ON THE ROAD

13th ANNUAL THEMATIC OPTION RESEARCH CONFERENCE
APRIL 13 AND 14, 2010

Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life.
– Jack Kerouac

If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.
– Lewis Carroll

Not all those who wander are lost.
– J. R. R. Tolkien

The safest road to hell is the gradual one - the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.
– C. S. Lewis

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Everywhere is walking distance if you have the time.
– Steven Wright

Having a great intellect is no path to being happy.
– Stephen Fry

To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence.
– Joseph Conrad

The road to success is always under construction.
– Lily Tomlin

A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it.
– Jean de La Fontaine

To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.
– Chinese proverb

I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road.
– Stephen Hawking

The road to truth is long, and lined the entire way with annoying bastards.
– Alexander Jablokov

The stable wears out a horse more than the road.
– French proverb

More than any other time in human history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.
– Woody Allen

Background and Purpose

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of USC College of Letters, Arts & 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.

This 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 "On the Road" to be presented as part of a panel. Topics are reflective of students' various disciplines and interests and focus on issues ranging from politics to popular culture. Some possibilities include departure and arrival, obstacles, the quest, travel, immigration/emigration, runaways, permanence, escape, self-discovery, life and death, home, marginalization and liminal spaces, borders and borderlands, progress, technology, past and future, the chase, tripping, signposts and milestones, transcendence, the path to success, innerspace, transients and transience, gates, tolls, or freewill and fate . . . Each panel is composed of five to six students, with a faculty member or Thematic Option writing instructor serving as the panel's chair and respondent. A question and answer session follows the presentation of papers in each panel.

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

Sara Balog
Chris Berry
Matthew Fagre
Erin Greene
Stephen Lamb
Morgan Leighton
Kevin Maloney
Emma McDonnell
Jack Peace
Lauren Perez
Christina Pushaw
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Tyler Vestal
Lauren Weinzimmer

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

schedule *and* table of contents

Tuesday, April 13 - University Club

4:00 p.m. **You Don't Die Enough to Cry**
Keynote Address by Professor James Kincaid, Department of English, USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Banquet Room

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

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

Wednesday, April 14 - University Club

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

Onward and Upward

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd, School of Philosophy
Tuesday, April 13
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room A

Maren Caldwell

Anarchy as the Next Big Trend: The Delusion of Counterculture in *Fight Club*

Fight Club's iconic überman Tyler Durden is an unapologetic anarchist and perhaps the one individual in the world completely resistant to society's influences. The only problem is that he doesn't actually exist. It also doesn't help that in David Fincher's film adaptation this counterculture hero is played by Brad Pitt, arguably the biggest male celebrity of the 1990s. So much for defying consumerist culture. Still, Tyler serves his purpose in Chuck Palahniuk's novel as he guides the narrator and many other exasperated corporate drones toward subversive violence and anarchy. Seeking an escape from the society that has stripped them of individuality, these men end up creating a new popular movement. Fight clubs and Project Mayhem may begin as extreme forms of rebellion, but as they are absorbed into the community they become as mainstream as, for instance, IKEA. A cycle of popular conformity is proven to be inevitable. Palahniuk's attempted critique of contemporary society has become an installation of popular culture - with its own cult following, movie adaptation, and "copycat" groups proliferating. What remains of genuine counterculture is only the desire to rebel, and a discerning, critical examination of the culture we so eagerly consume.

Emma Clarke

From Riots to Admiration: The Evolution of Popular Reactions to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

The first performance of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in 1921 caused such a strong reaction amongst the theatergoers that a riot broke out and the author had to flee for his safety. Not five years later, the play was being performed around the world to appreciative audiences and critical acclaim, and Pirandello is now considered to be one of the twentieth century's most influential playwrights. This paper sets out to discover the causes behind the vast range of reactions to the play and to ascertain how innovative and influential Pirandello's work really was. By analyzing the history of theater, both in the years leading up to the play's writing and in the years during and immediately following its early performances, the environment in which *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was written and produced becomes illuminated. Modern analysis of Pirandello's works and of the works influenced by him will help to determine his lasting legacy, while commentary on the work of Pirandello's contemporaries will show the extent of his innovation.

Kolleen Lee

Language: The Weight of History and Culture Traversing the Lines of Continents

A person's language carries the weight of their culture: idioms, expressions, and even strokes of the pen relay information from a history that could span thousands of years. Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* reveals an inevitability that words, phrases, writing, and many other aspects of language can become lost and forgotten in the forming of a new, hybrid culture. This shift is revealed most starkly by observing intergenerational shifts within immigrant communities. Sense of identity changes and cornerstones of culture

may be blurred in little more than a single generation. Of course, this is hardly limited to Asian immigration; this is a central and common consequence of any immigrant traversing the lines of the map, rowing against the hardships pushing them back onto the shores of their once-called home. Starting a new life in America is difficult for many and there is never a guarantee for success. However, even if few names are remembered at the end of a family's history, perhaps it is the language of conveyance and the stories that are passed down that solidifies their place in the future.

Gabby Sharaga

The Never-ending Road: (Backward) Progression in *Lord of the Flies*

My paper explores William Golding's vision of humanity and progress in *Lord of the Flies*. Removed from society, Golding's stranded boys must rely upon the leadership of Ralph, the voice of reason stressing survival over play. Ralph demonstrates Freud's notion of the "super-ego", which ties in with Lee Edelman's "reproductive futurism" or sacrifice today for progress tomorrow. But even Ralph, who exhibits the most potential to guide the boys toward moral progress, is corrupted by the boys' inherent savagery. Similarly, the naval officer, who as rescuer of the boys in his civilized official uniform and trim cruiser, is revealed to be just as destructive as the boys, but on a much larger scale. Written in the wake of World War II, *Lord of the Flies* indicates that the hope and vision of progress that guides our actions is instead leading mankind toward devolution.

Alexa Sieracki

The Inverse Underground Railroad: A Journey From Freedom To Slavery

"Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting.
That disturbed me . . . how easily we seemed to acclimatize." - Dana, *Kindred*

Octavia Butler, the first African American science fiction writer, reinvented the slave narrative for the modern audience. In *Kindred*, the protagonist Dana spontaneously time travels from the post-Civil Rights era of 1976 to the slave plantation of her ancestors in the early 1800s. This unconventional juxtaposition of past and present has led many critics to credit Butler with revitalizing the slave narrative form, however, I incorporate the views of literary critics Sarah Wood and Sarah Schiff to assert that by intertwining science fiction with historical context, Butler creates a genre entirely of her own. As a comparative lens, I analyze Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in which the term "kindred" appears recurrently throughout the text, suggesting that this particular slave narrative may have served as Butler's inspiration or model for *Kindred*. This term stresses how individually, Dana must connect with her ancestral roots in order to establish a personal identity, and collectively, how humanity must acknowledge the past in order to form a global identity, a vital component of human progress. Dana's journey from a modern world in the grip of apartheid, to a past fueled by the same racial divisions, suggests that perhaps the present is not so different from the past when human nature remains the same.

What's the Damage?

Moderated by Josie Sigler, Department of English
Tuesday, April 13
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room B

Stephanie Ashley

"I've Gone Looking for that Feeling Everywhere": Ecstasy, Violence, and Christianity in Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*

Pain and pleasure are usually thought of as opposites. Normally, people attempt to maximize the pleasure in their lives and reduce pain to a bare minimum. For Fuckhead (F.H.), a heroin addict from Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*, this is not the case. F.H.'s drug-induced quest leads him to find both ecstasy and situations of pain and often violence, from a car crash while hitchhiking, to driving his friend who has been shot to the hospital, to punching his pregnant girlfriend in the stomach. Such erratic and lewd behavior does not pigeonhole F.H. as a base loser, however. Instead, through Denis Johnson's protagonist we witness a grotesque vision of America after the Vietnam War, and as such, both the author and his character are searching throughout *Jesus' Son* for a form of ecstatic, holy bliss. The idea that what we consider holy or sacred is closely related to violence is broached by critic René Girard in his book, *Violence and the Sacred*, and the connections between such conflicting ideas and emotions in F.H.'s experiences will be explored in this panel presentation.

Gary Goldman

"Don't Remember [My] Name, But I Remember My Real Mommy": The Formation of Self in Henry Selick's *Coraline*

This paper explores how, on the road towards maturity and adulthood, children project the worst of their own personality onto their parents. While teenagers often blame their mothers and fathers for everything, it is often harder to consider that they might be the ones who are flawed and mistaken. In *Coraline*, the main protagonist invents a parallel universe in which her "other mother" is a monstrous and possessive villain; however, this is only a fulfillment of her own desire to be the center of attention. I will prove that by killing the "other mother" at the end of the film, Coraline defeats an aspect of her own personality. By drawing elements from Freud's Oedipus and Electra Complexes, as well as Kristeva's principle of abjection, I will demonstrate that a second reading of *Coraline* might suggest that the destruction of the maternal is essential in the formation of her identity.

Samantha Gross

Geeks and Norms: The Lingo of an Alternate Reality

Carny cant is a fluid language found in carnivals, circuses and sideshows across the country, and understanding it is the key to entering the insular world of the carnival. Performers use the cant to keep their lives on the back lot separate from the "norms" in the tents. This patchwork language defies classification in dictionaries, lists, and explanations because it has no use as a dead and stagnant language. If carny cant is to keep secrets, it must maintain its mystery by constantly changing. Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* is the story of a family that is itself also a carnival. The Binewski family carnival has many secrets, from their intentional experimentation with birth defects to make their children sideshow acts, to Crystal Lil's former job as the

"geek," biting the heads off live chickens. In *Geek Love*, carny cant separates the bizarre Binewski family from the norms, allowing them to keep their secrets and pity everyone who is unfortunate enough to be normal.

Christopher Hrvoj

The Path to Freakdom: Religious Self-Mutilation and Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*

"How soon would they take her feet off? When would they take her hands? ...Each time they clean[ed] a little more away, even a little toe . . . [she felt] what a weight of rot it was for [her]." - Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*

"If your eye is your downfall, tear it out!"
- Mark 9: 47-48

From Opus Dei's practice of mortification to Pope John Paul II's endorsement of the philosophy of "salvation achieved through . . . suffering," the Abrahamic tradition has long promoted a theme of 'mild' religious self-mutilation echoed in Jewish circumcision, and passages such as Mark 9 and Matthew 6 of the Bible. Yet it is doubtful that very many stringent followers of the Abrahamic tradition would find much of themselves echoed in the cult-like religion 'Arturism,' of Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*, a fictional novel centered on the bizarre Binewski family of freaks and the philosophy of apotheosis by self-mutilation developed and lorded over by one of its members—the limbless fish-and-flipper-boy, Arty. In fact, despite the similarities between modern religious and socially-ordained practices of self-mutilation and lobotomy and those described as an integral part of Arturism, Abrahamic readers of the cult would almost certainly profess an enormous discord between the sorts of spiritual salvation offered by each. In this analysis, I will draw upon the history of both carnivals and organizations such as Opus Dei to defend the claim that these professed disparities are reflective of an even greater discord between the philosophies of body and mind held by the carnivalesque and those endorsed by established religion—a discord that ultimately suggests a delineation between their two separate motives for existence so extreme that even similar means of existence can only fail to overcome it.

Cody Nelson

Manifest Destiny: The Frontier Myth and the Reality of the American West in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*

"You wouldn't think that a man would run plumb
out of country out here, would ye?" - Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

As a result of the nature of its foundation, America is unique in world history; American history is constantly focused at the frontier, concentrated on expansion. The majority of 17th and 18th century Americans, like Frederick Jackson Turner in his "Frontier Thesis," viewed Westward expansion as a benevolent, civilizing process, perhaps even a deeply spiritual process, which contributed to the prosperity of the United States. This interpretation of the American West is compounded by the genre of the Western and the moralizing force of the Western vigilante. It is this concept that Cormac McCarthy takes issue with in *Blood Meridian*. *Blood Meridian* is not a Western, but an anti-Western, which undermines our idyllic impression of the American frontier. Mark A. Eaton writes, "*Blood Meridian* demands to be read as a counter-narrative to the overly sanitized rhetoric of Manifest Destiny." Through descriptions of violence, immorality, and godlessness, McCarthy takes aim directly at Manifest Destiny and Turner's "Frontier Thesis," and brings into question the nature of the frontier and the philosophy behind American expansionism.

