

FINAL ORALS LIST
Sample 1

GROUP 1: Stéphane Mallarmé

Poetry:

Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard — Stéphane Mallarmé

Prose:

Crise de vers — Stéphane Mallarmé

Mimique — Stéphane Mallarmé

Theory:

The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé — Leo Bersani

GROUP 2: Questions of High and Low

Paintings:

Olympia — Edouard Manet

A Modern Olympia — Paul Cézanne

Theory:

Notes on Camp — Susan Sontag

Avant Garde and Kitsch — Clement Greenberg

The Painted Word — Tom Wolfe

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction — Walter Benjamin

GROUP 3: Questions of Authorship and Attribution

Books:

A Fan's Notes — Frederick Exley

The Argonauts — Maggie Nelson

Autobiography of Red — Anne Carson

Theory:

The Death of the Author — Roland Barthes

GROUP 4: Questions of Hybridity in Journalism and Essay

Books:

In Cold Blood — Truman Capote

Articles/Essays:

The American Male, Age 10 — Susan Orlean

Upon this Rock — John Jeremiah Sullivan

Frank Sinatra Has a Cold — Gay Talese

The New Journalism — Tom Wolfe

Late Victorians — Richard Rodriguez

Devil's Bait — Leslie Jamison

INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Sample 1

My thesis argued for a reconciliation of sorts between two unlikely works—Mallarmé’s lifelong attempt to write the ultimate Book and his magazine on fashion, authored under a series of pseudonyms. The comparison aimed to rattle several apparent divisions between the two texts—the division between high and low art, between poetry and prose, and between the authors to whom they were attributed (Mallarmé himself or the pseudonyms he adopted or if, indeed, there was to be an author at all). Although the thesis crystallized my efforts to trouble these boundaries, the tensions at their core have been present throughout my academic career. I have attempted to organized the following clusters to illustrate, in semi-chronological order, how the themes at the heart of my thesis emerged from my studies of the past four years. I do not mean to draw strict parallels between these works and my thesis, merely to demonstrate the similarity of the questions they posed.

The first cluster centers on three works of Mallarmé’s and one theory text *on* Mallarmé which were foundational in my approach to the thesis project. I clustered these texts not only for their common relation to Mallarmé, but also for a similar impulse in their argument. In Jacques Derrida’s *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, he levies a critique of Structuralism by pointing out that its methodology (namely, calling attention to and codifying the organizing principles of a system) always implied a fixed point of origin, a ground on which the structure is conceived (Derrida mentions *telos*, God, man, *aletheia*, consciousness, *eidos*, among others)—in his words, a “center.” In the lecture, Derrida proposes a new notion—one which would become ‘central’ to post-Structuralism—a decentering: an organization where even the governing principle is subject to a system of differences and relations. I mention this lecture, because this first group of works (and some of the others) coheres on the grounds of their common effort to undermine “centers” or at least to move away from them.

Un coup de dés, one of Mallarmé's most famous poems, realizes this effort most literally, in its modernist play with space, typography, and legibility. Mallarmé shatters the conventional poetic line and stanza, unfolding his poem instead over several spread out pages, inviting the eye to read up, down, across and over, in lieu of the standard left-to-right. In *Crise de vers*, the poet observes a similar rejection of structure taking place across all of French poetry as free verse begins to edge out the French alexandrine. Like Derrida, who calls his new structure a "disruption," Mallarmé see the arrival of free verse as "une inquiétude du voile dans le temple."¹ *Mimique*, likewise, describes a pantomime in the act of a radical kind of mimesis: one without an *original* to copy from; one which is "une allusion perpétuelle" or "un milieu, pur, de fiction."² The mime's representation, in other words, is a kind of original copy, a sign without an initial referent. The final text, Bersani's *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*, takes the same approach to Mallarmé's poetic project as a whole. Using the poet's self-declared death ("Je suis mort," he writes to Théodore Aubanel in 1866"³), Bersani probes the extremes of what it means for the poet to have "displace[d] the authorship of his poems from his defunct self to the universe."⁴ He wrests Mallarmé's oeuvre of even the center of their common author.

