

# Senior Thesis Orations



Wyoming Catholic College  
Spring 2026



# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Monday schedule .....	3
Tuesday schedule .....	5
Wednesday schedule .....	8
Thursday schedule .....	9
Abstracts (alphabetical by last name) .....	11
Index .....	55



Dear friends,

When Plato is not denigrating rhetoric, he instead portrays it as a religious event, done under divine inspiration, a sacred act of dedication and praise to a god. Later Hellenic culture wholeheartedly accepted this latter view, and at sacred festal times the city's celebrations would always include the crowd gathering to hear amazing oratorical feats. At its best, such epideictic oratory would invite the crowd to contemplate the true meaning of the festival and usher the city into an immersive experience of festal leisure and cultural formation. The Church Fathers took up the pagan festal culture and elevated it to new Christian heights. The Christian feasts were celebrated with prodigious works of oratory that continue to form the Christian imagination: polished phrases, well-balanced schemes and tropes, and vivid images, all put together to lead the congregation to both contemplate and embody the sacred mysteries being commemorated.

It is in the spirit of this Christian festal oratory that WCC gathers as a community during these four days of senior orations. The oldest Marian feast on the Church calendar is February 2, where Mary is shown to be the angelic throne, the new ark of the covenant, bearing her Son into the Temple. Thus, Mary is the Seat of Wisdom most properly in the Feast of the Presentation, a feast which we as a college extend to a celebration in her honor as *Sedes Sapientiae* on or around February 4, to culminate the week of orations. Like our patronal feast, these orations carry the final echo of Christmas some forty days later, giving us a last moment of festivity before the turn into the penitential forty days of Lent.

At the same time, these orations help reveal just why the College has taken the Seat of Wisdom as her patroness. For while Mary is most clearly the Seat of Wisdom as she presents her Son in the Temple, in that same moment she recedes into the background as she gives Jesus to Simeon, and through Simeon to the world. So too in one of the greatest moments of the school year, the College, as *alma mater*, puts her seniors on center stage; the fac-

ulty recede into the background, and the seniors, in anticipation of their graduation, are publicly presented as those appointed to serve as lights to the wider culture.

In their orations, the seniors share with us the fruits of their leisurely study: the depth and breadth of their relevant knowledge, their careful and nuanced consideration of ideas, their argumentative rigor, confident organization, and rhetorically effective style. The orations are the culminating effort of the seniors' training in the trivial arts, with each senior presiding over an hour of speech-making and question and answer, without a manuscript, on a topic they have been considering for at least the last six months. At the same time, we hope, this culmination is also a foreshadowing of the way our seniors will share with the world at large the common goods of truth and beauty in which they have immersed themselves these last four years.

In that spirit, as President, I gladly welcome you to the Senior Orations of the Wyoming Catholic College Class of 2026. This booklet contains the title and abstract of each oration, along with a schedule for the coming days. Enjoy these next four days, and make sure to thank our seniors for the great service they provide in helping us celebrate in such grand style.

President Kyle Washut



# MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

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**9:30 AM** Mass (Holy Rosary Parish)

**11:30 AM** “*Burn It Up! It’s All Straw!”: A Word of Caution When Approaching Aquinas*  
John Paul Nemeć, p. 43, Augur 113  
Panel: Holmes, Shields, Olsson

*The City in Scripture: From Garments of Skin to Garments of Light*  
Sintia Albeño, p. 11, Augur 114  
Panel: Papadopoulos, Dziad, V. Arbery

**2:00 PM** *Braising Bambi: On Sourcing Ingredients from the Wilderness*  
Barrett Baldwin, p. 14, Augur 113  
Panel: Tonkowich, Shields, Zimmer

*The Gift of Grief*  
Annika Allan-Burke, p. 12, Augur 114  
Panel: Dziad, Olsson, Zepeda

*Finding the Harmony in Dissonance*  
Emma Bleisch, p. 16, Winthrop room  
Panel: Bolin, Nicoletti, Grove

**3:15 PM** *Is Chivalry Dead?*  
Michael Barrow, p. 15, Augur 113  
Panel: G. Arbery, Holmes, Bolin

*Scrupulosity and the Sin of Not Wearing Makeup*  
Annmarie Bridge, p. 18, Augur 114  
Panel: V. Arbery, Tonkowich, Nicoletti

# MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

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**3:15 PM** “Drunk Again, O’Malley!”: A Thomistic Exploration of Why God Gave Us a Sense of Humor

Magdalena Mortensen, p. 42, Winthrop room

Panel: Olsson, Schubert, Hill

**4:30 PM** *The Child Is Father of the Man: The Fatherhood of Epic Poetry through Dante’s Eyes*

Diego Charles, p. 19, Augur 113

Panel: Cooper, Nicoletti, V. Arbery

*Israel’s Inheritance and the Comedy of Ruth*

Claire White, p. 52, Augur 114

Panel: G. Arbery, Hill, Papadopoulos

*You Oughta Be Ashamed of Yourself: Saint Augustine’s Reversal of the Edenic Transgression through Shame*

Vivian Borges, p. 17, Winthrop room

Panel: Schubert, Bolin, Olsson

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# TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

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**8:30 AM** *Finding Identity in Belonging to a Place: Why You Shouldn't Live Alone in a Cabin or Be a Perpetual "Nomad"*

Tessa Mallona, p. 38, Augur 113  
Panel: Zepeda, Hill, V. Arbery

*Grief and Communion*

Benedict Collins, p. 21, Augur 114  
Panel: G. Arbery, Nicoletti, Shields

*"Behold, I Make All Things New": The Redemption of Our Suffering in the New Creation*

Joseph Henderson, p. 33, Winthrop room  
Panel: Cooper, Tonkowich, Grove

**9:45 AM** *How to Use the World's Goodness: Resolving the Paradox of Detachment in Christian Life*

Cecilia Dax, p. 25, Augur 113  
Panel: Nicoletti, Zepeda, Grove

*Beyond Rose-Colored Glasses: Emotional Agency and the Bible's Command to Rejoice*

Aeja DeKuiper, p. 26, Augur 114  
Panel: Papadopoulos, Shields, Hill

*The Just Man Justices and the Lover Sings: Musings on Music as the Act Proper for the Lover*

Florian Covington, p. 23, Winthrop room  
Panel: Holmes, Anderson, Dziad

# TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

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**11:00 AM** *Do You Believe in Magic: Lewis's Re-enchantment of Reality*  
Gemma Davidson, p. 24, Augur 113  
Panel: Tonkowich, Zepeda, Olsson

*Who Is My Beloved? Desire through Kristin Lavransdatter*  
Carolina Gutierrez, p. 32, Augur 114  
Panel: Washut, Nicoletti, V. Arbery

*Aquinas, Dante, and Shakespeare Walk into a Bar: How and Why Dirty Humor Is Important*  
Isabella Wagner, p. 51, Winthrop room  
Panel: Cooper, Schubert, Holmes

**12:15 PM** Mass (Immaculate Conception Oratory)

**2:00 PM** *For the Time Being*  
Maile Escalona, p. 28, Augur 113  
Panel: Schubert, G. Arbery, Shields

*Owning Your Face: How the Modern Man Finds His Identity in the Painful and Tangible*  
Liam Federoff, p. 29, Augur 114  
Panel: Zimmer, Nicoletti, Papadopoulos

**3:15 PM** *Potatoes and Pontiffs: How Catholic Social Teaching Is Embodied by the Irish Constitution*  
Matthew O'Shea, p. 44, Augur 113  
Panel: Papadopoulos, Holmes, Grove

# TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

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**3:15 PM** *Christian Faith and Pagan Reason: Whether Christians Should Study Eastern Philosophy*

Jessica Atkins, p. 13, Augur 114

Panel: Bolin, Anderson, Hill

**4:30 PM** *The Hungry Dead: Zombies as the Poetic Image of the Corrupt Western Psyche*

Anna Grumbine, p. 31, Augur 113

Panel: Hill, V. Arbery, Schubert

*The Profound Relativity of Substance*

Grace Coughlin, p. 22, Augur 114

Panel: Bolin, Dziad, Shields

**5:30 PM** Akathist

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# WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

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**10:00 AM** Mass (Holy Rosary Parish)

**2:00 PM** *Together as One: Exploring the Relationship between Friendship and Happiness*  
Paxton Huemiller, p. 34, Augur 113  
Panel: Zepeda, Papadopoulos, Cooper

*That Thing's Not Fit for a Dog: Get a New Disposition*  
Alden Jewell, p. 35, Augur 114  
Panel: Bolin, V. Arbery, Grove

**3:15 PM** *Creative Writing 302: The Writer, Her Toolbox, and Her Craft*  
Stallings Marosy, p. 39, Augur 113  
Panel: Holmes, Cooper, Schubert

*Resting in Thee: How Augustine Discovers Attachment Security in the Father*  
Rose Malinoski, p. 37, Augur 114  
Panel: Dziad, Zimmer, Papadopoulos

**4:30 PM** *Cato and the Role of Suicide in Dante's Commedia*  
Genevieve Martin, p. 40, Augur 113  
Panel: Papadopoulos, Schubert, Holmes

*"He Must Learn Them Again": Faulkner and the Redemption of Modernity*  
Patrick Gleason, p. 30, Augur 114  
Panel: V. Arbery, G. Arbery, Cooper

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# THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

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**8:30 AM** *Musical Transfiguration: How Great Music Reinterprets Man's Lived Experience*  
Michael Dubruiel, p. 27, Augur 113  
Panel: Cooper, Zepeda, Grove

**9:45 AM** *Mountaineering and Romanticism: A Genealogical Exploration of Why Men Climb*  
Quinn Lynch, p. 36, Augur 113  
Panel: Dziad, Zimmer, Grove

*Unleashing Our Sleeping Self: An Exploration of Lucid Dreaming and Its Consequences*  
Joseph McAleer, p. 41, Augur 114  
Panel: Zepeda, G. Arbery, Bolin

**11:00 AM** *Combating Immoral Sexual Desires by Experiencing the Natural World*  
Austin Penny, p. 45, Augur 113  
Panel: Zimmer, Zepeda, Nicoletti

*Do Your Own Close Reading: The Poet as Rhapsode of Creation*  
James Sidloski, p. 47, Augur 114  
Panel: Hill, Holmes, Dziad

**12:15 PM** Mass (Immaculate Conception Oratory)

**2:00 PM** *Hope for a Cartesian Age: Overcoming the Egocentric Predicament*  
Isabella Ramsay, p. 46, Augur 113  
Panel: Shields, Bolin, G. Arbery

# THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

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**2:00 PM** *Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant: Revelatory Play in Shakespeare as an Asymptotic Expression of Man's Being*  
Kaitlin Sponseller, p. 48, Augur 114  
Panel: Schubert, Hill, Cooper

**3:15 PM** *"Yet You Will Weep and Know Why": The Necessity of Existential Despair for Christian Salvation*  
Mark Susanka, p. 50, Augur 113  
Panel: Shields, Dziad, G. Arbery

*"Your Desire Will Be for Her, but She Will Rule over You": The Restoration of Masculinity in C. S. Lewis's That Hideous Strength*  
Jessa Stommes, p. 49, Augur 114  
Panel: Hill, Olsson, Grove

**4:30 PM** *"I Praise You, for I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made": An Explanation of Transgenderism's Prominence and an Account of Where One Will Find Their True Identity*  
Grace Wiesner, p. 53, Augur 113  
Panel: Shields, Olsson, Zepeda

*"Our Hearts Are Restless Until They Rest in Thee": The Role of Silence and of Contemplation for the Happiness of Man*  
Nathan Clark, p. 20, Augur 114  
Panel: Anderson, Tonkowich, Grove

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# Sintia Albeño

*The City in Scripture: From Garments of Skin to Garments of Light*

Monday, February 2, 11:30 AM

Augur 114

Scripture presents a deeply ambivalent view of the city, portraying it as a place of human arrogance, violence, and corruption, as well as a place of divine presence, order, and redemption. The city of Cain in Genesis 4 is man's first attempt at establishing a 'collective identity' but its very foundations are stained with the blood of the innocent Abel. And yet the last image in the book of Revelation is that of the "holy city . . . coming down from heaven." How can this be? How does the city go from being a place of death to being an image of life? Is there a contradiction between these two views of the city, or are they the same city just "differently considered"?

**Thesis:** "*From Thy Face I Shall Be Hidden*": Tracing the Dialectical Development of the City in the Old Testament from Cain to David

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Travis Dziad

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

# Annika Allan-Burke

## *The Gift of Grief*

Monday, February 2, 2:00 PM

Augur 114

All who have made themselves vulnerable to love have experienced or will experience grief. What is grief, and what is it for? Grief is a universal experience that psychologist John Bowlby outlines as a process in four stages. I will explain the movement of these four stages through a literary example in Sigrid Undset's *Gunnar's Daughter* and a personal reflection in C. S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*. It will become evident through these examples that grief exists ultimately for the sake of reorganizing our understanding of reality to align with the loss and to more perfectly align with reality itself. John Paul II's Apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* allows us to see that grief is a salvific form of suffering, leading us closer to our own redemption, when man comes to more perfectly understand reality *through* the process of grief. The pain of grief becomes not just a symptom of the reality of death but a mode of personal sanctification: "We suffer with Him that we might also be glorified with Him." There is a salvific gift in the suffering of grief.

**Thesis:** "We Suffer with Him that We Might Also Be Glorified with Him": Discovering the Gift of Grief through Modern and Aristotelian Psychology

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Travis Dziad

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

# Jessica Atkins

## *Christian Faith and Pagan Reason: Whether Christians Should Study Eastern Philosophy*

Tuesday, February 3, 3:15 PM

Augur 114

In the Wyoming Catholic College *Philosophical Vision Statement*, we read that the *Philosophia Perennis* underlies the WCC education and that this Perennial Philosophy “is called ‘perennial’ (or ‘traditional’) insofar as it follows the common understanding of God, man, and reality handed down from the ancient Greek philosophers and the Bible.” Are the Greek philosophers and authors of Scripture the only sources from whom this Philosophy can be handed down, or can Eastern pagan authors also act as a wellspring for perennial truth? On the same page of the PVS, John Paul II’s and John Senior’s writings on the *Philosophia Perennis* are both quoted. But on further study, these two authors do not agree about whether teachings found in Eastern philosophic systems can be included in the perennial tradition. In *The Death of Christian Culture*, Senior says that Christians must consider Eastern Philosophy “the most serious assault ever made” against Christian belief, while in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II says that Christians must “draw from this rich heritage” of Eastern thought to “enrich Christian thought.” In this oration, I will examine each position to determine whose advice is more sound.

