

## 2017 Belmont Undergraduate Research Symposium

### English I

Moderator: Caresse A. John, Ph.D.

April 20, 2017

3:30-5:00 p.m. -- JAAC 2140

3:30-5:00 p.m.

### **“Structuring Voice and Identity: How Narratology Informs Readings of Power and Suffering”**

Alexandra Huff, Elliott Neal, Amanda Nicklaus, Rachel Petty

Faculty Advisor: Caresse A. John, Ph.D.

Narratology can be succinctly defined as the study of the properties and models of narrative. By identifying various forms of verbal representation and temporal ordering, Narratology attempts to construct a framework for understanding all narratives. Narratologists are commonly provoked by the questions of: “Who is the speaker of a narrative?,” “Who is seeing the events of a narrative?,” and “In what order are these events being told by the speaker?”. Though Narratology typically avoids questions of context, when used in tandem with other forms of literary approaches, such as feminism and postmodernism, textual interpretation becomes multi-layered and nuanced. This panel is formed from Belmont University’s Fall 2016 Narratology Class, and the panelists will present their final research projects: Alexandra Huff uses feminist narratological theory to explore the narrative structure and resulting duality of female voice in *The Great Gatsby*; Elliott Neal analyzes the use of anachrony in *The Great Gatsby*, showing how Nick Carraway’s nonlinear narration reflects the human condition of fragmented selfhood. In her analysis of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Amanda Nicklaus examines how normative discourse and narrative structure silence non-normative voices; and Rachel Petty analyzes the implications of the structure and the multiple narrators in *The Bluest Eye*. Ultimately, this panel aims to explore how the structure and discourse of narrative can depict voice and identity amongst power structures and suffering.

### **A Disappearing of Power: Structure, Identity and Female Voice in *The Great Gatsby***

Alexandra Huff

In *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterly writes, “*The Great Gatsby* is a book about power, and the romantic investment and indignant divestment of women is an aspect of and mask for the struggle for power between men which is its subject.” This paper approaches Daisy Buchanan, Myrtle and Jordan from a feminist narratological lens, exploring the implications of gender and sexuality on *The Great Gatsby*’s structure, function and modes of representation. The speech acts of the female characters are investigated simultaneously as gender performances and gender

transgressions, revealing a duality of female voice and experience in the text that destabilizes Nick Carraway's presentation of female characters as signifiers of desire and loss.

### **“An Incommunicable and Unconsolidated Chaos: Anachrony in *The Great Gatsby*”**

Elliott Neal

Nick Carraway's unreliable narration is one of the main topics of critical scholarship on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Approaching Nick's questionable reliability through the lens of narratology reveals the power of anachrony to create a disjointed, chaotic, and fallible narration and narrator. This paper examines in particular Fitzgerald's use of analepsis and prolepsis in Nick's narration and argues that Nick's experiences with Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Daisy Buchanan go unconsolidated and fragmented, instead of fulfilling Nick's desire to communicate a complete representation of Jay Gatsby's character and identity. And yet the fragmentation of Nick's narrative is exactly what allows for readers to grasp Fitzgerald's point: namely our incapacity for consolidating emotions, experiences, reflections, virtues, and identities into a single representation of selfhood. Nick Carraway's fragmented narrative not only exposes the human condition of chaotic and nonlinear selfhood, but also exhibits the ways in which art cannot ultimately represent the fragmented self.

### **“Quiet As It's Kept”: Silence in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

Amanda Nicklaus

The most important aspect of a narrative is the choice of narrator. Though Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* is clearly the story of Pecola, among the various narrators Morrison uses, Pecola is strikingly absent. In this essay, I use narratological theories of narration to examine the authorial choices implicit in narrators; more specifically, I examine why Morrison does not allow Pecola to narrate. Looking both at the societal context of the novel, as well as the structure of the novel, I argue that Pecola is excluded from narrating because the hegemonic narrative silences those who cannot fit their stories into its discourse. Ultimately, what Morrison's novel teaches us is that, as Claudia creates a space for validating Pecola's story, creating space for nonnormative voices allows unspoken stories to be told in an accurate manner.

### **A Witness to Suffering: A Narratological Analysis of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

Rachel Petty

In this paper, I examine and analyze the various formal devices that Toni Morrison employs in *The Bluest Eye* in order to make her readers actively witness the systematic suffering of the characters in the novel. I first show how the presence of multiple narrators broadens the scope of Morrison's novel to include the black community as a whole rather than just the suffering of one

character. I then examine how the novel's seasonal structure subverts traditional rebirth and renewal associations and implies a cycle of perpetual suffering. Finally, I illustrate how Toni Morrison involves her readers in the creation of the story's meaning by presenting the events of the novel in non-chronological fragments that readers must re-assemble. Though Morrison said she was unhappy with *The Bluest Eye* because it touched readers but did not move them, I conclude that Morrison's novel *is* able to move readers when they take these narratological devices into account and appropriately interpret Claudia's plea at the end. Claudia's final message to readers is that, in the face of suffering, rather than turn away their eyes and let the cycle continue forever, they must listen, witness, and then take action.