The second cluster of works is concerned with the value of art at the meeting grounds of highbrow and lowbrow culture. Manet's *Olympia* jump-started Modernism in French painting: it portrays a reclining prostitute addressing the viewer with an accusatory stare. Manet painted without the conventional shading technique *chiaroscuro*, making the lines bold and brash, and based the composition on Titian's famous *Venus of Urbino*, which underscored for contemporary audiences the painting's position at the intersection of bourgeois and working culture. This same concern—of

¹ Mallarmé, 367.

² Mallarmé, 378.

³ Bersani, 5.

⁴ Bersani, 6.

elevating lower class culture by appropriating bourgeois forms (or vice versa, or ensuring the two remain discrete)—is also at play in the four works of theory. Clement Greenberg’s essay, *Avant Garde and Kitsch*, insists upon the boundary separating the high “avant-garde” works which exist only for themselves (“l’art pour l’art”), and the low “kitsch” products, which were commercial, accessible and produced for public consumption. Benjamin polices a similar line, asking in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, whether the “aura” of an original work is degraded in the process of mass reproduction. Sontag’s *Notes on Camp*, takes the inverse line of thinking, musing elliptically on the pleasures of “camp” —a notion not far from Greenberg’s “kitsch.”

Tom Wolfe’s *The Painted Word* makes a much broader claim—that there has been a genre dissolution between painting and literature, that critical theory has become the mechanism by which avant-garde artists are found, shaped and celebrated. But a large part of this appropriation of painting by literature, Wolfe writes, has to do with class signifiers, and ensuring the high remains demarcated from the low and middle. In the second chapter, for example, Wolfe describes the process (he calls it “the Apache dance”) whereby avant-garde artists are uplifted by members of the *beau monde*: “there is a peculiarly modern reward that the avant-garde artists can give his benefactor: namely, the feeling that he, like his mate the artist, is separate from and aloof from the bourgeoisie, the middle classes.”⁵

The third group of texts revolves around the question of authorship. Just as Derrida calls attention to the reliance of Structuralist paradigms to make use of a “ground” or “center,” so Barthes, in *The Death of the Author*, critiques the overestimation on the part of Western readers of the author’s role in a work. And just as Derrida demands a radical “decentering,” so Barthes endorses an understanding of text as “multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue

⁵ Wolfe, 19.

with each other, into parody, into contestation.”⁶ All three of the accompanying texts imply a similar concern—each explores the question of where a text’s point of origin truly lies. Frederick Exley’s *A Fan’s Notes*, for example, is labeled a “fictional memoir.” In a prefatory note, Exley writes, “Though the events in this book bear similarity to those of that long malaise, my life, many of the characters and happenings are creations solely of the imagination.”⁷ The protagonist and author share a name, a sensibility, and many life experiences. But the fictional Exley had a wife, a mental institutionalization and several adventures that his creator did not. Throughout the “memoir,” it is unclear where the real Exley ends and the fictional one begins.

Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* creates a similar conundrum, as it is not an autobiography in the conventional sense—it is a book of fictional poems, ostensibly translations or reinterpretations of a lost work by the Greek poet Stesichoros, not told in the first person or, seemingly, “by” the color red. In the early pages of the book, however, Carson notes that adjectives do the work of determining the window through which a reader sees a noun (“When Homer mentions blood, blood is *black*. When women appear; women are *neat-ankled* or *glancing*”⁸). Appropriately, the color appears throughout the book, finding its way into where ever the novel wanders: in its protagonist, in volcanos, in sunsets and in feelings. If autobiography traditionally tells a subject’s story from their own point of view, Carson’s text tells that story through the lens of an adjective; through the color red.

Nelson’s text, finally, seems to both affirm and contradict Barthes’ argument. On the one hand, the book is deeply personal—it details the inner-workings of Nelson’s relationship with her partner, her thoughts on queer identity, and the biological and emotional changes of pregnancy and birth. But even as it is inseparable from its author, *The Argonauts*, also embodies what Barthes

⁶ Barthes, 6.

