

# Memory, Trauma, Dissociation and Amnesia


OLLI at Illinois  
Spring Semester 2020

# More conversation, anyone?

- IF anyone would like to join me for conversation (and maybe some beer or wine) after the class, please come find me at the end of class. Everyone is welcome.



# Why this course

- This course is an exploration of the human experience of memory, trauma, dissociation, and amnesia. It is also about the way in which we talk about these experiences and how we create narratives that make sense of and allow us to share the experience.
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# Movies to help us explore these issues

- The prince of tides / 1991
- Three faces of eve / 1957
- Sybil / 1976
- Frankie and Alice / 2010
- Collateral Beauty / 2016



# The creation of Narrative

Let me tell you what I wish I'd known  
When I was young and dreamed of glory  
You have no control  
Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?

And when you're gone, who remembers your name?  
Who keeps your flame?  
Who tells your story?

Lyrics from the musical Hamilton

# • Players in the creation of narrative

- The subject
- The observer / psychiatrist (in most of the stories we explore)
- The interpreter
- The recorder

# THE PRINCE OF TIDES

- Based on a book by Pat Conroy
- Film credits screenplay to Pat Conroy and Becky Johnson
- Directed by Barbra Streisand
- Released in 1991
- Described in Wikipedia as “an American romantic comedy’ (HAH ! ! ! ! )
- NO academy awards but Nick Nolte received three best actor awards from other sources

# Questions and conversation

- Does the film work?
- Does it tell a cohesive story?
- Does it do justice to the complicated issues of memory, trauma, and amnesia?



# • Diagnose the characters

- Tom Wingo
- Savannah Wingo
- Lila Wingo
- Henry Wingo
- Luke Wingo
- Traumatized
- Amnesia
- PTSD
- Dissociative Identity

# Question from last week

- Toward the end of the film, when they are embracing out on the sidewalk across from her office, she says,
- “I gotta find me a nice Jewish boy. You GUYS are killing me.”

# Who's story is it / Conroy's or Streisand's?

- Barbra Streisand consulted with doctors and therapist for approximately six months to help create a sense of authenticity for the film.
- Although she didn't receive on-screen credit for it, Barbra Streisand was one of the screenwriters of the film. In an article in US magazine in 1992, Pat Conroy said "it was that kind of amazing attention Barbra gave to detail. She put her mark on everything . . . I've never seen anyone go through a total immersion in a project like she does. . . I mean, here is how much input I had on the script---I think Barbra actually wrote it. She certainly wrote more of it than I did. . . She should have taken a screenwriting credit on it?"

# What changed

While the film was a [box office](#) hit and raised Streisand's reputation as a director, its numerous changes from the original novel upset some Conroy purists. The film eliminated most of the novel's flashback scenes. They describe Tom Wingo's relationship with his [siblings](#) in great detail.

In the novel, these flashbacks form the main plot and take up more of the novel than the romance between Streisand's character, Dr. Lowenstein, and Tom Wingo. The removal of the flashbacks makes the relationship between Wingo and Lowenstein the central story in the film, whereas in the novel, it is not.

Another character in the novel - the second Wingo brother, Luke, who appears only in flashbacks onscreen - is vitally important to the novel, and his death is a major plot point. In fact, the title of the book derives from a poem written by Savannah about Luke and his struggle against the government after the seizure of Colleton. In the film, "The Prince of Tides" is the title of a book of poetry written by Savannah and dedicated to Tom. Luke only appears intermittently, and his death is only vaguely described.

# What story is Streisand telling?

- The relationship between a teacher/coach from South Carolina and his family?
- A romance between that teacher/coach and a NY therapist?
- A story about how memory works and doesn't?
- The importance of remembering as a vehicle for the healing of trauma?

# More questions

- Why the Tom coaching Bernard play such a large part in the movie?

