1. Pippin, *The Lord of the Rings*
2. Voldemort, *Harry Potter*
3. Flynn, *Tangled*
4. Aragorn, *The Lord of the Rings*
5. Irene & Driver, *Drive*
6. *Breaking Bad* Logo
7. Captain, *WALL-E*
8. John Lennon
9. Will, *Good Will Hunting*
10. Nancy, *Weeds*
11. Alex, *A Clockwork Orange*
12. Leigh Anne, *The Blind Side*
13. Driver, *Drive*
14. T-Rex, *Jurassic Park*

15. Lucy & Jude, *Across the Universe*
16. Michael, *The Blind Side*
17. Lord Farquaad, *Shrek*
18. Walter, *Breaking Bad*
19. Shrek
20. Sean, *Good Will Hunting*
21. *Jurassic Park* Logo
22. EVE, *WALL-E*
23. Soap, *Fight Club*
24. HW, *There Will Be Blood*
25. Gandalf, *The Lord of the Rings*
26. Pauly D, *Jersey Shore*
27. Scully & Mulder, *The X-Files*
28. Chris McCandless, *Into the Wild*

29. Captain America
30. Rapunzel, *Tangled*
31. Harry Potter
32. Frodo, *The Lord of the Rings*
33. Narrator, *Fight Club*
34. Hermione, *Harry Potter*
35. Snooki, *Jersey Shore*

English Literature
SENIOR THESIS COLLOQUIUM
Roger Williams University

May 10, 2012

(de)CONSTRUCTING THE POPULAR *from MORDOR to JERSEY SHORE*

Roger Williams University
*Learning to Bridge the World*

WHAT IS A COLLOQUIUM?

Colloquium: "A meeting or assembly for discussion; a conference, council. Specifically an academic conference or seminar." (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

This year marks the 20th anniversary of The English Department's Senior Thesis Capstone project, one of the longest running two-semester capstone projects at RWU. The first semester of this sequence comprises an intensive reading seminar. During the second semester, students meet individually with the professor in intensive tutorial sessions. The ultimate thesis is a 20-25 page paper demonstrating analysis, close reading, research and revision skills that students have been honing throughout their English major curriculum. During the senior thesis colloquium, students present thesis synopses, sharing their work with the community and welcoming questions and discussion.

WHAT IS CULTURAL STUDIES?

Cultural studies is an academic field, which means (in part) that one could study its methodology in a course, or even major in it. Whereas cultural anthropologists study entire cultures, English majors use cultural studies to study texts. Cultural studies in the literary realm is grounded in critical theory and relies on the skills of literary criticism, which is what distinguishes it from cultural anthropology (although there is overlap). What are "critical theories"? Critical theories include Marxism (which is a foundational theory), as well as feminism, psychoanalytic theory, political theory and post-humanism (among others). These critical theories allow better understanding of the political dynamics of contemporary culture, as well as its historical foundations, conflicts and defining traits. For example, cultural theorists often concentrate on how a particular medium or "text" (which could be a film, a novel, a comic book, a graffiti wall, or an advertisement for example) relates to ideology, social class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality and/or gender. The humble goal of cultural theory is nothing less than understanding the way in which meaning is generated, received, reflected and propagated within a text.
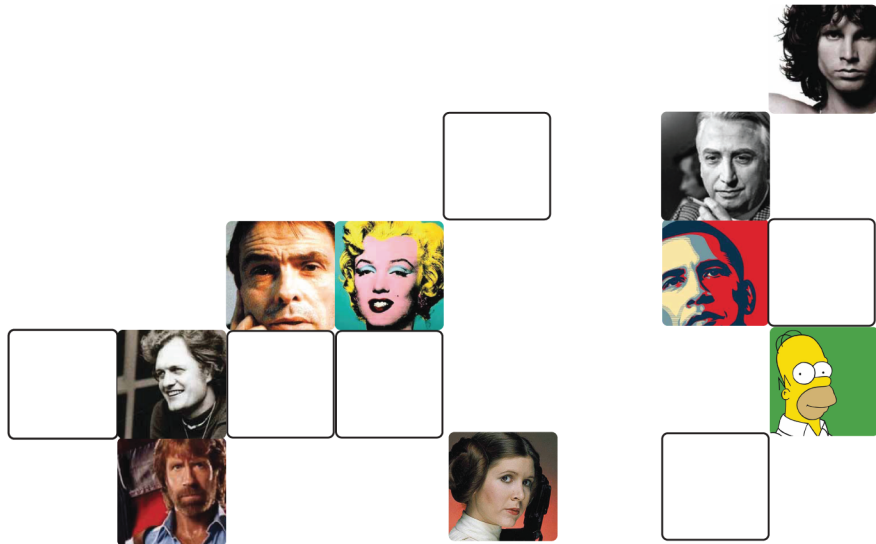
SCHEDULE OVERVIEW
9AM-4PM

