

***We the Animals*, We the Archetypes: Memoir, Truth, Fiction?**

50-word abstract: In *We the Animals*, Justin Torres articulates a narrative that feels like a memoir but nonetheless utilizes numerous literary and cultural archetypes. This discussion panel explores the way in which Torres opposes the archetypal and the individual, transitioning from the collective “we” of the beginning of the novel to the individualized “I” of the single narrator.

Proposal: Much of the public discussion around Justin Torres’ *We the Animals* interprets the text as a memoir, while Torres himself insists that it is entirely fictional. In this panel discussion we seek to explore the interplay between genre (the *bildungsroman* or the coming-of-age narrative) and memoir. We expect to explore the following questions:

- How does *We the Animals* conform to the traditional *bildungsroman*? How does it depart? Can we compare it to other works, such as *Jane Eyre*, or even *Harry Potter*?
- Does Torres’ representation of Puerto-Rican American culture encourage an autobiographical reading of his novel? Could the same book be written about a white Presbyterian family from Minnesota?
- How much do stereotypes and archetypes play into the representation of masculinity, femininity, class, and sexuality? What archetypes do we recognize and how are they treated?
- Are Torres’ characters more than just types, or is this story of growing up gay, working class, and Latino meant to be universal?
- How do formal aspects of the novel (first person plural narration, unnamed narrator) contribute to the perception of the book as a memoir?

The format of our discussion will be interactive, calling for audience participation at each of our discussion points. *We the Animals* has popular appeal, and we will invite listeners to share their knowledge of stereotype and archetype in contemporary culture. We will assemble a set of slides to guide the audience to key passages in Torres’ text.

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As faculty co-advisor of Sigma Tau Delta's Alpha Alpha Delta Chapter, I verify that all panelists are active participants in our campus chapter of Sigma Tau Delta.

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