# Positive review

- Nothing about Barbra Streisand's previous acting or direction is preparation for her expert handling of "The Prince of Tides," which has been pared down from Pat Conroy's sprawling, hyperbolic novel to a film that is gratifyingly lean. Discretion and reserve are not the first qualities that come to mind about Ms. Streisand's work, yet they are very much in evidence this time. So is the frankly emotional style with which she is more often associated, a style perfectly attuned to this film's complex, stirring story. "The Prince of Tides" marks Ms. Streisand's triumphantly good job of locating that story's salient elements and making them come alive on the screen.
  - N Y Times review

# Review, continued

- Everything about Mr. Conroy's overripe family saga is suffused with excess, from the author's descriptions of his characters ("The words of her poems were a most private and fragrant orchard," he writes of Savannah Wingo, the narrator Tom Wingo's twin sister) to the experiences those characters share. The three Wingo children, Luke, Savannah and Tom, seem to do everything in unison, often on what are either the very best or very worst days of their lives. Feisty, brave and endlessly self-dramatizing, they have the knack of being colorful to a fault.

- Janet Maslin, NY Times, Dec 25, 1991



# The Last Word from Pat and Roger

- [Pat Conroy](#), author of the novel *The Prince of Tides*, gave Streisand a copy of his novel with the inscription: "To Barbra Streisand: The Queen of Tides...you are many things, Barbra, but you're also a great teacher...one of the greatest to come into my life. I honor the great teachers and they live in my work and they dance invisibly in the margins of my prose. You've honored me by taking care of it with such great seriousness and love. Great thanks, and I'll never forget that you gave 'The Prince of Tides' back to me as a gift. Pat Conroy."
- Roger Ebert gave the film three and 1/2 stars out of four, praising Streisand's directing. Ebert wrote, "By directing one good film, you prove that you had a movie inside of you. By directing two, you prove you are a real director". He called the film "an assured and very serious love story that allows neither humor nor romance to get in the way of its deeper and darker subject", adding that "Streisand shows herself as a director who likes emotional stories - but doesn't simplify them, and pays attention to the human quirks and strangeness of her characters".

# The Three Faces of Eve

- Based on book by Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Kleckley / the book was eventually published in 27 language / The book may have been rushed into publication to capitalize on the public interest in multiple personalities after the Shirley Jackson's 1954 fictitious novel *The Bird's Nest*, which as also made into a movie, *Lizzie* in 1957.
- Nunally Johnson from Twentieth Century Fox became interested.
- Released Sept 1957
- Starred Joanne Woodward (who won an Oscar for Best Actress), David Wayne, and Lee J. Cobb.