You Win Some, You Lose Some

Moderated by Professor Eleanor Accampo, Department of History
Tuesday, April 13
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Pub

Jasneet Aulakh

Identity Crisis: Japan's Search for its Proper Place as Exhibited Through *Seven Samurai*

Akira Kurosawa directed *Seven Samurai* (1954), a Japanese film about a defenseless village that hires samurai to fight off looting bandits, in a time when Japan was struggling with its national identity. Japanese-American relations were improving after the occupation as Japan was finally beginning to be seen as an equal. Debts had been paid and Japan was developing a new identity that Americans approved of, largely because this new identity was one that was becoming increasingly pro-American. Thus it is no surprise that *Seven Samurai*'s portrayal of the Japanese as helpless, stupid, cowardly, and foolish made Kurosawa more successful in America than in his homeland Japan. Using John Dower's theory that Japan was seeking to find its "proper place" in the new world order, I will argue that Kurosawa did not make *Seven Samurai* in spite of the Japanese, but was instead hoping to use his film to awaken Japan to realize the identity crisis and low morale from which it suffered.

Gordon Grafft

"I Drink Your Milkshake": *There Will Be Blood* and the Dark Side of the American Dream

For as long as there has been America, there has been the American dream: anyone can get rich in the land of opportunity with some hard work. Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) examines the horrific downside to this dream as it follows the journey of Daniel Plainview from an average "oil-man" into a tycoon who dominates the entire industry. While Plainview himself achieves great success, this success comes with the destruction of the religious backbone of his community. Plainview's capitalistic "I drink your milkshake" (a phrase used during the film to discuss oil drainage that also applies to Plainview's ruthless selfishness) approach reveals the downside of a capitalist economy as he tricks, abandons, and beats to a pulp those around him in order to obtain wealth and power. While acknowledging the potential for success within the American dream, *There Will Be Blood* discusses the oft-overlooked downfalls of such a dream that have led the majority of American wealth to be held by a small minority of the population.

Angela Ross

On the Untold Road to Success: Celebrity and Selling Out in *Barton Fink*

Individual aspirations in the entertainment industry do not always fulfill those of others in the business or of society as a whole. In *Barton Fink*, the Coen Brothers expose the myths and truths behind one of the most profitable industries and the consequences of abandoning personal dreams for the path to financial stability and celebrity. Building upon Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's ideas of the culture industry and how an integral element of art is forfeited when art is mass-produced, I argue that Barton's ultimate failure on the road to "success" is the result of actually maintaining his integrity as an artist. He constructs a script that does not simply feed the public the same story it wants to hear but touches on some greater truths about humanity.

Though fame and celebrity are glorified in today's culture, the means of attaining them are rarely discussed. In showing us Barton's endeavors in Hollywood, the film accentuates how the actual road can be quite devastating, degrading, and even dangerous.

Margot Vitale

Freedom of the Road in *The Great Gatsby*: Access to Social Mobility

In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses the road as a symbol of the possibility of social mobility in that it provides physical mobility throughout the separate worlds of class in East and West Egg. Although the road falsely advertises the simplicity of moving from one place to another with the allure of expensive cars and trips to Gatsby's lavish parties, as Marx explains, social mobility cannot happen so peacefully. The ultimate failure of Jay Gatsby's trip into high society proves both Fitzgerald's and Marx's point that the American Dream cannot happen as smoothly as a car can travel on the road.

Means to an End

Moderated by Professor Ed McCann, School of Philosophy
Tuesday, April 13
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Jordyn Jacobs

Fuckhead and Mitchell Stephens: The Desire to Escape Reality

Canadian politician and social critic Douglas H. Everett once stated, "There are some people who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality; and then there are those who turn one into the other." Truth then seems to be something that can be ignored by average, everyday people, but what about those deviants who live a daily haze caused by drugs and addiction and live lives of utter sadness, loneliness, and deprivation? The characters Fuckhead, in Dennis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*, and Mitchell Stephens, in Russell Banks' *The Sweet Hereafter*, both travel down this perilous path, acknowledging their immediate realities but running swiftly and widely away from them. Fuckhead goes on an almost romanticized visionary quest, his addiction allowing him to live in an alternate world. Mitchell Stephens experiences an almost Freudian undoing of his reality, as his daughter's addiction and its perils destroy his rational mind. Both characters function as apertures through which we can see how addiction is necessary for them in order to reconstruct circumstance and to provide comfort in an otherwise terrible and melancholic reality. When the unbearable nature of that reality becomes illuminated, it is clear the drugs are not the problem, but rather a symptom of a far greater problem that is waiting to be understood and resolved. In addition, I will be incorporating Freud's essay "On Mourning and Melancholia" in my analysis of both characters.

Julia Mangione

The Will to Freedom: Shaping a Path in a Genomed World

"Why fight the 'natural' (oh, weaselly word!) order of things? . . . Is this the doom written within our nature?"
- David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, a novel of interwoven narratives spanning from 1850 to 2500, creates tension between the forces of determinism and free will. Nietzsche's theories drive Mitchell's views on many conflicts in the novel; however, surprisingly, Mitchell distinctly avoids addressing the question of fate. Employing Nietzsche's lens, I deconstruct the narrative of Mitchell's protagonist Sonmi-451, a genomed "fabricant" enslaved in a futuristic dystopian Korea, to uncover Mitchell's conception of compatibilism between fate and free will. Spread across centuries and continents, Mitchell's protagonists refuse to accept the "'natural' order of things" and fight to shape their own paths against established power structures. But can they will themselves to freedom? At first glance, the fates of Mitchell's interlocking characters seem inescapably determined. Yet the sheer will of each of the protagonists inspires in his readers a tantalizing hope that free will matters, and that these characters can ultimately determine their own paths.

Tye Diaz Masters

The Forage for Self Discovery

In Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, Christopher McCandless abandons the customary indulgent, consumerist, and unremitting American lifestyle in exchange for a penniless, precarious, and solitary trek across the American West in search for true joy and enlightenment. To McCandless the wild offers an escape from twentieth century society, freeing individuals from the consumerism and conformity and the societal pressures that it imposes upon its citizens. McCandless does not desire to be recognized through a prestigious degree; rather he pursues a higher level of self-empowerment and transcendentalist spirituality through experiencing authentic and natural humanity. McCandless' pursuit motivates him to abandon his family, companionship, and comfort to forage for personal self-awakening. Although McCandless' aspirations and methods may appear as arrogant, selfish, and recklessly idealistic in light of his death, this criticism does not diminish his pursuit of self-growth and devoted appreciation of an environment from which people are alienated. McCandless pursued his dreams with an unwavering conviction and admirably lost his life searching for wisdom.

Jamie Tunkel

On One Road: Sifting Through the Sedentary Journey of Bernardo Soares

"I've never done anything but dream. This, and this alone, has been the meaning of my life." - *The Book of Disquiet*, Fernando Pessoa

In Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*, Bernardo Soares is on one road. On the Rua dos Douradores, Soares sleeps, eats, and works; he hardly ever travels and expresses little desire to do so, since for him travel is a useless endeavor. Instead, Soares travels the expanses of his own soul, mind, and heart, constantly daydreaming, fantasizing, and thinking about his existence and his sensations. Soares' sedentary, internal, mental journey appears to provide his life with much meaning; in his imagination, he can go anywhere and be anything he pleases. Despite Soares' supposed enjoyment of his insulated experience, he occasionally laments the emptiness of living only in his dreams. Through the application of Freud's theories on daydreaming and creative writing, I will examine Soares' journey of self-discovery, and explore the notions of happiness, fulfillment, and daydreaming, considering the question of whether Soares can find meaning and experience self-discovery through his secluded, imagined, inward journey.

Aditi Yokota-Joshi

Seclusion of an Artist: The Necessity of Isolation in Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound*

In Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound*, Nathan Zuckerman writes to expose the vices of his Jewish community. In doing so, he is outcast from his community and begins a journey that could be called the antithesis of being "on the road." He comes across a dichotomy between being able to observe society and understand it: In observing society, an artist is isolated from it, looking objectively from the outside. However, to understand a culture an artist must be immersed, an integral part of it. This discrepancy parallels theories about postmodern art. Notions behind pop art suggest that an artist must be deeply connected with their community and culture to truly analyze it, while an art brut perspective would propose that raw, real art comes from minds untainted by external influences. By showing how Zuckerman grapples with this contradiction we can conclude, as Roth does, that there is a crossroad in the journey to artistic achievement in which a true artist will inevitably forgo his roots in order to analyze them without bias.

Fake IDs

Moderated by Jennifer Barager, Department of English
Tuesday, April 13
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room C

Alex Harper

Intercultural Invisibility in *China Men*

In Maxine Hong Kingston's novel, *China Men*, people who are culturally ambiguous or threaten to assimilate into another culture are avoided and demonized by the cultures they are in limbo between. The Chinese-American immigrant population and the transgender population are the most resolutely ambiguous and traveling populations in this novel. The cultures these populations reside between are separated by a chasm of empathy: men and women maintain separate spheres even in marriage; Chinese natives and white Americans are at odds due to racist international politics. The animosity between these pairs of cultures depends on the enforcement of a rigid binary between two sides. Because transcultural individuals--transgenders and immigrants--threaten this binary, the binary populations refuse to acknowledge their existence, and they are forced into invisibility. This invisibility is evident in interpersonal relations between members of the binary cultures and transcultural people, where the transcultural people are ignored or shoehorned into a single category of the binary they defy. However, in the anecdotes, legends, and mythology of the binary cultures, this invisibility falters, and transcultural people are acknowledged, though never directly or completely.

Jordan Koransky

Pessoa, Soares, and the Journey of the Imagination

"We never disembark from ourselves. We never attain another existence unless we other ourselves by actively, vividly imagining who we are." - Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*

Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* details the unique inner life and journey of Bernardo Soares, an assistant bookkeeper in Lisbon. Soares's inner journey is highly imaginative, driven by his dreams, fantasies, and subjective experiences and sensations. This paper will argue that Soares actively creates other inner selves and identities, projecting some aspect of his consciousness onto each of the various people he is. Renouncing the world of empirical facts with his "factless autobiography," Soares generates a personal reality in which he is free to create for himself whatever identities he fancies. His alternate personas occupy different possible worlds. Though Soares is the composite product of various inner selves and identities, he absurdly cannot escape his overarching meta-identity, the ghostly prose artist of the Rua dos Douradores. The paper will also explore how Soares embodies certain aspects of the absurd hero as presented by Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus," arguing for a connection between Sisyphus's "hour of consciousness" and Soares's subjective indwelling.

Jennie Lee

The Roads Both Taken: A Narcissist's Double Identity in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Traditionally the journey of self-realization is viewed as a series of symbolic crossroads through which an individual must forge a singular path, but in Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom Ripley travels two roads by assuming two identities in order to achieve self-realization. Tom epitomizes the classic narcissist defined in Jay Martin's *Who Am I This Time?*, whose fear of being invisible requires him to search for outside recognition. So when his friend Dickie Greenleaf fails to be the mirror in which Tom seeks self-reflection, Tom murders Dickie and takes over his life. Tom assumes a double identity that allows him to both give and receive the exterior perspective he requires for himself; as "Dickie," Tom can observe himself playing the role successfully and gain self-validation and thus circumvent the traditional predicament of the narcissist. Unlike the mythical Narcissus whose death can be read as a result of his realization that identity is not a unified totality, Tom embraces the fact that identity is fluid and resumes his journey of self-fulfillment—even if only to discover that in order to keep his double identity a secret, "two roads" is a solitary path.

Dana Li

Selling Out the Self: The Creation of Alternate Identities in *Lady Oracle*

Postmodern fiction often portrays reality as malleable, and challenges traditional views of self-identity. In Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, Joan Foster cultivates self-hatred due to her obesity, which causes her to feel dissatisfied with her life and leads her to create alternate personas, selling out herself. A series of societal demands—from her mother's dissatisfaction with her daughter's weight to her husband Arthur's expectations of her—induce Joan's identity division, which Atwood uses to illuminate the detrimental toll civilization's standards take on the individual. As Joan travels from childhood outcast to sensational artist, she customizes her actions and personality to fit the stipulations of her community. Examining the text through the lens of postmodern and psychological criticism, I will argue that it is the demands of civilization that drive people to stray from their individuality in order to fit the mold of society, and that in giving us Joan's story, Atwood illustrates how such stifling conventions compel a person to sell out not only art and talent, but her identity as well.

Ingrid Messbauer

Painting vs. Parenting: The Flexibility of the Maternal Role in *The Glass Castle*

In Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*, Rose Mary Walls seems to be an insensitive and irresponsible woman not at all fit for motherhood. However, this apparently obvious claim is called into question when we consider the possibility that motherhood is not tied to an individual, but instead is a set of expectations and responsibilities which can be taken up by any member of the family. This flexibility of the maternal role follows Judith Butler's idea of "performativity," in which identity is formed through action. Using Butler as a lens, this paper will explore the phenomenon of "role reversal" (in which children care for their parents) and our expectations of motherhood, ultimately attempting to determine if it is possible that Rose Mary is a good parent but a bad mother.