⁷ Exley, vii.

⁸ Carson, 4.

described as “multiple writings” in the most explicit sense. Nelson regularly cites other texts, moving seamlessly between quotes and her own words, demarcating the foreign voices only with italics and a small note in the margin. *The Argonauts* is simultaneously a tapestry of voices and entirely singular.

The final group centers on a subject towards which the others have gestured, and which plays a significant role in my thesis—the hybridization or mixing of genres. The book and all six essays straddle the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between the literary and the journalistic, between novel, essay, and report. Each work, like *La Dernière mode* itself, could make a case against the usefulness of such categories at all.

Comparative Literature Oral Exam
Sample 2

Group 1: “Elite” Culture in the Marketplace: Art as Commodity

Texts:

James, Henry. “Collaboration” and “The Real Thing” in *Complete Stories 1892-1898* (New York: The Library of America, 1996), pp. 234-255 and 32-57. Print.

Lawrence, D.H. “Things” in *The Complete Stories of D.H. Lawrence* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), III, pp. 844-853.

Reza, Yasmina. *Art*, trans. Christopher Hampton. (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996). Print.

Reza, Yasmina. “Art.” Inaugural performance, directed by Patrice Kerbat, starring Fabrice Luchini, Pierre Arditi and Pierre Vaneck. Paris, Comédie Des Champs Elysées, 1994.
<http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x66105>

Theory:

Bourdieu, Pierre. “The Market of Symbolic Goods” in *Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Ed. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. Print. 112-141.

Morris, William. “The Aims of Art” in *William Morris, Poet, Artist, Socialist* (New York: Twentieth Century Press), pp. 189-207.

Sommer, Doris. “Art and Accountability.” *The Work of Art in the World*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Print.

Group 2: Visual Art and Its Boundaries: On the Blending of Aesthetic and Emotional Lives

Texts:

Balzac, Honoré de. “Le chef d’oeuvre inconnu” in *La Comédie Humaine: études de moeurs: scenes de la vie de campagne*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). Print.

--- “Sarrasine.” *La Comédie Humaine: études de moeurs: scenes de la vie de campagne*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). Print.

Ovid. “Pygmalion and the Statue.” *Metamorphoses*. Book X. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). Print. Lines 243-297.

Theory:

Malraux, André. “Le Musée imaginaire.” *Voix du Silence*. (Paris: NRF, 1951). Print.

Ruskin, John. “Of the Pathetic Fallacy.” *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, part IV. First American Editin. (New York: John Wiley, 1863). Print. 156-172.

Tolstoy, Leo. *What Is Art?* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: The Penguin Group, 1995). Print.

Group 3: Mapping Consciousness in Modernist Fiction

Texts:

Joyce, James. "A Mother." *Dubliners*. (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 2007). pp. 139-154. Print.

Proust, Marcel. *Du Côte de Chez Swann*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1922). Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1925). Print.

---. *To the Lighthouse*. (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1927). Print.

Theory:

Bersani, Leo. "Fantasies of the Self and the World." *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and of Art*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Print. 21-55.

Rose, Phyllis. "Bloomsbury." *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. Print. 31-47.

Group 4: The Didactic Economics of Pre-Victorian British Women: Economic Narratology and Its Aspirations

Texts:

Edgeworth, Maria. "The Birthday Present." *The Parent's Assistant*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897). Print.

--- "The Bracelets." *The Parent's Assistant*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897). Print.

---"The Orphans." *The Parent's Assistant*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897). Print.

Inchbald, Elizabeth. *Nature and Art*. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997). Print.

Martineau, Harriet. "A Manchester Strike." *Illustrations of Political Economy*. Vol. 3. (Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1832). Print.

Theory:

Keynes, John Maynard. "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren." *Essays in Persuasion*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010). 321-332. Print.

