

Ambrose Research Conference 2024

Humanities Session Abstracts

Humanities Session 1 – Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Room A2210)

Shifra Hetherington, “‘Of Contradiction the Man Sings Not’: Fame in Dante’s Divine Comedy”

A careful reader of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* might claim that Dante unwittingly contradicts himself. In the first part of his *Comedy*, the *Inferno*, Dante states that earthly fame immortalizes one’s transitory life; yet, in *Purgatorio*, he contrarily asserts that worldly fame is an inconstant, fleeting thing. To notice this blatant incongruence is to accept one of two options: Dante, the great medieval poet, made a mistake, or Dante, the great medieval poet, did not make a mistake. When one not only understands that Dante’s medieval conception of fame differs from contemporary notions of fame but also examines the stark difference in the character of the souls who utter the supposedly conflicting statements on fame, the distinct natures of the *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, and the specific state of Dante’s soul in *Inferno* compared to in *Purgatory*, one can conclude that Dante’s apparent blunder is instead an intentional design for his purpose. Dante the poet uses fame as a gauge to measure the spiritual development of Dante the pilgrim, meaning Dante’s seemingly contradictory assertions about fame reveal the aim of his *Comedy*: to move one’s soul in this life from misery in vice to happiness in virtue.

Breeanne Nickel, “Predestination and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus”

Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* was and still is one of the most popular non-Shakespearean dramas to come out of the Renaissance. The play explores several areas of theological contention, but most scholarly debates tend to focus on the problem of predestination that it raises. This presentation takes up a similar theme, suggesting that Faustus’s alleged predestination is gradually reinforced in Faustus’s psyche by other characters throughout the play, ironically obstructing his potential for salvation and resulting in his transmogrification to an inverted Christ figure. This Christological inversion is exemplified particularly well in Faustus’s tragic death at the end of the play, where instead of a merciful God dying to save Faustus, Faustus dies to preserve his vision of a vengeful and unrelenting Calvinistic God.

Humanities Session 2 – Humanities for our World (Room A2210)

Aaron Fraser, “Compassionate Patriotism: A Response to So-Called Christian Nationalism”

Sarah Johnson, “Instagram needs the Humanities: Critical Thinking and Infographics”

Ellen Tiessen, “Goodreads: A Book’s Social Media”

Connection between humanities disciplines and the “real” world is one of the persistent complaints leveled against the humanities. On the other hand, humanities scholars argue that the humanities are essential to civil discussion in society, to the future of democracy, to human flourishing and even to the new post-industrial economy. This panel of senior humanities students will demonstrate that their disciplines can engage issues important in our current reality. They will also explore how the resources of their disciplines can be deployed to address these issues.

Humanities Session 3 – Historical Research on Nazi Germany (Room A2210)

Elijah Coutts, “The Social Composition of Early Nazi Supporters, the SA, and Their Attraction to Nazism”

Studying early Nazi supporters sheds light on the conditions and propaganda that influenced them, aiding our understanding of why Nazism initially appealed to the German public. Between 1928 and 1932, the Nazi vote surged by 1560 percent, as the party attracted a broad base from the working class to industrialists, with middle-class Protestants comprising the majority. The appeal of National Socialism came from its ability to address diverse concerns: the working class faced inflation and unemployment, the middle class feared downward mobility, and industrialists were worried about labour unrest and the risk of communism. Underpinning this was a profound economic crisis after the First World War, as hyperinflation and high unemployment led to social and political instability. The Weimar government's perceived failure to address these issues and its role in the widely-resented Treaty of Versailles eroded public trust and fuelled Nazi support. This paper examines the case of the *Sturmabteilung* (Stormtroopers, or SA), the Nazi Party paramilitary comprised largely of unemployed young men and war veterans. It will examine their social composition and assess how the Nazis effectively used a betrayal narrative, promises of jobs, and a fear of Communism spurred by increased labour militancy to attract new members to the SA and grow the party's support.

Kayla Sobolewski, “Using Wombs as Warfare: Nazi Policy on Women”

Hitler promised all women of the Third Reich they would be able to answer their natural calling of getting married and bearing children which was reflected in the National Socialist policies. Nazi policy looked to build a strong German nation by hindering the rights of women through instilling and promoting family policies that accelerated birthing rates in Germany. Nazism was a male-dominated movement that defined women's societal roles based on a stereotype of women as naturally submissive. The Nazi movement instilled policies that simultaneously empowered and controlled German women's autonomy to boost their birth rate while producing a pure-blooded Aryan nation. As much as Nazi leaders asserted that men acquired honour through participating in military service, they also upheld that honour to women which came from bearing the next generation.

Kyle Jantzen, “Bending Christianity to Far-Right Politics in Nazi Germany”

Historians have long laboured to explain both National Socialist views of Christianity and Christian views of National Socialism. While a consensus has been reached on the very mixed record of the Christian churches in the Third Reich, there remain conflicting interpretations of the Nazi policy on religion. Was Nazism a political religion or a form of religious politics? And if a religious politics, was it pagan, Christian, or something else? This paper seeks to explain the place of religion—and specifically Christianity—within the Nazi movement and Hitler's far-right regime by analyzing the responses of various German Protestants—some on the national stage and others tucked away in rural parishes—to the rise and rule of Nazism. Their mix of confusion and clarity about Hitler and Nazism helps us make sense of the historiographical debate about the place of religion in the Nazi regime.

Humanities Session 4 - Prudence and Justice in English Literature (Room A2133)

Stephanie Studzinski, “Reimagining Justice via Multiverse Theory”

Regardless of its veracity, multiverse theory has become deeply entrenched within popular culture, cosmology, and speculative fiction (SF) as a means of critical inquiry. American author Sheri S. Tepper’s *The Margarets* (2008) is one example of contemporary SF which utilizes multiverse theory to explore how the future of humanity might be altered by knowledge and experiences made accessible through a multiverse. In the novel, Tepper juxtaposes a biodiverse and intelligent interstellar community and the benefits of co-existing with nonhuman life with a near-barren Earth and the devastating consequences of the anthropogenic ecoapocalypses on Earth. Because the Earth can no longer sustain life, humanity must barter with extraterrestrials to survive. Since the only resource remaining is humanity itself, an interstellar slave trade develops. When Margaret Bain, the protagonist, is 'traded,' she splits into eight Margarets. These Margarets are different ages, classes, and genders and live different lives on different planets with distinct cultures, languages, and environments. While these planets all coexist within a single universe, they operate as macroscopic universes in that they are each unique, self-contained, and inhabited by a Margaret.

Through the multiverse, Margaret can explore different potential iterations of her life and discover that justice always exists in some form somewhere. The novel explores what justice might be for individuals who have suffered injustices, but also what justice might look like for an ecoapocalyptic Earth and nonhumans. This is part of a forthcoming book chapter in an edited volume entitled *Into the Other Worlds* (Routledge 2024).

Erin Clark, “*Beowulf*: A King’s Guide to Ageing with Prudence”

The Old English poem, *Beowulf*, is surrounded by mystery; scholars are still attempting to learn more about the historical context of the epic’s origin. Like all great works of literature, many have also been inspired to search for meaning inside its narrative. This paper embarks on a similar quest and argues that a model for aging gracefully is present within *Beowulf*. Through the poem, three key events highlight the role of warrior bonds in different life stages: Grendel’s anger at Heorot, Beowulf’s mutually beneficial interactions with Hrothgar, and Beowulf’s failure to fulfill his role during his last battle. In contrast to Hrothgar, Beowulf’s lack of prudence around aging jeopardizes everything he fought to protect.