ICARUS

Homesick for homeland, Daedalus hated Crete
And his long exile there, but the sea held him.
"Though Minos blocks escape by land or water,"
Daedalus said, "surely the sky is open,
And that's the way we'll go. Minos' dominion
Does not include the air." He turned his thinking
Toward unknown arts, changing the laws of nature.
He laid out feathers in order, first the smallest,
A little larger next it, and so continued,
The way that pan-pipes rise in gradual sequence.
He fastened them with twine and wax, at middle,
At bottom, so, and bent them, gently curving,
So that they looked like wings of birds, most surely.
And Icarus, his son, stood by and watched him,
Not knowing he was dealing with his downfall,
Stood by and watched, and raised his shiny face
To let a feather, light as down, fall on it,
Or stuck his thumb into the yellow wax,
Fooling around, the way a boy will, always,
Whenever a father tries to get some work done.
Still, it was done at last, and the father hovered,
Poised, in the moving air, and taught his son:
"I warn you, Icarus, fly a middle course:
Don't go too low, or water will weigh the wings down;
Don't go too high, or the sun's fire will burn them.
Keep to the middle way. And one more thing,
No fancy steering by star or constellation,
Follow my lead!" That was the flying lesson,
And now to fit the wings to the boy's shoulders.
Between the work and warning the father found
His cheeks were wet with tears, and his hands trembled.
He kissed his son (*Good-bye*, if he had known it),
Rose on his wings, flew on ahead, as fearful
As any bird launching the little nestlings
Out of high nest into thin air. *Keep on*,
Keep on, he signals, *follow me*! He guides him
In flight—O fatal art!—and the wings move
And the father looks back to see the son's wings moving.
Far off, far down, some fisherman is watching
As the rod dips and trembles over the water,
Some shepherd rests his weight upon his crook,
Some ploughman on the handles of his ploughshare,
And all look up, in absolute amazement,
At those air-borne above. They must be gods!
They were over Samos, Juno's sacred island,
Delos and Paros toward the left, Lebinthus
Visible to the right, and another island,
Calymne, rich in honey. And the boy
Thought *This is wonderful!* and left his father,
Soared higher, higher, drawn to the vast heaven,
Nearer the sun, and the wax that held the wings
Melted in that fierce heat, and the bare arms
Beat up and down in air, and lacking oarage
Took hold of nothing. *Father!* he cried, and *Father!*
Until the blue sea hushed him, the dark water
Men call the Icarian now. And Daedalus,
Father no more, called "Icarus, where are you!
Where are you, Icarus? Tell me where to find you!"
And saw the wings on the waves, and cursed his talents,
Buried the body in a tomb, and the land
Was named for Icarus.

- from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*
translated by Rolfe Humphries

Landscape With The Fall of Icarus
by William Carlos Williams

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near
the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself
sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

Background and Purpose

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

The Thematic Option conference provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to enrich their academic experience by publicly presenting their ideas and research. In response to a general call for papers, Thematic Option students developed topics under the theme "Icarus" 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 hubris, ambition, invention, creativity, art, the rise, the fall, liberty, imprisonment, fatality, beauty, wonder, lust, temptation, flights (of fancy), parents and children, youth and age, heaven and earth, myth, the natural and the unnatural, liminal states, leaders and followers, rebellion, loss, success and failure, courage . . . or risk something yourself:

"Never regret thy fall,
O Icarus of the fearless flight
For the greatest tragedy of them all
Is never to feel the burning light."
- Oscar Wilde

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

Yuliana Baskina
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Marianne Zumberge

Many thanks to the faculty and staff
who have played an integral role in the success
of the Thematic Option Research Conference.

schedule *and* table of contents

Tuesday, April 10

4:00 p.m. **"Wax Seems Like a Bad Choice: Daedalus, Fear, and the Failure of Craftsmanship"**
Keynote Address by Professor Daniel Richter, Department of Classics,
USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Banquet Room

5:00 p.m. **Dinner**

page

6:00 p.m. **Panel Presentations**
Dream On - *Room A* *4*
Versus - *Room B* *6*
Losing It - *Banquet Room* *8*
Two Steps Forward, One Step Back - *Pub* *10*
You Know You Want It - *Room C* *12*

7:15 p.m. **Break**

7:30 p.m. **Panel Presentations**
Pulling the Strings - *Room A* *14*
What's My Motivation? - *Room B* *16*
Trivial Pursuit - *Banquet Room* *18*
I Hurt, Therefore I Am - *Pub* *20*
The Way I See It - *Room C* *22*

Wednesday, April 11

5:00 p.m. **Panel Presentations**
Eye of the Beholder - *Room A* *24*
Ladies and Gentlemen... - *Room B* *26*
How to Deal - *Banquet Room* *28*
To Be or Not To Be - *Pub* *30*
Risky Business - *Room C* *32*

6:15 p.m. **Dinner**

7:15 p.m. **Panel Presentations**
Power Play - *Room A* *34*
The Harder They Fall - *Room B* *36*
Self-Less - *Banquet Room* *38*
Should I Stay or I Should I Go Now? - *Pub* *40*
Great Expectations - *Room C* *42*

Dream On

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Room A

Moderated by Professor William Handley, Department of English

Eric Bedroussian

Infidelity:
Putting Monogamy into Question in *Revolutionary Road*

I think that monogamy is artificial. I do not think it's something that comes naturally to us.
- Tom Ford

Is there a perfect model for a monogamous relationship, and, if so, how do we construct it? Frank and April Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* present a cold, disturbing look into the ideal American Dream: the husband, wife, and kids residing comfortably in their serene neighborhood adorned with white picket fences and lush greenery. But something about this security, this monotonous routine lifestyle drains the excitement and intense passion igniting the love between Frank and April. *Revolutionary Road* suggests that sexual exclusivity and a constricting sense of fidelity are, in fact, inhibitors of commitment to our partners. Infidelity, it seems, is not a matter of questionable morality or disloyalty, but is motivated by a desire to be liberated from the restrictions presented by monogamous relationships.

Kelly Belter

How to Bring Someone Back from the Dead:
Disillusion in *The Virgin Suicides*

They went off to be alone for all time, alone in suicide, which is deeper than death,
[…] where we will never find the pieces to put them back together.
- Jeffery Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*

By the time we are introduced to the Lisbon sisters, they are already dead. Regardless, the boys who narrate the novel obsess over them and struggle to keep them alive. They are collectors animated by a passion to revive the past. Their treasury of artifacts reflects, as Susan Sontag suggests in *On Photography*, "an endlessly alluring, poignantly reductive way of dealing with the world." So the boys arrange their exhibits—Cecilia's high-tops, Lux's brassiere, Bonnie's votive candles—and hope that these stolen memories will make sense of the girls' deaths. Instead, they are left with nothing but pieces that don't fit together, impossible gaps. These collectors cannot change history, no matter how hard they try. Therefore, the image of the girls that they reconstruct becomes more important than what actually happened. By clinging to pieces of the past, the narrators create an alternate memory. In Cecilia's case, she becomes what she has left behind: her diary. The boys pour over it, imagining the girl who wrote in its pages. However, their reconstructed idea of her only adds to their confusion. Even though they cannot bring her back from the dead, in their own way they try. They exemplify the intensity of human desperation—that which drives us to redefine the very things that escape us—and suggest that, even when it falls apart, the illusion is more important than reality.

Althea Capra

Mortal Gods:
Exploring The Philosophical Backdrop Of Global Citizenship

In James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he outlines a semi-autobiographical tale of self-discovery. Loosing the chains of religion, tradition, nationality, and heredity, Stephen pushes through the multivariable labyrinth of modernity and ascends to a state of profound autonomy. This transformation hearkens of the Nietzschean dictate that in the wake of the "death of God" we must respond by becoming Gods ourselves. So what does it mean to fulfill this mandate? In the 21st century, our ever-increasing interconnectivity has birthed a new notion of global citizenship. In David Christian's essay "The Return Of Universal History," he testifies to the ongoing shift by which individuals and communities have begun to "see themselves as part of the evolving story

of an entire universe, just as they once mapped themselves on to the cosmologies of different religious traditions." Perhaps more than any other time in history, the possibility of authoring reality in ways that span the entirety of human experience stands before us. This new mental and physical landscape demands that we become the proverbial Gods of our universal narrative, both wondrously omnificent in our capability and terrifyingly omni-responsible for the consequences of our autonomy.

Nikita Lamba

Identity Untethered:
Hyperreality in *The Great Gatsby*

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, James Gatz has made something out of nothing. He has risen from the dirt of North Dakota to the glitz and glamour of West Egg, New York, the apparent example of the American Dream. However, his realization of the Dream hinges on a lie: he lives in the construct of a fake identity under the name Jay Gatsby. Jean Baudrillard, in his theory of the simulacrum, defines this artifice that replaces reality as a hyperreality, and forewarns the tainted consequences of these constructions that deny reality. As Gatsby strives for the Dream, he creates hyperrealities all around him, distorting even the Dream itself into a hyperreality as he loses sight of the means toward it and focuses on the end. His refusal to accept the truth of his relationship with the love of his life, Daisy Buchanan, eventually unravels his constructions. Ultimately, Gatsby is left with nothing, shattered by the truths he denies, and he dies, tragically alone and unsung. His hollow demise begs the value of the American Dream and exposes the hollow danger of a hyperreality.

Matt Lui

Swept Along by Destiny:
History as an Active Force in *Libra*

Libra, by Don DeLillo, challenges the reader to wonder: is history a result of momentous events or is it a catalytic force with the capability to seize revolutionaries? Lee Harvey Oswald believes in the latter definition, that history is a force which can "surge through the walls, taking [revolutionaries] with it." In Oswald's mind, this perspective of history vindicates him, and defines him not as a murderer, but as a vessel of history. However, *Libra* places this interpretation of history in the mouth of an unstable murderer. I intend to argue that it is not Oswald's view of history that is necessarily wrong, but the way he believes it applies to his own life. Rather than a great man who is carried along by history's surge, Oswald is an unlucky bystander who gets swept up in something greater than himself. Still, Oswald is depicted in a sympathetic light. This not only validates his view of history, but also pardons, at least fictionally, his actions.

Sarah Zahedi

From Housewives to Career Women:
The American Woman's Quest for Success in A Male-Dominated World

Betty Draper is the complacent housewife; Joan Holloway is the adored office manager; Peggy Olson is the socially inept career woman. These female protagonists in *Mad Men* serve to display the stereotypical women's roles both at home and in the workplace in the 1960s. Historian Stephanie Coontz's *A Strange Stirring* explores the general frustration of women, like those represented in *Mad Men*, with these conventional women's roles in the post-war period. Through an analysis of this TV series and book, I identify the evolving definitions of success for American women in their pursuit of family life and/or a career in the 1960s versus the present day. Also, I study the misogynistic attitudes towards American women in the 1960s, which restricted them from seeking or attaining success. Through further research, I discuss the pervasiveness of these attitudes in the 1960s and their persistence in contemporary culture, investigating the evolution of these chauvinistic behaviors and the modern day woman's pursuit of success in a male-dominated working world. I note the reasoning behind the increasing movement of women from the home and into the workplace, as opposed to the limiting of themselves to a life of marriage and motherhood. Finally, I hope to prove that the decrease in the prominence of these chauvinistic attitudes in the workplace has been insignificant, even as the slight reduction of these attitudes has at least contributed to a greater female pursuit of success outside the home.

Versus

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Room B

Moderated by Professor James Kincaid, Department of English

Pratusha Erraballi

Musical and Sexual Performance:
The Dynamic Mr. Ripley

In creating the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, director Anthony Minghella developed the movie's characters with music in mind. He explains, "Music is at the heart of the film of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. […] I felt that music might also provide the movie with a way of dramatizing the thematic argument between two of the film's central characters." Dickie Greenleaf, who appears to have a spontaneous lifestyle, enjoys jazz, while Tom Ripley enjoys classical music. Minghella pits these genres against each other in a yin/yang relationship of sorts: jazz is creative while classical music is structured. Tom rejects classical music and takes up jazz despite his distaste for it; he also rejects his homosexuality in favor of what will get him the respect he desires. These choices are framed by the theory of performativity as explained by Judith Butler, who holds that society's myopic conceptions of "boy" and "girl" are fueled by heteronormative constructs. To not adhere to these norms is to be excluded as deviant. I plan to argue that musical constructs in the film parallel the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Both Tom and Dickie use music as a tool to create the appearance of certain personality traits; Ripley additionally chooses to repress his homosexual desires in favor of what is accepted by the people he is so desperate to please. This work will explore how Tom attempts to gain Dickie's acceptance and the extent to which he succeeds.

Adam Feisst

Homosocial Bonds:
A Racial Quest for Power in *Fear of Flying*

"It momentarily occurred to me that perhaps something more had happened between the two men during the night…" recalls Isadora in Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying*. Her momentary fear is cut short as she quickly considers the thought preposterous. But a homosocial bond is formed during the late-night encounter between Isadora, her white fling Adrian, and her Asian husband Bennett: it is created through a competition between the two diverse men in a quest for power. Using Eve Sedgwick's theory of homosociality, the conflict for power between the two men is fostered through their sexual control over the female conduit herself; however, Isadora's eventual selection of Adrian shifts the power dynamic in favor of the white man. This triangle between two racially different men and a female catalyst exemplifies the inequality between races in homosocial relationships, with the eventual result of white dominance. Women and their ability to subvert these relationships can attempt to balance the homosocial relationship's dynamic of power. But, according to Sedgwick, this endeavor is impossible because of the mere existence of power itself. True equality of power in a homosocial relationship can never be achieved.

Katie McKay

The Carnal Carnival:
A Fallen Man's Guide to the Circus

Illusion and a belief in the unreal make up the foundation of any circus. However, the peculiar circus in Charles Finney's novel *The Circus of Dr. Lao* substitutes calliope music, sawdust, elephants, and aerialists with sphinxes, werewolves, mermaids, and Satan himself, illuminating a dreamlike world that extends beyond mere illusion. If interpreted as an abstract and complex dream rather than a normal circus, Dr. Lao's circus reveals an analysis of the hidden workings of the unconscious mind of humankind. Analyzing the symbolism behind the circus attendees' interactions with Dr. Lao's fantastical creatures through Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* unmasks mankind's perversely skewed view of the world. Humankind's innate draw to sex in the presence of beauty prevents the circus-goers from seeing the purity of Dr. Lao's creatures. This sexualized perspective emphasizes the existence of the postlapsarian world of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The fall of mankind dooms humans to see with eroticized

blinders. Rather than merely exhibiting its magical creatures, Dr. Lao's circus makes a spectacle of the human mind by displaying its inherent flaws.