Cause and Effect

Moderated by Professor Thomas Habinek, Department of Classics
Tuesday, April 13
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room A

Jarrod Ehrie

Loneliness and the Path to Meaning in *Anagrams*

In Lorrie Moore's *Anagrams*, Benna has three friends, but only one is real. Benna's quest for affection corresponds to the writer and critic C.S. Lewis's two basic love types in *The Four Loves*: need love and gift love. In accordance with this model, Benna parasitically demands devotion from her lovers while satisfying her altruistic impulses through provision for her imaginary dependents. As this system implodes, Benna must ultimately strike out in search of reality, an ill-fated pursuit indeed, for truth proves too much to bear. Fiction is an integral component of the psyche, and without it, the mind is incapable of coping with the disappointment inherent in all human pursuits. Thus it would be best to merely travel, without beginning or end in sight.

Abigail Grabow

"Blood Was Staining the Sand": The Predators and the Hunted in *Lord of the Flies*

Conventional society provides us with rules and codes of conduct to guide the way we live our lives; some of which ensure protection for the weakest members of society. Without a kind of social contract for the boys in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* to enter into with one another, the mentality of the island leaves no safeguard for the weak. Pigs are animals hunted in inhumane ways with spears, and similarly, the animals the boys have become hunt Piggy. Golding seems to be calling our attention to the danger of what we are capable of doing to the weakest members of our community when protective laws are not present. The boys' aggression against the weak on the island begs us to ponder the possible degradation of a world without established protections for our weaker members. Sigmund Freud questions what good society does in overcoming this "human instinct of aggression and self-destruction" in his work *Civilization and Its Discontents*. The boys subscribe to this system of Social Darwinism, but Golding argues that human beings are virulent by nature and thus require road signs to guide them to protect mankind.

Michelle Lim

Kinetosis and Sartre

Nausea, one of Sartre's best known novels, describes one man's experience with an all-encompassing nausea that eludes rational explanation. Nausea is a peculiar ailment in that its etiologies are psychological as much as physical, and incredibly varied at that. Anyone who has experienced motion sickness knows that the characteristic distress in the pit of one's stomach goes beyond mere pain, effecting complete mental distraction. The sweeping nausea which Antoine Roquentin experiences in the novel can be understood as a motion sickness of sorts, a reaction to the physical movement of existence itself. He becomes aware of it in his interactions with external objects and situations, as these things begin to constitute an unfamiliar and hostile landscape through which he must constantly travel. The nausea is linked also then to deep existential angst that distracts him from all else, for with any type of motion sickness it is necessary either to cease the motion—living, in this case—or to seek a cure. Sartre's philosophical essay, "The Humanism of Existentialism" defines this cure in terms of accepting existence and the freedom derived from personal responsibility, and this allows Roquentin to make meaning out of the journey instead of sickness.

Alex Stillman

The God Machine and the Rabbit Hole: The Morality and Politics of *Donnie Darko*

"If God controls time, then all time is pre-decided. . . . Every living thing follows along a set path. And if you could see your path or channel, then you could see into the future, right? Like...that's a form of time travel."
- Richard Kelly, *Donnie Darko*

Richard Kelly's science-fiction/teen-romance film *Donnie Darko* seems critical, almost contemptuous, of the notion of simple, dualistic moral choices (such as good vs. evil, fear vs. love, etc.), and accuses those who emphasize these choices of hypocrisy. However, the film's climax seems to represent a very simple moral choice: Donnie chooses to go back in time and save his girlfriend. Examining the film through the lens of the polarized political climate of the 1980s, the time during which the film takes place, and with reference to Cartesian philosophy, I will explore how Kelly uses the notions of moral choice and free will to frame his film as a political commentary. In the film, Kelly suggests that our path is nebulous, and even questions whether right and wrong truly matter along the way.

Don't Judge Me

Moderated by Dr. Michael Robinson, Department of English
Tuesday, April 7
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room C

Katrina Karl

"You are mine": Possession and the Mother-Child Relationship in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Familial bonds in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* remain deeply affected by the legacy of slavery. As Morrison illustrates through developing the relationship between Sethe, Beloved, and Denver, mothers' "ownership" of and influence over their children are compromised by the warped conception of possession created by slavery. A dangerous confusion between the ownership of people and the ownership of objects ensues when slaves are considered property themselves. In *Beloved*, the distinction between maternal and material possession blurs. Sethe attempts to protect her children and maintain her maternal authority by killing them, an act that is not necessarily justifiable, but understandable considering the threat of slavery to the intrinsically close mother-child bond. This paper explores the extreme effects of possession on the mother-child relationship in *Beloved* in light of historical information, literary analyses of motherhood in the novel, and Judith Butler's "Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence."

Sean McCormick

Internal Racism in Mexican-American Culture: The Sacrifices of Becoming "American"

Wisecracks about Mexicans have permeated American culture so thoroughly since the Mexican-American War of 1848 that people now attribute any number of undesirable attributes to this race. This litany of stereotypes is usually verbalized by non-Mexicans, since presumably few Mexicans would promote such narrow-minded conversation. In fact, works of literature by Mexican-American authors usually seek to counteract stereotypes and also explore the exploitation of Mexican immigrants as dispensable units of labor—employees who can be worked tirelessly without adequate compensation. However, beneath this well-known storyline lurks an underlying, startling internal racism that surfaces occasionally in this literature. Novels such as Tomas Rivera's . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* portray an inherent hierarchy that second- and third-generation Mexican Americans assert over new immigrants—clearly evident when they refer to them as "wetbacks." A USC freshman's mother will not allow her Mexican-American daughter to tan without 75 SPF sunscreen because she is afraid that her daughter will become too dark and look less "American." My essay investigates further this internal racism in Mexican-American culture, through which recent immigrants strive to distance themselves from their Mexican heritage in an effort to achieve a conception of the "American dream."

Natalie A. Millman

"He fills me with horror but I do not hate him": Being Carried Off by the Phantom of the Opera

Published in 1909-1910, Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* has inspired dozens of dramatic interpretations—an unsurprising fact considering the deep emotional pull of the story. At its center is a love-triangle of epic proportions: a beautiful young opera diva must choose the love of a handsome aristocratic viscount or a brilliant but horrifically disfigured polymath. This presentation will invest time in understanding different perspectives of the characters and their subconscious motivations, particularly through analysis of

their desires and fears (through a Freudian lens). Their life journeys (both literal and metaphorical) make them into the people they are: people who are subjected to and who are trying to escape the contemporaneous prejudices and "horrors" that pursue them. Studying the problems of these three characters—Christine, Raoul, and Erik—can teach us something about ourselves, making our own time "on the road" through life a little easier.

Erik Peterson

Promiscuity and Parenthood: An Artist's Struggle in *Californication*

The television series *Californication* illuminates author Hank Moody's tug-of-war between his rather lecherous lifestyle and the responsibilities of parenthood. Abandoning his integrity as an author in exchange for the demands of parenthood, Moody speaks to the fine line artists must walk between the fantasy of their work and harsh reality. Moody's transformation from a loose bachelor author to a serious husband and father illustrates a key concept of the series: that the production of art requires a specific lifestyle, a specific persona through which art can be channeled. Examining Moody through the lens of Freud's theories on sexuality and human consciousness, I challenge *Californication*'s designation of art as separate from true life and claim that true art, art that brings fulfillment and meaning, can only be achieved through a synthesis of all of one's identities.

Jackson Peter Wyche

In Defense of Dexter

Is there such a thing as a "good" serial killer? *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, and its Showtime TV adaptation *Dexter*, have prompted many people to wonder whether or not the serial killer protagonist Dexter Morgan's actions are actually a good thing—he does, after all, only target fellow murderers who have escaped justice. But despite his set of victims, Dexter is still a brutal serial killer who knows he faces execution if apprehended. My question is this: Can Dexter's actions be justified philosophically? Using utilitarianism and objectivism, two drastically different philosophical systems controversial for their morally grey implications, I present a two-pronged defense for Dexter's actions. Drawing primarily on John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and the work of Jeremy Bentham I argue that Dexter's actions bring "the greatest good for the greatest number," and that murder can be justified under utilitarianism if the victim represents a greater threat to society than the murder itself. From Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and her writings on objectivism I conclude that, ironically, Dexter is morally obligated to kill.

His and Hers

Moderated by Professor Philip Ethington, Department of History
Tuesday, April 13
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Banquet Room

Juan Baron

Breaking the Chains of Masculinity

The Fool: Maybe he loves you?
Gelsomina: Me?
The Fool: Why not? He is like dogs. A dog looks at you, wants to talk, and only bark.
- Federico Fellini, *La Strada*

In Federico Fellini's *La Strada*, Zampano, the performing strongman, isolates himself from his troubles and his feelings by traveling constantly. However, being bound to the delicate femininity of his servant Gelsomina forces this masculine recluse down a road that ultimately leads to his acceptance of his own sensibilities. Depth psychologist Erich Neumann argues in his book *The Fear of the Feminine* that masculinity inhibits a sympathetic awareness of others and even oneself, a concept manifested in this film by the sudden compassion of the character when he reluctantly gives in to an intrinsic femininity. This perspective provides insight into the cold insensitive nature of Zampano and the way it drives him to reject the possibility of settling down and emotionally investing himself in others. Not only does this analysis serve to unravel the complexity of Zampano's character but it also allows us to view this neorealist film as a commentary on the aftermath of the idealized masculinity of Mussolini's fascist regime.

Casey Herndon

Like a Snowfield Between Two Lakes: Magical Realism, Naturalism, and the Perception of Death in "The Hunter's Wife"

When death appears in literature, most stories deal with its fallout and the nature of grief. Few question the nature of death itself, whether life and death are two interrelated and dynamic processes instead of distinct and static opposites. Anthony Doerr's short story, "The Hunter's Wife", explores the marriage of life and death in the remote wilderness of contemporary Montana, where nature itself becomes a blank slate for a survivalist hunter and his wife, who bears the supernatural ability to communicate with forces beyond the grave.

The story's protagonist, called only "the hunter," is the archetype of survival. Bloodshed is necessary to survive; the animals he kills must be sacrificed to ensure his own continued existence. Such a perception of sacrifice echoes the theories of René Girard in his book *Violence and the Sacred*. The hunter finds survival to be the sacred outcome of hunting and killing, but he comes to realize it is nothing compared to the supernatural power his wife bestows. She recognizes death as merely another place we all must journey to, and accepts it. Through naturalist metaphors involving winter, particularly the image of hibernation, Doerr illustrates the intriguing notion that "life" and "death" are merely different positions on a sliding scale.

Christopher Organ

Feminism and *Kill Bill*: Revenge Is a Dish Best Served by a Woman

Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* are visually stunning revenge films, tracing the main protagonist, the Bride, as she embarks on a journey to kill Bill and slaughter every member of his Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. In this essay, I will examine the female protagonists in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1 & 2* and how they break conventional properties of female aestheticism and gender roles. Physically active, cunning, and sexualized, the women's personal retribution and vengeance transform them into notoriously skilled agents. These women are not only vigilantes working outside the law, but also vigilantes working against feminist norms. In this way, Tarantino expands traditional notions of vigilantism and femininity, blending the two to create some of the most feared and dangerous women in all of film. Using contemporary feminist film theory, I will argue that instead of casting women as femme fatales or desirable objects, Tarantino's two films empower women, portraying them as individual social agents unrestricted by conventional codes of femininity.

Anu Ramachandra

Man at the Crossroads of Identity: The Paradox of Masculinity in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*

"Is that what a real man looks like?" asks the narrator of *Fight Club*, pointing to an ad for Abercrombie & Fitch. Chuck Palahniuk's novel, as well as its translation into film, answers this question with a resounding "NO." So then what does it mean to be a man? This is a central question of *Fight Club*, which traces the psychological journey of an unnamed protagonist whose search for identity leads him to violence, to anarchy, and eventually back to where he began. The driving force behind the novel is the dichotomy between the desire for masculine autonomy, manifested as Tyler Durden, and obligation to society. Palahniuk's choice of literalizing the narrator's crisis of masculinity through a second personality sheds light on its source: modern society, which both idolizes and demonizes the male instinct. My paper will examine *Fight Club*'s treatment of masculinity from a psychological and evolutionary perspective, and how it fits into the larger issue of self-identification in a consumer-driven, homogenizing world. Are we indeed unique, or are we, as Tyler puts it, "the same decaying organic matter as everything else"?