**Thesis:** Christian Faith and Hindu Reason: An Appraisal of Classical Yoga in Light of Pope St. John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Second Panelist:** Fr. David Anderson

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

# Barrett Baldwin

## *Braising Bambi: On Sourcing Ingredients from the Wilderness*

Monday, February 2, 2:00 PM

Augur 113

The rules of eating are simple: You need food in order to eat, and people to do the eating. This oration will focus on the first half of this equation (the preparation of the food) and will prove that the culture of eating which surrounds the hunter's dinner table is elevated in every respect. I will be drawing from a variety of works such as Xenophon's treatise *Cynegeticus*, Leon Kass's book *The Hungry Soul*, Euell Gibbons's work *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, and others. Furthermore, I will be drawing from my own personal experience as an avid hunter and seasoned chef to establish that this seemingly inexcusable act of "Braising Bambi" is an endeavor which is, in many ways, worth its salt.

**Thesis:** Hunting and the Culture of Eating

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. James Tonkowich

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Tom Zimmer

# Michael Barrow

## *Is Chivalry Dead?*

Monday, February 2, 3:15 PM

Augur 113

Don Quixote lies dying. Attempting to resurrect medieval chivalry in modern Spain, he's ridden the country in a series of haphazard misadventures. Now, he rejects these fantasies and calls himself "blessed" for regaining sanity. Despite its failures and mockeries, Don Quixote's life appeals: He sets out into a relativistic world that has forgotten many of the hierarchies and offices which give men meaning. He seeks to reestablish honor forms. At the same time that these institutions fell, the modern notion of universal human dignity arose. This is a positive development, yet it leaves the individual man in ambiguity about his particular role in society, information previously provided by set social hierarchies. Must we give up honor to have universal dignity? The question is deeply related to that of the role and goodness of chivalry, the quintessential honor form. This oration will establish the uniquely Christian foundations of chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain's story presents a definition of chivalry that reconciles honor hierarchies *and* a recognition of dignity in a perennial form. William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* exposes us to the world of southern chivalry, its faults, and the need to reorder it to its Christian foundations.

**Thesis:** Lov'd I Not Honour More: Honor, Dignity, and Charity in Medieval and Southern Chivalry

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Michael Bolin

# Emma Bleisch

## *Finding the Harmony in Dissonance*

Monday, February 2, 2:00 PM

Winthrop room

If you were to tell someone you enjoy listening to dissonant twentieth-century composers such as Stravinsky, you would likely be met with surprise, confusion, and a good amount of judgment. Most people find this music jarring and unpleasant, unable to understand how it could appeal to anyone. Given the aversion which this music creates, we might ask how something so unpleasant could possibly be edifying? Would it not be better to restrict our musical tastes to the ethereal consonances of Gregorian chant? Through an explanation of the aesthetic and the grotesque modes of beauty, consonance and dissonance find their proper place within the beautiful.

**Thesis:** Redeeming Harmonic Dissonance through the Grotesque

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Second Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Vivian Borges

## *You Oughta Be Ashamed of Yourself: Saint Augustine's Reversal of the Edenic Transgression through Shame*

Monday, February 2, 4:30 PM

Winthrop room

Saint Augustine famously wrestles with a plethora of personal shortcomings and grave sins: lust, doubt, greed, despair, even a misdirected interest in philosophy, which keep him from embracing the Church and finding rest for much of his life. Haunted, as we all are, by an inheritance of *shame*, Augustine must rectify his conceptions of God and self before his shame can become more than an isolating and fearful force. Under poisoned conceptions of God and self, shame is limited to just a nasty consequence of a fallen nature—an isolating self-awareness that keeps Augustine afraid of God's embrace. When his understanding of God and self is rectified, shame becomes the primary tool of his conversion and return to God. This oration will follow shame's transformation throughout the *Confessions*, shedding light on its nature and illuminating how true shame facilitates a reversal of the Edenic transgression.

**Thesis:** Damning Inheritance and Salvific Scourge: Reversal of the Edenic Transgression within Man's Own Soul in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

# Annmarie Bridge

## *Scrupulosity and the Sin of Not Wearing Makeup*

Monday, February 2, 3:15 PM

Augur 114

Women focused on modesty commit to following a narrow path with regard to makeup. On one side, stuck on the cliffs of scrupulosity, many women fear where the path of makeup might lead. On the other side, they see only the slippery slopes of sluttishness. Determining the true path is nowhere more contentious than in the use of makeup to enhance beauty. This oration will address the five main arguments made against makeup: that it is a sign of promiscuity, that it is a usurpation of divine providence, that it is both a tool and cause of vanity and pride, that it is detrimental to mental health, and, most importantly, that it is an outright lie. Further, I will prove the role of makeup to communicate and reveal the soul's hidden beauty.

**Thesis:** Translating God's Handwriting: How the *Techné* of Cosmetics Is Revelatory of the Human Soul

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

**Second Panelist:** Dr. James Tonkowich

**Third Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

# Diego Charles

*The Child Is Father of the Man: The Fatherhood of Epic Poetry through Dante's Eyes*

Monday, February 2, 4:30 PM

Augur 113

Do you have a dad? Then this lecture is for you! Centered on Dante's iconic relationship with Virgil in his own *Commedia*, this oration will focus on what Dante reveals about fatherhood. I will show how epic poetry is inherently fatherlike, and how to be worthy sons of our *Epic Fathers*.

**Thesis:** Epic Fathers: How Epic Poems Are Fathers as Seen through *The Divine Comedy*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Adam Cooper

**Second Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

# Nathan Clark

*“Our Hearts Are Restless Until They Rest in Thee”: The Role of Silence and of Contemplation for the Happiness of Man*

Thursday, February 5, 4:30 PM

Augur 114

The world is plagued with distractions to prayer. The obsession with noise nowadays has caused a fear of allowing oneself to be still and of meeting himself. In this senior oration, I will explain why silence is necessary for our journey to ultimate happiness with God. Through being silent, one will learn to be attentive, coming to know himself, the state of his soul, and nature, then finding God. A theologian may proclaim himself to be an expert on Scripture verses, but this is all for naught if he does not spend time with his Creator in silent love. I will explain why a daily observance of prayerful silence, which results in contemplation, is the key to the reform of modern society and that it is something to be cherished rather than something to be feared.

**Thesis:** On the Necessity and the Role of Silence in the Development of the Spiritual Life

**Thesis Advisor:** Fr. David Anderson

**Second Panelist:** Dr. James Tonkowich

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Benedict Collins

## *Grief and Communion*

Tuesday, February 3, 8:30 AM

Augur 114

“My heart was black with grief.” St. Augustine’s chilling description of grief for his departed friend depicts the crippling loss that changes every facet of life. After a severe loss, questions arise about God’s existence, His goodness, and our relationships with others. One answers these questions through external ceremonial processes of grief and an internal process of reconciling sorrowful emotion with notional beliefs. The result is apprehending that one relates to the dead in a transformed love that reaches beyond death by partaking in God’s love. In this oration, aided by the works of Homer, St. Augustine, C. S. Lewis, and others, I will explore how grief changes our perceptions of reality as we know it and brings us closer to others and to God. Rightly understood, grief can bring conversion and communion. Through fitting sorrowful emotion and deep questioning, man comes to the author of life.

**Thesis:** Good Grief

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Second Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

# Grace Coughlin

## *The Profound Relativity of Substance*

Tuesday, February 3, 4:30 PM

Augur 114

For Aristotle, the category of relation is among the accidents and naturally posterior to substance. However, in his *Introduction to Christianity*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger calls for a revolution in metaphysics which includes regarding relation as standing beside substance as an “equally primordial form of being” and, in effect, shattering the traditional understanding of substance. Approaching this claim from both theological and philosophical angles, I ultimately conclude that relation is not merely accidental but is co-extensive with substance—that *being-in-itself* is recast as *being-toward-another*.