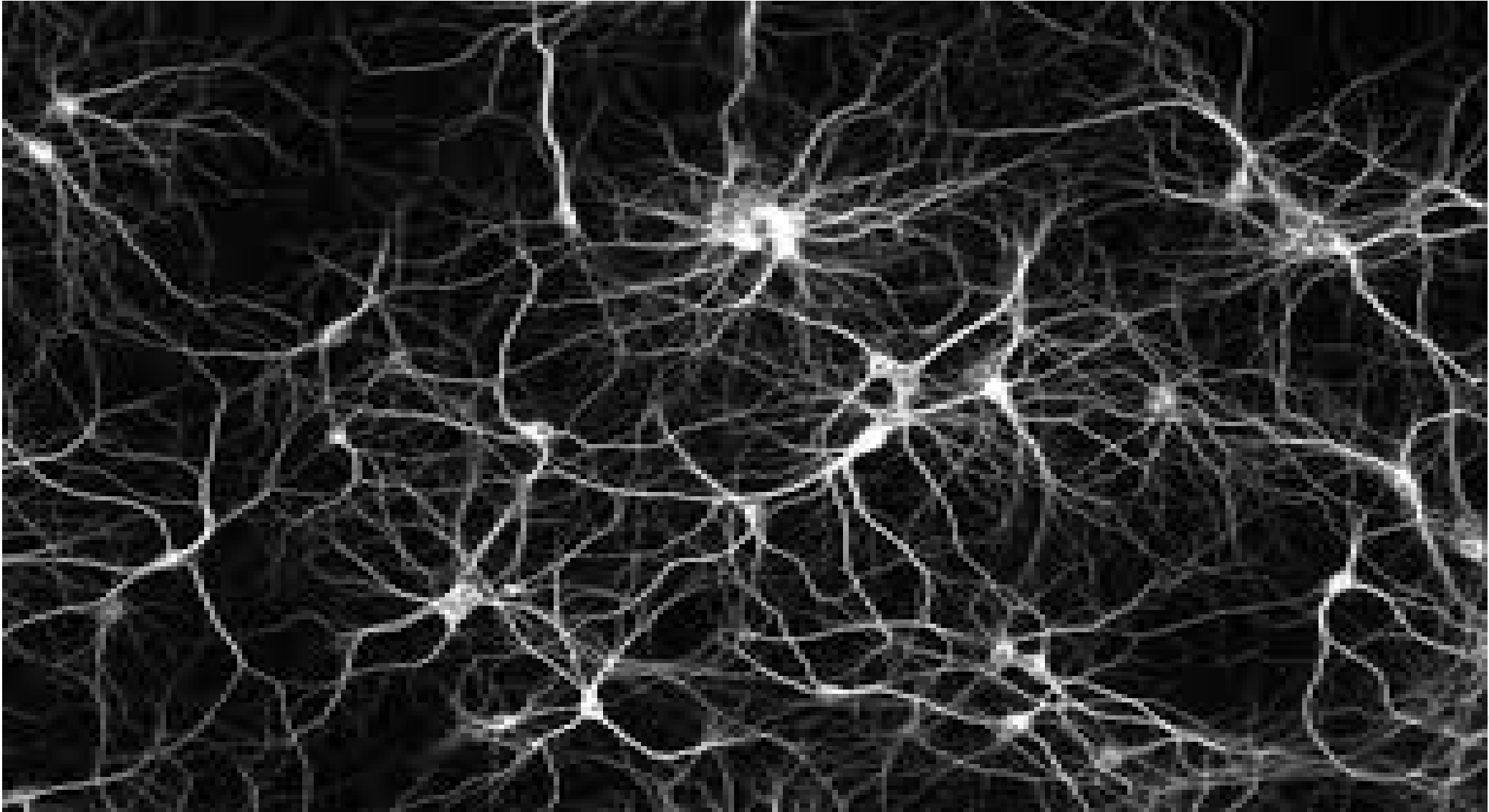
# The makers of the narrative

- Subject: Chris Costner
- Observers: Corbett Thigpen (Dr. Luther) and Hervey Kleckley (Dr. Day)
- Interpreters: Thigpen and Kleckley, Nunnally Johnson (who wrote the script from the book), Alistair Cook (who made a cameo appearance to vouch for the truth of the story)
- Recorder: Nunnally Johnson was both producer and director

# Switching

- In this film you will see portrayals of switching, the process by which one ego state/personality replaces another ego state/personality.
- This results in a change in state specific processing: Behaviors, way of speaking, emotional states all change.

# Neural Networks



# Neural Networks



# Structural dissociation / Basic Theory

Myers postulated that as the result of overwhelming trauma, the personality can develop parts that deal with the experience in different ways:

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- 1. The **EMOTIONAL part** of the PERSONALITY (EP) c
  - - encodes and stores the trauma
  - - relives the trauma in emotional and sensorimotor ways
  - - is often disoriented in time, situation, and identity
  - - is fixated on the memory of the traumatic experience
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- 2. The **APPARENTLY NORMAL part** of the PERSONALITY (ANP)
  - - is avoidant of the traumatic memory and keeps the trauma from being integrated
  - - has partial to complete amnesia of the trauma
  - - may have emotional and bodily anesthesia
  - - is capable of appearing and functioning normally

# Internal Family systems model

## **Managers**

Managers are parts with preemptive protective roles. They handle the way a person interacts with the external world to protect them from being hurt by others and try to prevent painful or traumatic feelings and experiences from flooding a person's awareness.