Alexandra Shokralla

The End of the Line: Motherhood in *The Glass Castle*

In Jeannette Walls' memoir *The Glass Castle*, Rex Walls, the protagonist's father, seems excused for his shortcomings as a father, while Rose Mary, the children's mother, is labeled a despicable mother because she is too juvenile to properly care for them. But is this fair? Women are simply expected to conform to a mold of motherhood, wherein their children are without exception their first priority. Mothers must give up elements of their very identity, and the fact that Rose Mary is unwilling to make such a sacrifice condemns her in our eyes. Motherhood is presented as the ultimate achievement in every woman's life, the end of her journey. Why must Rose Mary Walls cease to attempt to attain any higher status? She is a mother, we say—that is enough.

Just My Archetype

Moderated by Professor Nick Strimple, Thornton School of Music
Tuesday, April 7
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Pub

Shelby Bartholomew

The Housewife, the Circus, and the Danger of Imprisoned Imagination

In *The Circus In Winter*, Cathy Day offers a brief glimpse into the dangers of a world in which the nature of identity and carnival become warped, as both Stella, the "happy housewife," and the circus become prisoners, completely defined by four walls. Pressures to conform to the ideals of the 1950s housewife paralyze the creative identity of Stella, while the former circus quarters where she lives permanently display murals and props of a carnivalesque past. According to Betty Friedan's arguments in *The Feminine Mystique*, this conformity leads Stella down an unending road of discontentment and emptiness, labeled by doctors at the time as the "housewife syndrome." Ironically, this creatively suffocated woman is forced to make her home in the old winter quarters of a former circus—a house that effectively takes the fantastical liberating nature of the circus and confines it. The very building where Stella resides violates the transient nature of carnival, which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is traditionally "hostile to all that was immortalized and completed." Both Stella and the circus have been trapped and suffocated, and in the process, these repressed fantasies create an alternate world of imagination that threatens to topple reality.

Cece Bratton

Domestic Dangers: Entrapment and Gender Roles in *The Others*

In Alejandro Amenabar's *The Others*, Grace traps her children within their home because she cannot face her own horrible crime. Her denial of this crime ensnares her children but Grace's motherhood and her role as a housewife captures her as another prisoner of the home. Susan Kleinberg's exploration of *Woman's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present* proves that society's insistence upon familial and gender roles should be abolished to liberate women from the home. Even though the home is thought of as a safe place, Amenabar's movie clearly shows that danger can be created within these "safe" walls. By examining gender roles and how being a housewife endangers even Grace's well being, this paper will prove that societal conventions about motherhood can be all wrong and dangerous.

Claire Nickerson

Sexual Violence: *Lady Snowblood*, Manga, and Japan

In this presentation I will examine the relationship between sex and violence in Japanese culture through Kazuo Koike and Kazuo Kamimura's manga *Lady Snowblood*. Manga is often perceived as an extremely violent and graphically sexual art form. In many cases—as with *Lady Snowblood*—this is true. However, I argue that *Lady Snowblood* was one of the first manga to bring to the forefront the moral implications of the link between sex and violence. As Frederik Schodt mentions in his book *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Japan did not begin to crack down on sexual violence in manga—and its perceived real-world effects—until the late 1980s, about fifteen years after *Lady Snowblood* was written in 1972. In my paper I

link the moral implications of the sex and violence that the main character, Yuki, is shaped by and employs to the change over time in Japanese sexual culture, ultimately arguing that *Lady Snowblood* was ahead of its time because it depicted sexual violence as dangerous, a view not yet shared by most other manga and not yet reflected in Japanese public policy.

Joshua Waitt

Taking the Hard Road: Redefining the Modern Rebel

Recently, our society has embraced those who rebel against the urge to sell out and who refuse to give in to the rules of "the man." Drawing on Freud's theories in *Civilization and its Discontents*, I attribute this societal trait to the disparity between the laws of our civilization and the super-egos of its people. However, as demonstrated through the character of Hank Moody in *Californication*, a drastic change is beginning to take place, as selling out is now viewed more positively as an unselfish defiance of personal wants. The modern rebel has been redefined as the man who is able to supercede his hedonistic desires and conform to the rules of society in order to protect his immediate community. The impact of this shift cannot be underestimated, as this redefinition of rebellion demonstrates the beginning of modern society's return to a more moral and ethical set of values.

Bailey Wilson

Seeking Truth: How the Reincarnations of Philip Marlowe Have Created an Iconic Postmodern Hero

In the character Philip Marlowe, Raymond Chandler created an iconic American archetype. This is a hero that does not fit the prototypical American hero mold of a rags-to-riches underdog, nor is he immensely wealthy or a war hero. Marlowe's role as a hero stems from the fact that he is honorable, a truth-seeker, a romantic, a historian, and a storyteller. This character archetype has been echoed, imitated, and exists in various cultural, sexual, regional, and class contexts. As such and in the postmodern world, Marlowe takes on many different faces in different mediums, and one of his most recent reincarnations being teenaged television show protagonist, Veronica Mars. Chandler himself writes in his essay, "The Simple Art of Murder," about the importance of this character archetype, and Veronica Mars, a teenager in an affluent fictive setting akin to San Diego, embodies it. She is a loner in world that prides itself on wealth and hides truth behind money and glittering lies. Though only a teenaged girl, it falls on her shoulders to seek the truth behind the façade and rewrite her world's narrative in order to show reality for what it is.

Where Do I Belong?

Moderated by Professor Bruce Smith, Department of English
Tuesday, April 13
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room B

Danielle Marie Ello

Open Ears, Closed Listening Communities: The Importance of Aurality in Shaping Identity

It is easy to take for granted the constant stream of energy that is inescapable by all. Sound is everywhere: the percussion of heartbeat, wind's whistle, your favorite song. Even the deaf feel sound's vibrations. Thus, the existence of listening communities such as concerts, church congregations, and even households leads many to contend that music, and sound in general, have the "power to unite us all." Ironically, these listening communities serve two antithetical purposes: to unite and to divide. As listening communities are built, so are borders. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* demonstrates this: upon his return home, WWII veteran Tayo cannot reconcile himself with his Laguna Pueblo roots. The sounds of war, particularly voices of Japanese soldiers, haunt him, as do voices of dead relatives. His fixation with the past results in a disconnect with his community, creating a border that can only be bridged by re-familiarization with aural Laguna Pueblo culture: singing, storytelling, and sound ritual. "Open Ears" explores the paradoxical nature of sound and its importance in building both individual identity and collective culture. In doing so, "Open Ears" seeks to elucidate that although sound can divide, even the most difficult borders it creates can be overcome.

Billy Hagberg

Odyssey of the Subconscious or Fallacy?: What Jung's "Psychology and Literature" Reveals in *Jesus' Son*

"Every life is in many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves." - Stephen Dedalus, *Ulysses*, James Joyce

From the times before the Pantheon was erected on through the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have told stories of epic travels to return home. Each age and nation has its own emblematic tale of a legendary journey. Homer's *Odyssey* told us of the cunning of Odysseus and the figures and travails he overcame to return his kingdom. If I were to claim that modern America's Odysseus was a heroin addict named Fuckhead willing to rob a hospital to get his fix, would you throw me in rehab with him? Before you did, consider that through his long journey to sobriety, the protagonist meets a Cyclops, an enchanted seductress, and is torn between two evils that seek to destroy him. It is in his documentation of his epic journey that he seems to achieve a happy, normal life. But, what if F. H. was wrongly interpreting the power of his narrative? According to Carl Jung, though "it is a fact that in eclipses of insanity—in dreams, narcotic states, and cases of insanity—there come to surface psychic products or contents that show all the traits of primitive levels of psychic development," it is the representation of these "products or contents" that is "the secret of artistic creation." In my paper, I will argue that it is the representation of F-head's journey, not merely the journey itself that provides us with artistic value.

Ruth Madievsky

Humanizing the Monster

"The crucial ambiguity is whether freaks are less than human, or more so." - N. Katherine Hayles

Behind its flashing lights and cotton-candy façade, the brilliant world of carnival serves as a backdrop for Katherine Dunn's exploration of the fierce dichotomy between "freaks" and "norms," the two categories which separate spectacle

from spectator within her vividly twisted novel, *Geek Love*. Drawing from literary criticism centering on alienation and acceptance, I examine the line which separates the culturally accepted from those who have been culturally Othered. Using the emotional journey of Oly Binewski, albino hunchback dwarf and carnival performer, as my road map, I uncover the humanity behind Oly's corporeal monstrosity. I argue that Oly's external "freakishness" represents a warped manifestation of the fundamental humanity that pulses through her internal psyche. Through careful examination of Oly's painfully one-sided love for her brother Arturo, her stunted experience of motherhood, and her lifelong inferiority complex, I contend that the line between "freaks" and "norms" is not as thick as we have been led to believe. Though Oly began her journey resembling a monster, by the end of this paper, she emerges as fully human.

Scarlett Royston

Have We All Been Bamboozled?: What it Really Means to Be Black

Big lips, jet-black skin, and unintelligible slang: black stereotypes such as these have been perpetuated since the days of chattel slavery from the banks of Africa to the New World. The theatrical process of white actors painting their faces with black makeup and acting out black stereotypical characters, known as blackface minstrelsy, started in the early 19th century and continued until mid 20th century. These acts were supposed to embody what "blackness" really was, but what are the ideas of blackness today? Does blackness even exist in today's American society? It does to Mr. Dunwitty in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, who says that he is entitled to using the word 'nigga' because he is the one "keepin it real" and he is "bout it bout it." With the help of critics Ray Black, Bill Brown, and USC's own Shana Redmond, I argue that Spike Lee uses the film *Bamboozled* to challenge what "blackness" really is and who is truly entitled to it if it does exist. Lee not only questions Pierre Delacroix's path to success on the back of "The New Millennium Minstrel Show" and his contempt of his black heritage, but groups such as the Mau Maus who claim authentic blackness but fall into the same mainstream stereotypes as those framed as sell outs. This film makes us wonder have we all been duped, hoodwinked, bamboozled?

Kelsey Taylor

A Hitchhiker's Guide to Transcendence: Christopher McCandless and Nature Spirituality

"I prefer the saddle to the streetcar and star-sprinkled sky to a roof, the obscure and difficult trail, leading into the unknown, to any paved highway, and the deep peace of the wild to the discontent bred by cities. Do you blame me then for staying here, where I feel that I belong and am one with the world around me? It is true that I miss intelligent companionship, but there are so few with whom I can share the things that mean so much to me that I have learned to contain myself. It is enough that I am surrounded by beauty . . ." - Excerpt from the last letter ever received from Everett Ruess to his brother Waldo, dated November 11, 1934

After graduating with honors from Emory University, Christopher McCandless dropped out of sight. He changed his name, donated his savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, and hit the road. Influenced by such writers as Jack London and Thoreau, McCandless hitchhiked across the country, exploring the ragged margins of society in search of a raw, transcendent experience. His family had no idea what had become of him until April of 1992, when moose hunters discovered his decomposing body in the wilderness of Alaska. McCandless's story is controversial. Some admire the boy for his courage, while others argue that he was selfish for abandoning his family, or a reckless "wacko" whose arrogance and stupidity caused his demise. McCandless from Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, however, was not crazy, but rather was in touch with his very human desire to connect with the wilderness. By adopting a nomadic lifestyle that ended in Alaska's wilderness, McCandless discovered beauty and an ecocentric ethical system. Understanding how McCandless viewed the world, it is difficult to classify him as crazy or coldhearted. Rather, he was in touch with a part of his humanity from which many in urban environments are alienated.

Either/Or

Moderated by Professor Natania Meeker, Departments of French and Italian and Comparative Literature
Wednesday, April 14
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room A

Nathan Berger

Where Would the Dust Witch Fall in the Valley?

"Her cold wax hand brushed . . . a ledge within the coffin. Her eyes did not see; they were sewn shut with laced black-widow web, dark threads." - Ray Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

In Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, no character elicits a greater primordial fright than the Dust Witch, an unplaceable figure with both human and mechanical characteristics who taps into the deepest human sense of fear and revulsion. Decades after Bradbury created the Dust Witch, using arresting language to describe her in the most repulsive of ways, Japanese roboticist Masahito Mori expanded Sigmund Freud's theory of the Unheimliche, or uncanny, to explain why people have an intrinsic aversion to imperfect copies of human figures. The Uncanny Valley is formed from a graph of favorability versus likeness, which dips to extreme distaste as figures gain human characteristics imperfectly. Diverse hypotheses justify the existence of the Uncanny Valley, but their common thread relies on the same relation with death that Bradbury explores with the Dust Witch. By describing the Dust Witch as he does, Bradbury paints a monster that inherently repulses people, and he posits his own theory of the best weapon to defeat one's greatest fears: laughter.