**Thesis:** Ratzinger and Relation: An Exploration of Substance as Fundamentally Relative

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Travis Dziad

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

# Florian Covington

The Just Man Justices and the Lover Sings: *Musings on Music as the Act Proper for the Lover*

Tuesday, February 3, 9:45 AM

Winthrop room

“The Man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sound, Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.” Rephrasing this statement of Shakespeare’s as a question marks the beginning of this work. Who is the man that *does* have “music in himself” and is “moved by concord of sweet sound?” This oration will be musing on music not as sets of mathematical proportions and theory, nor as a psychological phenomenon, but as mysterious, ineffable language arising from man’s spiritual and relational being. Beginning with Shakespeare’s suggestions, we follow the writings of Josef Pieper and Élisabeth-Paule Labat, and are led to consider music, of which man is both the creator and receiver, as an incarnation of God’s beauty and the universal harmony of things and beings.

**Thesis:** *The Just Man Justices: Song as the Communal Act of Love*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Second Panelist:** Fr. David Anderson

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Travis Dziad

# Gemma Davidson

*Do You Believe in Magic: Lewis's Re-enchantment of Reality*

Tuesday, February 3, 11:00 AM

Augur 113

Look up the definition of a fairytale, and the Internet will tell you that it is a children's story, often idealizing make-believe worlds and creatures, or it will define it as an unlikely story, especially intended to deceive. Using C. S. Lewis's essays and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, I expound on how he rejects the perception of fairytales as essentially childish and deceptive. Instead, Lewis elevates our understanding of the fairytale because of its relation to material reality as we experience it. The connection Lewis proposes between the fantastical or imagined and our reality is also the connection he recognizes between our reality and the reality we are ultimately called to: union with God. Contemplating these connections allows us to experience the world not as an inhibiting burden but as a real communication of God's own self to us.

**Thesis:** Bicycles, Narnia, and Other Enchantments: Lewis's Baptism of the Imagination

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. James Tonkowich

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

# Cecilia Dax

## *How to Use the World's Goodness: Resolving the Paradox of Detachment in Christian Life*

Tuesday, February 3, 9:45 AM

Augur 113

We know from Genesis that God proclaimed the world good at its inception. However, throughout the history of the Church, there has remained another seemingly contradictory idea, that we should hate and abandon the world itself. The narrative promulgated by many saints, holy writers, and scripture is that the less good you see in the created world, the holier you will be; that encountering the things in the world is a stumbling block—the only way to combat this is flight from and abhorrence of them. This practice known as “detachment” is held up as a goal for Christians today in what can be a toxic contrast to receiving the world as God’s gift to us. So what disposition towards the world should we aim for? Is detachment efficacious or dangerous? To illuminate these questions, I walk through the perspective of St. John of the Cross in his work *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Through his work, I will look beyond the common understanding of detachment to find its purpose and use, concluding that this way of life does not necessitate a view of the world as evil; rather, detachment is what enables man to appreciate the world as good in its deepest sense.

**Thesis:** Spiritual Detachment’s Affirmation of the Goodness of the World

**Thesis Advisor:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Aeja DeKuiper

## *Beyond Rose-Colored Glasses: Emotional Agency and the Bible's Command to Rejoice*

Tuesday, February 3, 9:45 AM

Augur 114

Multiple times throughout the Bible, man is commanded: “Rejoice in the Lord, all you righteous!” (Psalm 33:1). Yet joy is commonly understood as an emotion, something not inherently able to be chosen. Further, it often seems that attempts to “choose joy” result in a putting on of rose-colored glasses, a denying of reality, a fake facade. How then is man able to fulfill the command to rejoice while still experiencing emotions fully and being true to reality? In my oration, I will investigate man as an emotional being and consider what agency he has over his emotions and the way in which habituating himself to focusing his attention on the good actually disposes him to joy and expands his capacity to receive reality. I will then shift my attention to the command to rejoice in the Psalms and show that joy is the fundamental, proper, and fitting response to reality.

**Thesis:** Rejoice in the Lord, All You Righteous: Choosing Joy as the Fundamental, Proper, and Fitting Response to Reality

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

# Michael Dubruiel

## *Musical Transfiguration: How Great Music Reinterprets Man's Lived Experience*

Thursday, February 5, 8:30 AM

Augur 113

Arthur Schopenhauer remarks in his fundamental metaphysical work, *The World as Will and Representation*: “Music has a much more powerful and penetrating effect than any of the other arts, for the others speak only of shadows, whereas music speaks of the essence of things.” The preeminence of the musical arts has been recognized not only by Schopenhauer, but by nearly all of history’s philosophical masters. But in what way can we say that the musical arts “speak of the essence of things?” What strange qualities do the musical arts possess which lend them the ability to penetrate into the utmost depths of our being?

Aided by the thought of Schopenhauer’s disciple, Friedrich Nietzsche, this talk will consider the strange case of musical significance, asserting the spirit of music’s power as a representation of transcendent Being and an exhortation to life.

**Thesis:** The Creative Ecstasy of *The Spirit of Music*: Musical Significance as Nietzschean Becoming

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Adam Cooper

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Maile Escalona

## *For the Time Being*

Tuesday, February 3, 2:00 PM

Augur 113

Man exists in time. Yet he scarcely knows what it is. Temporality, despite being intimately bound to man, eludes him. Man, paradoxically, cannot articulate what time is. In the words of St. Augustine: “What then is time?” Yet the enigmatic nature of time itself is not the greatest source of temporal anxiety. Rather, it is what St. Augustine calls the “distention of being.” Time—elusive and ephemeral—fundamentally frays man, whittling him down to the smallest sliver of being with every present moment. To exist in time is to be ontologically unraveled. This leaves one with a pressing inquiry: If man’s being is evanescent, how ought he to live? How should one exist in time well? This oration will explore a reconciliation of temporal existence by first clarifying the stakes of time philosophically and then turning to *The Brothers Karamazov* as a literary meditation on life in time—from sunrise to sunset. Through Dostoevsky’s vision and characters—Zosima, Alyosha, and Ilyusha—the oration proposes a mode of temporal life that is not defined by distention, but by iconic remembrance: a unique mode of recollection that, by eternally re-presencing being, counters its dissolution and thus guides and governs a life lived well in time.

**Thesis:** Eternity Sown in Time: The Slanted Rays of Light

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

# Liam Federoff

## *Owning Your Face: How the Modern Man Finds His Identity in the Painful and Tangible*

Tuesday, February 3, 2:00 PM

Augur 114

A century ago, the feminist movement spread like wildfire through western society. Having achieved its noble goal of equality between the genders, its proponents now seek to take it a step further: the ultimate standardization of the human race. They seek a world where the concepts of “man” and “woman” are accidents to be put on or taken off like a suit of clothing. In this oration, I will use a multitude of data, trends, and statistics gathered from the past hundred years to attempt to paint the full picture that this uprooting of gender roles has had on society, particularly in its men. Men don’t know *how to hurt* anymore. And by taking man out of his traditional arenas of the tangible and competitive, they have left him in a state of proto-schizophrenia. Sports are the key to bringing him back. I will define what a sport truly is and then show why it is our best hope in this task. Using psychoanalysis, Aristotle, Aquinas, St. John Paul II, and William Shakespeare, I will show that only by getting man onto the pitch and around his peers can we help him find his identity again.

