

## Digel/Jones Memorial Award for Graduate Student Writing at the MA Level (2021)



### Molly Porter, “A Curious Pattern Like a Tree”: Edenic Death and Life in *Mrs. Dalloway*

The relationship between religious tradition and modernist literature has undergone significant critical reappraisal in recent years during the post-secular turn. But while scholars have scrutinized the use and abuse of Christianity in canonical writers with turbulent personal relationships to the church such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf’s connection to established religion is often regarded as uncomplicated atheism and has gone relatively unstudied. Yet the allusively layered portrayals of death in Woolf’s novels displays an unorthodox yet deeply connected relationship to the Christian tradition she ostensibly rejected. This paper charts Woolf’s use of arboreal imagery drawn from the Bible and Dante in her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* to argue that she employs and subverts Christian symbolism to create a distinct-

ly modern conception of interconnected immortal life. Guided by the images of the Edenic and infernal trees that pervade this novel, readers can more fully grasp Woolf’s roots in religious tradition that branch into an utterly transformed theological vision. Woolf complicates, obscures, and ultimately transcends the simple dichotomy of the tree of life and the fatal tree of knowledge into rich, ambiguous, modern splendor; wasteland and Eden become one in a vital, mystical “embrace in death.” Through the religious allusions that explicitly and implicitly abound throughout her works, this paper contends that a study of Woolf’s treatment of Christianity sheds a key light on secular reconceptions of immortality in the social and psychological upheaval of modern society. In this alienated, traumatized, semi-secular chaos of a world, Woolf’s characters somehow possess an astonishing power to create connection, hope, and life.

## Digel/Jones Memorial Award for Graduate Student Writing at the PhD Level (2021)



### Adam Heidebrink-Bruno, “Data Ethics and the Making of Digital Subjects” Abstract

In “Data Ethics and the Making of Digital Subjects,” I analyze the shortcomings present in two dominant data ethics frameworks (data privacy and data sovereignty) that limit the efficacy of any and all regulations developed under their assumed logics. Data privacy and data sovereignty are two small parts of a larger ethical situation emerging in our digital lives, and I believe that today’s debates concerning digital subjectivity ought to account for a broader set of questions and concerns. By drawing on Emmanuel Levinas’s theory of the “Infinite” and Judith Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*, this paper calls for a reframing of the data ethics debate, shifting the focus away from privacy and sovereignty and toward subject formation. Today’s regulatory practices consistently overlook and marginalize the role data has in producing

our contemporary subjectivity, threatening the ability of these legal frameworks to secure essential human rights and real autonomy online. By prioritizing ethical responsibility at the individual level, data ethics frameworks direct attention away from the important act of negotiation that occurs between users and digital platforms at the “scene of address.” I argue that situating data ethics in the realm of privacy and sovereignty overdetermines what constitutes a violation of one’s digital rights and prevents us from asking a more complicated set of questions considering how the violated self was constituted in the first place. In the end, I suggest pivoting the focus of data ethics toward the social production of subjects, thereby advocating for a different set of rights and regulations better suited to the ethical challenges and possibilities of digital life.