Dustin Byer

Time Rules: Determinism in *Lost*

"The universe has a way of . . . course correcting." - Eloise Hawking of *Lost*

Rooted deeply in philosophy and particularly dwelling on the relationship between fate and free will, the television series *Lost* propels its characters through time on a mysterious island in the South Pacific. *Lost* falls under the time subgenre of science fiction, which, as a vehicle, frequently explores the idea of determinism. Two prominent approaches to determinism exist: first, Compatibilism argues that free will and determinism operate simultaneously, and second, Incompatibilism argues that they are mutually exclusive and create a logical contradiction. By using these perspectives as lenses for examining character journeys in *Lost*, I evaluate the legitimacy of each viewpoint in the context of these special cases. Primarily, I assess the validity of these approaches with respect to the character Desmond Hume, who does not adhere to the time rules that bind other characters. Notably sharing a surname with the classic Compatibilist David Hume, Desmond evokes interest because rather than passively experiencing the chronological passing of time, he actively engages his temporally non-linear path through it, thereby challenging common notions of causality and fate.

Montana Harrington

On the Road Again: The Child's Role in Pedophilic Behavior in Nabokov's *Lolita*

The road is perceived as a wide-open space, home to an endless amount of strange characters and frightful dangers. Complementary, the car provides just enough safety to be able to travel such dangerous roads while

still allowing for an exhilarating experience. In Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, the title character parallels the road, whereas Humbert Humbert is essentially identical to his blue sedan, the beloved Melmouth. At first glance the car, just like Humbert, seems to be in the dominant position in its relationship with the road, although in reality it is really the road, or Lolita, that calls the shots. Similarly, the child, in our society, is actually the one who controls and ultimately determines the actions of the pedophile, not the pedophile himself. Theory from James Kincaid, an authority on child sexualization; Deborah Paes de Barros, a scholar on the influence of the road; and Christine Sanderson, an expert on pedophilia and child sexual abuse, is put into dialogue to examine how this symbiotic relationship works and how we, as a culture, have allowed it to transpire.

Emily Hou

The Unexpected but Not Undesirable Double Relationship in *Strangers on a Train*

Urban travel often puts people in uncomfortably close proximity. Buses, trains, and airplanes diminish our physical distance from one another and sometimes, as in the case of Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, the result of this "criss-crossing" of lives outlasts the length of the journey. After a seemingly random run-in between Guy Haines and Bruno Anthony, the latter sets into motion the binding deal of a mutually beneficial exchange of murders and the viewer realizes that these men are to be seen as doubles to one another. Hitchcock's mirroring of doubles complicates Otto Rank's traditional theory, which states that the "consciousness of guilt . . . place[d] on a double" is a "detached personification of instincts and desires." With the unavoidable congestion of modern transportation, this psychological separation is rendered impossible as the attachment between Haines and Anthony only increases, redefining the contemporary definition of the double.

Sue Anna Yeh

Traveling Backwards: Nostalgia in *Nausea*

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* and Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* both reject nostalgia because it comes at the expense of acknowledging the present. In *Nausea*, it is Roquentin's love of adventure that ultimately leads to his nostalgia, because adventures in real life are best appreciated in retrospect. Although people appreciate stories because they give order to seemingly random events, significance can only be established with hindsight. However, the absurdity of nostalgia is that focusing on previous events elevates the past and creates constant dissatisfaction with the present. While his research about the late M. de Rollebon is a crutch that Roquentin leans on to give his own life meaning, it is also a handicap that prevents Roquentin from living in the present. Nietzsche calls nostalgia a "pampering spiritual diet," disparaging the idea that if people work hard enough, they can return to better bygone times. Roquentin also rejects nostalgia; while he struggles to piece Rollebon's mysterious life together, he suddenly understands the impossibility of knowing the past—it is all just conjectures. "The past," he finally concludes, "[does] not exist." Roquentin replaces nostalgia with the nausea of recognizing that he is fully responsible for creating his own essence.

Looks Can Be Revealing

Moderated by Professor Steven Ross, Department of History
Wednesday, April 8
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room B

Max Erwin

Screen Tests: Fellini's *8 1/2* and the Self-Aware Artist

The film *8 1/2*, at its core, is indicative of a hopeless impasse between artist and creation. Fellini, through the character of Guido, is confronted by a series of creative roadblocks that prevent him from making the film he is supposed to make. But the tantamount obstacle to the completion of the film—and to his enjoyment of the entire process—is Fellini's own overbearing insecurity about the film he is making. Constant self-consciousness and self-criticism permeate the film, working as a direct counterpoint to the film's sequences of idealism and fantasy. In more recent times, the omnipresence of self-awareness in art and entertainment is indicative of a major shift in the road to creative output—the acceptance that any product of creativity is fundamentally unoriginal. *8 1/2* predicts this development with its commentary on how it is impossible to make an ideal film without some level of self-awareness and Fellini's oeuvre after the film attest strongly to this artistic compromise.

Alexander B. K. Fullman

For the Kids: Reproductive Futurism in Children's Television Programming and *The Turn of the Screw*

This paper compares the different versions of Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism as found in the children's television show *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. In James's work, we find a highly protective governess who actively works to shield her charges from external threats to the ultimate detriment of the children. In the Disney show, rather than portray parents as guards against threats, the external threats are simply removed, allowing the children to have great degrees of freedom and self-control. The dichotomy between texts written by adults for adults and texts written by adults for children suggests that while we wish to shelter children and prevent their exposure to perceived threats, we try to prevent children from realizing they are being sheltered and limited. Furthermore, our attempts to shelter children to protect them for the future may be detrimental to the children in the present.

Katherine Lewin

The Alienation of the Orgy: An Exploration of the Unsexy in *Eyes Wide Shut*

In a culture as sex-obsessed as ours, it should come as no surprise that audiences flocked to see a film advertised as "the sexiest movie ever." However, Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* was met with huge criticism, mostly because of its total lack of sexiness. Why is this film uncomfortable to watch, but not the other prominent sex-driven media of today, such as programming featured on HBO, sexy advertising, and pornography? Viewers may feel anxiety due to the stark contrast between the sex portrayed in *Eyes Wide Shut* and these more idealized depictions of sex as, well, sexy. In marketing his film, Kubrick clearly knew that sex sells. Moreover, his decision to cast Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman—Hollywood power-couple of the moment—in a dysfunctional marriage was not accidental. *Eyes Wide Shut* was promoted as an "erotic

thriller," but the movie failed to make good on that promise, as even scenes such as those involving an orgy have a sterile, jarring quality. What Kubrick delivered in *Eyes Wide Shut* is not sex, but instead a critique of sex and marriage as they are traditionally represented in film.

Kimberley Mok

Medical Mysteries: The Institutionalized Freak Show?

"When you're born you get a ticket to the freak show.
When you're born in America, you get a front row seat." - George Carlin

Why does human nature possess an inherent fascination with the human form? This obsession with the body manifests in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* as Olympia, one of the "freaks" in the Binewski fabulon, a family of engineered "freaks" via Papa and Mama Binewski's conscious decision to breed their own circus, struggles internally as she grapples with the desire to be seen—her body as a spectacle—while simultaneously yearning for a humanizing aspect in exploiting herself for public entertainment. Laura Mulvey and Rachel Adams discuss this scopophilic pleasure, looking as a source of pleasure and the pleasure in being looked at. Adams delves into how "freak shows" have developed and science's role in creating "the spectacle." I intend to examine the degree to which medical discourse regarding "freaks," abnormalities and the uncanny is meant to be scientific and how much of it is meant to be a spectacle, for pure entertainment purposes to satisfy the duality of fascination and repulsion among the public. I aim to unravel the link between "freak shows" and medical studies and how medical claim serves as a disguise for a modern day "freak show," from scientific exhibits to the mystifying medical mystery programs on television.

Shaked Peleg

The Road to Fame is Paved with Bad Intentions: Celebrity as a Source of Identity in *To Die For*

"You're not anybody in America unless you're on TV
. . . if people are watching, it makes you a better person." - Suzanne Stone, *To Die For*

Gus Van Sant's 1995 film *To Die For* offers a commentary on Americans' obsession with fame and the consequences of a person internalizing that obsession as a source of their identity. The mockumentary form of the film offers us a perspective on the ways that the protagonist, Suzanne Stone, embodies our idealization of celebrities and the use of fame as a moral compass. This skewed perception of reality results in dire consequences for Suzanne and the people around her. The postmodern structure of the film integrates Suzanne's perspective, which reveals her neurotic focus on achieving fame, with the national media's treatment of her story. Though Suzanne may have a predisposition for madness, her interaction with the media indicates the role our society, which exploits celebrity for entertainment value, has in creating the monster that is Suzanne Stone.

Help! Help! I'm Being Repressed!

Moderated by Professor Richard Fox, Department of History
Wednesday, April 8
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Lucia Ledonne

The Haunted House: Hallucinations in *Beloved*

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the main character Sethe makes a decision to murder her child to protect her from slavery. Sethe appears satisfied with her decision, yet her child haunts her for the entire novel, revealing that she still feels guilt about the murder. Sethe also sporadically has recollections of brutal occurrences in slavery, which reassure her she made the right decision. This juxtaposition of burning guilt and painful reassurance shows the suggestion of the novel that no correct decision existed in Sethe's situation. Sethe's journey to mental breakdown indicates that a decision of this magnitude broke her. Her attempt to kill the schoolteacher could suggest that she has made peace with her decision. However, I believe that Paul D's visit at the end reveals that Sethe never made peace with herself, and this discomfort reveals that she actually made the incorrect decision. Therefore, while the novel may seem to say that Sethe had no chance at making a right decision in her position, I believe that her mental state at the end of the novel reveals that she made the incorrect choice, suggesting the deep, irreversible wounds inflicted by filicide.

Sara Meghji

Betrayal on the Road to Freedom

"They were looking for me—already! They shouldn't have known yet that I was gone. They couldn't have known —unless someone told them. . . . Someone had betrayed me." - Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

In her novel *Kindred*, Octavia Butler establishes a tension between the post-Civil Rights Era and the antebellum South by sending the protagonist Dana back in time. As an African-American woman, Dana not only fears immediate persecution and punishment at the hands of volatile white owners, but she also encounters betrayal by her own enslaved peers since slaves' differing roles and owners' differential treatment of slaves created a hierarchy that stimulated jealousy among slaves. In fact, plantation owners often required "driver" slaves to help the overseer maintain discipline in the fields. Moreover, to lessen their own chances of punishment, slaves sometimes jeopardized their peers. Using resources from African-American culture studies as well as the nineteenth-century slave narrative by runaway-slave Jacob Green, this paper illuminates how pressures created by plantation owners encouraged betrayal among slaves and how such acts made the road to freedom even more dangerous.

Aadrita Mukerji

Project Mayhem: Journeying Through *Fight Club*'s Dystopia

Society's obsession with reaching utopia is equaled only by its fascination with dystopia. For every Thomas More, there is an Anthony Burgess; for every *Paradiso*, a *1984*. Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* provides a unique view because it is, as author Tom Moylan says, "proto-dystopic"—it follows the trajectory from a stable, recognizable society to a world fraught with terror and uncertainty. As it does so, the novel's protagonist struggles constantly with his issues of loneliness. He has no name, no job, no purpose—that is, until he meets

Tyler Durden. In essence, *Fight Club*'s chronicle of society's descent into dystopia mirrors its protagonist's descent into madness—the more anarchic the unnamed narrator becomes, the greater Tyler Durden's influence and the stronger Project Mayhem's impact. The question, then, is where that journey begins. Are the protagonist's dystopic desires inherent, internal, and pushing outward, or are they a knee-jerk reaction to years of societal repression? Palahniuk himself is a self-described Romantic. Analysis in light of decadent romanticism, which glorifies self-destruction, reveals a haunting circularity: both individual and society are responsible, and each perpetuates a vicious hatred of the other.