**Thesis:** How to Own Your Face: How the Modern Man Finds His Identity in the Painful and Tangible

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Tom Zimmer

**Second Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

# Patrick Gleason

## *“He Must Learn Them Again”: Faulkner and the Redemption of Modernity*

Wednesday, February 4, 4:30 PM

Augur 114

In his famed Nobel Prize speech, William Faulkner, recognizing an overall loss of direction in the modern age, asserted that “the young man . . . must learn them again . . . the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed.” Faulkner built his work upon this foundation: that until man learns to embrace these “old verities” in accordance with their appropriate forms, “he labors under a curse.” Of Faulkner’s characters, *The Sound and the Fury*’s Quentin Compson best personifies the affliction to which the author refers. A child of the postbellum American South, Quentin struggles to reconcile archaic conceptions of honor with the rapidly-changing social climate of the twentieth century, living and dying “as though he stood among and watched the end of man.” But how do we re-learn these “verities” without lapsing into mere nostalgia? Unable to experience nostalgic delusions, the Compsons’ black servant, Dilsey, unites her suffering to the example outlined in the Gospel, choosing to endure by serving the family to which she binds herself. This oration will explore how Faulkner, anticipating the directionlessness of modernity through Quentin, offers a remedy in Dilsey: “a spirit capable of . . . sacrifice and endurance.”

**Thesis:** “The Mausoleum of All Hope and Desire”: William Faulkner and the Influence of Inherited Stories

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Adam Cooper

# Anna Grumbine

## *The Hungry Dead: Zombies as the Poetic Image of the Corrupt Western Psyche*

Tuesday, February 3, 4:30 PM

Augur 113

Zombie survival stories offer a poetic image of the great men who narrowly survive the disease of democracy. In this oration, I argue that we modern Americans are unconscious yet faithful followers of a Nietzschean moral structure, and thus zombie survival horror stories attract us by their clarity in portrayal of those men who are monsters and those who remain human. Zombies, with their roots in Haitian voodoo culture, also symbolize the American psyche's subconscious sense of shame for the human sacrifices offered up in worship to industry, progress, and Americanism. In modern corporate culture, men and women often lose their humanity and virility, told to lay their harsh edges, cold grit, and recklessness on the altar of progress and to replace the savage virtues with squalid niceties and moral shades of gray. Zombies are the restless dead spirits of those Americans who killed their ferine humanity to be civilized instead. The zombie is the antithesis of the ideals of the horror protagonist: intellectual pride, sadistic pleasure, and transcendent madness. The zombie subverts these three ideals through its mob mindlessness, physical disease, and madness from hunger. In this oration, I will lay out the landscape and structure of the postmodern soul as described in horror and persuade this audience that the zombie represents the common, deadly sins of a failed, soft Christian culture.

**Thesis:** “She Committed Suicide”: Horror Stories: The American’s Conduit for Cathartic Release

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

# Carolina Gutierrez

## *Who Is My Beloved? Desire through Kristin Lavransdatter*

Tuesday, February 3, 11:00 AM

Augur 114

In *Kristin Lavransdatter*, Sigrid Undset's *magnum opus*, the reader is led through the life of one woman from childhood to death. After reading the book, the reader is left pondering sin and its heavy effects on man, in particular, the sins that result from acting on her desire and disobedience. The reader then comes to the conclusion that the outcome of disobedient desire must be sinful and harmful.

If the outcome of desire is so often portrayed as sinful and harmful in this example and many others, then one is naturally led to think that desire is made of the same parts. However, man cannot escape desire, since he is constantly looking to fill the desire of his soul. What, then, is desire? How is our desire ever redeemed in our world full of sin? Is it a good thing to desire? Where can we ultimately direct our desire to?

Using *Kristin Lavransdatter*, the wisdom of St. John Paul II, and the story of the Prodigal Son, the reality of desire will be exposed and put forth. We will wrestle with each question about desire. The connection of desire and the love of the Father will be shown through parts of *Kristin Lavransdatter* and the Prodigal Son. Then, we will be able to see how the sinfulness of desire can be redeemed and lead us ultimately into the loving arms of God the Father.

**Thesis:** "I Will Rise Up and Go Home to My Father": Love and Desire in *Kristin Lavransdatter*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Kyle Washut

**Second Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

# Joseph Henderson

*“Behold, I Make All Things New”: The Redemption of Our Suffering in the New Creation*

Tuesday, February 3, 8:30 AM

Winthrop room

The Book of Revelation was written by John the Apostle c. AD 95, during the persecution of the Christian Church under the Roman emperor Domitian. It was written to remind her of the indestructible hope she has in Christ, who “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev 1:5–6). The title of the book in the original Greek is *Apokalupsis*, which means “to uncover; to reveal.” In this final book of the Bible, Christ is unveiled in all his splendor and majesty.

How can we rejoice in our sufferings? Why is God’s judgment a source of hope? Why is our redemption fulfilled in the New Creation? This oration will show how Revelation answers these questions by unveiling Christ as our Savior, our Judge, and our Bridegroom. By putting Revelation in conversation with John Paul II’s *Salvifici Doloris* and Benedict XVI’s *Spe Salvi*, we will see why these three roles of Christ—Savior, Judge, and Bridegroom—cannot be separated, and why, in the fulfillment of these roles, Christ is the one who can truly say, “Behold, I make all things new.”

**Thesis:** “Behold, He Is Coming with the Clouds, and Every Eye Will See Him”: The Book of Revelation and the Unveiling of the Christ

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Adam Cooper

**Second Panelist:** Dr. James Tonkowich

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Paxton Huemiller

*Together as One: Exploring the Relationship between Friendship and Happiness*

Wednesday, February 4, 2:00 PM

Augur 113

Aristotle claims that a spiritual thinker thinking resides at the causal center of the universe, while the cosmic governor is fundamentally a lover, according to the Christian tradition. In both Aristotelian and Christian traditions, imitation of divinity's nature is regarded as the cause of human happiness. While the two philosophies of thinker and lover are not necessarily opposed or exclusive, Aristotle's metaphysics points entirely toward a human contemplative happiness. But in the Christian tradition, because he is in the image of a lover, man's nature requires him to love and places a relationship with Divinity as the end of his existence. This oration discusses the ways in which man's nature and the nature of the Divine relate to his final end, and the ways in which relationships, specifically human friendships, can be seen as happiness.

**Thesis:** Participatory Divinity: Metaphysical Implications of Contemplation and Friendship

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Adam Cooper

# Alden Jewell

## *That Thing's Not Fit for a Dog: Get a New Disposition*

Wednesday, February 4, 2:00 PM

Augur 114

What makes human beings happy? In his time-honored treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims moral virtue is the answer. Living virtuously, Aristotle says, gives man his greatest natural delight; the Church, too, says moral virtue aids us in imitating Christ and attaining eternal life: “[the virtues] make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life . . . they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.” Virtue requires having a proper disposition and acting according to it. Though Aristotle writes little about dispositions, he asserts that if you do not have the proper disposition, you should act as if you do, and you will eventually come to love the things you do and thus will form a virtuous disposition. It seems similar to the now-ubiquitous saying, “Fake it till you make it.” This saying is misleading and unhelpful to those truly seeking to understand dispositions and become excellent human beings. In a philosophical examination, this oration shall define what a disposition is and how we ought to expect to create and change dispositions to the best possible end.