Comparative Literature Oral Exam
Intellectual Autobiography
Sample 2

The opportunity to explore a wide range of topics and texts as a Comparative Literature undergraduate has been an invaluable academic experience and one for which I feel an immense amount of gratitude. Looking back on my intellectual trajectory, I am especially thankful to have been able to combine work from multiple fields, often bridging the social sciences and the humanities. Moreover, my interest in the visual and performing arts inspired me to undertake a “panaesthetic” approach towards my study of literature. This has perhaps been the most enduring thread in my work.

While pursuing a Secondary in Economics, I quickly became interested in art and literature markets of the modern era. I began by investigating the early life and work of John Maynard Keynes, his own artistic sensibilities, and, in particular, his tenure as president of the London Artists’ Association. The Association’s aim of providing contemporary artists, including many of Keynes’ friends, with a steady income seemed to challenge the value of aesthetic individuality and to raise questions regarding the status of the artist in the marketplace. These concerns also pointed to a larger issue motivating my curiosity: I wondered whether (and how) monetary forces confer legitimacy on a work of art or whether they instead debase aesthetic production. This debate forms the crux of the first cluster of works on my oral examination list.

In particular, this issue seems to exist between sociological and aesthetic theories, and Pierre Bourdieu’s piece, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” which I read during my first Comparative Literature course (“Literature 96: Grounds for Comparison”) became a focal point in many of my academic investigations going forward. I was troubled by Bourdieu’s attempt to theorize hierarchies of cultural publics, corresponding to hierarchies of cultural production, and I

began to test his conclusions against some of my favorite twentieth-century French works, including Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant*, and Yasmina Reza's play, *Art*, which I encountered in in Sophomore Tutorial ("Literature 97"). Reza directly explores the sociological complexity of art markets, as she links cultural prestige to the monetary value of a work, while undermining economic concerns as a primary criterion for aesthetic legitimacy. Crucial to my engagement with the play was Doris Sommer's chapter on "Art and Accountability" for both its discussion of innate aesthetic judgement and its commentary on the public, communal, and even revolutionary, function of art.¹

Yet, in my Junior Tutorial, I also began to contrast these material and monetary aspects of a work of art with its emotional and symbolic value. I became intrigued by the interpersonal aspects of aesthetic engagement that underpin economic valuations, and I sought a fuller understanding of art in social life. I realized I loved Reza's play for its incisive treatment of a delicate friendship and the way in which different approaches to art affect or reveal varying styles of intimacy in Reza's characters. Reading the short fiction of D.H. Lawrence and Henry James similarly opened avenues through which I could explore the implications of economic activity and art production on social life. Focusing on art in the marketplace thus morphed into tracing broader questions of class, vocation, materialism, and the veneration of beauty.

This led me towards Tolstoy's conception of art as that which conveys emotion; *What Is Art?* resonated with me personally, and I found that Tolstoy's definition offered the most comprehensive grounding for the remainder of my tutorial work. I was increasingly drawn to

¹ In this vein, I also focused on French theater in particular as a site of revolution, through works such as Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* and Jean Anhouil's *Antigone*. This background helped me understand the ways in which Reza's *Art* relies on, and achieves, mass public engagement.

fiction featuring artists as protagonists, fascinated by the way authors portrayed their romantic and social lives. I specifically began looking at the ways these characters, who should be the most aesthetically rigorous, often mischaracterize others by virtue of their own work. Initially, this involved considering the Pygmalion myth and its many reincarnations, as I wondered how the modern caution against confusing art and reality developed from the optimism of Ovid's account. I found that Honoré de Balzac offered the most interesting reimagining of the problematic emotional life of the artist in relation to his work. In "Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu" and "Sarrasine," Balzac explores the limits of aesthetic realism, both on a literal level, as his characters blend the realms of art and love to disastrous results, and on a meta-textual level. In this vein, I also became interested in the problem of endowing art objects with life in connection with Ruskin's concept of the "pathetic fallacy" and sentimentality.

This theme became a major focus of my junior essay entitled "Creating an Aesthetic System: Marcel Proust on John Ruskin, Society, Objects, and the Self," as I sought to understand Ruskin as an aesthetic mentor for Proust. I concentrated on the Swann and Odette love story, and the ways in which visual art and music act as mediators for their connection. Again, Swann makes a categorization failure, falling for someone not his "genre" or "type," and his reliance on aesthetic markers proves misguided. Understanding the ways in which Swann fails as a critic in both his personal and professional life also opened up new avenues of inquiry into Proust's vision for his own criticism.