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Case, Ph.D, "What Happened to 'Trembling with Awe'?"

PANEL 1: Fallacies of Popular Culture

Annie Rae, "Dissolving Barriers: The Beatles and *Across the Universe*"

Elizabeth Mullin, "'The Pirates Don't Eat the Tourists': *Jurassic Park* and the Dangers of Frankenstein's Creation"

Kara DeAngelis, "Convincing Matthew Arnold to Read Jodi Picoult: The *Plain Truth* about Popular Culture"

Marguerite Meinzer, "Rubbernecking the *Jersey Shore*"

PANEL 2: Environmental Alienation

Elizabeth Perreca, "Imploding False Consciousness and Igniting Praxis: A Marxist Analysis of *WALL-E*"

Laura St. Aubin, "Christopher McCandless: *Into the Wild*'s Marxist Martyr"

Jessica Sasso, "Seeking Balance: A Sustainability Framework Analysis of *Into the Wild*"

PANEL 3: Deconstructing Ideologies

Caitlin M. Studley, "'I'm Finished!': Yielding to Capitalist Ideology in *There Will Be Blood*"

Devin Zucker, "Incommensurate Moralities: An Ideological Analysis of *Breaking Bad*"

Kristyn Wajsgras, "Ticky Tacky Patriarchy: Feminist Chaos in *Weeds*"

BREAK FOR LUNCH: RESUME PROMPTLY AT 1PM

PANEL 4: Reconstructing Ideologies

Kaleigh Wilson, "'How Do You Like Them Apples?': *Good Will Hunting*'s Alternative Path to Success"

Ashley Aliengena, "Justifying the Finale: Hierarchical Truths in *The X-Files*"

Cahrissa Dasso, "Ultra Violence and Beauty: An Anti-Aristotelian Analysis of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*"

PANEL 5: Evolving Heroes

Mary Rafferty, "Stars, Stripes, and Spandex: *Captain America* Retconning the American Heroic Ideal"

Alexandra Artiano, "*Drive*: Deconstructing the Hero"

David Chapleau, "From the Shadows of Fangorn to the Fires of Mount Doom: Individuation in the Hobbits of *The Lord of the Rings*"

Zachary Lyons, "Rethinking the Hero: Marginalization in Shakespeare, Twain and Tolkien"

PANEL 6: Decoding Race, Class, Gender

Amanda Silva, "Because It's Where My Family Goes": An Ideological Analysis of Racism and Anti-Racism in *The Blind Side*"

Jared Wolf, "Breaking the First Rule of *Fight Club*: An Analysis of Gendered Social Reformation"

Kristina Ragone, "Invisible Hegemony: An Examination of Patriarchal Structures in *Harry Potter*, *Tangled*, and *Shrek*"

Senior thesis presenters are invited to Jackie's Galaxy.

The first round of appetizers will emerge at 6pm.

(But you might find your professors there a tad earlier.)

DECONSTRUCTING THE POPULAR:
From Mordor to Jersey Shore

PANEL 1: FALLACIES OF POPULAR CULTURE

Annie Rae, "Dissolving Barriers: The Beatles and *Across the Universe*"

In 2007, Universal Studios released the movie musical, *Across The Universe*, which pays tribute to the Beatles and culture of the 1960s. Many protested that the movie's popular culture form was degrading the legendary work of the Beatles. This negative reaction, however, may have been a result of American society operating under the misunderstanding of the role of popular culture. This thesis argues first that *Across the Universe* is a relevant and appropriate medium for a tribute to the Beatles. It then uses this argument as a case study that attempts to shatter the mistaken ideology that analyzing popular culture has no academic value.