Mary Waller

Ginsberg's *Howl*: Elevating Fallen Angels

In a society powered by industry, where things that were once valued as artistic trades have been converted into quality-controlled mass-production, who are the angels? The speaker of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* argues that the angels are the hipsters, the drug addicts, the jazz musicians, writers, and psychiatric patients among other social pariahs, and that it is Moloch, the industrialized and institutionalized society of the 1940s and 50s, that is destroying them. Within the first section, the image of angels becomes an extended analogy of the poem's radical ideas. Besides possessing numerous vices, these angels demonstrate spiritual potential through a variety of religious practices—Zen Buddhism, Judaism, Native American religious traditions. Thus, one of the primary functions of *Howl* is to change these despicable characters into symbols of lost angel-intellectuals instead of the despicable characters that society sees. In this paper, I will explore how the poem uses religious language out of context in order to redefine what is angelic and what is holy, elevating a class of individuals that would otherwise be tagged as hell-bound. This paper will argue that Ginsberg uses the symbol of the angel to resurrect a feeling of holiness within a money-driven world of failed Dadaism that to him is fallen.

ShuWen Zhang

The Words that Mold Our Worlds

In David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, protagonist Sonmi~451's subversion against the totalitarian society of Nea So Corpros is instigated by her expansion of vocabulary. As a cloned fabricant, Sonmi~451 is enslaved for the use of Neo So Corpros's "pureblood" inhabitants—inhabitants who drive fords, drink starbucks, and watch disneys. This generalized use of specific brand names in place of common nouns is just one of the ways in which the capitalist dystopian reality of 22nd-century Korea seeps into the society's language. The language in use, however, not only reflects the condition of Neo So Corpros, but also molds the inhabitants' identities, as I demonstrate using Benjamin Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity. Thus, Sonmi's ability to overcome the "language barrier" isn't just a matter of learning a new tongue—it challenges her inherent fabricant status and causes a shift in her identity.

Losing It

Moderated by Professor James Collins, Department of Classics

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Olivia Duenow

A Mental Constellation of Revolt:
The Burning Satisfaction of Masochistic Love in Adam Haslett's *You Are Not a Stranger Here*

Overwhelming hopelessness and powerlessness govern the short stories in Adam Haslett's *You Are Not a Stranger Here*. For example, "The Beginnings of Grief" is saturated in melancholia, where after losing two parents to two separate catastrophic accidents, the narrator mourns them by antagonizing a fellow schoolmate and bully, Gramm, who verbally abuses, beats, and eventually rapes him. However, Haslett's narrator is no victim. Imprisoned by his own mind, the narrator is unable to feel without the affliction of pain and suffering. In "The Good Doctor," a dialogue between Mrs. Buckholdt and her doctor, Jack, gives way to the awful revelation of her son, Jason, a methamphetamine addict who dies violently in a car crash just a few days after he chops her fingers off with butcher knife to punish her for her attempts to rehabilitate him. Just like Jack clings to her story and seeks to validate his career and personal shortcomings, Haslett's characters thrive off pain as a way to create pleasure. Such erratic behavior exhibits what Freud describes in "Mourning and Melancholia" as one's identification of the ego with the object lost. All of Haslett's characters undergo loss and succumb to a "mental constellation of revolt" in seeing themselves slip away. What these stories tell us is that love is undermined by loss when a person's spouse, family member, loved one or soul mate dies unexpectedly. In other words, why love at all if it is measured in not only the loss of another but also the loss of yourself?

August Luhrs

Why You Should Kill Yourself:
Righteous Suicide in *Donnie Darko* and the Psychology Behind Martyrdom

A storm is coming, Frank says
A storm that will swallow the children
And I will deliver them from the kingdom of pain
I will deliver the children back to their doorsteps
Because I am Donnie Darko.

An apocalyptic parallel universe threatens to kill all of Donnie's loved ones in Richard Kelley's cult-classic teen film, and to save them, Donnie must go back in time and get pulverized by a falling jet engine. His heart-wrenching yet necessary death enlightens the audience to a radical notion: that death isn't always a tragedy. Drawing from Dr. Rona Fields' influential study on the psychology of martyrdom, I dissect Donnie's close kinship with such suicidal activists as kamikaze pilots, jihadist bombers, and self-immolating monks in an attempt to fathom how these people ignored their primal survival instincts and instead chose to relinquish life. The key difference between these groups, however, is that these selfless zealots died for their countries, religions, and causes much greater than themselves, whereas Donnie's sacrifice was deeply personal—he died in the name of love. By analyzing Donnie's time-bending act of deliverance, I arrive at the conclusion that in order to die for others, you have to kill your "self": your psychological ego. This revelation leads to a deconstruction of the American social stigma on death and poses the final question: Is the most worthy aim of life to die a selfless death?

Wai Hwa Tan

On The Nature of Strength & Weakness

Sometimes, it takes more strength to run away than it does to stay and fight. Miriam Toew's *A Complicated Kindness* presents to us a teenage girl, Nomi Nickel, whose life is defined by loss. Her world in East Village is smothered beneath a religious oppression that seeps into every aspect of her life and creates the ever-present pressure of having

to watch her step or risk excommunication. This pressure slowly drives the disintegration of her family, so that one by one, her sister, mother and father all leave her. In spite of the various opportunities presented to Nomi to follow in her family's footsteps, Nomi finds herself unable to leave the broken home that has left her with nothing but memories to love. Instead, she finds comfort and strength in these memories that allow her to carry on living in the community that she despises. But is it really a strength if it keeps Nomi trapped in East Village? Like Nomi, each of us holds different ideas of what strength is, and this idea guides the choices we make in our lives and molds us into the people we are. My paper will attempt to explore the dichotomy between strength and weakness in our lives through the thoughts and actions of the characters in *A Complicated Kindness*.

Caitlin Wilhelm

In Pursuit of Privacy:
Clarissa Dalloway's Control as Hostess

Clarissa Dalloway's perfectly planned party is the centerpiece of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the novel takes place as Clarissa directs her household staff and prepares for her role as hostess. When guests begin discussing Septimus Warren Smith's suicide, she worries that this topic will ruin her carefully constructed polite atmosphere. She quickly accepts Septimus' suicide, however, thinking to herself that "she had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away." She uses this image to conceptualize this unknown man's death, and in doing so she realizes that she identifies with his apparently rash action as a method of preserving one's autonomy. This paper will use feminist readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* to explore the connections between Septimus' suicide, Clarissa's established role as hostess, and Woolf's own social anxieties. With these connections, I will use Clarissa's party as a symbol representing her ability to interact with the outside world while keeping her own compulsions under control.

Shannon Zhang

Bulimia of the Soul:
Materialism in *Spirited Away*

Chihiro, the heroine of Hayao Miyazaki's 2001 film, *Spirited Away*, nervously watches her parents amble off in search of food in a theme park. Her uneasiness is warranted: the theme park is the domain of traditional Japanese spirits and her parents are transformed into pigs for their greediness in consuming the food of spirits. *Spirited Away* teems with spectacularly drawn food, but the film is not a celebration of food. Instead, the film is a cautionary tale about greed. Chihiro, while searching for a way for her and her parents to escape the spirit world, encounters other characters, who, like her parents, are wounded and transformed as a result of their greediness. Their bodies are a manifestation of the conflict between the id and superego as proposed by Freud's 1923 paper, "The Ego and the Id"; the materialism that rose in Japan during the 1980s gives free rein to the id, even as the superego attempts to retain control. This conflict manifests itself in neurotic behaviors such as vomiting, in an attempt to purge oneself from the binging from the id's rampage. Hayao Miyazaki thus uses the bodies of his characters as a rebuke to not only Japan but also to humanity, for simultaneously chasing materialistic dreams and forgetting tradition.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Pub

Moderated by Professor Rebecca Lemon, Department of English

Jackson Burgess

Prepare to Evacuate Soul:
Self-Destruction and Existentialism in *Fight Club*

How everything you ever love will reject you or die.
Everything you ever create will be thrown away.
Everything you're proud of will end up as trash.
-Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*

In his portrayals of men burning themselves with cigarettes, punching each other (and themselves) into masochistic euphoria, castrating government officials, and setting fire to corporate headquarters, Chuck Palahniuk depicts a world ruled by chaos. Tyler Durden, the narrator's schizophrenic alter-ego, converts countless people to his philosophy of self-destruction and anarchy. His late-night fight clubs evolve into something far more frightening than men wanting to experience a fist fight before they die: a philosophical movement that toes the line between enlightened religion and perpetual suicide. But to appreciate Palahniuk's novel in all its glory, we have to read it next to something unexpected: existentialism. The philosophy's echoes in the story are abundant. *Fight Club*'s characters become obsessed with the inevitability of their own deaths, a clear hat-tip to Kierkegaard's trademark despair. Tyler and the narrator scoff at "self-improvement" and engage in hopelessly lost causes, uncannily exemplifying the writings of Nietzsche and Camus. Palahniuk constructs a story that burns and bleeds—a jarring, horrifying blend of violence, rebellion, and self-destruction—but, in keeping with his existentialist predecessors, he points his characters in the direction of self-actualized freedom. With a shove and a grin, he sets them off towards their destination, on a path that cruises straight through hell.

Taylor Crisp

"Fiery the Angels Fell":
Dehumanizing the "Other" in *Blade Runner*

In *Blade Runner*, director Ridley Scott presents viewers with a futuristic world in which inter-planetary colonization is accomplished through the pioneering efforts of superhuman replicants—artificially intelligent beings whose sole purpose is to act as a living buffer zone between harsh alien environments and the more highly prized "real" humans that follow. The film presents these replicants as tragic beings akin to the fallen angels of Christian tradition, and in doing so explores the concept of human identity in an increasingly technological, urbanized world. This paper will use Judith Butler's concept of the "grievable death" from her work *Precarious Life* to explore this fictional conflict between man and machine, applying her theory of normative identity to determine the ethical and philosophical implications of a world in which "machines" are given faces.

Maddie Lees

The Invisible Libido:
Female Heterosexuality in *Fear of Flying*

Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying* has often been hailed as a harbinger of a new generation of heterosexual women: ones who see themselves as liberated and sexually alive; and ones who are in touch with their desires and do not exist in passive service to their husband or lover's whims. Indeed, the novel presents us with a sexually honest and vivacious protagonist, Isadora, who is not afraid to tap into and indulge her own sexual fantasies. But to what extent is she really a sexually self-serving female figure? Is it even possible for a heterosexual woman to be the governor of her own sensuality, without appearing merely desirable? My paper will critically examine how *Fear of Flying* is

both progressive and regressive in its representation of female heterosexuality. Through unpacking Isadora's complex relationship with her desire, I will assert that female sensuality has been "written" by ambitious, yet misguided, male theorists such as Freud. It is therefore of the utmost importance that women reimagine themselves and their sexuality and, in the process, answer Helene Cixous' call to embrace *écriture féminine*: "women's writing."

Adrian Swanberg

The Men Behind the Masks:
Internet Vigilantism and *V for Vendetta*

We've all seen them by now: thousands of Guy Fawkes mask-wearing protestors gathered to picket all sorts of injustices. These representatives of the Internet group Anonymous have become notorious for various vigilante campaigns, and for sharing their disguises with the masked crusader from *V for Vendetta*. But what else do they share with him? In this paper, I will show that they are effectively a modern adaptation of his values and ethos, retaining his original tenacity for vigilante justice, but reflecting a more subdued method of subversion against recognizably milder threats. V, of course, fought against a tyrannical government; Anonymous fights against controversial churches and the corporate status quo. Still, in this collective's wayward culture there lies a clear inspiration. Though most members of Anonymous have probably never seen or read *V for Vendetta*, they strongly parallel V in that they have decided to take matters into their own hands due to perceived grave justices. This analysis is useful because it ultimately allows us to conclude whether Anonymous, like V, is a destructive force, or, on the contrary, a creative force. I've found the former to be true.

Madi Swayne

The Electricity of Ginsberg's *Howl*:
An Examination of the Symbol of the Dynamo

When Allen Ginsberg was writing his famous poem *Howl*, America was rapidly industrializing, mechanizing, and electrifying itself into the modern world of power. Ginsberg imagines this industrial progress as Moloch—dirty, nasty, power-hungry capitalist individuals with quelled creativity. It seems strange then, that Ginsberg would choose the image of the dynamo to represent creativity itself. The dynamo is a powerful machine that generates electric energy, something revered by the industrialized, regimented American culture criticized by Ginsberg. Why, then, does *Howl* point to the flaws in American society by advocating dynamism? This essay will examine the dynamo as a strategic image Ginsberg chose in order to make his vision of creativity fit within the industrialized zeitgeist. The dynamo, I shall argue, is a symbol that represents the speaker's turn toward nonviolence and introspection.

You Know You Want It

Moderated by Professor Diana Blaine, The Writing Program

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Room C

Matthew Agam

Being Seen:
The Need for Attention in Deborah Eisenberg's *What It Was Like, Seeing Chris*

Adults and adolescents alike struggle with the many qualms of the social animal. To interact, to influence and to be part of a society are needs inherent to all people, but more than wanting to be moved themselves, humans want to be recognized by others. For Laurel, the archetypal modern-day teenage girl in Deborah Eisenberg's *What It Was Like, Seeing Chris*, being seen is all she can think of. Whether it is by the man she visits periodically, by her best friend, or by her own mother, her invisibility to the world manifests in her very being and preoccupies her completely. For Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, this obsession can be explained in the same rhetoric that people use in taking pictures. In an innate desire to prove that they are really there, people have made photography a common practice, exercising constant power over the people they want seen and the way they want them presented. But as Sontag highlights, this process ultimately falls short of its intentions: a photograph can only "make the present past and the past pastness," and if anything, is a destructive process that does exactly the opposite of what it promises. Despite its success at showing what is there and providing proof that something existed, its information is inaccurate, freezing immediately into a timeless medium. Concurrently, the subject of the picture detaches from its inert brother and moves along to see another day. Thus, as the two diverge, the meaning of a photograph loses value constantly, and as Eisenberg argues, the only way to be seen by others is through an appreciation for the changing world uniting us all.