Running parallel to my consideration of in the emotional dimensions of art was an interest in the physical manifestations of intellectual and creative space. As I looked at the ways in which the emotional, symbolic and aesthetic invaded the social worlds of fictional characters, I also became aware of the spaces in which these characters were, and were not, able to operate. I

attempted to understand times in which social positioning was at odds with aesthetic production, specifically in modernist fiction. Virginia Woolf's novels provided the most fruitful examples for considering *gendered* intellectual and physical spaces in particular, which Phyllis Rose's description of Bloomsbury helped me put into context. Similarly, in James Joyce's, "A Mother," I was particularly intrigued by the restrictions on Mrs. Kearney's movements and how physical space affects her ability to achieve artistic and monetary success for her daughter. My attention to fictive physical environments soon carried over into my study of Proust, as I became fascinated by the complex liminal spaces between the symbolic and the corporeal realms in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. I traced the ways in which Proust's narrator seeks both to incorporate his environment into his mental space and to imprint his consciousness on the landscape, as an argument in favor of a closer blending of the two spheres. In many ways, my thesis project came out of this intellectual investigation, as I began to focus on the function of religious spaces in the novel before transitioning to a study of the cathedral structure in Proust's criticism.

Finally, in a slightly different vein, my economic and literary interests came together last fall in a seminar on "Money in English Literature," which allowed me to explore how female authors in England described their economic environment in the early stages of the industrial revolution. I was particularly interested in the ways in which they theorized childhood and engaged in didactic endeavors. I traced words associated both with progeny and money, such as "labor," "seed," "maturity," and "entrust," while paying particularly close attention to the concept of replication. I hope to continue to study "Economic Narratology" and understand how economic concepts benefit from the narrative form.

I remain intrigued and puzzled by many of these topics, which I know will continue to structure my academic exploration going forward. The fact that I am still so inspired by this work

is a testament to the incredible guidance I received from Comparative Literature faculty and students as my initially esoteric interests took shape. Joining the Comparative Literature department gave me an intellectual home, and I am very appreciative of all I was able to accomplish over the last four years.

Comparative Literature Oral Exam List
Sample 3

GROUP 1: Italy: The Past and Future of Poetic Tradition

Poetry

Dante. Sections I-VI, XIX, XXVI-XXVIII. *La vita nuova*. 1295.
 Petrarca, Francesco. Sonetti 1, 3 61, 126, 128, 302. *Canzoniere*. 1336.
 Leopardi, Giacomo. “L’infinito,” “Le ricordanze.” *Canti*. 1835.

Movies

La dolce vita. Directed by Federico Fellini. 1960.
La grande bellezza. Directed by Paolo Sorrentino. 2013.

Theory

Hobsbawm, Eric. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.” *The Invention of Tradition*. 1983.
 Lyttelton, Adrian. “Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento.” *Making and Remaking Italy*. 2001.

GROUP 2: The “Modern” Novel and Meta-Literary Consciousness

Fiction

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Il Decameron*. 1350-1353.
 Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quijote*. 1605, 1615.

Theory

Bakhtin, Mikhail. “Discourse in the Novel.” 1934.
 ---. “Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel.” 1941.

GROUP 3: Modernism and the Experience of Subjectivity

Fiction

Breton, André. *Nadja*. 1928.
 Woolf, Virginia. *The Waves*. 1931.
 Cortázar, Julio. *Rayuela*. 1963.

Theory

Woolf, Virginia. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” 1924.

GROUP 4: Romantic Modernity and Poetic Engagement

Poetry

Blake, William. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. 1793.
 García Lorca, Federico. *Poeta en Nueva York*. 1940.

Theory

Foucault, Michel. “Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire.” 1971.
 Paz, Octavio. *Los hijos del limo: del romanticismo a la vanguardia*. 1974.