Elizabeth Mullin, "'The Pirates Don't Eat the Tourists': *Jurassic Park* and the Dangers of Frankenstein's Creation"

This close analysis of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (USA, 1993) -- one of over a thousand different adaptations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) -- demonstrates that despite the many technological advances of the past two centuries, both texts follow very similar patterns in cautioning that potential disaster may arise from unchecked scientific experimentation. It is worth noting that despite nearly two hundred years of separation, the two texts raise almost the same questions in relation to the ethics of scientific progress. This thesis further notes that the social unease concerning scientific ethics reflected in both novels might explain the popularity of the Frankenstein story. If, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall suggests, "Popular culture is one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged," then the Frankenstein story might remain so popular because it engages its audiences in a relevant issue that has yet to be solved.

Kara DeAngelis, "Convincing Matthew Arnold to Read Jodi Picoult: The *Plain Truth* about Popular Culture"

Is it possible to be both a work of mass culture and still meet the standards of quality set in place by elite cultural theorists such as Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis? Using Jodi Picoult's novel *Plain Truth* (1999) as a case study, this paper will examine the recent push in higher education to study popular culture. It will address the fear that popular culture studies leads to "leveling" or watering down the quality of higher education. I will analyze both the novel and the Lifetime Television adaptation of this story to illustrate the potential value of mass culture while also making distinctions based on aesthetic quality. This analysis is based on cultural theorists ranging from Matthew Arnold to Michael Schudson in order to explode the cultural dichotomy between high and low culture.

Marguerite Meinzer, "Rubbernecking the *Jersey Shore*"

This thesis examines why *Jersey Shore* (2009-Present), MTV's popular reality show, is so interesting to viewers despite the fact that many dislike the show. In order to understand why, it is crucial to study cultures featured in the show. Through this analysis, I have discovered the cast members place an emphasis on the culture of drinking alcohol, the culture of sex, and the culture of appearance. Examining these three cultures reveals imbedded interests: danger, violating social norms/taboos, and vicarious participation. Although there is much controversy over this show, it is evident that the show prompts much interest. Raymond Williams, a popular culture critic, would agree that studying these cultures helps viewers understand their own wider culture, which ultimately helps audience members better understand their society as a whole.

PANEL 2: ENVIRONMENTAL ALIENATION

Elizabeth Perreca, "Imploding False Consciousness and Igniting Praxis: A Marxist Analysis of *WALL-E*"

Disney Pixar's *WALL-E* (USA, 2008) ostensibly presents itself as an innocent family film portraying the love between two robots, WALL-E and EVE. However, despite the seemingly innocent romance, *WALL-E* contains strong ideological components. Specifically, it attacks the consumerist impulse implicit within a capitalist ideology. Ultimately, WALL-E acts as the catalyst for political change, freeing humanity from the constraints of consumerist ideals. WALL-E also reveals humanity's inability to partake in the Marxist concept of "praxis." Specifically, WALL-E rejects capitalistic ideals by reinstating the impetus for praxis within society. Upon humanity's return to Earth they are able to reconnect with each other and nature, partake in meaningful labor, and rebuild a planet destroyed by consumer capitalism.

Laura St. Aubin, "Christopher McCandless: *Into the Wild*'s Marxist Martyr"

Director Sean Penn's adaptation of John Krakauer's book *Into the Wild* (USA, 2007) tells the story of Christopher McCandless, who gives up all possessions and walks away from an upper middle class, dysfunctional family to go on a "great Alaskan adventure." Unfortunately, he is unable to survive in the wilds of Alaska and he dies a painful death. A close analysis of Chris's relationship to the two most extreme ideologies of his life -- capitalism and romanticism -- will reveal what leads him to this situation. It will also explain how Chris's deep transcendentalist yearnings bring him salvation from hypocrisy and the insidious corruption of material things, while routing him closer to humanity and human connectedness.

Jessica Sasso, "Seeking Balance: A Sustainability Framework Analysis of *Into the Wild*"

This thesis analyzes *Into the Wild*'s Christopher McCandless, a seemingly flawless Romantic who travels into the lost acres of Alaska. McCandless abandons society by latching onto the Romantic ideal that one must surround one's self in nature to find truth beyond materialism. However, he disregards ideals that balance the Romantic equation. With no intention of returning to society, McCandless unwittingly embodies the hyper-individualist lifestyle from which he is trying to escape, ultimately leading to his death. Looking at McCandless through a lens of sustainability reveals the complicated interrelationships between Man and Nature.