Modupe Alabi

Fatal Euphoria:
The Art of Self Destruction

"Should I, or shouldn't I?" A moment of temptation can hold the most exquisite pain that humans ever taste. To satiate a devouring desire, we set off—perhaps blindly, perhaps knowingly—on a journey of self-destruction toward objects of beauty we believe complete us, because of the way their characteristics entrance us. A person picks her poison when fixations arise with objects that are inaccessible, and the blind chase of beauty often leads to destruction. The restless search for inaccessible beauty reveals man's weakness in the face of forbidden fruit by how we succumb to it. "Destruction" and selected poems of Charles Baudelaire's *Le Fleurs du Mal* embody these desires and allow us to explore the relationships that we have with fatal passions, which stem from our lack of self-control. Even Icarus remembered his father's warnings as he rose closer to the sun but ignored them because of the euphoria he found in being near the heavens. Blinded by his pleasures, he only realized how far he'd ventured when he began to fall. With the concept of fulfilled temptation from Baudelaire's notions on destruction, I argue that the concession to reckless desire is ultimately fatal.

Eleanor Duke

Fame and the Übermensch:
A Journey to Stardom

Stardom is arguably the most sought-after goal in our society. But how do we get there? As we constantly strive for more money and success, satisfaction is unattainable. We exist between two identities: anonymity and fame. Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* describes man as a tightrope walker, suspended between two realities: that of basic human existence and that of the übermensch. Young starlets on their quest for fame are likewise suspended between two existences, making their way toward stardom, not knowing whether they will ever arrive at the other side. Norma Desmond of *Sunset Boulevard* and Faye Greener of *The Day of the Locust* both aim to gain reverence in the public eye. Norma refuses to let go of her life in the spotlight, and her delusion allows her to believe that she still has the ability to return to the big screen. Although Faye is relatively untalented and unsuccessful, she is convinced that she

is destined for the theater. The confidence and passion they exude is that of Oscar winners, not second-rate, washed up actresses. Their thirst for stardom—their personal quest for übermensch status—is never satiated. The root of Norma and Faye's unhappiness and anxiety is their inability to understand that, like Nietzsche's description of man's progression to übermensch, the quest for stardom is a continuously self-creating and improving journey, rather than a destination.

Nandini Ruparel

Not Just the Girl Next Door: Sexuality and Its Implications in *Farewell, My Lovely*

Sex, lies, affairs, jewelry heists, forged identities, broken hearts, and murder—a typical day in the life of private detective Phillip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*. However, beneath the risqué details and sensual ideals, Chandler's world conveys a masculinity in crisis, where the homosocial bonds of men function as much as the sexual relationships between men and women. Whether Phillip Marlowe is beaten physically or seducing a rich man's wife, he uses his sexuality and habit of sexualizing others to safeguard his own identity. As Chandler argues, Marlowe is "everything . . . a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man." However, in "Murdering Masculinities," Greg Forter describes the men in these crime novels as prone to the "psychologically 'feminine' compulsion to be a hardboiled corpse." And, as we look a little more carefully at Marlowe, his keen eye for detail is not solely his asset as a detective; his hyper-sexualized treatments of men and women alike exhibit his own feminization, and his masculine exterior is almost continuously under attack. Just how manly is Chandler's man, capable and willing to walk the "mean streets" of seedy Los Angeles? Is it truth he is after or the key to his own deteriorating masculine shell?

Christina Stewart

Finding Freedom: Sex as "Liberation" in *Fear of Flying*

Isadora Wing is the ideal straight, female maverick. A little sassy, a little promiscuous, the protagonist of Erica Jong's best-selling novel *Fear of Flying* finds herself trapped in a lackluster marriage. Her husband does not beat her, nor does he drink or gamble—he does nothing wrong. Yet, Isadora is not happy; she is not free. In a desperate attempt to find some sense of life and purpose, she cheats on her husband. Society shames those who are not monogamous, but should we? According to Pat Califia, Isadora is simply trying to find her way to freedom. By doing who and what she wants, when she wants, Isadora puts herself first. With her happiness a priority, she can better process her desires. Isadora's affair with Adrian is not only about sexual satisfaction—it is about defining herself through her sexuality. In the conclusion, Isadora ends her affair and lives alone. Only when she feels completely independent can she return to her husband and be happy. I hope to show that many straight, female mavericks try to follow her path to find freedom, but it is not the actual act of sex that sets them free. Rather, it is the dénouement and the analysis of their actions during the aftermath that truly liberate them.

Pulling the Strings

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

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Room A

Courtney Alpeter

The Construction of a Flawless Identity Through a Skewed Sense of Reality

In his satirical novel *Being There,* Jerzy Kosinski paints the image of a man of uncertain mental health named Chance, whose reality has been completely defined by the images he sees on his television set. As such, he is devoid of personal thoughts and motivations, enabling those around him to fashion him into the person they need and want him to be. EE Rand, a woman who invites Chance to live in her and her husband's home after her chauffeur strikes Chance in an auto accident, does just this, taking advantage of Chance's malleability, seeing the potential for him to fulfill her basic desires for love and emotional and sexual fulfillment. Given EE's limited perception of the reality that Chance will never be able to provide her with what she needs, I argue, then, that she has a more distorted sense of reality than does Chance. Further, using George Gerber's Cultivation Theory which posits that television is a medium through which our perceptions of reality are formed, I demonstrate that while Chance's world revolves around his television set, it is EE, knowing that Chance has appeared on television, assigning significant meaning to what this must imply about him, who has the more unrealistic, idealized lease on the world. Instead of seeing Chance for the mentally disabled man he is, she allows herself to indulge in the belief that he is the perfect man, demonstrating that she exists in a romanticized world in which perceptions are more important than actuality.

Regina (Yomyong) Chung

Murray's Quotes:
Scare Tactics in DeLillo's *White Noise*

It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force,
so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms.
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is a critique of the postmodern world, a novel that questions whether individual authority and escape from fear is even possible. Yet DeLillo's protagonist, a college professor named Jack Gladney, fails to stir up a radical rebellion against the system. Rather, he realizes that despite the hypocrisy and the irony behind our advertising-driven world, we live with societal systems that provide us our only stability. Murray, a colleague of Gladney's at the College-on-the-Hill, makes countless ironic quotes that could challenge such conceptual flaws of society. However, Murray's insights never provide any useful solutions. This paper will argue that through Murray's quotes, *White Noise* signals that our biggest fear should in fact be the ambiguity of human motives within the postmodern world. Among the profusion of advertisements and consumer products, human action becomes connected only to the desire to buy.

Sarah Beth Comfort

The Landing:
Where Memory and Reality Collide

Moments to remember are just like other moments.
They are only made memorable by the scars they leave.
- *La Jetée*

Strings of fixed images, which comprise Chris Marker's 1962 film *La Jetée*, seduce the nameless narrator with the possibility of motion outside of time itself. But it is a doomed possibility, and the shocking reality renders the narrator immobilized for his entire life. By dissecting the manipulation of film's intrinsic relationship to time through images, as film professor Bruce Kawin considers in his article "Time and Stasis in *La Jetée*," I delve into the tension

between the enigma of fixed reality and the romantic promise of a life outside of time, as evidenced in the narrator's struggle against psychological inertia. Does a separation exist between a dream and a memory, the past and the present, when an emotional fixation can ground any memory in the realm of reality? Above us stretch our plans, dreams, and fantasies: below us, our past and the memories contained therein. Within the human mind, however, an obsession with either the heavens or the depths distorts fantasy and reality, until the search for the truth of the present drowns in the confusion.

Shelby DeWeese

Big Brother Is Watching: Filial Relationships and Fear in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

How does panopticism relate to family psychology? In Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell labels one of the most iconic figures in dystopian literature "Big Brother" as an imitation family member. Orwell purposefully draws focus onto familial relationships, yet this remains a very under-analyzed aspect of a novel that is otherwise under constant scrutiny. Sigmund Freud's psychological analysis of parent child relationships and Michel Foucault's understanding of the panoptic system can be synthesized in the context of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in order to reveal the effect that constant surveillance can have on private relationships. When intra-familial relationships are translated from private to public realms, children are able to wield an absurd and even dangerous amount of power over their own parents. By examining the glimpses of family life that Orwell provides in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through a Freudian lens, this paper will demonstrate that the natural process of liberation from parental authority can become dangerous if it is sped up and externalized by a panoptic system.

Sara Itkis

Wings and Walls: Unison and Divisions in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*

Why am I me, and why not you? Why am I here, and why not there?
When did time begin, and where does space end?
- *Wings of Desire*

Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* presents a world seen from the perspective of angels: a world of flowing unison. Taking place in post-war Berlin, where separations define the culture, this perspective draws an unexpected contrast with the political reality of that world. Through an examination of Wenders' use of cinematic technique, I discuss how the director expresses both the objective omniscience of the angels and the subjective isolation of the human perspective, ultimately fusing the two together. Visual design, sound design, and composition are some of the tools that Wenders utilizes to create different perspectives and to illustrate the themes of unison and division. Unlike the ever-present angels, humans face questions of individual identity, of separation and loneliness, of mortality, and of beginnings and endings. Damiel, the protagonist angel, resolves to "take the plunge" and join the people in their struggles, for he yearns for the viscerality of human experience. As he and Marion, the trapeze artist with whom he falls in love, unite in passion, their two worlds merge in an effort to overcome the boundaries that cause such isolation within each individual.

What's My Motivation?

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp, Department of English

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Room B

Rebecca Baugh

Shadows of Government:
A Jungian Reading of *V for Vendetta*

Alan Moore's graphic novel *V for Vendetta* takes place in a dystopian fascist state lead by Adam Susan, the Leader. In this graphic novel, the protagonist, V, rebels against the government in an attempt to create an anarchist state. In my paper, I apply Jungian Shadow theory to the opposing characters of the Leader and V, who share some surprising similarities though they maintain opposing political views. The shadow, Jung argues, is one of the most recognizable archetypes. It is comprised of the repressed instinct and perceived shortcomings of its counterpart the self or the persona. Looking at V as a Jungian Shadow and the Leader as the self will help explain the graphic novel's unexpected ending. Why does V die when he has appeared previously indestructible? Why does the novel end in a state of do-as-you-will chaos rather than V's envisioned anarchist Utopia? Jung's shadow theory provides some explanation. Using Jung, we see that V must die because he is a shadow without an ego. A shadow and ego can only exist with each other; once one is gone the other dies too.

Nicholas Kosturos

Conspiracy, Delusion, and the Assassination of a President:
The Power of Secrets in *Libra*

Don DeLillo's *Libra* illustrates a fictional group of disgruntled CIA operatives who craft a secret plot to assassinate President Kennedy. This plot, as well as other secrets, becomes a blinding and empowering force when placed in the hands of these men. The transformation of loyal, patriotic CIA operatives into rebellious assassins who murder their commander-in-chief prompts the reader to question the effects a secret has on the individual. What is it about crafting and keeping a secret that corrupts man? How do secrets afford one a great deal of power, as indicated by the successful assassination of President Kennedy? This paper seeks to prove, using both DeLillo's text and psychological research, that the key to cracking the elusive power of secrets is understanding the way in which secrets themselves create an environment of exclusivity. This sense of exclusivity forces the keeper of the secret into a delusional state in which he derives immense power from strong feelings of pride and invincibility. Ignorantly believing in the merit of their mission, the conspirators rebel against all authority in a blind flurry of hubris and exhilaration in order to see their secret desire become a reality.

Perry Nunes

Glitz, Glamour and Descent into Madness:
The Deterioration of the American Dream in *Mulholland Drive*

Hollywood has always been portrayed as an ideal environment for the fabled American Dream to prosper. Talented young actors and actresses come from all around the world and, with a little luck, attempt to catch the eyes of big shot filmmakers in hopes of being transformed into movie stars. David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* critically explores the reality of this idealized transformation from nobody to starlet through Betty, an aspiring actress who is thrust into the excitement of the movie business upon moving to Los Angeles. Lynch expresses Betty's glorified vision of success in Hollywood as a colorful and picturesque dream, which slowly fragments as a series of bizarre events begin to occur. As the film climaxes, we learn that almost the entirety of the film is an elaborate fantasy created by Diane, a failing actress driven to insanity by a disappointing career. Diane lives vicariously through Betty's invented successes as a way to cope with the deterioration of her own ambitions. Through this jarring contrast between dream and reality, *Mulholland Drive* exposes Hollywood as a superficial institution with the manipulative power to skew morals and destroy lives. On a larger scale, it suggests that the American Dream that we have grown to idolize—the notion of working hard to gain wealth and influence in society—is an impractical lie that is not only driven by materialism and greed, but is also ultimately unattainable.

William Tzeng

The Wagnerian Tragic Hero:
Models of Genius in Hermann Hesse's *Gertrude*

In the novel *Gertrude*, Hermann Hesse presents two diametrically opposed characters: Kuhn and his best friend Heinrich Muoth. Kuhn and Muoth are both brooding artists, and each a genius in his own right. Muoth is a self-destructive, prodigious singer who seems to derive his abilities from pure talent as opposed to any adherence to traditional schooling. Kuhn, on the other hand, is a self-doubting, introverted composer who accepts his training at a prestigious music academy even though he feels it does him little good. Interestingly, the character of Muoth parallels the life of Wagner in a noticeable manner; like Wagner, for example, Muoth steals the wife of one of his best friends. By using the historical example of Wagner subtly referenced in the novel, I argue that the dichotomy between Kuhn and Muoth shows the contrasts of genius itself.

Sara Worth

Over His Head:
Max Fisher as Failed Übermensch in Wes Anderson's *Rushmore*

My top schools where I want to apply to are Oxford and the Sorbonne.
But my safety's Harvard.
- Max Fischer, *Rushmore*

Max Fischer, a Renaissance Man of fifteen, is the king of Rushmore Academy. Each year he and his drama Players can be relied upon to produce the most elaborate play the Rushmore community has ever seen. He cannot, however, be relied upon to turn in his homework. Max is a constant over-reacher, far more interested in pursuing whatever is over his head than what is required of him by authority figures. He is an Emersonian hero and the product of an Emersonian private school education, shaking off society's bridle in favor of a "self reliant" pursuit of achievement(s). His goals, so supercharged, suggest that Max has moved from an ideal of "Self-reliance" to that of Nietzsche's "Übermensch." Max's extracurricular activities—and romantic pursuits—invoke Nietzsche's concepts of "self-mastery," "self-cultivation," "self-direction," and "self-overcoming," as laid out in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Max insists on being superman ("I saved Latin; what did you ever do?"), but his efforts ironically gain him expulsion from his beloved Rushmore. His devastation is telling; the pursuit of achievement—the game of self-improvement—is what makes Max tick. Without it, he is bereft. In his postmodern tale of an overextended teen, Wes Anderson presents a case study of the dangerous progression from the seemingly benign self-interest of Emerson to the ruthless individualism of Nietzsche. Max's hyperextension eventually reveals the perils of a life ruled by boundless, dogmatic ambition. Rushmore Academy's quirkiest fifteen-year-old aims endearingly high but suffers an über-tragic fall.