**Thesis:** Should We Fake It Till We Make It: Interpreting the Understanding of Virtue with Aristotle, the *Catechism*, and *Atomic Habits*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Quinn Lynch

## *Mountaineering and Romanticism: A Genealogical Exploration of Why Men Climb*

Thursday, February 5, 9:45 AM

Augur 113

“Why do men climb?” The question is asked so often that one would think that it was one of the great mysteries of the universe, right up there with “what is truth” or “what is beauty.” The question itself is, in all seriousness, not a particularly difficult one to answer, but rather the difficulty arises from both confusion about what the question is asking and, subsequently, confusion over what constitutes a satisfactory answer. The world of mountaineering literature is littered with countless terse answers. For Mallory, “Because it is there”; for Rebuffat, “Because we were made for it”; for Chouinard, “because we need to”; the list goes on. In this oration, I clarify what exactly this question is asking, explore the bearing that the causes for the movement of mountaineering have on this answer and the intellectual continuity between mountaineering and romanticism, and ultimately provide a satisfying and unified answer to the question: that mountaineering constitutes a recentering of man’s relation to the cosmos.

**Thesis:** Mountaineering and Romanticism: The Genealogy of an Idea

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Travis Dziad

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Tom Zimmer

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Rose Malinoski

## *Resting in Thee: How Augustine Discovers Attachment Security in the Father*

Wednesday, February 4, 3:15 PM

Augur 114

With his emphasis on internal conflict, the development of the self, and his inner life, St. Augustine offers us one of the most psychologically rich writings in our curriculum, the *Confessions*. Throughout this work, Augustine especially focuses on the nature of human relationships. As a result, the modern psychological understanding of relationships, commonly known as attachment theory, provides a helpful framework in which to understand Augustine's life.

A relationship with God is at the heart of the Catholic faith, but Augustine realizes that past experiences of relationship deeply shape the capacity to be in relationship with God. Prior to his conversion, Augustine shows signs of insecure attachment in his earthly relationships, leading to inner disintegration, loss of identity, and habitual sin that drives him further from God—the only Person capable of fulfilling his deepest relational needs. Augustine's longing for a secure attachment, however, ultimately brings him to the Father, in whom his restless heart can find rest.

**Thesis:** St. Augustine as the First Attachment Theorist: The *Confessions* in Conversation with Modern Attachment Theory

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Travis Dzidic

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Tom Zimmer

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

# Tessa Mallona

*Finding Identity in Belonging to a Place: Why You Shouldn't Live Alone in a Cabin or Be a Perpetual "Nomad"*

Tuesday, February 3, 8:30 AM

Augur 113

Willa Cather's early novels *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* depict the struggle to farm in the early Nebraska territory. As her characters, particularly the heroines Alexandra and Ántonia, learn to give themselves fully to the land in order to make the land fruitful, they also reveal a universal truth, namely, that man must belong to a certain place in order to ground his identity. Their commitment to the initially desolate Nebraska wilderness reveals the necessity for an intimate relationship with the place that man finds himself in.

**Thesis:** Belonging to the Land in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Virginia Arbery

# Stallings Marosy

## *Creative Writing 302: The Writer, Her Toolbox, and Her Craft*

Wednesday, February 4, 3:15 PM

Augur 113

My father is a carpenter by trade. It is as if his hands are imbued with a certain knowledge of what he is fashioning. In them I most often see a measuring tape—whipped out with ease to determine proper length and proportion. Next are his most-used tools: a circular saw, a Ryobi drill gun, and a paintbrush that always reminded me of a bunny's tail. And often as he goes, but especially near the end of the project, he brings out his carpenter's square with the level, ensuring that the final product bears a certain likeness to its symmetry.

Like a carpenter, writers too have a toolbox. Instead of knowing hands, we have a knowledge-imbued emotion, creative intuition, which springs from the depths of our soul and forms the work. The practical intellect is our measuring tape, making and discovering the rules that perfect our art. With our circular saw, we divide a story into its events, creating a plot. Then we drill in screws by relating each scene to the whole by “principles of design.” Finally, with words we paint a pleasing picture for all to enjoy and delight in as a reflection of beauty—our square and level.

**Thesis:** “Take Pleasure as Your Guide”: How Creative Intuition Allows the Writer to Follow Her Pleasure

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Adam Cooper

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

# Genevieve Martin

## *Cato and the Role of Suicide in Dante's Commedia*

Wednesday, February 4, 4:30 PM

Augur 113

Dante's depictions of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven are rigidly structured: circles of punishment for the damned, levels of purification for the saved, and planets of sanctity for the saints. Each realm is suited to the virtue or vice it portrays, and every soul is sorted into their appropriate sphere. But as Dante leaves the Inferno for the Purgatorio, he encounters Cato—a figure who is neither here nor there. Not suffering in Hell with his fellow suicides, he isn't really saved either, but finds himself caught between suffering and salvation. This oration will answer the question of why Dante places Cato in the prominent and vague position that he does and what a pagan's suicide could hold for the rest of Dante's journey.

**Thesis:** Dark Woods and Dismal Prospects: Dante's Suicidal Journey to the Noble Body

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

# Joseph McAleer

*Unleashing Our Sleeping Self: An Exploration of Lucid Dreaming and Its Consequences*

Thursday, February 5, 9:45 AM

Augur 114

Sleep, for man, is necessary to survival. And so, by extension, dreams are necessary as well, for one cannot sleep without dreaming. Everyone dreams, and yet no one is quite sure why. Numerous great thinkers over the centuries have offered theories attempting to explain the purpose of dreams' occurrence, but none were solidly proven until our technology had advanced sufficiently enough to map the activity of the brain. But even before this breakthrough, it was widely acknowledged that there was more than one type of dream. Aristotle himself writes about dreams in which the dreamer can exert control over the events that occur in the dream. Such a phenomenon is referred to as lucid dreaming. This oration will explore what a lucid dream is, why they occur, and why they are something best avoided.

**Thesis:** The World of Dreams and the Consequences of Controlling It: Why Lucidity in Dreams Is Best Avoided

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Michael Bolin

# Magdalena Mortensen

## *“Drunk Again, O’Malley!”: A Thomistic Exploration of Why God Gave Us a Sense of Humor*

Monday, February 2, 3:15 PM

Winthrop room

Risibility, the ability to recognize and respond to humor, is an essential attribute of the rational intellect, the reason. It is a trait specifically built into our reason—designed to follow from our reason’s very nature—by the creator of the universe. Out of all intellects and animals in the created cosmos, only the human person recognizes and laughs at humor.

But why is humor linked to rationality so mandatorily? What even is humor in the first place? And lastly—and perhaps most perplexing of all—why did God choose to give us this strange ability, and what purpose does it serve in our lives in reference to him?

This oration will first explore the philosophical basis for humor, using the work of St. Thomas Aquinas on the reason and its process of understanding. We will study the powers which enable the reason to recognize humor and philosophically analyze the reason’s action as it moves through a joke, to determine “what makes something funny.” Finally, this oration will posit a theological explanation for humor, attempting to explain why God chose to instill it in our rationality—and in that choice, what he is telling us about ourselves.