PANEL 3: DECONSTRUCTING IDEOLOGIES

Caitlin M. Studley, "'I'm Finished!':
Yielding to Capitalist Ideology in *There Will Be Blood*"

Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (USA, 2007), a loose retelling of Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* (1927), explores the trials and tribulations of early 20th century oil tycoon Daniel Plainview. While Daniel's powerful pronouncement "I'm finished!" in the closing scene of the film may present itself as little more than his declaration of victory over his chief competitor, a close analysis of Daniel's character reveals this statement as the pinnacle of his unconscious submission to the ideology of capitalism, which ultimately destroys his personal relationships and leaves him with nothing other than his painfully acquired wealth—a seemingly useless accomplishment by the film's end. This focus on Daniel provides new insight into the commonly critiqued and tense relationship between capitalism and religion present in this film.

Devin Zucker, "Incommensurate Moralities:
An Ideological Analysis of *Breaking Bad*"

By analyzing the complexities that arise between family values and traditional Judeo-Christian moral codes in AMC's popular hit series *Breaking Bad* (2008-present), readers will realize why series protagonist Walter White is difficult to classify as a moral character. Upon discovering that he has terminal cancer, Walter begins to manufacture methamphetamine so that his family will be provided for after his death. His hard work and clear desire to provide for, protect, and guide his family seems to provide moral justification for his actions. However, by putting his family first he abandons traditional morality. This thesis will ultimately explain one reason for this show's popularity by analyzing Walt's incommensurate moral justifications through the lenses of both deontology and consequentialism.

Kristyn Wajsgras, "Ticky Tacky Patriarchy: Feminist Chaos in *Weeds*"

In the Showtime series *Weeds* (2005-Present) the protagonist Nancy Botwin turns to trafficking marijuana in order to maintain a comfortable lifestyle for herself and her two sons after the death of her husband. Some viewers may view Nancy as a representation of an attempt to combine the role of mother and the role of working woman. In this sense, the show may seem to convey a feminist outlook. Nancy might appear to be a strong and independent woman doing the best she can for her family while also dealing with the struggle of running a business. However, this thesis will argue that this series not only represents "motherhood" and "business women" as mutually exclusive ideas, but also reinforces the patriarchal notion that chaos ensues when women escape patriarchal gender roles.

BREAK FOR LUNCH
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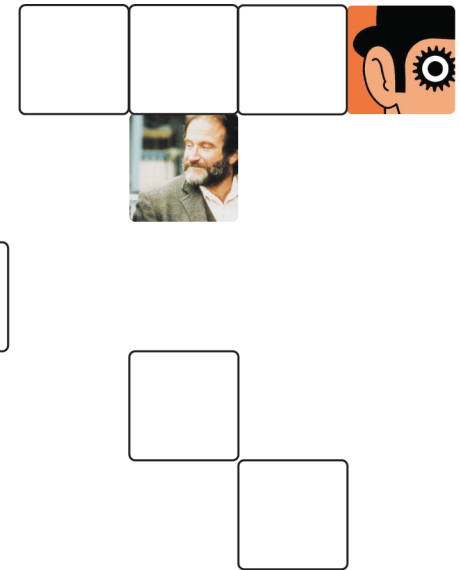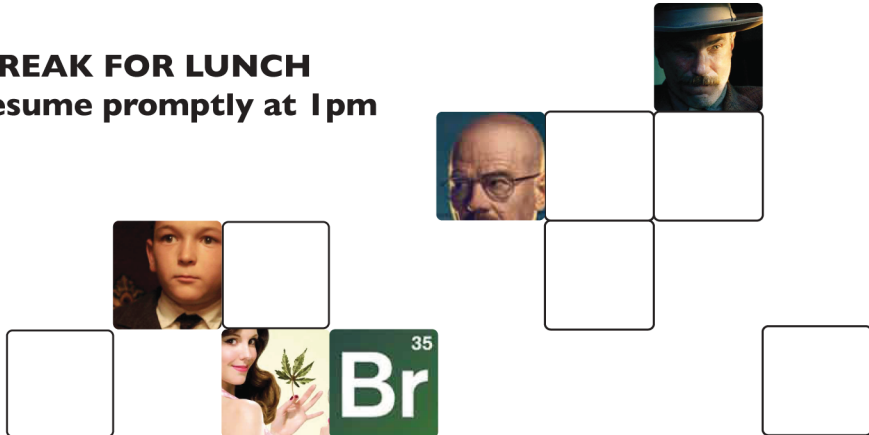
PANEL 4: RECONSTRUCTING IDEOLOGIES

