminine from all meaningful roles, creating a novel about the woes of white, middle-class American men. The novel's few feminine characters are defined by their otherness—by their lack of masculinity. But what if this representation of the feminine is meant to illuminate, rather than obscure, feminine voices? In the following essay, I will read *Fight Club* through the lens of Luce Irigaray's feminist theory and argue that by subordinating the feminine and exalting the hyper-masculine, Palahniuk engages in a form of mimicry; he deliberately submits his female characters to subordinate roles in order to expose and challenge a repressive patriarchal structure. I will examine how Palahniuk represents women in *Fight Club*, and how their oppression—which is largely hidden in the novel—lies at the foundation of the more obvious oppression Palahniuk depicts: that of middle-class men living in a consumerist society.

Jack Flynn

## Punk Rock Saviors and Sexual Subversion in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

John Cameron Mitchell's filmic masterpiece, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, affords a view into the life of a trans punk singer pressured into a sex reassignment surgery that is botched, leaving Hedwig with an "angry inch" below her belt and an identity that even modern labels seem unable to capture. As Judith Butler argues in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," seeming uncertainty in gender and in sexuality can subvert a heteronormative system. This paper employs Butler's argument in an examination of the film, claiming that although Hedwig struggles with feelings of incoherence and seeks a clearer understanding of self, her subversive power actually stems from her sexual ambiguity.

Leslie Lee

## Women Who Kill: The Murderous Intentions of Virginia Woolf and *Lifeboat's* Alice Mackenzie

What drives women to kill? And is this murderous impulse ever justifiable? Ostensibly, only wicked motives could spawn such a crime, but a consideration of the female killer's motives changes the entire perception of murder in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Lifeboat* and Virginia Woolf's essay "Professions for Women." Providing a murderer's perspective, Woolf explains that she must metaphorically kill the authoritative, internal presence of the "Angel in the House" to be rid of female submissiveness and to claim self-rule. Similar reasons perhaps coerce Alice Mackenzie, who experiences incarceration in both body and spirit, to kill and overthrow her German oppressor. Enslaved and forced into both mental and physical confinement, these women slay their oppressors to prevent a life forever lived in subjugation. They must kill or they risk their own death—either literal or spiritual. Murder thereby translates into a desperate attempt to escape from and retaliate against an oppressive force: violence enacted solely for the sake of freedom. I maintain that their subjected states redeem these women's crimes, and that good intention renders even violent action justifiable.

**Camille Shooshani**

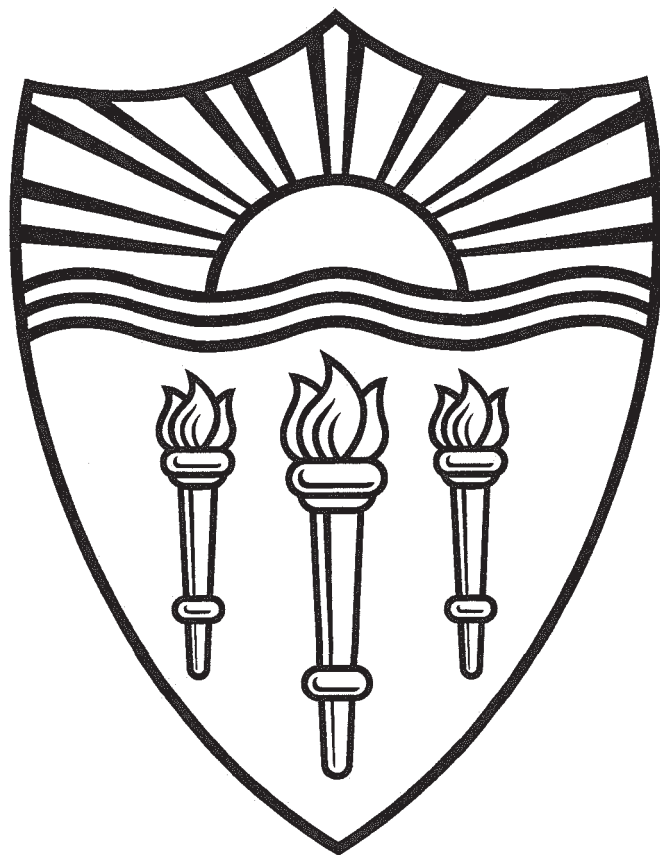
### **The Real Humbert Humbert**

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* traces Humbert Humbert's despicable infatuation with young girls, specifically Dolores Haze, whom he manipulates and abuses. Our narrator obscures, elevates, and complicates his story through masterful manipulation of language. Humbert crafts layers of separation between his terrible actions and the man performing them by shifting blame away from himself and onto his body or Lolita. Humbert's seductive, scheming language is echoed in the casual discourse meant to complicate and excuse the sexual violence of the self or others in modern society. Both the fictional pedophile and today's language subtly implicate the woman as the deviant and normalize the behavior of the assailant. Irina Anderson's *Accounting for Rape* reveals that the woman is positioned as culpable for "her appearance, for the sexual arousal of her attacker, and for implying consent to intercourse." The collective belief in Humbert's corruption is ironic given the near duplicate action and tactics of today's rapists, who are accepted and adopted by society. We can stomach Humbert's despicability because we bracket him into the realm of fiction. Despite the fact that we analyze it in literature, we fail to recognize its perpetuation in society.

**Shanelle Sua**

### **A Place for the Out-of-Place Biker in *Thelma & Louise*: The Role of Racial Minorities in a Feminist Film**

Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* is a feminist classic, famous for its showcase of female empowerment. However, the plight of other minorities is not entirely absent from the screen. In a short scene towards the end of the film, a Rastafarian biker happens upon the cop locked in his car's trunk by Thelma and Louise and blows pot smoke into the air hole. Though seemingly insignificant, this segment illustrates how racial minorities and women can aid one another in the fight against white patriarchy. *Thelma & Louise* creates a world where the mere act of holding hands illustrates female solidarity in their quest for empowerment. This scene shows that this cooperation can include racial minorities as well. By examining how the biker scene unfolds, I illustrate how *Thelma & Louise* hints that racial minorities and women face similar obstacles, and can clasp hands in order to achieve equality.



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