Comparative Literature Oral Exam Essay
Sample 3

The Inscribed Accident: Chasing Time and Consciousness in European Literary Tradition

Much of my time in Comparative Literature has been spent parsing out the differences between prose and poetry, and, through hybrid classes such as my Junior Tutorial, trying to establish connections between these two modes of writing. In particular, I have been interested in exploring the relationship between genre and time—in studying how first-person, speaking voices have evolved over time, and how their relationship to the objects and people around them has taken shape. My goal has been to understand sequential markers of tradition, from the Middle Ages to today, as well as to trace formal and thematic affinities across time, space, and genres. It both uses and questions the distinction that Bakhtin draws between poetry, the epic, and the novel: if poetry and the epic are self-sufficient (“In poetic genres, artistic consciousness—understood as a unity of all the author’s semantic and expressive intentions—fully realizes itself within its own language”; “The epic past [...] is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located”), the novel innovates thanks to heteroglossia and an open-ended, future-oriented vision. This intellectual autobiography aims to look within and across genre, language, and literary movements, considering works along two axes: linguistic unity or disunity (the “openness” of the speaking voice to other forms of consciousness) and temporal enclosure, with regards to an idealized past—national and/or personal—and the open-ended present.

The journey begins in Italy, the heartland of early modern Western European poetic tradition. My goal in this section is to understand—with the help of scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and

Adrian Lyttelton—the meaning of national tradition and identity. It explores the relationship between speakers and their physical and temporal environment. Dante, Petrarch, and Leopardi's works are predicated on memory—specifically, on romantic relationships branded by death and social isolation (“what pleases the world is a short dream,” Petrarch writes). Personal history is narrated as the conjoined interaction of chance and fate—a unique, possibly heroic “destiny”: Dante repeatedly evokes numerology; Petrarch declares “blessed” the time and place in which he first experienced love; and Leopardi speaks of the cruel fate of his seemingly hopeless life, in which he is condemned to see the visible world as dead memories. If Dante uses a prose frame to give dynamism, unity, and credibility to his narrative, Leopardi relies on the external environment as a structure for memory. Similarly, the 20th-century movies *La dolce vita* and *La grande bellezza* use Rome—a geographic location permeated by civilizational memory—as a backdrop *and* a living entity. In the last scenes of *La grande bellezza*, three movements overlap: the protagonist's return to an idealized past; a nun's physical and spiritual elevation toward the Christian eternal; and the geographical sliding of the camera along the Tiber river and its various monuments, which merges time and space. Alongside the actors, the city becomes a silent protagonist, capable of recounting a disjointed, accidental narrative of its own.

Mikhail Bakhtin identifies this possibility for the past and the future to “flow” with and into each other as markers of the transition from the epic to the novel. Group 2 examines two early novelistic forms that rely on a realistic, historical frame—for Boccaccio, the Black Plague in Florence and for Cervantes, 16th-century Spain—to recount a series of multi-voiced, fantastical adventures. In the *Decameron*, the tales that the ten young Florentines relate function as self-contained, detachable entities. A similar format structures *Don Quixote*, yet if Boccaccio's stories often parody the genre of didactic, allegorical tales, Cervantes transforms satire into a tragicomic

tale of unprecedented scope—a novel that satirizes *itself*. The conceit of a narrator-as-translator allows Cervantes to comment, within the text, on his own work, disrupting the narrative at will. *Don Quixote* is permeated by playful, authorial games that undermine the very possibility for narrative unification and stable, character consciousness. In Chapter II.5, when Sancho Panza’s speech suddenly turns into Don Quixote’s (supposedly because of an inconsistency in the original manuscript), the boundaries between the master and his servant become blurred. Cervantes reveals the artificial, linguistic nature of his protagonist—and the capacity for heteroglossia to radically determine the boundaries between one consciousness and the next. Paradoxically, as *Don Quixote* mocks the conventions of chivalric tales, it becomes a tale of epic dimensions, self-contained in its imaginative and linguistic world, yet simultaneously pervaded by laughter, narratorial self-consciousness, and variations in point of view.