Stephanie Nicolard

"Even in Sensible Shoes She Shuffled as Though Barefoot": The Rocky Road of Adolescence in *The Virigin Suicides*

"Obviously, Doctor," says the youngest. "You've never been a thirteen year-old girl." The youngest Lisbon girl in Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides* believes that she has experienced more pain and angst than an adult. According to Freud, the desires of humanity, ranging from emotional acceptance to material gratification, govern the psyche. How, then, could a teenager know how bad life can become if she hasn't even lived that much of it yet? This paper will explore the prominence of Freud's ideas of instinctual and subconscious desires in adolescence. As these girls are denied the basic pleasures of growing up, Freud's claims in *Civilization and Its Discontents* come into play. Because he writes that the purpose of life is controlled entirely by the "pleasure principle," there would therefore be no sense in existing when one does not benefit in a material or emotional way. The Lisbon girls display Freud's notions as, along their roads of adolescence, they are driven to steer themselves off of their journeys and commit suicide. Eugenides's text, therefore, seems to be a rejection and mocking of Freudian psychology. Is there even any meaning in our lives beyond fleeting and ephemeral pleasure when growing up can sting so much?

Nicole Shoohed

The Feminine Plight: Entrapment and Disillusion in *Jane Eyre* and *The Circus in Winter*

"Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel . . . they need exercise for their faculties . . . they suffer from too rigid a restrain . . . and it is narrow-minded . . . to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex."
- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Isolation. Entrapment. Anger. Madness. These sentiments exhibit a common thread between the confinement of nineteenth-century women, best established by Charlotte Brontë's character Jane Eyre, and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century women in Cathy Day's *The Circus in Winter*. This novel heavily examines the experiences of the neglected wife of the circus owner, Irene, the crowd-pleasing trapeze artist, Jennie Dixianna, and the isolated and disillusioned 1950s housewife, Stella, which all dauntingly reveal the struggles with paralyzing entrapment women have faced throughout the decades. Looking at the roots of nineteenth- century Feminist and Gothic literature and using critical observations of Feminist theorists including Nancy Armstrong, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, I will explore issues surrounding the disquiet and anger felt by Victorian women and its ensuing "madness." This "madness" not only manifests itself in *The Circus in Winter* within the lives of the nineteenth- century characters but also finds parallels in later decades, especially the 1950s. While in *Jane Eyre*, we see Jane's pent up hostility divulge itself through Bertha's mysterious and shocking character better known as the "madwoman in the attic," *The Circus in Winter* demonstrates distinctive manifestations of that same madness as a result of incessant isolation and confinement in relation to the adjacent circus. Just as *Jane Eyre* counteracted images of the "angel of the hearth" ideal in the Victorian Era, these disparate domestic lives void of stimulation or excitement shake the core of archetypical notions of women.

Psych!

Moderated by Professor William Handley, Department of English
Wednesday, April 14
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Pub

Michelle Banh

Suspended in Time

"I want to be both of us at once, feel again the feeling of losing the edges of my self,
of seeing the admixture of future and present . . . ." - Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife*

In Audrey Niffenegger's novel *The Time Traveler's Wife*, protagonist Henry DeTamble experiences "Chrono-Impairment," a condition that causes him to time-travel sporadically and to seemingly coexist in his past, present, and future. Conflicted between the multiple versions of himself that exist throughout his lifetime, Henry seeks release from the tyranny of time. Drawing from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory regarding the return of the repressed, where suppressed elements of the unconscious resurface as physical behavior, I contend that traumatic events from Henry's past subconsciously reappear as his ability to time-travel. In my interpretation, Henry's disjointed movement through time serves as a shield, protecting him as he delays the task of coping with his mother's death. Until Henry can acknowledge his repressed emotions, he will remain a traveler suspended in time, forced to traverse the same road again and again.

Kathryn Henzler

Journey to Adulthood:
A Mother's Influence in *The Glass Castle*

In Jeannette Walls' memoir, *The Glass Castle*, the four Walls children must survive having a bad mother. The theorist Julia Kristeva maintains that in order to form an individual identity, the influence of the mother must be rejected. In accordance with this theory, we see the children, especially Jeannette, initially push away from their bad mother. However, in the successful transition to adulthood, individuation is only part of the equation. In addition—and most importantly—the child must also come to accept their mother's point of view, or rather, to accept that she has her own point of view. This can be tricky. Here, I explore the extent to which the label of "bad mother" serves as a means of creating an "uninhabitable" identity (in Judith Butler's terms), one which then becomes almost impossible to identify with. As the most integral step of the journey, acceptance of or identification with the mother's point of view is then the most difficult to accomplish. But when skipped, the crucial journey is incomplete, and the subject risks staying a child forever.

Isabella C. Hsu

Psychoanalysis and Ned Kelly of the Kelly Gang

Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*, winner of the Booker Prize, is an autobiographical novel about the life of Ned Kelly through his own eyes. Ned Kelly is a folk hero known throughout Australia because of his notoriety as a bushranger, a type of outlaw. As a bushranger, Ned Kelly often committed acts of violence against the authorities trying to capture him. I argue in this essay that Ned Kelly's violent actions as an adult can be explained by Sigmund Freud's theories on criminals and the Oedipus complex. I will show that his

adult behavior as a violent bushranger can be explained by psychoanalyzing the trauma Kelly experienced in his childhood, such as his father's abandoning of the family, his mother's open sexual relationships, and his constant harassment by the police. I argue that Ned Kelly becomes a bushranger because of his mother's influence and the absence of his father. He is forced to literally take on his father's role, for example, by acting as the protector and breadwinner of the family. This role, I ultimately argue, makes him see himself as the romantic and sexual opposite of his mother, which manifests in the jealousy he shows toward his mother's lovers.

Elena Hutchinson

When Sorry Is Not Enough:
How Guilt and Shame Pave the Road from Childhood to Adulthood
in *Atonement* and *The Sound and the Fury*

Sin is a loaded term. It implies the flouting of some divine law, the judgment of a power outside the self. When children "sin" in the context of their societies, their crimes may have long-lasting effects on both their communities and their own development into adults. "When Sorry is Not Enough" incorporates the theories of Sigmund Freud as a lens through which to examine the development of child "sinners" in fiction. Freud argues that the events of childhood have profound effects on the adult persona. How, then, are the adult characters of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* formed by the guilt or shame they experienced as children? This study contrasts the development of children who suffer guilt for their transgressions—Briony Tallis of *Atonement* and Caddy Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*—with those who feel shame due to the actions of others—Lola Quincy and Quentin Compson. The latter seem to seek ways of avoiding the shame of their pasts, while guilty characters succeed in confronting their crimes and moving on. When children stray from the "right" road, they must find a way to bear the burden of their pasts as adults.

Spandana Myneni

The Devil of the Mind Palace:
The Gothic Monster Hannibal Lecter as Guide in *The Silence of the Lambs*

Despite the fact that serial killer Hannibal Lecter in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is incarcerated, trapped in a tiny cell for the rest of his living days, he has an uncanny ability to trap his investigator, Clarice, in his psychology. Dr. Lecter, while a serial killer of the type seen in David Fincher's *Seven*, is also part of a longer cultural tradition—the Gothic monster. Like Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray, there is a kind of queerness to this character, a suggestion of sexual difference in his appreciation of art and culture. Furthermore, like Dorian Gray's library, Dracula's castle and Frankenstein's lab, a house of horror—Buffalo Bill's house—lies at the end of both the physical and psychological journeys in the film. In this paper I study the Gothic monster Lecter through the lens of Sigmund Freud's ideas about the uncanny, showing how the doctor is instrumental in leading Clarice—and the audience—on a road through her memories and pathologies to find answers, despite his being confined to a cell a few feet long.

The Human Condition

Moderated by Dr. Tanya Heflin, Department of English
Wednesday, April 14
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room C

Kabir Kang

Dead Ends and Going Nowhere

The feeling of paralysis can be found amongst all people, often manifested as sentiments of making no progress. Time seems to fly by, while people feel trapped in space. This is the absurd journey: a journey without actual movement. This journey feels as if it is being made only along the chronological plane. My primary source to evidence this claim is *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett. In *Endgame*, the two main characters, Hamm and Clov, are trapped in a house of endless isolation and suffering. For the entire duration of the play, no progress is made—not even Hamm's contemplation of suicide can be fulfilled. The two characters are suspended in a prison in which their indecisions are simply decisions not to act. "The Myth of Sisyphus" adds to this examination by arguing that perhaps it is a curse that is unavoidable. Sisyphus is punished by having to push a rock up a mountain, letting it fall to the base, and repeating this infinitely. This is a clear illustration of attempting to act, but never making progress. While some journeys of a more inspirational nature are reserved to admirable heroes, the absurd journey is a universal story of the sufferer. How will we ever get anywhere if all we think about it that we aren't making any progress?

Austin Keeling

"I'm the Beast": Human Nature and Civilization in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

Where does evil come from? When William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies*, he believed the answer to this question could be found within human beings. He wrote the novel as an exploration of the human capacity for evil, and explicitly admitted in interviews and writing that at the time of the novel's completion he believed that evil stemmed from human nature. However, in this paper I will offer an alternative to the common analysis of *Lord of the Flies* by interpreting the text through the lens of what theorist Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism." With this theoretical angle it can be seen that society, too, is to blame for mankind's tendencies toward evilness, which calls into question our definitions of success. This paper does not aim to completely invalidate the widespread reading of Golding's novel as a meditation on humanity's inherent evil, but rather to provide a counter-example, one which exposes the dual nature of the problem Golding set out to discuss in his novel. Through the use of critical interpretations, historical reactions to the text, and the scholarly theories of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Freud, my paper will attempt to examine the root of evil in civilized life.

Jenna Kovalsky

Step Right Up!: The Art of Drawing People to the Spectacle

"If we understand the mechanisms of the group mind, is it not possible to regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it?" - Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*

Spectacles do not sell themselves. However spectacular they may be, they must be showcased to draw an audience. In the world of the carnival, attracting crowds becomes a matter of survival, for without spectators a show loses its luster and amounts to nothing. In Katherine Dunn's novel *Geek Love*, the Binewski family aims to bring attention to its own Fabulon, for their livelihood depends on it. Just as a product must be marketed to consumers, a carnival must be sold to the public as it travels from town to town. To do this effectively requires a certain skill and understanding of human nature. People have historically been drawn to sensationalism and the carnival barker capitalizes on this reality. The tactful use of hyperbolic diction and imagery has a way of tapping into human weaknesses. In *Geek Love*, the Binewski Fabulon employs such techniques through glittering promotional posters and through the energized rhetoric of their carnival barker, Olympia Binewski. Drawing from the evolution of public relations—a field developed by Sigmund Freud's nephew, propagandist Edward Bernays—and using the critical lens offered by Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on excess and extremes, I contend that selling spectacles requires a manipulative strategy. The key to diverting people from their daily paths and compelling them to take a detour in the carnivalesque lies in the rich understanding and exploitation of the human psyche.

Abby Stork

The Involuntary Path: The Fight Against the Tribe of the Elderly

"Behold your future. . . . you will not apply for membership, but the tribe of the elderly will claim you." - David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

In David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Timothy Cavendish is trapped by a "tribe of the elderly"—beguiled by his brother into imprisonment in a nursing home, the aging Cavendish is astonished to find himself incapable of escape. But it is more than a physical tribe that has claimed Cavendish; throughout the narrative we see how his very psyche is under attack by the forces of aging and memory loss. These forces are forever pushing him toward leaving the ranks of normal society and submitting to the slow-paced and pudding cup-filled world of the elderly. Drawing support from real life memoirs of aging, I intend to show how Mitchell presents Timothy Cavendish as a model warrior in the battle against the "tribe of the elderly," as his actions show us that the surest way to fight back against our impending senectitude is through our attitudes, the only part of us immune to erosion by time and age.

All By Myself

Moderated by Erika Wenstrom, Department of English
Wednesday, April 14
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Room A

Angeli Agrawal

Black, White, and Brown: Multicultural Hybridity in *Tropic of Orange* and Passing

It is part of human nature to idealize, to desire and to fantasize about who we wish we were rather than accepting reality. Although Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* cover different time periods, their timelessness originates from this inherent conflict between identity idealism and realism. Larsen covers the more traditional perception of race—that of Blacks versus Whites in 1920's New York. Yamashita, however, utilizes the more contemporary issues of multicultural tensions that arise in Los Angeles. Despite changing perceptions about race within societies, a singular cultural identification always prevails over the incorporation of multiple identities. Larsen's use of third person limited narrative fits the time period she emulates; its one-sided approach suggests the one-sided nature of society—Black or White. Clare, who tries bridging both worlds, cannot survive and therefore cannot be the narrator of the novel. Yamashita weaves multiple narrations into her text with the same result; although characters like Gabriel identify more strongly with their American upbringing, his fantasies lie in a return to his Mexican heritage. Ultimately, both novels demonstrate the farce of racial equality; until people can accommodate their multiple identities, the borders that divide races—and societies—will always exist.