Kaleigh Wilson, "'How Do You Like Them Apples?':
Good Will Hunting's Alternative Path to Success"

Lawrence Bender Productions' *Good Will Hunting* (USA, 1997) might seem to be a feel-good love story, or perhaps even viewed as fleeting amusement because it is a work of popular culture. However, a close analysis of the movie indicates a carefully structured film designed to provide a gentle critique of the American Dream. In place of the American Dream, the film offers an alternative set of values, replacing materialism with emotional strength.

Ashley Aliengena, "Justifying the Finale: Hierarchical Truths in *The X-Files*"

Following in the wake of a two-season decline in popularity, the final episode of Fox Network's long running sci-fi drama, *The X-Files*, left many fans feeling intensely dissatisfied. Their primary concern was that the finale (titled "The Truth") did not fulfill the promise of the show's famous tagline, "The Truth is out there." This thesis targets the source of fans' frustrations by mapping the psychological progression of truth witnessed in Mulder and Scully's evolutions. The resulting recontextualization not only justifies the finale, but also redresses the tagline, suggesting the need for a more relative, pluralistic understanding of truth.

Cahrissa Dasso, "Ultra Violence and Beauty: An Anti-Aristotelian Analysis
of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*"

Stanley Kubrick's classic dramatic thriller, *A Clockwork Orange* (USA, 1971), details the disturbing life of teenage protagonist, Alex Delarge, as he engages in a spree of horrific crimes, which lead to his attempted rehabilitation using a newly invented (albeit controversial) form of psychological conditioning. This movie is famous for its presumably excessive use of violence; however, this thesis argues that the violence is not simply excessive. An examination of the racy artwork and balletic fight scenes -- often accompanied by strains of Beethoven -- will reveal the movie's argument with Aristotelian aesthetics. Whereas Aristotle's theory of catharsis argues that art can purge violent emotions, Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* insists the reverse. Kubrick's depiction of Alex's character reveals both that art is unavoidably connected to violence, and worse, that it often inspires it.

PANEL 5: EVOLVING HEROES

Mary Rafferty, "Stars, Stripes, and Spandex:
Captain America Retconning the American Heroic Ideal"

Captain America, the Sentinel of Liberty, has been fighting for the protection of American ideals since his Marvel Comics conception in 1941. The character has also been representative of a particular American ideology: The American heroic ideal. Over time, his character has been "retconned" (i.e., updated via retroactive continuity) to keep up with the constantly shifting ideals within a society that both produces and consumes his comic books, movies, and the other cultural productions bearing his name. By examining the original _Captain America Comics_ of the 1940s in contrast to his 21st-century namesake in the film _Captain America: the First Avenger_ (USA, 2011), this thesis reveals not only how his creators infuse the heroic ideal of Captain America into his story, but also how this character recursively contributes new qualities to an ideology that changes with each significant evolution of his character.

Alexandra Artiano, "_Drive_: Deconstructing the Hero"

The 2011 film _Drive_ directed by Nicolas Winding Refn features a protagonist who is given no name in the script, but is credited as "Driver." The film sympathetically depicts Driver despite the fact that he commits brutal murders. This brings up the question of what kind of hero Driver is. This thesis analyzes the different parts of a modern hero, western hero and 20th century antihero that are evident in Driver's character to define what kind of hero can exist in modern society, where justice and violence are typically seen as incompatible.

David Chapleau, "From the Shadows of Fangorn to the Fires of Mount Doom:
Individuation in the Hobbits of _The Lord of the Rings_"

The most prominent flaw in Jungian criticism of J.R.R. Tolkien's _The Lord of the Rings_ (1955) is the gross neglect of Merry and Pippin in the discussion of the theory of individuation in the novel. This thesis examines the importance of including Merry and Pippin in the criticism, as they provide essential substantive evidence towards the presence of full, complete and comprehensive relevance of individuation in the development of the characters in _The Lord of the Rings_.