Trivial Pursuit

Moderated by Dr. Andrew Allport

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Banquet Room

Sonali Chanchani

The Emptiness of the Dream:
Faye Greener's Never-Ending Performance in *The Day of the Locust*

At the center of Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* lies Faye Greener, whose relentless quest to become a successful actress causes her to become a performer in her own life. This action embodies Jean Baudrillard's theory of the "simulacrum"—the idea that in simulating the real, the fake eventually creates a reality of its own, becoming a hyperreal construction. Faye's delusional refusal to accept that her dream is futile leads her down this path of imitation. Her first appearance in the novel reveals that her very existence is built on these simulations, as she tries to pass herself off as a helpless little girl. Throughout her story, she blindly persists in adopting similar roles of clichéd female characters—the seductress, the ungrateful diva, the self-sacrificing daughter—never once offering a genuine self or recognizing the consequences of her performances. Her real-life existence has no basis in reality, and as a result, she recognizes no moral bounds and forms no substantial emotional connections with those around her. She leads an empty and unsatisfying life, suggesting that, ultimately, her character epitomizes the perils of the hyperreal existence: a meaningless, hollow, and dissatisfying reality.

Michael Chasin

The Price of Narrative Rebellion:
Why There Can Never Be a "Time Lord Victorious"

The laws of time are mine! And they will obey me!
- The Tenth Doctor, "The Waters of Mars"

Terry Gilliam's time-bending film *Twelve Monkeys* follows a man who, in attempting to avert a causal inevitability, triggers his own destruction in a classic science fiction example of one of the most enduring rules of narrative: Heroes who rebel against the laws of their own story's construction will face brutal defeat. By drawing from both temporal and narrative studies I expose why neither Gilliam's protagonist, as portrayed by Bruce Willis, nor one of the most beloved characters in contemporary science fiction—The Doctor of the BBC's *Doctor Who*—are able to transcend the invisible laws governing their narratives. For if storytellers were to spare their most defiant characters and appeal to the desire for triumphant heroes, they might violate the audience's inherent need for actions to beget consequences, a transgression that—far worse than Bruce Willis or the Doctor meddling with time—would destroy the integrity of the stories themselves.

Shoko Oda

Los Angeles: City of Dreams . . . or a Façade?

Icarus, the overachiever, sought for higher skies, aiming to reach for the sun. The same phenomenon occurs frequently in American literature, where some go-getters aim for the sunny, bright city of Los Angeles. My paper examines how Los Angeles influences overachieving individuals in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*. The novel takes place in Hollywood, where overambitious characters scramble to pursue their dreams. In the eyes of these characters, Los Angeles is a place where the overambitious can achieve dreams, success, and wealth—but observations of social critic Mike Davis say otherwise. Using Faye Greener from *The Day of the Locust*, I explore how go-getters incorrectly imagine Los Angeles as "the city of dreams." I utilize observations of Mike Davis from *City of Quartz* in order to explicate why this image of Los Angeles is actually a façade—an illusion fabricated by the overambitious. My paper hopes to answer why many overachievers strive to make their way to the "City of Angels," hoping to strike rich. How does the myth of this city interact with the personalities and actions of the characters? And most importantly, is Los Angeles really the brilliant city that these go-getters imagine it to be?

Daniel Rothberg

Homesick for Homeland:
***Brokeback Mountain* and the Struggle to Settle on the American Frontier**

We have made a tradition out of mourning the passing of things we never had time really to know,
just as we have made a culture out of the open road, out of movement without place.
- Wallace Stegner

In his critique, Stegner, known as the "dean of Western writers," speaks to a mentality that perceives the American frontier as flux, defined by displacement and movement. *Brokeback Mountain*, a romantic tragedy about two gay cowboys in Wyoming, illustrates Stegner's observations concerning the frontier's association to unsteadiness and changeability. In the 2005 film, the two protagonists, Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar, are displaced emotionally and physically by sexual identities that clash with heteronormative standards and a frontier where place seems ephemeral. Despite their displacement, Twist and Del Mar often appear attracted to forging a home, a possibility that the story preserves until the end of the film. By the time the credits begin to scroll, the desire for settlement seems only an example of, as Stegner wrote, "the passing of things we never had time really to know." By examining the relationship between Twist and Del Mar, *Brokeback Mountain* challenges then ultimately affirms a vision of the American frontier that discourages settlement through a culture of movement and displacement.

David Tobia

"Nobody wants to be here and nobody wants to leave":
Memory and Motivation in *The Road*

What happens when we are severed from the past? What happens when the stories that provide us with motivation lose their referent? Cormack McCarthy's *The Road* allows us to ask these questions as a father and son struggle to find reasons to live in a post-apocalyptic world. Albert Camus' consideration of the myth of Sisyphus and what gives life meaning can help us reconsider *The Road*, as we analyze the limits of the value of life and the possibilities of constructing meaning from the meaningless. Is attempting to survive in *The Road* anything more than endlessly pushing a boulder up the hill, only to see it roll back down again? This paper argues that the attempt is what matters and that even in a seemingly hopeless world people can delve into the past to uncover reasons to live for the future.

I Hurt Therefore I Am

Moderated by Professor Ed McCann, School of Philosophy

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Pub

Zach Barahal

The Mask of Civilization:
Identity, Conformity and Violence in *American Psycho*

American Psycho's Patrick Bateman is an insider outsider. Physically, Bateman fits in with his faceless investment banker colleagues. Consumerism and material possessions allow Patrick Bateman to wear a mask of normalcy, to purchase the same things that those around him do and to pretend to fit in. But is that enough? Bateman himself believes "there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but no real [Bateman], only an entity." He lives his life in a dream of sex and violence while externally defining himself through material possessions. He is characterized by complete emptiness underlying his lack of identity. His quest to stand out while stopping others from rising above him, for example his colleague Paul Allen, drives him toward psychosis. I explore Bateman through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory that society's barriers restrain humans from acting on their natural violent and lustful urges. Bateman is the result of these constraints. Bateman is naturally evil but the barriers of society prevent him from acting on his urges. Bateman desires uncontrolled lust, greed and violence and lives out delusions of murder and sexual violence in his head. He manipulates identity and uses possessions as a substitute for identity while his inner life descends into a violent extravaganza of sex, blood and death.

Jeremy Bergman

Whose War Is It Anyway?:
The Dehumanization and Empowerment of the Modern Terrorist

What defines legitimate violence? Alan Moore and Judith Butler, two contemporary writers and philosophers, present similar arguments to this troubling and relevant query. Moore, the acclaimed mind behind the graphic novel *V For Vendetta*, illustrated that the terrorist, V, despite his good intentions and political morality, could never be perceived as legitimate because he was not supported by any government or political machine. In *Precarious Life*, Butler agrees, stating that, because we perceive terrorists to be faceless and without an identity, that they are not human; therefore, it is easier to legitimize our violence against them. Still, just because our governments and our media may delegitimize the violence of terrorists, it does not make their acts any less powerful or impactful. In this paper, I will echo Alan Moore and argue that terrorists are empowered by their anonymity and dehumanization, and that America's recent foreign policy plans reflect this.

Sawyer Coleman

The Devastation of Isolation:
The Intertwined Paths of Violence and Alienation in *Ham on Rye*

In Charles Bukowski's *Ham on Rye*, readers sympathize with Henry Chinaski as he attempts to overcome the difficult circumstances that define his existence. Yet Henry also emerges as a dangerous character with violent tendencies and disturbing sexual fantasies. His actions stem from an internal dissatisfaction with himself and the world around him. Confined to a volatile home environment, he yearns for social acceptance, but his childhood experiences only beget anguish and frustration. As the story progresses, Henry expresses his unhappiness in two ways: complete self-absorption and unbridled hostility towards others. These two forces—isolation and violence—both torment Chinaski and serve as outlets for his emotions. Strikingly intertwined, Henry's seclusion and his fits of rage emphasize the natural relationship between living alone and this vicious behavior. Chinaski's malicious thoughts and outbursts express his deep-seated feelings of loneliness, demonstrating the detrimental effects of living in a solitary world.

Kati McCormick

"We Dance to Fire Alarms":
The Tango Between Sadomasochism and Ambivalent Love in *Choke* and *Written on the Body*

"If it comes down to a choice between being unloved and being vulnerable and sensitive and emotional, then you can just keep your love," declares Victor Mancini in Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Choke*. As a sex-addicted con artist with a very strong Oedipal complex, Victor displays the Freudian response to ambivalent love. He masochistically allows himself to be the victim of other people's anger, absurdly taking blame for past wrongs: "I tell them, heap it on me. Make me play the big passive bottom in your guilt gang bang. I'll take everybody's load." This sadomasochism born from ambivalence is also found in the nameless, sexless, and genderless protagonist of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. (S)he continually indulges in relationships with married or only temporarily available partners; at the end, s(he) cuts and runs. The protagonist is emotionally and physically incapable of having an enduring relationship until (s)he meets Louise. However, this relationship with love and pain simply translates itself into forcing the protagonist to leave the relationship in an attempt to save Louise's life. This character loves love, yet loathes it as well. Sadomasochism runs rampant in both works; however, the causes of their pathologies are distinct. Victor's ambivalence is directed towards his mother and stems from genuine love; thus, he has the possibility to be redeemed if he can resolve his displaced love. Winterson's protagonist, however, is ambivalent towards love itself and (s)he falls not into love but into oblivion.

Alyssa Murphy

Daddy's Little Girl:
An Analysis of Corrupt Parent/Child Relationships in Performers

"Because everything [she] does comes from within. From some dark impulse. I guess that's what makes her so thrilling to watch. So dangerous. Even perfect at times, but also so damn destructive."
- Thomas Leroy, *Black Swan*

When reflecting on contemporary creative accomplishments, one cannot deny that some of our society's most stunning art often stems from anger, pain, or psychosis. In Cathy Day's novel, *The Circus in Winter*, readers are introduced to the gorgeous, yet destructive, Jennie Dixianna—an acrobat famous for her self-mutilating circus acts, her promiscuous lifestyle, and her alcoholism. While Day paints these deleterious tendencies as tragically beautiful, the text does suggest that Jennie's behavior is a manifestation of a more sinister desire for perfection. In this paper, I will examine Jennie's lifestyle in light of her abusive relationship with her father. By incorporating modern theories of psychoanalysis relating to performance psychology and parental relationships, I will discuss how Jennie's harmful habits actually originate in a need for perfection and stability, a drive she developed during her damaged childhood. I will support this argument with examples from Darren Aronofsky's critically acclaimed film *Black Swan* and delve into deeper questions raised by each text. Why is abuse connected to the need to perform? Why is performance so closely tied to themes of sexuality? And finally, are these women truly seeking perfection, or simply the acceptance and approval they failed to receive in their broken childhoods?

The Way I See It

Moderated by Matthew Smith, Department of English

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Room C

Tiffany Chu

In Defense of the Conductor:
Barenboim's Approach to Silence in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*

"I like Wagner's music better than anybody's," Oscar Wilde once said. "It is so loud that one can talk the whole time." Wilde's joke plays off the common conception of Wagner's music as loud and dramatic—perhaps overly so. Indeed, Wagner is known for the immense sounds he demands from his singers and orchestras, and was the first to introduce the idea of continuous orchestration to the opera form. There are no distinct songs in Wagner's operas; melodies are sung or played throughout the opera, each transitioning to the next without pauses to allow for applause. Despite all of the attention paid to Wagner's orchestration, however, it is important to understand his music as more than an auditory experience. Wagner designed a theater specifically to showcase his operas; his music was tied to a deliberate and specific space, time, and atmosphere. Conductor Daniel Barenboim says of Wagner's artistic vision, "This is how he came to the concept of the continuity of sound: that sound tends to go to silence, unless it is sustained." By examining how Barenboim's understanding of silence informs his interpretation of Wagner's music, specifically in the prelude to the opera *Tristan und Isolde*, this paper will discuss the considerable influence the conductor has in shaping the way an audience experiences music.

Jason Finkelstein

The Impersonality Chimera:
Joyce's Reconciliation of Contradictory Theory and Practice

The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality
- T.S. Eliot

The modernist poet T.S. Eliot theorized that poetry should be depersonalized, as this genre requires the poet to undertake a "continual surrender of himself." Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* delineates a similar theory of the role impersonality plays in literature: that art demands that the "personality of the artist … finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak." His model for explaining this theory is a ballad called the *Turpin Hero*, "which begins in the first person and ends in the third person." However, as Joyce penned the final chapter of the very book in which he made that statement, he inverts this method, as *A Portrait* shifts from an anonymous, third person narrator to an intimate, first person, fragmented diary format—an obvious contradiction with Stephen's stated theoretical view. The diary at the least makes us reconsider what Joyce originally intended in his explanation of impersonality. Of the several dozen entries, many parallel previous scenes from the book. Through readings of these parallel depictions, this paper will reconcile the seemingly contradictory theory and practice of impersonality: at once an escape and expression of the "I."

April Luo

When You Believe

Risk more than others think is safe. Care more than others think is wise.
Dream more than others think is practical. And expect more than others think is possible.
- Steve Smith, Guest Director of Big Apple Circus

Ladies, gentlemen, and children of all ages, step right up and enter the exciting backstage world of the modern circus. The PBS documentary *Circus* showcases the marvels of the carnival from the perspective of the performers, bringing a new interpretation to the age-old spectacle of breathtaking drops, unbelievable feats of strength, and spectacular acrobatics that seem to cheekily spit in death's face. Modern times and the advent of ground-breaking

technology may have changed the way the game is played, but one underlying axiom has remained the same: it is only the viewer's own acceptance of the impossible that ultimately turns a performance from mundane to magical. Samuel Taylor Coleridge calls this acceptance "willing suspension of disbelief," defining it as an investment of truth in an author or artist's work. However, the fresh perspective afforded to the audience by *Circus* reveals a fascinatingly similar mindset on the part of the performers themselves. I therefore propose that a successful circus act depends as much on its participants' faith in their own invincibility as its viewers' willing suspension of disbelief. Through examples chosen from the six episodes of Season One, I will explore the intersection between Coleridge's original concept and its evolved form in the lives of circus performers, as well as the crucial role played by both in the achievement of the unachievable.

