

**Her great cry is for women-to make them better by making them freer”: Rachel Crothers  
and the “New Woman” on the Early Twentieth-Century American Stage  
by Blair Best**

*Thesis directed by Robert Davis*

Blair Best notes that Rachel Crothers broke radical new ground in how writers represent female experience by portraying the experience of being a woman by staging conflicts between work, family, and the fight for economic independence. Much scholarship has been devoted to Crothers’ plays, but a reconsideration of how she shaped the plays as performance texts shows that they were intended to be far more daring than commonly understood. Drawing on the plays, author interviews, critical responses, and manuscript sources, Best places Crothers in early twentieth-century women’s history to show how this pioneering author completely changed the way women were represented on the American stage.

**Unknowable: The Nature of Truth in the Information Society  
by Madeleine Cella**

*Thesis directed by Professor Alisa Zhulina*

Madeleine Cella examines the commodification of information and news in the age of capital by looking at three pseudo-documentary mystery podcasts: *Tanis*, *The Black Tapes*, and *Rabbits*. In order to understand our current political situation of “fake news,” “the echo chamber,” and “alternative facts” Cella argues that it is important to excavate the history of the relationship between performance, technology, and scientific knowledge. “Technological development in communication,” writes Cella, “leads to a greater amount of information being processed and distributed throughout society.” Cella ultimately sounds the alarm about how “truth” has become “a commodifiable asset that can be distorted and utilized by economic and political structures to maintain pre-existing power structures.” In addition to her Honors work at Tisch Drama, Cella double-majored in History and is planning to pursue the study of law.

**Fantastick Success: An Exploration of a Forty-Two-Year Run  
by Eli LaCroix**

*Thesis directed by Professor Alisa Zhulina*

Eli LaCroix argues that it was the small scale and economic constraints of *The Fantasticks* that enabled Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt’s musical to remain an Off-Broadway commercial success for forty-two years, becoming the world’s longest-running musical. Eli explores the material conditions of the show and also places *The Fantasticks* into the larger historical context of the development of Minimalism across the arts in Europe and the United States. *The Fantasticks*, argues Eli, is a popularized Minimalist revolution in music undertaken by such experimental figures in the 40s and 50s as John Cage and Yves Klein. “Minimalism, budget, and the creative team members’ backgrounds,” lie at the heart of the musical’s success and its persistent appeal: “It can translate to apartment living rooms, dingy black-boxes, and large prosceniums. From high schools to summer stocks, from cabarets to performance halls, *The Fantasticks* works.”

**Mother’s Milk: Mapping the Feminist Autobiography**

**by Juliana Corsetti**

*Thesis directed by Professor Laura Levine*

Juliana Corsetti's thesis begins with a paradox: autobiography breaks conventions of fiction because lives are unpredictable and don't follow Aristotelian rules of exposition, climax, and denouement. On the other hand, autobiographies employ elements of fiction because they depend on memory which distorts truth. How does Corsetti know this? In her own memoir she admits not only to dressing up to sneak into the spa of a 5-star hotel in Luxembourg to impersonate clients but to what she considers a worse sin: making up the detail of a changing room in the retelling of the story. Corsetti's thesis asks crucial questions about fiction and truth to answer the larger question of what would constitute a truly "feminist" autobiography. Contrasting Gertrude Stein and *Joan Didion* she offers brilliant readings to theorize an answer.

**Is't real that I see?: Seeing, Believing, and Love in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *All's Well That Ends Well***

**by Elsa Kegelman**

*Thesis directed by Laura Levine*

Love hath twenty pairs of eyes," Valentine of Shakespeare's *Two Gentleman of Verona* says. But does having twenty pairs of eyes help or hinder vision, asks Elsa Kegelman. Do they allow one to love better or worse than the usual number of eyes? Kegelman's thesis traces the contrast between those loves that depend on what they can see with those loves which ignore the evidence of the senses. Her analysis allows her to bring together concerns not usually treated in tandem in studies of Shakespeare. Pursuing these question in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Kegelman argues that the ability to incorporate dead parents into one's life is what distinguishes those who ignore reality from those who are able to transcend appearances. Her thesis offers extraordinary insight into the texts she examines.