Marguerite Bowen

Traveling an Endless Road of Perfection in *The Book of Disquiet*

While some people explore the wonders of the natural world in hopes of "finding themselves" in different cultures, Fernando Pessoa enjoys inward journeys through his thoughts with various daydreams as destinations. In *The Book of Disquiet*, he describes new sensations and deep emotions that are authentic to him because only he experiences them in his daydreams. In this way, his daydreaming is similar to Sigmund Freud's notion in "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" that a creative writer fulfills his unsatisfied desires through creating and expressing fantasies. The inward journey he takes is more valuable than actual travel because he discovers many identities, each of which genuinely represents him. In actual travel, on the other hand, he claims that everyone experiences the same sensations- they see the same sites, taste the same foods, and feel the same weather. For this reason, Pessoa challenges conformity with the rest of society. Thus, instead of feeling shame about his daydreams, which Freud believes most people feel, Pessoa celebrates daydreaming as a mode of self-discovery. He achieves individual freedom because he comes to know his true self and does not try to manipulate himself solely so that society will accept him.

Rachel Marshall

Desire for Escape: Wilderness Isolation in *Into the Wild*

In a contemporary society that expects more and more of middle class, young adults, sometimes enough is enough. In Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless is one for whom the triggers united to form not just a desire, but also a physical need for wilderness isolation. Krakauer presents Chris as one of many

adventurers, and Chris saw himself as a follower of writers like Henry David Thoreau. The widespread reader identification with McCandless also demonstrates this "one of many" element of McCandless' story. Desire for wilderness isolation, however, is certainly not universal, and Chris' naïveté reflects how going "into the wild" is often more about the self than the wild. In Chris McCandless, the common fascination with wilderness isolation came together with a dissatisfaction with contemporary society, a hope to test his limitations, and a history of hurtful family relationships to trigger his journey into the harsh reality of the Alaskan wild.

Jay Todd Max

"Right Up Her Ass!": How *Lord of the Flies* Encourages Adolescents' Exposure to Sex

Stranded on an uncivilized island, the boys of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* receive a sex education naturally; when they metaphorically rape a sow and nakedly participate in the "right of domination" of the island, the boys become experienced in the ways of sex. Eventually this education in sex and in sexual domination results in a devolution toward savagery and murder. So what goes wrong? Is it bad they learn about sex while so young, or is the error merely the manner in which the boys behave after their sexual education? Judith Levine, author of *Harmful to Minors: the Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*, defends that age is not the problem—she argues all children should learn about sex sooner. Rather, Levine asserts—and Golding agrees—that the problem occurs when sexual development monopolizes the development of the child and inhibits the child's development in other areas, like intellect and emotions. This idea, in a Freudian perspective, is that sex education at a young age helps adolescents—who already have sexual thoughts—mature along the road of psychosexual development. So, as long as sex does not become the children's obsession, society should expose its children to sex at an early age.

Adam Phillips

"Partly Truth, Partly Fiction, a Walking Contradiction": A Post-Chandler Psychology of Vigilante Justice in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*

Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* both present an image of the lonely crusader, the vigilante, in Philip Marlowe and Travis Bickle, respectively. Indeed, Marlowe has largely become an archetype for many such modern day lone wolves and gumshoes. While Bickle in many ways possesses the core ingredients of the Marlovian hero—the moral code, the broken city, the addiction to the road, the odd relationship with women, and above all, the desolation—he also marks a staunch departure from the form. The reason: Bickle, unlike Marlowe, is psychotic; he's no hero. Marlowe is an active example of Carl Jung's notion of the collective unconscious; his acts are steeped in the primordial, inherited tradition of the hunt for truth while maintaining a considerable amount of honor and bravery. Bickle is a rejection of Jung, a demythologizing of the archetype, and a return to Freudian psychology. His actions are a function of an externally motivated desire to become a hero, not an innate inner tendency to be one. His desire, which he is forced by his present day society and his socioeconomic situation to repress, leads to a psychosis, which ultimately paves the way for the climactic bloodbath of vigilantism at the film's finale.

Story Time

Moderated by Professor Daniel Richter, Department of Classics
Wednesday, April 14
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Room B

Edie Cao

Homosexuality in Hermeneutics: The Role of Freud in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*

"Hysterical neurosis is an involuntary psychogenic disorder of function where symptoms begin and end suddenly in emotionally charged situations, symbolic of underlying conflicts." - *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III*

Charles Kinbote, the self-appointed editor and commentator of the poem *Pale Fire*, is a homosexual neurotic with delusions of grandeur. Kinbote analyzes lines of the poem and tangentially weaves fantastical stories of his exile as king of the distant land Zembla. He alludes to several questionable and blatantly homosexual relationships. Kinbote is a perfect case study of hysterical neurosis and repressed sexuality to evaluate psychoanalytically. Interestingly enough, Nabokov himself loathed Freud; nonetheless his allusions to Freud show that he is no stranger to psychoanalysis. The difference between analyzing Nabokov's work versus Freud's work is that Kinbote is a character and Freud's patients are real people. The gap between fiction and reality satirizes the application of psychoanalytic theory in literature. It tempts the reader to psychoanalyze Kinbote but also reels in critics to scrutinize its esoteric nature. In order to fully dissect the work, the reader must decide how seriously to take a Freudian approach and assess the impact of Kinbote's insanity. The road here is not a physical one, rather the reader is embarking on a journey through Kinbote's delirious mind and imagination.

Abigail Gregg

Outward Bound: The Role of Adventure in the Modern Era

Stories of adventurers are widespread, both in history and popular media. Our culture has been fascinated by the stories of adventurers like John Chapman, Thor Heyerdahl, John Muir, and Roald Amundsen for generations. However, in the most recent decades, the stories of explorers that receive the most attention are those, like Christopher McCandless, and Timothy Treadwell, who for various reasons, fail and are killed by their exploration. While the past few decades have seen their share of adventurous success stories, like Peter Whittaker, Doug Ammons, and Lynn Hill, their successful feats have garnered much less attention than those of Treadwell and McCandless, whose failures have inspired novels and feature films. This paper explores our current fascination with these failures and questions if we as a culture are no longer inspired by the success stories. Using the stories and media attention surrounding McCandless and Treadwell, counterpointed with accounts of other current adventurers, it probes our advancing alienation from nature and what this means for modern adventurers.

Maddy Lansky

Your Worst Nightmare: *Time's Arrow* and the Inescapability of Trauma

"When people move—when they travel—they look where they've come from, not where they're going. Is this what human beings always do?" - Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*

In Martin Amis's novel *Time's Arrow*, Tod T. Friendly suffers a trauma so severe his consciousness splits upon his death and he begins to hurtle backwards through time reflecting on his own life. This reflective force narrates the novel, reliving Tod's life with no control over Tod's actions or emotions, and no access to Tod's thoughts. Using psychoanalyst Gabriella Guistino's study on memory and trauma in dreams, which argues that dreams manifest past trauma, I contend that Tod's vivid dreams remain as the only marker of his terrible past. I intend to prove that the Holocaust shaped Tod's character to a pervasive and inescapable extent, resulting in a mental split that marks Tod's attempt to escape from his past. The reversal of time reveals the true natures of the horror of the world, and this reflection marks Tod's attempt to find sense.

Chris Rowe

Unfinished Laura

Vladimir Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* contains a fragmented narrative and fragmented characters. Like daydreaming, this fragmentation needs to be contextualized in something larger than itself in order to make sense. Sigmund Freud likened the creative writing process to serious play—daydreaming is the creation of a fantasy world. Thus, creative writing is often fragmented because these fantasy worlds do not come to the author in complete form: they must be contextualized with other fragments in order to achieve unity and make sense. *The Original of Laura* is fragmented because it is still in a crepuscular stage of development. Nabokov died before he could finish the world of Laura and contextualize the characters and ideas that are written on his 138-note card draft. The creative process is often fragmented because an author invests a large amount of intellectual energy formulating ideas, which are as fragmented as the images of the author's fantasy. If the fantasy cannot be made whole, the author will hope for its destruction, since the author's job is to join together the fragments of a world the author sees all at once and hopes to convey to a broader audience. Thus, self-deletion is a part of the creative process as an author must select and order fragments to create the envisioned fantasy world: the author must self-edit and expunge some material for the sake of the finished product. In *The Original of Laura*, Nabokov makes his writing process transparent, showing the reader how he may have progressed from note cards to a novel had he not died before he finished it.

Sarah Stancliffe

The Long Road to Redemption: A Study of Briony's Journey in *Atonement*

One misunderstanding on the part of Briony Tallis sets forth a stream of events that destroys the lives of Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Thomas. In Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*, the ideas of forgiveness, of innocence, and of atonement are explored in a difficult and tumultuous world. It is with the absolute certainty of a child that a grown man is wrongfully accused of rape and has his whole world ripped from his hands. The ensuing novel is an older Briony's attempt to create a space where she may achieve some sort of redemption for her past crimes. Exploring the differences between reality and fiction is important in understanding the implications and meanings in McEwan's text. Using Brian Finney's "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion" as a primary text, I aim to explore the different spaces created in the novel *Atonement* and how they effect Briony's never-ending journey towards forgiveness. Briony's remaking of Robbie and Cecilia's lives emphasizes her belief that she cannot be forgiven in the real world and, therefore, must create a fictional one in order to attain the forgiveness she desperately seeks.

Me, Myself, and I

Moderated by Alexis Lothian, Department of English
Wednesday, April 14
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Banquet Room

Rebecca Braun

"The Truth Will Be Hurrying Home": Home as a Double for Self

Charles Baxter stated in an interview that his novel *The Soul Thief* is about "identity theft." However, Baxter refers not to theft of credit cards but of personal possessions, memories and experiences. Protagonist Nathaniel's unstable identity is as open to influence and theft as the apartment he rarely locks, especially to sly Jerome Coolberg. As Nathaniel's identity is compromised by Coolberg—whose own identity is consequently an amalgamation of acquired traits—the contents of Nathaniel's home mysteriously disappear, revealing that the home serves as a double for the self. When his house is finally emptied, Nathaniel mentally breaks down and the relationship between Nathaniel's private interior and the private-made-public interior of his apartment suggests that like the objects taken from his home, Nathaniel's soul is an equally vulnerable material good. When an adult Nathaniel protects himself by using his public identity even in private life, visible in his impersonal suburban house, Baxter shows the extent to which the soul is an unstable public construct.

Kirstie Jones

On the Road to Identity Erasure: How Stereotypes Erase the Identity of Theolonius "Monk" Ellison

Percival Everett's novel *Erasure* uses the character Monk to illuminate the struggles of those who are deprived of control over their identity because of societal conceptions of race. Drawing upon Erik Erikson's theory in *Identity and the Life Cycle* that a stable identity is partially dependent upon outside recognition, I show that Monk loses his sense of self because stereotypes lead society to view him differently than he sees himself. I will supplement my discussion with critical race theory about white privilege, arguing that members of minority groups often lose the power to identify themselves as individuals because they are automatically ascribed with the perceived characteristics of their ethnic group. The public's failure to see the parody in Monk's stereotype-ridden novel essentially validates his fears that he has lost the ability to shape how he is perceived by others, sending him down the road to identity erasure. I argue that by the end of Everett's novel Monk develops an identity that is purely defensive, defining himself simply by what he isn't rather than what he is. In chronicling Monk's journey of self loss *Erasure* reminds us of the great internal damage suffered by those who are the victims of stereotypical judgments.

Rob Rosencrans

"The First and Personal Balance": Accepting Identities in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

"For this is the journey that men make: to find themselves." - James Michener, *The Fires of Spring*

Identity, according to Judith Butler, is performative; for Sartres', the power to control it is purely personal. These theories speak powerfully to the identity of Jeanette, the protagonist of *Oranges Are Not the Only*

Fruit, specifically because it is so fractured and fluid, so multifaceted. These theories, which imply that identity changes, must consequently require that any acceptance of identity must likewise evolve. Having accepted ourselves, we must in turn accept the new person we have become, the person who allowed for that recognition. This understanding is critical; it tells us that for this particular journey the road never ends; we are constantly arriving at a new self, constantly coming to terms with that new self. This understanding lies at the core of the text's conclusion, although it implies in its own way that no story ever ends.