Amanda Martial

"One Man's Terrorist Is Another Man's Freedom Fighter" *V for Vendetta*: A Justification for Terrorism

Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* addresses important questions about political violence and state power through its morally ambiguous, and masked, protagonist, V. V performs acts defined as "terrorism" by the state such as gruesome mass murders and destruction of buildings. V kills upwards of fifty individuals, yet the audience remains on his side due to the blatant injustices of the state. Therefore, the audience finds itself supporting terrorism. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler theorizes about the way violence is defined as either legitimate or illegitimate. Butler states, "The use of the term, 'terrorism,' thus works to deligitimate certain forms of violence committed by non-state-centered political entities at the same times that it sanctions a violent response by established states." This paper will use *V for Vendetta* and Butler to question when does violent rebellion (terrorism) become a legitimate form of dissent from a government? How oppressive must a government be in order for the general populace to ignore the unethical acts of terrorism? I argue that the government V fights against is not legitimate due to its obvious crimes against its citizens. Therefore, the definition of V as a terrorist, defined by an illegitimate government, is invalid and his acts of violence are justified.

Carrie Ruth Moore

"Fashioning the Five-Star Funeral": Misplaced Heroism in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*

A hero never fails to impress. Somehow, the idea of an everyday citizen reaching for greatness intrigues us; we reread these epic stories until our eyes hurt, and we empty our wallets at Regal Cinemas to see the latest superhero release. And yet, the story of a hero is greater when it involves a tragic ending. "Is that what perfection costs? Operatic heroics and a tragic end?" asks the sexless and genderless narrator of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*, who struggles with this question of heroic identity before ultimately deciding that the tragic route is the most desirable. When he or she learns that his or her lover, Louise, has cancer, our protagonist sends Louise back to her husband, Dr. Elgin, and willingly embraces the resulting loss and loneliness. Conversely, Toni Morrison's *Jazz* follows the eighteen-year-old Dorcas, who, shot by her lover at a public dance, refuses an ambulance in order to dramatize her death. As though they understand that tragedy augments their heroic tales, these characters employ extreme and illogical measures to guarantee their undoing. Using the theories on heroism by Joseph Campbell, this paper explores the logic behind these characters', and consequently, our, fascination with tragedy in order to examine how willing one must be and how far one must go in order to transcend the ordinary.

Eye of the Beholder

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Room A

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

Michael Bell

Rock Your Body:
Queer Constructions in *Stone Butch Blues*

Jess Goldberg can't seem to get a break. She's been raped by the police, exiled to another sex, and had her heart broken. People avert their eyes in shame or look on with malicious leers . . . all because of the way she looks? This Stone Butch must face a serious case of the Blues. The antitype of female beauty, her selfhood is constantly torn apart. Having been betrayed by her body for not complying with societal standards, it's queer that she even made it without "a sliver of cuteness to hide behind," as she likes to put it. Jess' case begs the question: what is the relationship between the impersonal construct of beauty and the genesis of personal bodily constructs (i.e. gender and body image)? This paper explores the limits of social beauty on the queer body by examining the representation of gender, beauty, and body image in Leslie Feinberg's novel. I argue that the body isn't beautiful, instead only the normative connection between body and gender warrants the appraisal of beauty. In this sense, beauty is more than skin deep, but only for those who can properly align gender and body image.

Breanna Betts

Reforming Aquinas:
The Artist as the Interpreter of Beauty in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is the story of a young artist who wants to write A Portrait.
- Umberto Eco

In James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus becomes a true artist by defying dogma, reforming scholastic aesthetics, and defining meaning in the world. Yet as he matures, the core of his artistic identity remains founded on the views of Thomas Aquinas, and he returns to Thomist ideas of beauty and epiphany until he realizes his own beliefs. Stephen ultimately diverges from Aquinas in his mastery of "epiphanization," what Umberto Eco calls the process of the artist transforming commonplace beautiful things into meaningful ones. I explicate the crucial moment of Stephen's epiphany in which he reminisces on his ideals of feminine beauty. Although I utilize Thomist concepts in my consideration of Stephen's aesthetics, I argue that scholasticism is only a springboard that Stephen uses to outline his own views: he borrows Aquinas's terminology to support the development of a personal aesthetic. In Aquinas's doctrine, an epiphany is an emotional moment that the artist can put into words; in *A Portrait*, it represents an essential moment of art itself. Thus, Stephen validates the artist as the premier interpreter of beauty—as the sole arbiter of the revelatory experience of the epiphany.

Sonya Egoian

Heaven in Harlem:
Art and Education as Saving Graces in Sapphire's *Push*

Art lifts man with gentle hands out of and beyond imprisonment in nature.
- G.W.F. Hegel

In his lectures on aesthetics, G.W.F. Hegel articulates mankind as torn between the earthly, sensuous world and the enlightened world of art and ideas. Seemingly trapped, mankind must seek liberation through the realms of art, education, and philosophy. Harlem-born Claireece "Precious" Jones, the heroine of Sapphire's harrowing novel *Push*, embodies Hegel's amphibious view of man impeccably. Although a victim of poverty and abuse, Precious' s dogged pursuit of education and, more specifically, literary art work liberate her from her stifling social conditions

and serve as an avenue of self-empowerment. Infusing the works of Hegel and his contemporary Fredrich Schiller into an analysis of *Push*, this paper will seek to draw arcs and parallels between Precious' journey and the philosophy of art as a mechanism of transcendence. Can Precious ultimately overcome reality's obstacles through her discovery of literature? By interpreting *Push* through a Hegelian lens, this project will explore the nuances and limitations of a modern-day struggle to find freedom and enlightenment through education.

Ashley Song

The Conversion of the Artist: The Images of Beauty and Flight in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

In James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Daedalus experiences an epiphany while gazing at a beautiful girl on the Howth strand. Imagery of Stephen's soul in flight precipitates his epiphanic moment, and thereby he places new found importance on building a life filled with beauty and art. Emptying his soul, he negates his prior identity and discovers the energy to create art and fulfill the role of an artist. Stephen's flight involves secular atonement, whereby he is "touched with the wonder of mortal beauty," the beauty of the sea-bird girl on the strand. Stephen's experience of beauty reveals the function of epiphany in the creation of art, and I claim that Stephen's flight allows him to fashion aesthetic views upon which he shall forge the conscience of his race.

Leah Wyatt

"Confusion Is Next": The Unpleasant Sounds of Sonic Youth

The Sonic Youth song "Confusion Is Next" would not be described as beautiful or melodious. Rather, this song, with its harsh chords and dissonant overall sound, could be described as irritating or even called "noise" rather than music. So why does Sonic Youth make unpleasant music? Is music not meant to be enjoyed? By analyzing the lyrics, vocals, and instrumentation of the song "Confusion Is Next," this paper will argue that Sonic Youth's music is unpleasant in order to give the impression of "interpretive listening." As opposed to gaining a complete understanding of what the song means, listeners are left with a powerful impression that may be interpreted in any number of ways. Listeners may wonder, "Is there any greater meaning to this song, or is it simply confusion and chaos?" By building the listener's tolerance to unpleasant noise and thus forcing him to listen beyond the noise, Sonic Youth trains its listeners to get past their own need to derive a specific understanding of the emotions in the music.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Room B

Moderated by Professor Alice Echols, Department of English

Estelle Berger

The Sacrifice:
A Woman's Path Toward Self-Definition

It is my thesis that . . . our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentials as human beings.
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

This is an examination of a cloistered woman so alienated and consumed with fear of the outside world that self-discovery is unattainable. *Mad Men*'s Betty Draper is paralyzed by an illusion of the ideal nuclear family: the television commercials, billboards, literature, and magazine advertisements that dictate her role as wife and mother. As described in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the 1960s housewife is unable to gain a sense of identity because she never considered that she had the option to break free of the norms outlined by society. Betty is barred from rebellion, from daring to look at her life and wonder about the possibilities that lie beyond the walls of her colonial home. Her life serves a purpose; she fulfills a role. And when one has been told to follow a traditional path, it takes a great deal of courage to venture into an unknown land. Not only is Betty frightened by her potential as a person, but she also fears becoming like Peggy Olson: the working woman, the desexualized woman, the outsider.

Kayla Carlisle

Society Takes Its Makeup Off:
The Ugly Face of the 1980s "Sex Wars" Reflected by the Gilead

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the many similarities between Offred's roles as a woman before and during the oppressive Gilead's regime indicate Atwood is using her dystopian world to comment upon society's treatment of women during her time. Atwood seems to believe a cause of female oppression is, astonishingly, certain feminist attitudes found in the "Sex Wars" of the 1980s. The best evidence for Atwood's implied preferences for different feminist branches comes in the form of Offred's mother (whose feminist attitudes resemble Andrea Dworkin), Serena Joy (the former spokeswoman for the conservative, gender-divisive Gilead revolution), and the heroic Moira (whose behavior and beliefs often reflect lesbian separatism). Are these characters' beliefs and actions a conscious commentary on 1980s feminism on Atwood's part, or is her incrimination of certain feminist groups of her time as instigators of female oppression accidental? Using Atwood's novel and various texts concerning the 1980s "Sex Wars," I will investigate how the characterizations of these three characters appear to suggest, like the story of Icarus (whose failure to neither fly too low nor too high led to his death), that lack of moderation in belief or action is perilous.

Shannon Cheng

(S)mother No More:
Redefining the Self Without Parental Guidance in *Stone Butch Blues*

Jess Goldberg, the butch queer protagonist of Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, struggles to define hirself outside of hir parent's conventional gender expectations. As a child, s-he is forced to make performative decisions that are socially acceptable to appease hir parents' demands. Hir inability to perfectly perform an accepted gender role leaves both hir parents' and hir own desires unsatisfied. It is only after Jess rebels against hir parents' expectations and refuses to perform the gender role forced upon hir that s-he begins to visualize a self outside of an Oedipal logic. Jess's refusal to wear feminine clothing and hir rebellious decision to wear a man's suit mark the beginning of the construction of hir new sexual identity. Jess breaks two symbolic thresholds. When Jess commits an act forbidden by hir parents' rules and enters hir parents' room, s-he crosses the threshold of filial disobedience; indeed, when

Jess reaches into hir father's closet and takes out hir father's suit to wear, s-he crosses the threshold of visibility. For the first time, s-he can visualize the person s-he will become in the future. For the first time, s-he is satisfied. In the mirror, s-he finds hir self in hir act of Oedipal rebellion. Jess furthers hir filial separation when s-he wears another man's suit instead of hir father's suit. In another man's suit, s-he creates a self-image outside of hir father's expectations. Jess is able to discover hir sexual identity through this act of rebellion. It is in this pivotal moment of self-recognition that Jess breaks away from hir dependence on hir parent's gender expectations. I will show that a woman can only visualize and define hir sexual identity outside of an Oedipal logic after s-he commits an act of filial rebellion.

Mabel Tsui

Fairy Tale Pornography:
Undoing Gender in *The Bloody Chamber*

In "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride," Angela Carter constructs her stories through means typically associated with female objectification—from the fairy tale genre to scenes of explicit sexuality. However, her use of such devices actually functions to 'undo' them. While the female protagonists acknowledge their subjugation, they do not passively receive it; instead, they act contrary to the expectations of traditional gender roles to challenge and actively break them down. Through Judith Butler's theory of performative gender identity, I will analyze the emphasis Carter places on "feminine" and "masculine" labels. By stressing these gender stereotypes, Carter shows how they are normative and worth challenging as constructs of a misogynistic society.

Vivian Wu

Bridging the Gap:
The Meaning Behind Unspoken Words

What happens when a girl who is beginning to recognize her own homosexuality realizes that her own father has been repressing his sexual orientation his entire life? How does this affect the father's ability to function as a parent? *Fun Home* chronicles Alison Bechdel's relationship with her father as their competing forms of masculinity play out in her childhood up until his death, creating a complex dynamic between the development of Alison's homosexual identity and her father's desire to mask his. The absence of the father figure in the narrator's life, combined with Alison's persistent desire to demystify his personal history and her place in his life, leads to a deeper understanding of her father's struggle to fit into society without compromising his true identity. On one hand, a young Alison resents a lack of physical and emotional attachment to her father; on the other hand, she realizes that her father, though embracing unconventional parental methods, may have been the father that she needed all along. The void between Alison and her father is filled with literature as a mode of communication and understanding. I will explore the relationship between the father and the daughter by analyzing the role of *The Odyssey*, and how the epic shapes the way Alison finds meaning in her dysfunctional family life.

How to Deal

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd, School of Philosophy

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Jenna Bamberger

"Layer over Layer Over Naught":
The Psychology of Performance

We have all, at one time or another, been performers, and many of us still are
- politicians, playboys, cardinals and kings.
- Laurence Olivier

In Cathy Day's *The Circus in Winter*, there are few characters as deceptively familiar as the aerial acrobat, Jennie Dixianna. True, one wouldn't meet a psychopathic, masochistic, manipulative circus performer with a penchant for meaningless sexual ventures on a typical day, but in Jennie, Day paints a character that is so flawed, so undeniably human, that we cannot help but recognize ourselves in even the most twisted aspects of her psyche. She is not crazy. She is a holistic, understandably broken individual coping with trauma by turning her entire life into a performance. Indeed, many of the underlying currents of Jennie's darkly colorful character are easily explained by basic principles of psychology, including the consequences of child molestation, the causes of psychopathy, and self-harm as a coping mechanism; she has been hurt, and she is doing everything in her power to change her circumstances. Through Jennie, we glimpse what it really means to put on a show: but more than that, through Jennie, we come to realize why we are compelled to do so.

Dalton V. Banh

Condemned to Be Free:
Anguish and Suffering in *No Exit* and *The Stranger*

The one who realizes in anguish his condition as being thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation.
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre famously claims, "I am condemned to be free." But what exactly does Sartre mean by freedom, and why does he describe it as condemning, as if it were inevitably imposed upon us? Sartre explains that our existence precedes our essence, and our essence is constructed by the choices we make out of free will. When faced with this enormous responsibility of choosing our own essence, we are often overwhelmed. But how do we react to this—do we attempt to escape from this oppressing freedom? In Sartre's play *No Exit*, three anti-heroes attempt to relinquish their free will by placing it into the hands of others. The characters remain trapped in hell for eternity, never able to fully realize the futility of their misguided efforts. In contrast, what if we accept our free will instead of oppose it? Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger* illustrates an existentialist hero who serves as the living representation of freedom in its purest and most absurd form. Yet despite his philosophical strength, Meursault is ostracized by society and seems to live an empty life devoid of any meaningful interaction. In these two works, Sartre and Camus demonstrate radically divergent approaches to free will. However, the two ultimately lead to a convergent end: suffering.