**Thesis:** “God Has Made Laughter for Me”: A Brief Yet Loquacious Discourse on the What, How, and Why of Humor

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Scott Olsson

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

# John Paul Nemeć

## *“Burn It Up! It’s All Straw!”: A Word of Caution When Approaching Aquinas*

Monday, February 2, 11:30 AM

Augur 113

As Catholics, we believe that unity with God is our final end. Furthermore, we are meant to spend this life preparing for that eternal unity, coming to know and love God to the best of our abilities. However, in an age that demands scientific justification for everything, it can be tempting to allow the “subtle and insidious spread of rationalism” to creep into our understanding of scripture and even of God Himself. While rational knowledge is not false, it falls terribly short of how we can know God in this life. This oration will show how we are called to love God, not only in a rational manner, but also in an imaginative and sensual way.

**Thesis:** United or Divided? A Thomistic Examination of Knowledge in the Conscious Intellect and Man’s Final End

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

# Matthew O’Shea

## *Potatoes and Pontiffs: How Catholic Social Teaching Is Embodied by the Irish Constitution*

Tuesday, February 3, 3:15 PM

Augur 113

*Bunreacht na hÉireann* (The Irish Constitution) begins with “In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred.” Adopted in 1937, a century marked by a descent into secularisation, liberalism, and rationalism, this constitution is a striking example of a Catholic State in the modern age. This oration will examine how many of the principles in the foundational document of the Republic of Ireland are drawn from the social teaching of Leo XIII. It will not only argue that the State envisioned in the Leonine encyclicals is the one most proper to man and his nature, but that the Irish Constitution exemplifies how Catholic Social Teaching ought to be implemented in state affairs. Finally, it will maintain that Vatican II’s *Dignitatis Humanae* does not mark a break with Leo XIII, but must be understood in the “hermeneutic of continuity”—a principle embodied in Article 44 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

**Thesis:** The Most Holy Trinity as Man’s Final End: A Defense of the Political Theology of the 1937 Irish Constitution

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Austin Penny

## *Combating Immoral Sexual Desires by Experiencing the Natural World*

Thursday, February 5, 11:00 AM

Augur 113

To combat the immoral sexual desires stimulated through social media and the world around us, I undertake a novel exploration into the positive neurobiological effects of nature in stopping these sexual desires and preventing sexual addictions.

I will provide scientific studies to explain what dopamine is, what its role is in desires and addictions, and what effects the natural world has on people and addictions.

Through these studies I will draw connections between the positive effects of the outdoors and the processes of sexual stimuli to prove the hypothesis that the outdoors is an effective method to control immoral desires. I will also propose ways to use the natural world constructively as a tool to combat these desires.

**Thesis:** The Addict and the Outdoors

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Tom Zimmer

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda

**Third Panelist:** Fr. Robert Nicoletti

# Isabella Ramsay

## *Hope for a Cartesian Age: Overcoming the Egocentric Predicament*

Thursday, February 5, 2:00 PM

Augur 113

Alexis de Tocqueville observes America as “the one country in the world where the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed.” We are mostly Cartesians. However, intrinsic to Descartes’s philosophy is what Robert Sokolowski dubs the “egocentric predicament,” wherein one finds that reality only exists inside the mind, and truth is reduced to mere opinion. Descartes’s project, it would seem, leads to isolation and solipsism. But shouldn’t an examination of oneself lead to wisdom and harmony? Isn’t the Delphic maxim “know thyself” a proper starting point for philosophy? The purpose of this oration is to demonstrate how man’s turning inwards to a study of the structures of consciousness through Husserlian phenomenology permits his subjective experience to draw him ever closer to wisdom.

**Thesis:** The Phenomenological Project: How to Overcome an Ego-centric Characterization of Truth

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Michael Bolin

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

# James Sidloski

## *Do Your Own Close Reading: The Poet as Rhapsode of Creation*

Thursday, February 5, 11:00 AM

Augur 114

The Church Fathers have given us the term “God’s First Book” to apply to the physical creation. From the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas we learn that each created thing represents some aspect of the divine goodness in its own way, thus revealing creation to be in fact a book of poetry, written by God about himself. Our ability to read the poetry latent in creation has become marred by the Fall; it is no longer obvious but rather requires effort on our part to appreciate the significance of things beyond their surface appearance. Human poetry attempts to rediscover the underlying unity of all things through the use of metaphor, which pushes us to look beyond the visible and “sense the similarity between dissimilars,” as Aristotle says. It is therefore necessary not only to view creation through the poetry of the great poets, but also to write our own poetry, thereby forcing us to closely observe the world around us, and resulting, in Pieper’s words, in “learning how to see again.”

**Thesis:** Creation the Basis of Poetry

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Travis Dziad

# Kaitlin Sponseller

## *Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant: Revelatory Play in Shakespeare as an Asymptotic Expression of Man's Being*

Thursday, February 5, 2:00 PM

Augur 114

*Hamlet* uniquely dramatizes the angst of man's embodied existence. For Hamlet, this existence is one where matter fails incessantly at expressing the spiritual, where quintessence is bound in dust, and where the poorer medium of seeming will never articulate the riches of being. Not only are seeming and being divorced on a natural level, but this misalignment can also be intentionally exploited. One may "smile and smile and still be a villain." Responding to such deception, Hamlet does something odd. Feigning madness and staging a performance, Hamlet *plays*. Rather than being purely deceptive, this play is revelatory and oriented towards the truth. Why? *Hamlet* dramatizes Shakespeare's philosophy as a playwright: that man's being is of such depth that only a multitude of expressions can begin to asymptotically express it. For Shakespeare, revelatory play overcomes the difficulty of transposing the richer medium of being into the poorer medium of seeming by equipping the latter with more expressive power. By relating this phenomenon in *Hamlet* to similar occurrences in *Much Ado About Nothing*, this oration will argue that for the "valiant piece of dust" that is man, Shakespeare suggests that one can indeed tell all the truth, but only at a slant.

**Thesis:** You Would Play upon Me? Play as the Antidote to the Disconnect between Seeming & Being in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Adam Cooper

# Jessa Stommes

## *“Your Desire Will Be for Her, but She Will Rule over You”: The Restoration of Masculinity in C. S. Lewis’s That Hideous Strength*

Thursday, February 5, 3:15 PM

Augur 114

By the standards of modern society, the gender revolution is believed to have brought liberation, equality, and prosperity to women. But what did this entail for men? In this oration, the themes of love, sexuality, and transhumanism in C. S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength* will be used to illustrate how feminism emasculates men in their relationships, what state this leaves men in, and how they can regain an authentic masculine identity. Through the characters’ development in reciprocity, objectivity, and the human experience, Lewis shows that the only way for men to reclaim their masculinity is through the acceptance and enactment of sacrificial leadership, especially regarding the women in their lives. Ultimately, authentic masculinity is the driving force in the undoing of feminism’s debilitating damage to restore proper order to the roles in any relationship.

**Thesis:** Because You Desire Her: An Effigy of Emasculation and Recovery in the Literature of C. S. Lewis and Ernest Hemingway

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Stanley Grove

# Mark Susanka

## *“Yet You Will Weep and Know Why”: The Necessity of Existential Despair for Christian Salvation*

Thursday, February 5, 3:15 PM

Augur 113

The twenty-first century has seen constant advances in technology, psychology, and medicine, yet each new generation struggles more intensely with despair than the last. Man seems unable to free himself from its paralyzing grip; all he can do in response to this growing sickness is try to ignore it, or silence it with medication should it appear. But the problem of despair remains and continues to grow. Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher of the early nineteenth century, saw this developing darkness and proposed an alternate remedy. He saw despair as more than an emotional illness, understanding it to be most properly a sickness of the spirit which threatens man’s existence as man. His antidote is not avoidance, but embrace. Rather than fleeing from despair, the philosopher declares that man ought to “despair with a vengeance, despair to the full.” This oration will first clarify Kierkegaard’s conception of despair then show that his counsel to man is as true now as it was when he first wrote it—perhaps even more so. Today, Christians would do well to heed his advice, as despair is a critical step towards salvation.