Zachary Lyons, "Rethinking the Hero:
Marginalization in Shakespeare, Twain and Tolkien"

Marginalization of individuals and groups occurs in literary texts just as it does in real life. Shylock from William Shakespeare's _The Merchant of Venice_ (c. 1596), Jim from Mark Twain's _Adventures of Huckleberry Finn_ (1885), and Merry and Pippin from J.R.R. Tolkien's _The Lord of the Rings_ (1954) are all marginalized in various manners. By first investigating the ways in which the three texts marginalize characters and then comparing these characters to the ostensible heroes of their respective texts, this thesis illustrates the perhaps surprising claim that marginalized characters are sometimes more heroic than the heroes themselves.
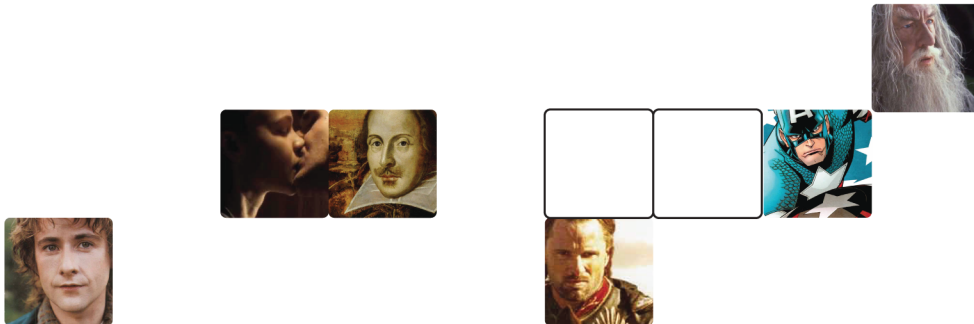
PANEL 6: DECODING RACE, CLASS, GENDER

Amanda Silva,   "Because It's Where My Family Goes": An Ideological Analysis
**of Racism and Anti-Racism in _The Blind Side_"**

Director John Lee Hancock's 2009 hit film _The Blind Side_ features the story of a young black man named Michael Oher. Michael has been a victim of poverty and has never had a steady home until one day, the wealthy and white Tuhoy family welcomes Michael into not only their home, but also their hearts. Some viewers claim that this film is racist, arguing that the whites are portrayed as saviors who hold racist assumptions. However, a close analysis of the film will reveal just how complex the issue of race truly is in _The Blind Side_. Furthermore, this ideological analysis will reveal three dominant ideologies and complexities -- classism, family values, and white privilege -- all of which the film uses to attempt to combat racism.

Jared Wolf, "Breaking the First Rule of _Fight Club_:
An Analysis of Gendered Social Reformation"

Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel Fight Club features Bob, Chloe, and a narrator who, at various times in the novel, conform to both male and female traditional gender roles. This novel does not simply endorse the abandonment of these traditional gender roles. Instead, it endorses a balance of both masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviors across the sexes. This reading reveals Bob's unsuccessful attempt to achieve that balance in contrast to Chloe's swift and successful transformation. The narrator's evolution towards that balance is slower and more complicated – it also involves the abandonment of consumerism as he develops in emotional maturity.

Kristina Ragone, "Invisible Hegemony: An Examination
of Patriarchal Structures in _Harry Potter_, _Tangled_, and _Shrek_"