Youssef Biaz

A Real Word Problem:
How Loss and Trauma Destroy the Expectations of Language
in Takashi Miike's *Ôdishon* and Denis Johnson's *The Name of the World*

"Words create lies. Pain can be trusted."
- Asami from *Ôdishon*

In the film *Ôdishon*, Asami is infuriated by the fact that she is not Aoyama's first and exclusive love—she's jealous of

both his long deceased wife and his son. No longer believing the widower's pledge of love, she feels she can only trust his cries of agony as she tortures him with needles and a wire saw. In Denis Johnson's novella, *The Name of the World*, Michael Reed is tortured by a similar idea: having lost both his wife and his daughter to a brutal car wreck, would he betray his pledged love for them by moving on and loving a much younger, sexually perverse, and yet extremely clairvoyant cellist named Flower Cannon? A common denominator in both of these works is that language fails to characterize the immense grief, hurt, and suffering that accompanies a tremendous loss. Without it, we follow Aoyama and Michael into dark and abysmal places of torment and grief. Theorist Georges Bataille warns that valuing such "verbal invention" is foolish and can only end in "long torment and abrupt violence." Nevertheless, this somehow leads to our protagonists ultimately concluding, "life is wonderful," or in Michael Reed's words, "utterly remarkable." Maybe they have learned to transcend the limitations of language in order to live a fulfilling life and accept the tragic fall that comes after living passionately and fully even if too close to the sun.

Shefali Deshpande

Lesbian Rape:
Butch Trauma in *Stone Butch Blues*

Nowhere is the sadistic potential of a language built on agency so visible as in torture. While torture contains language, specific human words and sounds, it is itself a language, an objectification, an acting out.
- Elaine Scarry

Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* tests the ability to narrativize torture. Jess Goldberg does not entirely understand herself; she endures insults about her gender and sexuality from other kids in school every day. Before she can discern her gender identity, a gang of football players violently rape her. Even after promising herself that she will never be raped again, Jess undergoes this torture a second time with police officers. Feinberg describes both obstructions of dignity merely in words. The second time, however, Feinberg does not explain moment by moment what is happening; Jess' mind drifts to a happier place while the police officers have her handcuffed and subject her to their hateful actions. Juxtaposing the two situations with the same crime makes me wonder: does one way express trauma better than the other? The answer to this question lies in our recognition of her pain. We need to know exactly what happened and learn to actively read traumatic stories. The structure of this novel serves as a realistic, disturbing, and first-hand account, not only of the humiliation of butch rape, but also the extent to which we can understand Jess' trauma through narrative.

Rebecca Southern

Reviving Nomi:
Saving the Self of an Adolescent Girl

Blessed are the forgetful: for they get the better even of their blunders.
- Friedrich Nietzsche

If a person's family shapes her identity, what happens when a girl's family is incomplete or absent? In Miram Toews' novel *A Complicated Kindness*, Nomi Nickel struggles to find her own identity and copes with her desire to break away from her restrictive Mennonite community. As she reveals how her family became so fragmented, Nomi's memories of her sister, mother, and father are pieced together. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* by Dr. Mary Pipher describes the social and cultural pressures that face today's young women and uses case studies and psychoanalysis to illustrate the complications of growing up in what she considers a dysfunctional culture. Dr. Pipher discusses how society shapes adolescents by telling them what they should or should not be, causing an increasing trend of emotional disorders in young women. Nomi encounters a similar conflict between who she should be, according to Mennonite culture, and who she wants to be, resulting in alienation and self-destruction. My paper will discuss the role of family and society in forming one's identity and sense of self by applying Dr. Pipher's ideas in conjunction with other critical texts to analyze the childhood of Nomi in *A Complicated Kindness*.

To Be or Not To Be

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Pub

Moderated by Professor Lawrence Green, Department of English

Francesca Bessey

Chasing Entropy:
The Price of Disillusion in *The Crying of Lot 49*

Is it worth dismantling the very foundations of one's life to uncover the truth behind it? Perhaps—if the process of deconstruction also reveals the secret nature of the materials holding them together. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas makes a foolish sacrifice, abandoning the systems and principals that order her life for the pursuit of truth about an enigma she is not even sure exists. The quest ultimately fails, but not before annihilating Oedipa's comfortable existence as a self-respecting, middle-class, suburban housewife, the perfect manifestation of the so-called American Dream. Each new inquiry Oedipa makes into her elusive target, "The Tristero," further dissociates her from the order she knows, until her life becomes an entity consumed entirely by entropy. While her goal remains unattained, however, Oedipa does not complete her journey unenlightened. With disorder, comes revelation. With chaos, comes the liberty to examine the systems of her past from a standpoint never permitted her while under their care. Oedipa may the structure that houses her stability, but in doing so she uncovers the disorderly rot in the woodwork.

Daniel Fletcher

Living Up to the Stories We Tell:
The Ethics of Action in *The Road*

In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the reader is presented with a world seemingly absent of morality. In such a world, where positive examples are scarce, stories about goodness teach the boy how he should behave. But stories are not enough. As his spiritual identity unravels, the boy questions to what extent illusions like stories, and labels like "the good guys" are meaningful if they are never supported by action. The spiritual epicenter of the novel occurs when the boy and his father cross paths with the prophet-like Ely, who draws attention to the perverted nature of spirituality in their world. By using Freud and his writing on religion and the nature of illusions, we can see that the man creates delusions of inherent goodness so that he and his son can be "the good guys." Even though the novel seems to privilege the father's notion of the boy's inherent goodness, in the end, we find that being good means doing good.

Michael McBride

Too Weird to Live, Too Rare to Die:
Hedonism, Identity, and the State Fantasy

It is well known that America is a heavily medicated culture—one in five citizens are currently prescribed antipsychotics. Oscar Zeta Acosta, in *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, follows in this long tradition of patriotic drug use. His hedonism and violent benders remain unparalleled by almost any literary figure—except, perhaps, his friend, client, and accomplice Hunter S. Thompson. And while at first glance their drug fueled bacchanalia seems like good old-fashioned American escapism, in the end, it is more accurately read as a product of American Exceptionalism. Political theorist Donald Pease coined the term "The New American Exceptionalism" to describe the belief that America is somehow an "exception" to the rules. The government operates outside the law, in many senses. Acosta and Thompson take this concept and personify it. By granting themselves powers and privileges of the State, they reveal the vast hypocrisy between the rights granted to the government and those granted to citizens. By misbehaving grossly, they highlight in an extreme fashion the lack of sovereign power vested in the American people. Acosta's hedonism is a search for identity. As he finally comes to realize himself as "The Brown Buffalo", he, like the Buffalo, is searching for survival in a country that has almost extinguished him. His hedonism is an aggressive expression of American frontier masculinity, an unholy affirmation of Cartesian duality, and most importantly, a search for truth and transcendence in an exceptional country.

Elizabeth Louise Peabody

"The cults of the famous and the dead": DeLillo's Echoes of Joyce

Everything that we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks . . . The cults of the famous and the dead.
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling . . . like the descent of their last end,
upon all the living and the dead.
- James Joyce, *The Dead*

Don DeLillo ends White Noise in a tone hauntingly similar to Joyce's famous last line from *The Dead* and the heroes of these two texts are both college professors who lead somewhat unfulfilling lives. But even though both men have different fears and wants, they both experience a moment in which their perspective on life and those they love is changed: Gabriel, when he sees his wife listening to distant music, and Jack, when he sees Babette on television. It seems that DeLillo intended for Jack to be compared in some way to Joyce's Gabriel; if this is the case, then what kind of change does Jack go through because of this moment, and how could this change relate to Gabriel's own progression? Are DeLillo's characters' reliance on tabloids and the whispers of the television supposed to be a parody of Joyce's profundity—or are they a tribute to it? And how should we as readers be expected to receive the two authors' tendency to confuse the borders between life and death? Using critical articles on *White Noise* as well as interviews of DeLillo himself, I will explore the relationship between DeLillo and Joyce, between Jack and Gabriel, and between reality and the fantastical effects of background noise.

Seira Tanaka

When Pigs Fly: The Incongruity of The Liminal State in *Spirited Away* and *Fiskadoro*

In Hayao Miyazaki's film Spirited Away, ten-year old Chihiro wanders into the spirit world and matures beyond her years to rescue her friend and parents from the clutches of the manipulative Yubaba. Having had her identity destroyed and reconstructed in the radically different societal structures of the spirit world, her abrupt return to childhood would seem meaningless, purposeless—and should likely lead to disillusionment. Just as, in Denis Johnson's *Fiskadoro*, nuclear warfare had shattered civilization to the point of no return; Chihiro, in *Spirited Away*, had been altered beyond regression in the adult, working society of the bathhouse. In both cases, the clear shift in Chihiro's mannerisms and the obvious portrayals of trauma in *Fiskadoro* illustrate how the liminal state does not, cannot, exist in a vacuum; the ground from which Icarus takes flight could not have been the same one he would have returned to, because his perception of the world would have been very different. What had once been a land where one could not fly had suddenly turned into a land where one could, and this subjective coloring of perspective makes all the difference. Then, if the definition of the liminal state is that of a state of being between two realities, the subjective removal of the destination as a grounding point implies the loss of the liminal state as a concept.

Risky Business

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Room C

Moderated by Thomas Winningham, Department of English

Catherine Brackett

"You're one to talk, you bloodless, money-grubbing freak!":
***American Beauty* and the Question of Whether to Love at All**

Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world, I feel like I can't take it, and my heart is just going to cave in.
- Ricky Fitts, *American Beauty*

Moderation is a principle of life usually absent in the most genuine of love stories. Love and hate are so intense, and so inextricably bound, that even the most heart-rendering of love stories conclude in tragedy. For some, the experience provides a source of self-discovery or re-identification, as in the experience of Lester Burnham in *American Beauty*. In utter boredom and despair with his seemingly "normal" married life, Lester falls for a teenaged girl, quits his job by extorting his boss, develops a love for marijuana, buys his dream car, and begins lifting weights with the zeal of a high school athlete. The paradox, however, lies in the chaos that ensues from Lester "taking control" of his life. Sure, he is ecstatic, but he alienates his wife and daughter, almost commits pedophilia, disrupts a neighbor's household and puts himself in physical danger in the process. By eliciting the theories of Freud on sexual development and sexual perversion, this paper explores the duplicitous nature of pleasure and pain. If one pursues pleasure but really seeks to inflict pain on others and possibly his or herself, are such extremes inevitably worth it? What, then, is the price of ecstasy? What is the price of love?

Sara Clayton

Emerging from Inevitable Subjugation: An Analysis of Yeats's "Leda and the Swan"

Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?
-"Leda and the Swan," W.B. Yeats

Based on the myth of Zeus raping Leda in the form of a swan, "Leda and the Swan" is an imperfect Petrarchan sonnet that takes this bizarre incident and transforms it into an aesthetically cerebral masterpiece. Yeats, demonstrating his polished and innate aptitude for poetry, utilizes exact and poignant diction as well as a deliberately altered structure to create an intense and strange exchange between a girl and an extra-ordinary swan. But somewhere between the "sudden blow" and Zeus dropping Leda, the "staggering girl" finds opportunity and takes advantage of an otherwise shameful and traumatic personal episode. In this scenario, Leda uses the strength she extracts from Zeus's ravishment in order to initiate the end to the Trojan era as retaliation for what she suffered. After the final interrogative couplet, the rest goes down in history. In time, Leda becomes the mother of Helen, the notorious occasion for the devastating Trojan War. A sonnet filled with deceptions, misconceptions and subtleties, "Leda and the Swan" presents a derivation from the inevitable—a struggle that unfolds to an unexpected outcome.

Patrick Cleland

Time Is Money:
An Investigation of the Ethics of Time Travel in *Primer*

This paper examines the relationship between ethics and innovation. Ethics—or lack thereof—can either prevent or create mishaps in scientific inquiry, as seen in Shane Carruth's 2004 film *Primer*. The film, centered on Aaron and Abe, tells the story of two freelance inventors who stumble upon a massive discovery: the ability to travel backwards in time. Though there can be no doubt about their intellectual prowess, the protagonists of the film appear to be devoid of moral competence. In lieu of responsible examination, they resort to cheating time for money and power. Not surprisingly, this reckless behavior leads to complications and an eventual deterioration of the pair's

partnership. Author David Koepsell aims to prevent such catastrophes brought on by immoral practices in his article "The Ethics of Investigation" from *Skeptical Inquirer* by emphasizing the need for self-regulation and a formalized set of ethical guidelines in science. This paper aims to determine which of these ethical guidelines Aaron and Abe break and to identify choices which could have been made that would have been more scientifically responsible. Critiquing experimental practices in established fields of science proves to be easy because one can base criticism on moral conventions which the investigators did or did not follow. In the world of *Primer*, however, we encounter seemingly supernatural circumstances such as multiple versions of the same person and knowledge of the future. These paradoxes create unprecedented moral quandaries. Aaron and Abe's inability to solve these dilemmas with the same formalized, ethical parameters as established scientific practices reflects the human tendency to submit to the temptations of unlimited power.

Kate Lavelle

When I Grow Up:
Examining the Emergence of Adolescent Identity

Adolescents often long to escape their homes. Preoccupied with dreams of adulthood, their idealized notions of what constitutes independence consume their childhoods. These young people are trapped by their inexperience, unable to depart their hometowns without the ability to support themselves. For sixteen-year-old Nomi Nickel, from Miriam Toews' novel, *A Complicated Kindness*, escape from her conservative Mennonite community seems impossible. The Mouth, the leader of the community, prevents residents from venturing out and establishing new lives by enforcing strict, religious rules. When Nomi witnesses older members of her family depart, she realizes that the way of life in her community is not the only way. As Nomi gains an awareness of herself and her capabilities, she no longer wishes to be constrained by antiquated traditions. Nomi struggles with her desire to do what is right for her, even though her actions may harm her family. With the assistance of Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, I will explore the difficulties of realizing one's potential in the midst of a repressive environment in conjunction with coming to understand just what it means to be an adult.