Group 3 explores the connection between these early examples of narrative innovation and 20th-century representation of consciousness. It examines the way modernist writers exploit the novel’s flexibility, transforming it into a genre capable of aggregating multiple layers of subjectivity. In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Virginia Woolf gives precedence to character development, arguing that modern writers must strive to “catch” their characters, focusing on the complexity of human nature and consciousness. In *The Waves*, she constructs a novel without a single line of narratorial intervention; neither a play nor a poem, the work challenges heteroglossia in its conjunction of internal monologues with striking linguistic consistency. In *Nadja* and *Rayuela*, by contrast, narratorial digression is central to the work. Breton’s novel adopts the surrealist technique of automatic writing to compose a story that—similarly to the Italian poets’ focus on romantic destiny—extracts from chance encounters the seeds of fate, building a tale that merges folly, romance, and the possibility of a truth beyond reality. Cortázar interrogates the

possibility of novelistic unity by allowing the reader to alternate between a linear plot and a section of scattered fragments. In their “chase” for characters, these authors build worlds in which the reader is encouraged to recognize and fill narrative gaps, disrupting traditional divisions between narrator and reader, author and character.

Group 4 questions the distinction between epic distance and present open-endedness. Blake and Lorca’s works emphasize the central presence of the first-person poet-and-speaker, creating a self-contained, epic-like world, yet also provocatively address the open-ended present. They combine myth with a concern for socio-political reality. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* refuses to separate sexual energy from political history: through a mythological tale about rape, Blake interrogates oppression and purity, relating his story to the American revolution. Federico García Lorca also turns to the United States to explore hardship and exploitation, as he writes about Great-Depression-era New York. Both authors couch societal criticism in abstract, universal terms, aimed at liberating the body from its moral and commercial shackles. The authors reflect on Christianity and morality, on the beastliness of human nature, and on the intersection of mythology with life. The poetic speakers become prophet-like voices capable of unifying the entire world in a network of elemental threads, at once physical and abstract: “The true pain that keeps things awake / is a small infinite burning / in the innocent eyes of other systems,” Lorca writes, as though New York city were a gateway to the cosmic system. “They told me that the night & day were all that I could see; / They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up. / And they inclos’d my infinite brain into a narrow circle,” Blake’s *Oothoon* relates, expressing the constraint of categorization on a free soul. At once Romantic and modern, these poets produce works that radically interrogate human nature, historical events, and societal tenets of morality. Like Foucault’s genealogical approach, these poets blend the body and history: they understand history

as an object that must be constantly analyzed, revised, transformed, through a “will to knowledge,” an energetic desire to re-examine the past as interconnected accidents—a string of events marked by randomness and discontinuity, tied together, like the body, in an ephemeral aggregation of molecules subject to life and death.

What Bakhtin calls epic distance and poetic self-sufficiency can thus be used—in works as culturally distinct as Blake’s visionary poems and Woolf’s poetico-dramatic novel—to interrogate the present through the lens of quasi-prophetic energy. Conversely, works such as Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, written over four hundred years ago, still provide a template for “modern” or “modernist” experimentation with narrative disruption, digression, and disunity. The possibility for the sequence of this intellectual autobiography to be restructured into an equally cohesive narrative—for example, for works in Group 4 to connect to works in Group 1, thereby creating a circular narrative of past-and-future innovation—reflects the main import of my Comparative Literature studies at Harvard: the possibility to use rigorous tools of literary analysis to dissect texts of various (langu)ages, in order to trace the profound—however unconventional or accidental—affinities between works divided by time and space. As Octavio Paz notes, when defining the tradition of the modern as a succession of ruptures: “the future offers us a double image: it’s the end of times and its re-beginning, it’s the degradation of the archetypal past and its resurrection.” The future is at once a retrieval of the past, a movement toward the ideal, and its selective destruction. As history and literary tradition move forward, cycles emerge, close, and reappear; speakers interrogate the meaning of their surrounding world in terms at once universal and historically specific; authors “chase” their own characters and, through these, their own, accidental destinies—their resuscitated, ruptured, echoing selves.