## **Exiles**

Exiles are parts that are in pain, shame, fear, or trauma, usually from childhood. Managers and firefighters try to exile these parts from consciousness, to prevent this pain from coming to the surface.

## **Firefighters**

Firefighters are parts that emerge when exiles break out and demand attention. These parts work to distract a person's attention from the hurt or shame experienced by the exile by leading them to engage in impulsive behaviors like overeating, drug use, violence, or having inappropriate sex. They can also distract from the pain by causing a person to focus excessively on more subtle activities such as overworking, over-medicating.




# One Metaphor





# Showtime





SO . . . . .

Is that the end of the story?

Did they live happily ever after?



# The rest of the story

The Three Faces of Eve / 1957 book / Movie—Sept 1957

Corbett Thigpen and Hervey Cleckley

The Final Face of Eve / 1958 / Evelyn Lancaster and James

Poling (Who's he?)

I'm Eve / 1977 / Chris Costner Sizemore and Elen Sain Pittillo

A Mind of My Own / 1989 / Chris Costner Sizemore

# The Last Face of Eve / 1958

- Written in the first person (Evelyn Lancaster) who writes about her the parts before “integration” in the third person.
- Covers the same years as Three Faces of Eve /1951 to the late 50s / with a brief history of her life before 1951
- This means it tells the same story from Eve’s perspective rather than the perspectives of Thigpen and Checkley, and has many fewer excursions into psychological theory.

# Who really wrote it?

- The ghost writer, James Poling, was found by the lawyer whom Chris had employed to investigate whether a legal document she had signed while under the care of Thigpen, which assigned the rights to her life story to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, would prevent her from publishing her version of the story.
- Chris / Evelyn reports that Thigpen and Kleckley gave her encouragement about writing a book because she had a unique experience of all this. However they put pressure on her and Poling to let them edit and approve the manuscript, which means it essentially mimics their version.
- Chris felt she had been thwarted from telling her own story

# I'm Eve / 1977

- Now Chris uses her real name and writes with the help of a cousin, Elen Sain Pittilla, who lived in Durham, NC. They would get together for long weekend and Chris would talk about her memories
- Written in the third person and reads more like a novel than a memoir.
- Covers her whole life, from birth to the year of publication. including the years in the 60s and early 70s when she sought help from six psychiatrists and identified 22 personalities, or alters. Finally she found Dr. Tony Tsitos, a psychiatrist in Annandale, Virginia and Dr. Tibor Ham, a physician in Vienna Virginia who worked together to help her find healing
- Written in the two years (1975-1977) after her ‘final integration” with Dr. Tsitos. It ends with much of her emotional issues still unresolved but states a determination to go on seeking recovery.

# Differences in the narratives

- I'M EVE reports innumerable episodes of dissociation from about age 2 through 1975. She was constantly being punished for things she swore she had not done so she became known as a liar.
- She had blackouts and fainting spells, episodes of dissociative blindness, embarrassing moments of incontinence.
- None of this is reported in THE THREE FACES OF EVE. Were Thigpen and Kleckley unaware of all this or did they pick and choose the details to include in order to make the narrative manageable and believable to readers?
- The strangest of these differences and omissions relate to early life traumas.



## The Traumas / Just a few of the many

In Mrs. Sizemore's case, the fragmentation in her mind began when she was as young as 2, after she had witnessed a series of gruesome incidents, including her mother being bloodily injured in a kitchen accident, the funeral of an infant, the dragging of a corpse from a ditch, and a man being "cut in half by a saw at a lumber mill,"

- NYT Obituary 8/5/16

# What's the theme?

- If you add the memory of being made to kiss the face of her grandmother's corpse, it is clear that the theme running through all of these events is a fear of death. But the choice of which to include in the narrative is curious.
- Aside from a brief reference to learning from Eve's parents about the corpse in the ditch, the kissing of the corpse is the only one included in **THREE FACES OF EVE**. It's certainly not the most dramatic.
- Chris refers to the others in more than one place in her later writings but only talks about kissing the corpse when she narrates her therapy with "Dr Luther" in **I'm EVE**. Did it really happen or is it an example of therapist induced memory?
- Why to Thigpen/Kelckley and Johnson make that memory the pivot point of the narrative?