Laura Rutledge

Rolling Back:
Hunter S. Thompson's Personal Search for the Savage West

> . . . you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.
> - Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Hunter S. Thompson's autobiographic novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, opens with a quote from Dr. Samuel Johnson: "He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." Yet, it is Thompson's self-conscious and magnified yearning for beastliness that makes him that much more human. He is excessive and over-confident, but he is also aware of his self-destruction. Throughout this picaresque, Thompson flies close to the sun, almost melting. Almost burning. He and his "lawyer" venture through Las Vegas destroying everything in their path. They take nothing seriously; they do nothing soberly. Through these actions, Thompson lives out his own fantasy of the frontier. Like the frontiersman Frederick Jackson Turner imagined embodying the American character of the western frontier, Thompson seeks out the "savage heart of the American dream." Thompson takes an alternative approach to Turner's imagination of Western savagery. By seeking out self-destruction and savagery in the midst of an epicenter of American decadence, Thompson redefines the frontier thesis. While his story is intensely personal, Thompson simultaneously explores his realization that like a run-away Conestoga wagon, the counterculture has crashed and burned. His story thus becomes an allegory about the hippie generation. Thompson knows the danger of his excess, and he morosely awaits his eventual tumbling into the depths below.

Power Play

Moderated by Anthony Abboreno, Department of English

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Room A

Natasha Cirisano

Living on the Edge:
The Power and Peril of Extremes

Society doesn't like exceptions. Instead, members of society who stand out are often ostracized because their otherness threatens the established hierarchy. These social exceptions, called "marginalist characters" in Peter McCarthy's article "Marginalist Criticism: An Infantile Disorder?" are figures who identify with "alienation or extraordinary otherness" in order to replace their duller or more mediocre selves. In Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy*, the established society is the convent; the marginalist figure is the main character, Mariette. I will explore how Mariette's extreme displays of piety threaten the convent because they represent new power and perspective in a society whose structure is defined by submission and obedience of rigid standards. Undermining the convent's unilateral approach to prayer and faith itself, Mariette's marginalization and resultant expulsion from the institution epitomize the way in which society must maintain its structure by forcing mediocrity in lieu of going above and beyond the norm.

Blake Dethlefsen

The Internal Freak:
Society and Sexuality in *Geek Love*

Shadows, lust, and the grotesque characterize the gritty strip club segue into the core of Katherine Dunn's novel *Geek Love*, using the combination of sexuality and deformity that leaves the reader entirely repulsed, but driven forward with a guilty curiosity. From there the story continues to chronicle the success of the genetically altered Binewski family carnival and the relationship between Oly Binewski and the strip club patron Miss Lick, both riddled with unbridled attraction to abnormality. *Miller v. California* defines obscenity as material that is offensive to the average person and does not contain serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. Assuming the world of *Geek Love* is our same world, Dunn pushes the boundaries of sexual normalcy and comfort for a society in which the average person would thoroughly reject the grotesque sexuality permeating throughout the novel. However, the shadowy demons that dwell within the strip club and feed off the subjugation of female deformity are collectively the anonymous male spectator, a thinly veiled reflection of ourselves as readers. Dunn argues correctly that we all have an inner freakishness, it is at the dark core of human nature. Therefore, our laws do not exist to protect the majority from the deviant sexual minority, but rather to shelter an oversensitized society from the freak that exists within all of us.

Justin Elliot

Daydreaming in *Brazil*:
The Plague That Kills the Rebel Within

Terry Gillman's dystopian film *Brazil* depicts a society in the future crippled by gluttony, monstrous bureaucracy, and a lack of critical thinking. The film follows the protagonist, Sam Lowry, as he comes to consciousness of his society's coercive flaws. While Sam struggles as his life slowly collapses under the broken society he lives in, he is still frequently able to slip away into the utopian world of his dreams. Even in the tragic ending of the film where all that Sam loves is destroyed, Sam is able to forever escape to his dreams. In this essay, I will show that by seeking refuge in the imaginary, Sam becomes just another victim of his society and a failure to his true dreams to liberate himself from the bureaucratic system. Overall, the film is a testament to staying grounded in reality, no matter how harsh it is, for it is where true heroes fight for progress.

Ashley Miyasaki

Morality of the Socioeconomic Elite: Does Great Power Necessitate Great Responsibility?

Most people today are familiar with the story of Bernie Madoff, the former non-executive chairman of the NASDAQ stock market who orchestrated what is now considered to be the largest financial fraud in US history. While we tend to treat Madoff as an aberration, his example is by no means exceptional; similar examples recur throughout history. Madoff and his ilk make us ask: Do those in positions of power maintain a social conscience, or do they believe that they only bear individual responsibility for themselves? By examining the actions of *The Magic Christian*'s Guy Grand and Slavoj Zizek's essay, "Nobody has to be vile," I hope to glean greater insight into these issues. I analyze the ethics of the tricks that Grand plays on those around him. I consider whether preying on innate human desires—which lead people to behave in ways that conflict with their morals—is exploitative, or if allowing people to express their true nature is liberating. Furthermore, I explore the phenomenon that Zizek discusses of affluent members of society simultaneously creating and attempting to cure global social problems. I conclude that though the affluent may assume the pretense of acting in the interests of the greater society, they are intrinsically self-centered and motivated by personal avarice. As virtual linchpins of society, they must remember that their actions may have significant bearing on overall social development and the livelihoods of other individuals within their society.

Carly Turner

The "Unmixable Mix" of Law and Desire: Cultural Constructions of Identity in *The God of Small Things*

This paper explores the extent to which societal laws and cultural norms have the power to construct desire, and, in turn, to influence identity. Through a cultural analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the paper will traverse cultural and political boundaries in its exploration of the impact of our placement of people into categories based on qualities such as appearance, gender, and religion. In reference to Judith Butler's theory of normative conceptions of human, the paper will address our personal roles in the creation of "unlivable lives" and uninhabitable identities. This paper will prove our complicity in society's encroachment on personal identity, as we actively create and maintain social boundaries in an attempt to force people to live—and love—within the lines.

Christine Xu

Dismantling Corpocracy in the Language of "The Orison of Sonmi~451"

He bought a styro of starbuck for himself and an aqua for me. Disneys were called "movies" in those days. When Hae-Joo's handsony purred at a key scene, he glanced at his rolex and asked if Mr. Chang was waiting in the basement fordpark.
- Sonmi~451, *Cloud Atlas*

Sonmi~451 is a fabricant, or cloned laborer, confined to the franchises that grease the wheels of Nea So Copros, a futuristic nation goaded by an insatiable need to acquire, privatize, and consume. In David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Sonmi undergoes an intellectual transformation that advances her ability to think and speak in "pureblood consumer" language, an experience inherently denied to those like her. This "ascension" yields a startling realization of her tongue's cultural implications as pureblood lexicon replaces Sonmi's limited fabricant vernacular. Using Nea So Copros as a case study on macroeconomic relationships and consumer behavior, I examine cross-sections of its language to gain insight into the values of corporatism entrenched in Sonmi's society. As we look closely at the correlations between a word, its meaning, and its function in Nea So Copros, language comes to act as a function of government power that either limits or grants consumer agency. As is evident from Sonmi's case, only those who crack the barriers of language can truly shatter the insularity of a constructed culture.

The Harder They Fall

Moderated by Meghan Davis Mercer, Department of English

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Room B

Jack Begert

Go With the Flow:
Why Only Idiots Time Travel

When you mess with time, bad things happen; this is the ethos that lies at the center of not only Shane Carruth's cult classic *Primer*, but also almost every conventional time-travel plot. As the two protagonists, Aaron and Abe, discover more and more about the powers of time-travel, their friendship crumbles before the viewer's very eyes, along with their morals, and even their very humanity. Utilizing time-related articles from *American Philosophical Quarterly*, I plan to reveal the intense bond between time and the ambiguous yet uniquely human notion of the self. Our favorite stories elucidate an intense and insatiable fascination with chronology and its effect on the human mind and spirit. Why is it that when man unravels time, the self begins to unravel as well?

Michael Bergsma

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down:
The Value of Human Relationships in the Post-Apocalyptic World of *The Road*

Nature has died; civilization has collapsed; and most humans have become marauding cannibals. *The Road* presents its characters with a problem: in a world where the "bad guys" become cannibals and the "good guys" commit suicide, what is our reason for living? The father and son's decision to struggle forward in this life contains parallels to *Paradise Lost*, a poem that culminates in the exile of two humans from a perfect paradise, never to return again. When the future is uncertain at best, it is human relationships that keep us anchored in life. I explore this link through the contemporary psychological research of Daniel Gilbert to understand what *The Road* tells us about our relationships, happiness, and desire to live even in a world without hope.

Sydney Bernardo

Nobody Matters:
The Construction and Destruction of Identity in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

I always thought it'd be better to be a fake somebody than a real nobody.
- Tom Ripley, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

As the title of Anthony Minghella's 1999 psychological thriller would indicate, Tom Ripley is talented. He is a master con artist, and uses his "talents"—lying, forgery, and impersonation—in an attempt to twist reality and take on the persona of Dickie Greenleaf, a wealthy yet careless heir whom Tom believes to be a "somebody." And though Tom's perception of what makes a person a "somebody" versus a "nobody" is highly influenced by his obsession with upper class society, his pursuit of Dickie's life leads him to explore two different bodies—both physically and mentally. He manipulates his own identity and appearance to match the "somebody" he wants to become and, through this, comes to embody an image of simulacra, which, as Jean Baudrillard states, "[substitutes] signs of the real for the real itself." However, in the end, Tom's perversion of reality fails. The simulacrum, by definition, can never truly become the original. Thus, not only is he unsuccessful in becoming Dickie Greenleaf, but through his manipulation of identity in favor of a convoluted hyperreality, Tom inadvertently loses his genuine self as well, leading to the destruction of any opportunity for love or happiness.

Burke Gibson

No Agency for the Two Toms: Free Will and Characterization in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Both Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* feature characters that seem eerily unlike real people: Pynchon's Oedipa Maas acts illogically and inconsistently, while Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never quite seem to see the broad picture of their world. The extent to which these characters have free will is brought into question in each work, as they all act strangely because they're products of predetermined systems and structures. I plan to argue that the authors render the characters uncanny in this way to draw attention to the fact that, for all their characterization and believability, the subjects of a novel or play are simply a collection of words; Oedipa, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are all controlled by both the structure within the plots of the works and by the structures of the works themselves, and therefore have no agency. The authors are attempting to push readers to question the structures that control real life, and the extent to which we, as real humans, are just characters with no free will.

Isabel Ssu-Yuan Shen

"Enemies, You and I": The Mediocrity and the Overman in *Amadeus*

"Stop, dwarf!" I said. "It is I or you! But I am the stronger of us two: you do not know my abysmal thought. That you could not bear!"
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

At the beginning of the 1984 film *Amadeus*, a deteriorating Antonio Salieri attempts suicide by slitting his throat, calling himself the wretched murderer of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The film progresses in a series of flashbacks as Salieri confesses his jealousy, admiration, and hatred toward the ingenious but vulgar composer, exposing his desire to ruin the man who had taken away his fame. I will illustrate how Salieri embodies characteristics of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or Overman, as he rises to power and thwarts God by plotting against his beloved enemy. Based on Nietzsche's philosophy, the Venetian composer should emerge stronger, transcendent, triumphant after watching Mozart die; yet in the end, Salieri is a forgotten figure—the patron saint of mediocrities—confined to a wheelchair and an asylum, forced to live in the shadow of greatness in the form of a giggling, unrefined drunkard. What happens to one's psyche when becoming an Overman isn't enough to guarantee the success he desires? What does this denial of success do to a man, and what, in turn, does it make him do? In this paper, I will combine film and philosophy in order to demonstrate that the mindset of "I or you" destroys a person faster than he can ever hope to destroy anyone else.

Maxwell Weiner

The Fall of the Ageless Dorian Gray: Morality and Beauty in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Not "Forgive us our sins" but "Smite us for our iniquities" should be the prayer of man to a most just God.
- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

This essay takes a close look at the life of the beautiful Dorian Gray and his inevitable fall from grace. A stunningly handsome man gifted with eternal, incorruptible looks, Gray sees his beauty as a means by which he can mask the sins of a hedonistic lifestyle. The titular portrait ages and degenerates in Dorian's stead, thus he does not suffer the physical consequences of his sinning. This allows him to ignore the immorality of his actions. And so Dorian does. Gray falls from grace, ruining the lives of so many and experiencing a "terrible joy" in doing so. Was Dorian's fall inevitable? Coupled with theory from Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts*, an examination of Dorian Gray in his final moments reveals how he was able to ignore his sin and why it resulted in his destruction. The analysis comes to the conclusion that by remaining beautiful Dorian Gray was able to ignore the consequences of his sins and thus his fall was inevitable.

Self-Less

Moderated by Thomas Winningham, Department of English

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Banquet Room

Katherine Gardiner

The Willful Disintegration of the Self:
The Feminist Downfall in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Mariette in Ecstasy*

Truth is subjective: absolutes, even of the soul, do not necessarily exist. Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* explores the nature of such subjective truth through the young Creole protagonist, Antoinette, who ascribes to the lunatic role that her English husband assigns to her—and, indeed, this submission ultimately transforms her into the madwoman in the attic. Mariette, the main character in Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy*, suffers a similar fate: this early 20th-century woman hopes to be confirmed as a nun, yet the other Sisters feel jealously at her obvious spiritual transcendence, eventually kicking her out of the convent. Thus, the nuns deny Mariette the most important aspect of her identity as a Bride of Christ. With her vocation ripped away from her, Mariette feels trapped in the outside world, wishing for the confines of the nunnery, just as Antoinette feels imprisoned within her husband's attic. I will argue that such marginalization as a result of immersion into the patriarchal system directly facilitated these women's fall from grace through an essential denial of their identities. Yet, as I will show, the true tragedy of their stories is that both Antoinette and Mariette play an active role in their own disintegration by accepting what others tell them as truth: they sacrifice themselves, acquiescing to the demands of society—and this is their true fall.