**Thesis:** “Come Weep with Me, Past Hope”: The Redemptive Role of Despair in the Personal Life of Man

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Travis Dziad

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

# Isabella Wagner

## *Aquinas, Dante, and Shakespeare Walk into a Bar: How and Why Dirty Humor Is Important*

Tuesday, February 3, 11:00 AM

Winthrop room

Humor is often treated as morally insignificant, while sexual humor in particular is frequently dismissed as inherently inappropriate or sinful. This oration challenges that assumption by arguing that humor, like sex itself, is a genuine human good that holds an important role in man's pursuit of virtue. Drawing primarily on the moral philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, this oration examines the dual nature of the human person as both spiritual and bodily, arguing that sexual themes are not intrinsically incompatible with virtue. Rather, when humor acknowledges the body without contempt or mockery, it can contribute to a virtuous life. Literary analysis of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* illustrates how an innuendo can function as a mode of sincere expression rather than moral transgression. Ultimately, this oration proposes content, context, and intention as guiding principles for moral judgment in humor, rejecting both puritanical restraint and uncritical permissiveness in favor of properly ordered laughter.

**Thesis:** Holy Humor! Why Dirty Humor Does Not Always Cause You to Sin

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Adam Cooper

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Tiffany Schubert

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Jeremy Holmes

# Claire White

## *Israel's Inheritance and the Comedy of Ruth*

Monday, February 2, 4:30 PM

Augur 114

In the Old Testament, humanity is corrupted with sin and death because of the Fall. And yet, the literary critic Louise Cowan claims that the story of the Israelites before Christ dwells in the genre of comedy, not tragedy. By employing Cowan's understanding of comedy, this oration will argue that the Israelites enter into comedy through God's covenant with Abraham. It will examine the Book of Ruth, a microcosm of the comedy in the Old Testament, and reveal how a Gentile woman participates in Israel's covenant and community through her faith, her marriage, and her child. The oration will conclude by uncovering prefigurations in Ruth of our relationship with Christ and His Mother and illustrating how Ruth is a paradigm for us to imitate to enter into the new comedy of inheritance under Christ.

**Thesis:** "Your People Shall Be My People and Your God My God": The Comedy of Inheritance in the Old Testament

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Glenn Arbery

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Stephen Hill

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Pavlos Papadopoulos

# Grace Wiesner

*“I Praise You, for I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”: An Explanation of Transgenderism’s Prominence and an Account of Where One Will Find Their True Identity*

Thursday, February 5, 4:30 PM

Augur 113

In our day and age, we have come to live in a world where transgenderism is viewed as an acceptable way of life. As Catholics, we are taught that this way of life is immoral and should be rejected. However, we may not necessarily know why that is the case, making it difficult to have fruitful discussions with those of the opposing view. In my oration, I will explain why transgenderism is prominent today, and I will explain how one can only find their true identity in Christ.

**Thesis:** A Look at Transgenderism: Its Ideology and Prominence

**Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Daniel Shields

**Second Panelist:** Dr. Scott Olsson

**Third Panelist:** Dr. Henry Zepeda



# Index

aesthetics, 16  
Aquinas, St. Thomas, 42, 47, 51  
Aristotle, 22, 34, 35, 41  
art, 16, 39  
*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 25  
attachment theory, 37  
Augustine, St., 17, 21, 28, 37

beauty, 16, 18, 23  
being and seeming, 48  
Benedict XVI, 33  
Bible, the, 11, 52  
*Brothers Karamazov*, *The*, 28

Cather, Willa, 38  
Catholic social teaching, 44  
Cato, 40  
Cervantes, Miguel, 15  
chivalry, 15  
*Chronicles of Narnia*, *The*, 24  
city, the, 11  
comedy, genre of, 52  
*Commedia*, Dante's, 19, 40  
communion, 21  
*Confessions*, 17, 37  
contemplation, 20  
cosmetics, 18  
Cowan, Louise, 52  
creation, 47  
creative intuition, 39

culture, 31  
Dante, 19, 40  
de Tocqueville, Alexis, 46  
Descartes, René, 46  
desire, 32  
despair, 50  
detachment, 25  
*Dignitatis Humanae*, 44  
dignity, 15  
dissonance, 16  
*Divine Comedy*, *The*, 19, 40  
*Don Quixote*, 15  
Dostoevsky, 28  
dreams, 41

eating, culture of, 14  
emotions, importance of, 26  
epic, 19  
ethics, 35, 51

fairytales, 24  
fatherhood, 19  
Faulkner, William, 15, 30  
feminism, 29, 49  
*Fides et Ratio*, 13  
friendship, 34

Genesis, book of, 11  
grief, 21  
grotesque, in art, 16

habits, 35  
*Hamlet*, 48  
 happiness, 34  
 Homer, 21  
 honor, 15  
 horror, genre of, 31  
 humor, 42, 51  
*Hungry Soul, The*, 14  
 hunting, 14  
 Husserl, Edmund, 46  
 identity, 38, 53  
 imagination, 43

John of the Cross, St., 25  
 John Paul II, St., 13, 29, 32, 33  
 joy, 26

Kass, Leon, 14  
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 50  
*Kristin Lavransdatter*, 32

Leo XIII, 44  
 Lewis, C. S., 21, 24, 49  
 literature, 19, 24, 30, 31, 38, 40,  
     48, 52

makeup, 18  
 man, nature of, 29, 42  
 Maritain, Jacques, 39  
 masculinity, 29, 49  
 metaphysics, 22  
 modernity, 30  
 modesty, 18  
 mountaineering, 36  
*Much Ado About Nothing*, 48, 51  
 music, 16, 23  
*My Ántonia*, 38

nature, 36, 45  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 31  
 Old Testament, 11, 52

phenomenology, 46  
 philosophy, 13, 22, 28, 34, 35, 42,  
     46, 50  
     Eastern, 13  
     political, 44  
 Pieper, Josef, 23, 47  
 place, importance of, 38  
 poetry, 47  
 political philosophy, 44  
 prayer, 20  
 Psalms, 26  
 psychology, 37, 41, 45  
*Purgatorio*, 40

rationalism, 43  
 Ratzinger, Joseph, 22  
 relation, category of, 22  
 relationships, 37  
 Revelation, book of, 11, 33  
 romanticism, 36  
 Ruth, book of, 52

*Salvifici Doloris*, 33  
 scripture, 11, 43, 52  
 Senior, John, 13  
 sexuality, 45, 51  
 Shakespeare, William, 23, 48, 51  
 shame, 17  
 silence, 20  
*Sir Gawain and the Green  
Knight*, 15  
*Sound and the Fury, The*, 30  
*Spe Salvi*, 33  
 sports, 29  
 Stravinsky, Igor, 16  
 substance, category of, 22  
 suffering, 33

*That Hideous Strength*, 49  
 theology, 17, 20, 21, 25, 26, 32–34,  
     43, 50, 53  
 time, 28  
 transgenderism, 53

Undset, Sigrid, 32  
*Unvanquished, The*, 15

Vatican II, 44  
Virgil, 19  
virtue, 35

woman, nature of, 18  
writing, 39

Xenophon, 14

zombies, 31

# Notes:





