

FACULTY COLLOQUIUM

Wednesday

September 16, 2015

UC 222

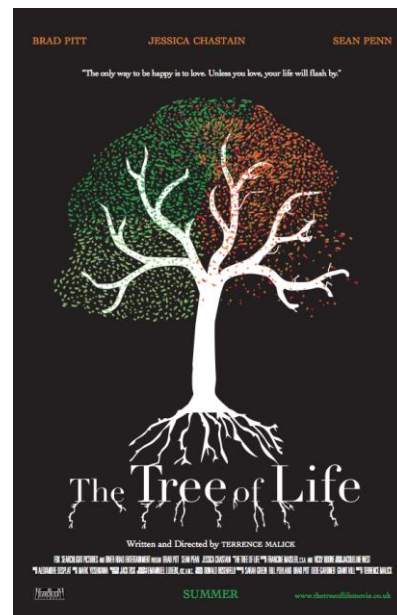
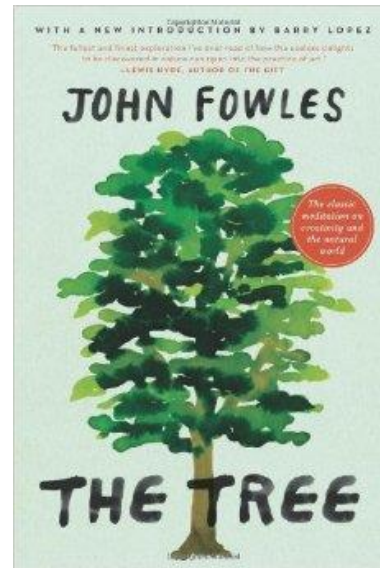
12-12:50pm

Tree-Worship and the Oedipal Ecology of *The Tree & The Tree of Life*

By Dr. Colin Carman,
Instructor of English

This essay combines *The Tree* (1979), a non-fiction work by British novelist John Fowles, and “The Tree of Life” (2011), a film by American writer-director Terrence Malick, in order to explore their unique ways of revering nature, particularly trees. Taken together, these psychologically-charged works proffer an environmentalist epistemology whereby man comes to know the natural world around him in ways that feel familial and, in effect, familiar. Due to the fact that family relations are central to these works, I argue that the art of tree-worship in Fowles and Malick is joined with the process of oedipalization, so strongly that their ecological sensibility is interwoven with a fear of the father and an equally strong love for the mother/earth. Recognizing what I call the *oedipal ecology* that underpins man’s attachment to nature means owning up to our own power to disturb, even destroy, an

environment that is paradoxically sublime *and* recognizable in human terms. These works by Fowles and Malick are useful because they urge us to acknowledge, rather than outright reject, an oedipal landscape that must be crossed rather than canceled out.



Please come with your lunch; bring your colleagues and students too!