# A Mind of My Own / 1987

- Written in the first person and for the first time she uses her real name, Chris Costner Sizemore.
- Chris states that this not a book about her illness but a book about her health
- She details her increased self-confidence, her improved relationship with her husband and children, her increasing skill as a painter, and her eventual career as a public speaker and consultant on issues of mental health.
- Toward the end she reports on her husband being diagnosed with Parkinson's and their move to North Caroling to be nearer family.

# Going public

- The decision to go public evolves out of her desire to tell her own story. In order to do that she needs to be able to talk to people about what she wrote in the book.
- Since she is having increasing success in painting, she starts doing shows. There is a show at a gallery at a university in northern Virginia, but her paintings aren't selling well so she contacts a local newspaper, reveals her identity as EVE and gets interviewed.
- The story is picked up by other newspapers and TV stations and a media storm ensues.
- Chris's picture is on the front page of the Washington Post.

# Mastery

The treatment of multiple personality disorder (MPD) is often a prolonged and grueling enterprise, which imposes taxing demands upon the therapist and the patient alike. It becomes quite important to pace the therapy, lest the already beleaguered patient become both acutely and chronically overwhelmed. The majority of the extant literature on the use of hypnosis for the treatment of MPD addresses the processes of accessing the alters, abreacting traumata, arranging reconciliations among the alters, and facilitating integration.

This communication discusses the necessity of titrating the amount of discomfort the patient must endure against the patient's resources and capacity to achieve mastery and self-efficacy. Several hypnotherapeutic techniques for offering respite and temporary asylum are explained and illustrated: alter substitution, the provision of sanctuary, distancing maneuvers, bypassing time, bypassing affect and/or memory, attenuating affect and/or memory retrieval, and rearranging the configuration of the alters by bartering or “shuffling the deck.”

- Richard Kluff

# Which is the real story?

- Did Thigpen and Kleckley write their version because it was such an unusual story OR to enhance their professional reputations? (They did present about her at the APA while she was still in treatment.
- Why did they try to keep control of the story by reviewing and editing THE FINAL FACE OF EVE.
- Why did they keep telling her not to go public because she wasn't well enough? Why did they discourage her from seeing the movie (she learned about the premiere in Augusta from newspapers)? She finally saw it on TV in the 70s, about 20 years after it premiered.
- What about the "educational" film they made to show to colleagues that ended up in a library where the public could access it?
- Is I'm EVE a useful telling of her story? ( I found it very disorganized and confusing). A MIND OF MY OWN is much more readable

# Late life controversy about Thigpen

The sunny narrative of Mrs. Sizemore's triumphant second act was called into some question in 2012, when Colin A. Ross, a psychiatrist specializing in dissociation, published a book, "The Rape of Eve," in which he accused Dr. Thigpen of having exercised an unethical, Svengali-like influence over Mrs. Sizemore and manipulating her for nefarious purposes during and after his treatment of her ended. Dr. Thigpen died in 1999.

-NYTimes Obit

## More dirt on Thigpen

“At different times he functioned as her psychotherapist, publicist, literary agent, film agent, book editor, contracts negotiator and legal adviser,” Dr. Ross wrote. “He attended her husband’s funeral uninvited, was her son’s godfather and engaged in sexual misconduct with her. He arranged for her to have an abortion, and during the procedure she was sterilized without her or her husband’s consent.”

NYTimes Obit



# The Last Word

- For an excellent summary of all the parts of Chris Costner Sizemore's life, read the obituary in the N Y Times dated Aug 5, 2016
- It's a much more cohesive narrative than any one of the books or even of all of them put together.

# Extra credit

- Do some online research and see what you can find out about **Robert Oxnam**.
- We will be talking about his book later in this course.

# Keeping in contact

- Feel free to email me with questions or suggestions about issues you would like me to cover:
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