This thesis reveals the patriarchal structures present within today's popular children's literature. An examination of _Harry Potter_, _Tangled_, and _Shrek_ shows that female characters in these movies actually demonstrate behaviors that perpetuate the patriarchal structures which they at first seem to avoid. This thesis will conclude that, after examining these popular children's works, it is clear that these patriarchal structures are not only present in literature, but they are often invisible and pervasive.
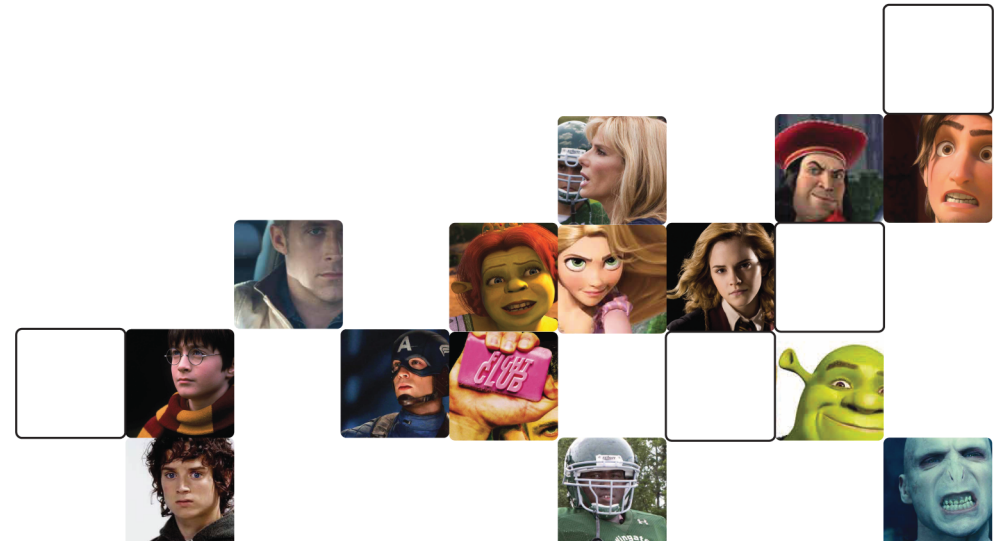
IN DEFENSE OF THE POPULAR

PIERRE BOURDIEU
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste **(1984)**

"To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class' [. . .]. The definition of cultural nobility is the stake in a struggle which has gone on unceasingly, from the seventeenth century to the present day [. . .]. Even in the classroom, the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture, in a cultured household, outside of scholastic disciplines."

ROLAND BARTHES
"From Work to Text" (1977)

"The reduction of reading to consumption is obviously responsible for the 'boredom' that many people feel when confronting the modern ('un-readable') text, or the avant-garde movie or painting: to suffer from boredom means that one cannot produce the text, play it, open it out, *make it go.*"

MICHAEL SCHUDSON
"The New Validation of Popular Culture" (1987)

"Indeed, for Barthes, as long as a person reads passively, it matters little if the reading matter is Shakespeare or subway graffiti. The task is to read playfully [as if one were reading music to perform a score, which is the opposite of passive reading . . .]. And the task for the humanities in the university I would infer from this, is not to create hierarchies of Works but to educate readers in reading. If this can be one with Shakespeare, fine; if it is better achieved with newspaper cartoons, that's fine too."

STUART HALL
"Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'" (1981)

[Popular Culture] is the ground on which [. . . social] transformations are worked"

RECENT COLLOQUIUM TOPICS

SPRING 2012: (de)Constructing The Popular: From Mordor to Jersey Shore
SPRING 2011: American Literature of the 1960s
SPRING 2010: Transcendentalist Ideas in Mid-19th Century American Literature
FALL 2009: Writing the American Landscape
SPRING 2009: Shakespeare and 'The Other'
FALL 2008: My Head's Not Bowed: Celebrating the works of Annie Proulx, Louise
    Erdrich, Sandra Cisneros, Jumpa Lahiri, Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison

SENIOR THESIS ADVISOR: Dr. Margaret Case

SPECIAL THANKS TO . . .

. . .our phalanx of second readers, whose revision suggestions made a world of difference and without whom this process would not have been complete. (But let it here be recorded -- they bear no culpability for any remaining problems.)

Jennifer Alexander *	Susan Pasquarelli
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Sargon Donabed	Matthew Ulricksen
Alejandro Leguizamo	Mike Wright
Kate Mele	Jordan Yamaji Smith
Maria Misiaszek	

* Read more than one thesis

. . . Karen Bilotti for her crackerjack bibliography workshop.

. . . Renee Soto for her phancey oral presentation workshop.

. . . Joseph L. Auger for A/V mentorship.

. . .Ashley Aliengena for designing the poster and program.

And everlasting thanks to Cyndy Chappell for all she does with grace, efficiency, and love throughout the year, including organizing this event from Day One to Jackie's.