**Got To Be Real: The Cost of Equality**

by Sean Conroy

*Thesis directed by Professor Sebastián Calderón Bentin*

Through a series of multigenerational ethnographic interviews, a critical analysis of television shows and films such as Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning*, and the effects of social media and dating apps, Sean Conroy traces the way solidarity has changed between gay and transgender men in New York City over the past decades. Starting with Émile Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, Conroy explores specific social spaces central to the reproduction of gay and trans solidarity. He argues that the framing of civil rights along neoliberal lines and the atomizing force of social media have had a debilitating impact on traditional forms of gay and trans solidarity evinced not only in mainstream representations of gay life but also in the testimony of his ethnographic subjects. Conroy's thesis is of vital importance in understating the imbrication of queer identity, political struggle and digital capitalism in our changing urban landscape.

**Tomorrow for Me: The Invisibility of the Trans- Feminine Body in Theatre and Live Performance" by Teagan Rabuano**

*Thesis directed by Professor Robert Vorlicky*

Teagan Rabuano argues that the history of drag reveals discrete spaces for trans visibility. Transwomen Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner are marked on a trajectory from Burt Savoy to trans liberators, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. By 2017, however, the representation of transwomen's lives are soloists, including Kate Bornstein, Justin Vivian Bond, and Bianca Leigh. Unlike an emerging presence of transmasculinity, Taylor Mac's *Hir* and Collins and Davis's *Southern Comfort*, transfemininity is invisible in casted plays. Inspired by Jose Munoz's theory anticipating inclusive theatres of transfemininity in casted plays, Rabuano concludes: "Art is the trans community's futurity. Art is our procreation." Teagan, a trans scholar, artist, and activist, leaves an indelible imprint on NYU. Teagan's legacy captures how researching, writing, and living in the present move margins to center.

**Taking Up Space: The Regulation, Representation, and Reclamation of Fat Female Bodies in the U.S.**

**by Sarah Cook**

*Thesis directed by Gwendolyn Alker*

Sarah's thesis is one of the first academic endeavors that extends the field of fat studies into the realm of theatre and performance. Deeply personal, deftly intellectual, and frequently humorous, her work demonstrates how theatre artists perpetuate stereotypes of the fat female body. Yet the thesis also remains hopeful that theatre provides an embodied site for fat female artists to reclaim stories by and about themselves. Employing theoretical frames as diverse as Julia Kristeva's discussion of the abject, to Fishman and Freespirit's *Fat Manifesto* (1973), Sarah makes the argument for the fat body as a feminist issue, and one that is uniquely manifested within live performance. With wide ranging cases studies Sarah deftly moves from fat representation in mainstream culture to less well-known contexts, wherein playwrights depict characters who are both fat and deeply complex.

**Imaginary Friends: The Evolution of the Homosexual Male Playwright's Manipulation of Identity**

**by Phillip Kenner**

*Thesis directed by Gwendolyn Alker*

Phillip Kenner's thesis begins with a re-visitation of the "The Great Homosexual Theatre Scare" of the 1960s. Here *New York Times* critics, Stanley Kauffmann and Howard Taubman, revealed a perceived threat of homosexuality in the U.S. theatre through their deeply homophobic writings. In a fiercely intelligent reclamation of these legacies, Kenner re-reads the female protagonists in the works of Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee through a queered lens. He then builds on this foundation to explore "the history of gay male playwrights and their use of identity on stage" in ensuing decades. Chapter two examines the seminal coming out of gay culture that was *Angels in America*. A final chapter analyzes Robert O'Hara's *Bootycandy* and Jack Ferver's *Chambre* as deeply historicized, and keenly contemporary stagings of gay male identity.