Samantha Goldberg

Hands Go Numb:
The Social Imprisonment of *Mad Men*'s Betty Draper

Betty Draper goes through the motions of a monotonous lifestyle. She has a routine that she complacently follows, laid out for her by the 1960's American housewife stereotype. As season one of *Mad Men* progresses, however, Betty increasingly experiences moments when her complacency with this role becomes numb—she feels empty and confused. Her alienation from herself is manifested in her hands. In order to explain how Betty labors under an oppressive stereotype, and why her hands are alienated from her body, I will employ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's notion of "false consciousness." This idea suggests that we make our own decisions but the real motives impelling us are unknown; our motives are based on years of being told what to do and how to feel. The series traces Betty's increasing awareness of this false consciousness and her struggle to clarify her own consciousness. Finally, my paper touches on the contemporary implications of Betty's false consciousness and her inability to break from it completely. Why does the character of Betty Draper continue to speak to the unstable role of women in society? To what extent have modern women developed a collective consciousness and actually used it as a platform for social advancement? Have women really grown wings that have aided their plight from social imprisonment, or have they only developed wax wings that guarantee their fall into the numbing past of the 60s?

Chloe Lauter

"Wreckage of an Exploding Life":
The Articulated Artifice of *Written on the Body*

The depths of passion are written on the flesh. Fingers become barbed wire; bruises and bite marks are signs of love. "Who taught you to write in blood on my back?" asks the nameless, sexless narrator of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*. In this story, love is a passion that consumes until all that is left is flesh-bound grief, and the narrator slowly loses pieces of her or his identity in the process of losing each lover. He or she descends into anonymity, losing a body even as the novel focuses on the intricate physical details of the narrator's newest lover and latest loss, a dying, passionate redhead named Louise. As the real Louise disappears from the narrator's life, our protagonist begins to deconstruct the physicality of an imaginary Louise until the reader knows this new, fabricated body's details intimately. And yet, because the narrator invested so much of her or his identity in Louise, by recreating her body

the narrator begins to reconstruct his or her own self. This loss of the self in the process of losing love recalls Freud's articulation of melancholia, when the abandoned lover "knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him." Clinging desperately to the wreckage of lost loves in order to preserve an identity, the narrator unwittingly sacrifices the self in pursuit of love. But is it a pointless sacrifice? How do we love if doing so means losing ourselves?

Ricki Reisner

Lying Naked in Nebraska

In one of the final scenes in *Boys Don't Cry*, Brandon Teena and Lana Tisdel lie together in the nude in a shed outside of Candace's home in Falls City, Nebraska, hiding from Tom and John. Brandon was able to explore a mature and adult relationship with one woman who recognizes him as transgendered and together, they accede to a "modern" form of homosexuality. Through Hilary Swank's award winning performance in *Boys Don't Cry* and interviews with Brandon's loved ones, past lovers, and accused rapists in the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story*, we see Brandon struggle with manhood in the rural quarters of Nebraska. Judith Jack Halberstam discusses the term metronormativity, the conflation of "urban" and "visible" in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities. Such narratives tell of closeted subjects who "come out" into an urban setting, which in turn, supposedly allows for the full expression of the sexual self in relation to a community of other queers. The rural queer may be attracted to the small town for precisely those reasons that make it uninhabitable for the urban queer. But the small town proves to be dangerous for Brandon and in my paper, I will look at how that ultimately leads to Brandon's passing.

Matthew O. Stock

This is "Jack's Conference Paper":
The American Dream as a Loss of Identity

Your head will collapse
But there's nothing in it
And you'll ask yourself
Where is my mind?
- "Where is My Mind," Pixies

David Fincher's filmic adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* brings us into a world of men disillusioned and emasculated by a consumerist culture and an American Dream that is ostensibly a lie. This creates angst for the men of middle-class America, especially for the film's main character, a man we simply know as "the narrator." The narrator stocks his "young professional" apartment with useless IKEA furniture and a wardrobe of designer shirts and ties, thinking these things will lead to fulfilment, although they do not. His growing dissatisfaction leads him to create a second self, Tyler Durden. Tyler epitomizes the hyperreality postulated by theorist Umberto Eco which claims America has disregarded the authentic in favor of the Almost Real. Tyler is everything the narrator wants to be but can't. He is unleashed on the world where he first creates freedom in the form of violence through Fight Club and then full on chaos through Project Mayhem. In this paper, I argue, using Eco's theory on hyperreality, that through both the film's script and visual design, Fincher shows the need for the narrator to splinter himself in two, its effects and, ultimately, what happens when this artificial creation becomes a Frankenstein-like monster.

Should I Stay or Should I Go Now?

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Pub

Moderated by Samantha Carrick, Department of English

Ian Hecht

Joyce Rejects Forgotten Beauty and Wishes to Create His Own

In Chapter V of *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus rejects the sentiment of W. B. Yeats's "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty." In his poem, Yeats mourns the loss of beauty as it used to be represented in chivalric texts. However, the underlying theme of decay makes it a modernist poem. Why does a fellow modernist such as Joyce reject it? I argue that Joyce rejects the portrayal of beauty that Yeats laments as having lost. Stephen Dedalus wishes to create a new aesthetic theory, and his departure from tradition requires a rejection of Yeats's "forgotten beauty." He wishes to create a new form of beauty that has never been seen before, and in this way his departure from tradition parallels the mythic Daedalus' crafted wings. In fashioning such beauty, Stephen Dedalus attempts to recreate "the conscience of his race."

Winona Leon

A Rendered Reality

Is it wrong to trust in a beautiful lie if it helps you get through life?
- Naomi "Nomi" Nickel, *A Complicated Kindness*

Left with no one to guide her, Naomi "Nomi" Nickel from *A Complicated Kindness* is like a refugee stuck inside her own home. Even the idea of God confounds her because her Mennonite town associates restraint and obedience with its religion instead of empathy and solace. In his essay "Notes of a Native Son," James Baldwin's investigation of how to discover liberation apart from one's home illustrates the risks that Nomi will face after she decides whether to leave or stay. Yet, since both of these choices seem to only induce grief, she instead uses sex, drugs, and vandalism to withdraw from reality. As she adapts the same surrealist viewpoint chronicled in Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, Nomi begins to transform the moments she has lost into tangible, transcendent experiences. Inspiration stems from not only reviving these memories but also altering them to satiate her desire for acceptance. While these altered memories lack truth and detail, will Nomi's ability to confront her past finally enable her to develop the courage necessary to confront reality? By tracing Nomi Nickel's journey to cope an environment devoid of opportunity, *A Complicated Kindness* explores the sustainability of hope built on the struts of reignited dreams.

Ani Misirian

The Paradox of Creativity:
Freedom and Imprisonment in Wallace Stevens' Poetry

And that's life, then: things as they are,
This buzzing of the blue guitar.
- Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar"

Creativity will set you free—somewhat. At least that is the implication in Wallace Stevens' poetry. The concept of creativity and a "supreme fiction," as phrased by Stevens, introduces the idea that we are what we create; therefore, societal institutions that free or ensnare the individual are a direct result of our own creativity. Just as there is a limit in the creation of any artistic work, there is a limit to how free we can set ourselves from the restrictions we self-impose. The largest of these restrictions lies in our perpetual quest for truth, an idea explored extensively in Stevens' poetry. As Stevens notes, truth is not a concrete concept; it is immanent rather than transcendent. In tracing the similarities between religion and poetry, Stevens explores the idea that truth is largely open to individual interpretation, and consequently, subject to the whims of human creativity. This paper will explore the role of creativity in Stevens' poetry as both an escape from reality and a method of re-entering the prisons that we create.

Cara Palmer

Failed Escape:
Action and Avoidance of Responsibility in *The English Patient*

In Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Almásy attempts to remove himself from the world and the consequences of his actions by concealing his identity and hiding his personal history. However, the revelation of Almásy's story drives the novel, placing the reader's desire for knowledge at odds with Almásy's desire for anonymity, indicating that perhaps Almásy cannot successfully maintain his removal from the world. In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean Paul Sartre argues that individuals must take responsibility for the choices they make, because those choices shape not only their identity but also the world. Using Sartre, this paper explores Almásy's culpability for both his actions and his denial of personal responsibility. As the narrative forces the uncovering of Almásy's past, we find that, despite his confidence in the insignificance of his choices on others and on the world, the impact of Almásy's actions does not disappear; he cannot escape his responsibility.

Maria Peltekova

The Reality of Fantasy:
Discovering the Truth in Magic

All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream.
- Edgar Allen Poe

Most of us struggle to believe in actual magic. But we easily believe in illusions, in tricks of the light, in smoke and mirrors—charlatan explanations for the wonder of magicians and circuses. Willingly we escape to fantasy worlds, yet no matter how far we run, on some level, our feet still remain rooted to disbelief. Erin Morgenstern's novel *The Night Circus* challenges the notions of magic and reality as the story unveils the performance of two young illusionists. They truly possess talents of the phenomenal, but disguised in a circus, hardly anyone believes in the authenticity of their magic, save for an average boy named Bailey. Ultimately, he is the one who saves the Night Circus from ruin by embracing its impossibly fantastic reality. Morgenstern's language and magical realism subtly allow readers themselves to suspend their disbelief and run away to the circus, a concept which both literary critics Mikhael Bakhtin and Ethan Gilsdorf discuss. In the end, perhaps dreamers do turn away from standard truths, but if they believe in the fantastic as Bailey does, they can actually have a stronger influence on reality than anyone would think.

Great Expectations

Moderated by Brett Gordon, Department of English

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Room C

Maggie Admire

No, Sweetie, We Want You to Disobey Us:
The Expectation of Rebellion in *Mariette in Ecstasy* and *Spirited Away*

Rebellion is key to establishing a sense of self. All teenagers rebel to establish independence from their parents. For teenage girls, their rebellion is doubled: as Virginia Woolf's argues in her essay "Professions for Women," women rebel to establish independence from men. Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* relies on rebellion. Chihiro's refusal to listen to her parents keeps her from getting turned into a pig, and, doing Virginia Woolf proud, she clings to her identity in the form of her name, which lets her escape the confines of the bathhouse and the male customers she serves, gaining a great deal of maturity. Thus, in *Spirited Away*, rebellion is expected. The idea of rebellion is similarly troubled in Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy*. Mariette joins a convent, intending to serve God and the patriarchy, going against Woolf's philosophy. But the nuns have their own expectation of Mariette: to shake up their structured, monotonous lives. Though Mariette tries her best to be the "angel in the house" or rather the "angel in the convent" she is labeled a rebel, unwillingly pushed into adulthood. Thus, rebellion is not a step towards freedom, but the act that thrusts teens into adulthood and women into masculine roles, conforming them to the very society they protest.

Meghan Heneghan

". . . an' the Fall was our cure":
Apocalypse as a New Beginning in *Cloud Atlas*

The perpetual tendency in the race of man to increase beyond the means of subsistence is one of the general laws of nature which we have no reason to expect will change.
- Thomas Malthus

Set on an island of post-apocalyptic Hawaii, the events of David Mitchell's novella "Sloosha's Crossin' An' Ev'rythin' After" take place in the life of tribesman Zachry, living within a society reduced to pre-civilization primitivism. Plagued by reduced life expectancy and widespread disease, these Valleysmen embody the fate that scholar Thomas Malthus described in his *Essay on the Principle of Population*—a society self-defeated by overexploiting its resources. However, tinges of optimism within Mitchell's work and predictions of recovery within Malthus's research offer a contending outlook on the fate of this rudimentary society. By examining the rise and fall of civilization from an anthropological standpoint, I consider whether primitive life after "the Fall" may suggest an endpoint in a Malthusian limited race, or the beginning of a cycle of regeneration in society.

Hannah Kim

It Is Written:
Fatalism in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

Where we went wrong was getting on a boat. We can move, of course, change direction, rattle about, but our movement is contained within a larger one that carries us along as inexorably as the wind and current . . .
- Guildenstern, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are destined to die in Stoppard's postmodernist play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Their helpless struggle to make sense of their role remains unresolved by their inevitable and long-expected death. The pair's inexorable fate, and helpless struggles to escape it, raises the question of control within the work. The unfortunate pair is unable to affect the plot through their actions and is instead acted upon by the plot. The plot is not the usual passive product of characters' actions, but a relentless and living organism that kills off characters to serve an aesthetic purpose. This leads to the conclusion that, ultimately, control and power lie in the hands of the

storyline—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern must die because they are "marked for death" by the written text of the play. Essentially, there is a higher power, the plot, which transcends the characters to decide their fates. If this then is the case, is there any use in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggling to escape their fate? And why does the plot "mark" them for death? By utilizing Hooti and Shooshtarian's postmodernist reading of this play, I will explore the fatalistic implications of the work as well the indifferent yet ruthless power of the plot.

Austin Mora

Call Me the Author:
California and the Golden Mythology of Joan Didion

Much in *Run, River* . . . has to do with the ways California was or is "changing," the detailing of which permeates the novel with a tenacious (and, as I see it now, pernicious) mood of nostalgia.
- Joan Didion, *Where I Was From*

Run, River delves into what is perhaps most essential to Joan Didion's career as a writer. After all, it is not often that an author returns to her novel forty years after its publication to openly criticize herself. Didion wrote the first half of *Run, River* while she was working at *Vogue* in New York City, still young and very much a product of California mythology herself, yearning for the "way the rivers crested and the way the tule fogs obscured the levees and the way the fallen camellias turned the sidewalks brown and slick during the Christmas rains." *Run, River* was written as a paean to those Californian rivers as Didion had seen them during her youth. Much of Didion's critique of her first novel in *Where I Was From* relates to the emotion (as she grants it, "a tenacious nostalgia") with which she had written the novel. She is perhaps right in describing her own sentiment in writing the novel, as her protagonist Lily certainly portrays a great deal of nostalgic impotence, a woman yearning always for the years when things had been simple. *Run, River*, however, is a novel that self-consciously reveals the dangers of Lily's perpetual yearning for the past. If a person lingers always in nostalgia, what does her existence in the present matter?

Riley Pietsch

Prisoner in Charge: Panopticism in Doubt

Aren't you ashamed to show yourself after becoming so ugly?
- The Prince, "The Thieving Dove"

Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism, found in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, addresses the balance of power between an observing authority and its subjects of surveillance. Likewise, in John Patrick Shanley's film *Doubt*, Sister Aloysius Beauvier (played by Meryl Streep) is the clear authority over a traditional Catholic school in the Bronx. Resisting the school's gradual shift into a more modern religious era, Streep is trapped by her faith, an archaic system of morality and behavior by the standards of the increasingly contemporary society. I will argue that though she acts as the overseer in control of her own panoptic world, Streep is in fact more imprisoned by her role as the defender of her faith than she is empowered. This will aim to show that *Doubt*, in light of Foucault's theory, raises questions about the quality of security one can find in a theistic religion.

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