Maria Cristina Stan

Discovering the World While Standing in Place

"What's travel and what good is it? If the freedom isn't in me,
then I won't have it no matter where I go." - *The Book of Disquiet*, Fernando Pessoa,

In his *The Book of Disquiet*, Fernando Pessoa declares that the idea of travel nauseates him because the whole world is just a collection of similar landscapes. For Pessoa, the most interesting and valuable destination is not a physical one, but a place within the mind, where the dreamer is free to create her own realities and discover herself as she travels. An individual doesn't have to go very far from home to be able to experience this freedom of self-discovery if she can will herself to explore her mind. But when we are habituated to daily life, we are often defined by the roles we play, our obligations to others, and societal expectations. When we travel, the goal is to be left with nothing to define us but our own psyche. Unfortunately, many people travel on a mission of self-discovery all over the world, never realizing that before their world can change, they must change themselves to be able to see the world through a different inner lens. Pessoa's lens is fabricated of dreams in which he explores the world as he envisions it, but even the imagination can only take us to places we can conceive, while traveling in reality with a will to learn about ourselves will challenge our identity and existence in ways we could not possibly imagine.

Annie Vought

Reaper Madness: Transience, Unfinished Business, and Coming of Age in *Dead Like Me*

"Life sucks, and then you die. And then it still sucks." - George Lass, *Dead Like Me*

Where do we go when we die? What happens to the problems that plagued us during our lifetime—do they dissolve into irrelevance, or continue to trail after us through our passage into the afterlife? When eighteen year old George Lass dies suddenly after being struck by the falling toilet seat from a de-orbiting space station, she learns that Death has "hired" her to join a crew of grim reapers responsible for the souls of those lost in accidents, murders, and suicides, and must assist in the executions of complete strangers before gently guiding them into the afterlife. As George explores the domain of death after death alongside her co-reapers, she develops a new perspective on the life she left behind when she was unceremoniously torn from Earth in the middle of her struggle to reach adulthood. Although George's earthly adolescence is long since gone, elements of that past life—namely, her mother and younger sister—still live on, and George suffers from a sense of melancholia over all that she had left unsaid and unsettled in a life now far beyond her reach. I will both explore and challenge ideas presented in Freud's essay "On Mourning and Melancholia" through my discussion of the means by which George breaks from traditional conceptions of the melancholic as she struggles to deal with both her incapacity to change anything about her lost life and the many challenges of her new life. I aim to further our examination of death in a new light as George's soul is given a second chance at coming of age, even after death.

My World Is What I Make It

Moderated by Naomi Greenwald, Department of Comparative Literature
Wednesday, April 14
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Pub

Miruna Barnoschi

Abracadabra!: Magicians Conjure a Damning Escape from Reality

"The phrase 'crossing of boundaries' occurs pejoratively more than once in his notebooks; by it he appears to mean that certain distinctions must be strictly maintained. Art and life constituted one such distinction; illusion and reality, another." - Steven Millhauser, "Eisenheim, the Illusionist"

Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode" and Steven Millhauser's "Eisenheim, the Illusionist" employ magicians as means for the main characters to escape reality and step into a fantasy world. That road to the fantasy world, known as the transcendental experience, is carefully constructed through the use of magic and illusion. The psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and R. D. Laing explain the overarching transcendental experience, as well as the elusive connection between reality and fantasy, the reason for the human need to escape from one world to another, and the value of that escape as it pertains to Allen's and Millhauser's stories. Moreover, the transcendental experience of the protagonists, and indeed all human beings, manufactures a collision between reality and fantasy, which leads to counter-intuitive, existential, and damning revelations about the world around us; 'Abracadabra!' and the world is the opposite of what it should be. As Paul Watzlawick, psychologist and philosopher, concludes: "There is not illusion, because there is only illusion."

Matt Mallon

Rewriting Reality: Post-Structuralism and Pluralistic Reading in *Synecdoche, New York*

Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) critiques the post-structuralist view that the meaning of a text emanates not from the writer, but from the reader, whose interpretation of the text can be completely different from the author's intentions. The film shows the fallacy of this theory by drawing it out to extremes—Kaufman shows that if the reader has ultimate interpretative power, then it is possible for the reader to go so far as to change the very essence of the text, in effect rewriting the work through his own subjective interpretation. The main character, Caden, not only rewrites the books and media he encounters (for instance, finding only blank pages in a book after he scorned the author or seeing himself in cartoons), but rewrites reality as well, attending funerals of family members that have not died and, on a larger scale, recreating New York City in a giant warehouse and writing lines for everyone who lives there under the pretense that he is creating a play. Kaufman posits that the reader should not force his own interpretation upon a text, but instead should let the author and characters guide him.

Blair Moylan

More than Melancholia: A Deflection of Denial

"The only way I could go on living was to believe that I was not living" - Billy Ansel, *The Sweet Hereafter*

When multiple deaths occur, as in Russell Bank's novel, *The Sweet Hereafter*, and numerous children are killed in a tragic accident, it is natural for a small town, such as Sam Dent, in upstate New York, to need to find a scapegoat for their grief. Billy Ansel, widower and father of two children who perished in the bus accident, explores a different technique, believing that by denying life itself he is somehow closer to death; a strange pathology he attempts to impose on the entire town. This collective melancholia departs from Freud's essay "On Mourning and Melancholia" in that it applies to more than just one individual, but rather the entire town, restlessly searching for someone to blame. By choosing to neglect his life, and actively trying to stop a lawsuit from happening, Ansel seeks to keep the other town members trapped in the same melancholic limbo as himself, without any real sense of closure. Such behavior results in his creation of an interim reality and a wreckless road between the death he associates with and the life he nearly fails to live.

Vellore S. Adithi

On the Road and on the Run: Escapism, Art, and Multiplicity in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*

Joan Foster is an escape artist—she uses her gothic romances as an outlet to escape, however temporarily, the disappointments of an otherwise unfulfilling life. Because a single, unified identity is not sufficient or satisfying, Joan engages multiplicity through art and fantasy. Drawing on Gwen Raaberg's notion of the collage "as a feminist strategy in the arts," I argue that Margaret Atwood uses this technique of fragmentation and pastiche both in the textual structure of *Lady Oracle* and in the development of Joan's psyche. Joan herself engages in a prototypical form of this strategy of collage, deconstructing her identity into its component parts, selecting the desired components, discarding the others, and then resolving the disorder with a re-envisioned construction of herself. Empowered by the creative agency and the liberation posed by this deconstructionist-revisionist-reconstructionist manner of thinking, Joan applies this same methodology of self-perception, or rather, self-conception, to the world around her. In thus depicting Joan's reformulation of self, Atwood reinforces the potential of collage as a means of protest and revolution—she presents the reader with an oppositional strategy by which she might turn the status quo of gender inequity on its head.

Jonathan Wong

Stymied Self-Realization: Emerson's Self-Reliance Applied to the Identity of Tom Ripley

Reading Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* through the lens of Ralph Waldo Emerson's conception of "self-reliance" invokes questions about the seeming success of the protagonist Tom Ripley's process of "self-realization." In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson asserts that man must ultimately trust himself above the voices of society in order to find peace with his own identity. In one sense, Tom's murder of Dickie Greenleaf and subsequent usurpation of Dickie's identity is a modern realization of Emerson's ideal, albeit a dark one, in which Tom quite literally silences the voice of his disapproving companion and finally fulfills his ambition and aspirations as an actor by "playing" Dickie. Yet, contrary to Tom's perception that he has indeed become Dickie and thus achieved self-realization, Tom's appropriation results in the creation of a unique persona, characterized by a love for material property and submission to social norms—two traits absent in the real Dickie Greenleaf. The reliance of Tom's created identity on two major tenets of Emerson's argument—property and conformity—and his growing anxiety at the end of the novel reveal that Tom's acquired persona fails to give him the peace that would accompany Tom's realization of his own self.

How to Deal

Moderated by Dr. Andrew Hakim, Department of English
Wednesday, April 14
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Room C

Daniel Kadin

Nietzsche and Holden's Dance of War

This paper argues that Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* incorporates elements of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, primarily through the character of Judge Holden. To Nietzsche the world was a nihilistic, senseless, and grotesque place, much like the one McCarthy depicts. McCarthy clearly presents the Nietzschean ideas of inherent human brutality and the utter uncertainty of the world. He also shows that it is bereft of moral and ethical objectivity and is predominantly nihilistic. As scholars have noted, the judge expounds the existentialism of Nietzsche by presenting a meaningless world without any absolute morals or ethics and uses this existential uncertainty and nihilism to forge his own philosophical thought, based on his conception of the revered "dance of war." Holden's aggressive nature is realized through his brutal actions and belief that power and violence are the ultimate determinants in the world. I ultimately argue that Holden diverges from Nietzsche through his physical manifestations of brutality and aggression, since Nietzsche's doesn't seem to advocate the type of violence McCarthy depicts. Embracing this overwhelming sense of uncertainty and nihilism, Holden extends Nietzsche by creating his own philosophy predicated on a reverence for warfare, grotesque violence, and bloodshed.

Stephanie Pushaw

"I Read, Therefore it Writes": An Exploration of the Narrative and its Relation to Post-Structuralism in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*

In our postmodern age, when the possibilities for novelty in literature and other art forms seem to be exhausted, certain works still manage to offer a refreshing perspective on the roles of readers and authors in the modern world. Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* is one of these rare literary works. Examining how we read, why we read, and what literature can help us discover—even in a world where innovation seems impossible—this book is a puzzle, a maze, but, most of all, an invitation to reevaluate why reading still matters. In the tangle of narrative shifts and postmodern concepts presented in the novel, the main act—of reading a story, and of becoming so involved in the story that the line between reality and fiction blurs—stands out and begs to be noticed, and to be celebrated. The distinctive use of the second person throughout much of the novel serves not only as a memorable narrative technique but also cements the book as a solid example of post-structuralism, which serves to call into question the role of the novel (and other forms of art) in the modern age: what are the roles and responsibilities of writers? What constitutes "reality" and what constitutes "fiction?" Calvino's unorthodox narrative style and unique capabilities as a storyteller allow these questions to be posed, and permit the audience to discover potential answers for themselves.

Grace Rhee

Where The Wild Things Are: The Journey from Adolescence to Adulthood and the Fictions Necessary to Get Us There

Though on the surface a children's movie based on a children's book, the film *Where the Wild Things Are* dives into Freudian ideas on early childhood development. There are two journeys present in the film. The first is Max's journey into his imagination, which he embarks on as reality becomes unbearable, demonstrating an early use of fictions as coping mechanisms and the creation of a Freudian ego made to satisfy the needs of the *id*. However, in Max's second journey, in which he transitions from childhood to adulthood by assuming responsibility over the very Wild Things that he created in his mind, Max soon realizes that he must return home and grasp a more practical method of dealing with the harsh realities of life. Drawing on Freud's notions about the human psyche, I argue that the film demonstrates a part of human nature present even in adolescence—the attempt to escape those truths we cannot bear, which must later transform into a more sound acceptance of reality.

Katie Risbrough

The Joys of Motherhood: Increased Expectations and Their Effects on Mothers

In Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*, the Walls family demonstrates the ways in which the mothering expectations that society places on women can sometimes lead to upsetting results. Rose Mary is nothing like the "perfect mother" that society expects, and her refusal to surrender her identity causes society to immediately judge her as a bad mother. However, the ultimate success of her children seems to suggest that perhaps it is the outcome, and not the happiness or easiness of the childhood, that makes a mother a good one. Her actions, her husband, her lifestyle and her children force readers to question the true meaning of a perfect mother, and to realize that the unfair expectations placed on the mother over the father can lead to unbalanced blame between parents. Centering upon Rose Mary, this paper both questions what makes a good mother and what makes a bad one, and the reasons that society feels the need to label them as such.

Rishikesh Santhanam

Life as a Road: *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and the Moment of Consciousness

Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* illustrates the life and death of an ordinary, bourgeois man. For most of his life, Ivan is blind to the nature of his choices, following the road dictated by social convention, which he believes will lead to a life of importance. Ironically, Ivan's choices result in his feeling inconsequential and unfulfilled as he fails to reconcile his need for purpose with the empty reasoning behind his choices. Like the hero in Camus's "The Myth of Sisyphus," Ivan lives a life of repetitive misery, burying himself in bureaucratic work in a pointless attempt to feel powerful. Both Ivan and Sisyphus must struggle with the realization that their life and work have been meaningless. The characters each arrive at a moment of consciousness when they realize their absurd situation of needing fulfillment in a world defined by futility. Both characters cope with this realization by accepting responsibility for their actions. Ivan recognizes the pain he has caused in others; Sisyphus consciously chooses to continue his work despite its futility in order to assert his individual power. In such moments of consciousness, individuals recognize their ability to define meaning for themselves and determine the road of their life to their individual needs.

"What's your road, man?—holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow." (Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*)