

GARY LONGSINE

Students live novels read for class

A tightly woven semester, like a tightly woven belief structure, unravels slowly at first from the smallest realization. Class begins at 7, not 7:30. So I was late for the screening of "A Room With a View."

As the screen version of the E.M. Forster novel publicly tested my emotional stability, I wondered how many other people on campus are living some version of the novels they're reading for class. Quite a few, I expect. A novel is more likely to be popular if people identify with it.

"Lying to George." As a further test of my self-control, the producer had elected to display the chapter titles between scenes. At the beginning of the end, the heroine lies to her lover. She doesn't love him.

"Lying to Cecil. Lying to Mr. Beebe, Mrs. Honeychurch, Freddy and the Servants." The climax builds with these lies to the heroine's fiancé, priest, mother, brother and kitchen staff.

Somewhere in the fading past, George had said to her, with bravery characteristic of one resigned to failure, "I want you to have your own thoughts, even as I hold you in my arms." Our tragic hero spoke my words, with my voice, almost 50 years before I was born.

As if that weren't humiliating enough, George got a happy ending.

And suddenly, I realized that for the last year, I've felt like I'm living inside an absurd novel, somebody else's fictionalized account of life — it can't really be like this.

Now I know. I'm a tortured '90s experimental fiction novel written by a neural network on somebody's souped-up personal computer. It's trained to write like Franz Kafka and fed the plot sketch of "The Graduate," the text of Job and the poetic verse from "A Room with a View."

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm "G.," an absurdist character with no real name. G. plods bravely through life, if one considers forward motion



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without the ability to see ahead bravely.

Carefully setting the wheels of fate in motion, G. once left a note on the door of a woman he scarcely knew: "Stopped to see you. — G."

And the gods laughed. But who are they, anyway? So they created the universe. Big deal. Who created them?

If I'm the output of a computer program, then God above my god is a celestial version of IBM or an omnipotent version of Microsoft's CEO, Bill Gates.

And as I ponder Gates as God, my screen saver kicks in, dropping random blocks of text off my screen. I watch them disinterestedly bounce across the bottom of the screen and off the edge. A block with God in the middle drops off, leaving blackness behind, triggering a memory of a god that I once considered as most likely to be.

It was the god of an ancient Cabalist sage and a young theoretical physicist. The sage once said that God's first act of creation was to withdraw part of himself from the universe to make room for the cosmos.

This ancient speaks directly to the modern physicist. Among the latest in 20th century physics, string theory seems to hold the promise of uniting the myriad theories that describe the basic structure of our universe.

Essentially, it says that the basic component of everything is the string.

This is a loop of energy — mathematical magic actually — that spins, turns, wobbles, waves, rotates and combines with other strings to form the myriad subatomic particles that make up our existence.

However, this theory describes a universe of 10 dimensions, or some such. As we are aware of only four, this seems to present a problem. One possible answer, from the heights where theoretical physics and mathematics merge, or seem to merge — there could be great parallax from my perspective — says that several of these dimensions are "wrapped up" in the structure of matter.

Picture a loop as a length of hose joined end to end. If the hose is cut and you look at the end, you will see a circle, one of the extra dimensions hidden in the loop. Theorists in string theory say that nobody really understands it better than this.

The Cabalist sage did. God's first and only act of creation was to withdraw part of herself from the universe to make room for the cosmos.

Like the neural network software that wrote the novel that G. lives in, the universe is disinterested in us. Like G., we respond to this apparent insensitivity by maintaining an active interest in ourselves, each other and the universe.

The natural order of that interest, progressing from ourselves outward, has led people from the dawn of time

to describe the universe with personal characteristics. This is the origin of God.

Because we are natural phenomena, and because it is natural for finite, self-aware entities to seek understanding, god has arisen at various times in various cultures. God looks much the same everywhere, because god looks like man.

God has undergone various revision throughout time. Stable, thriving societies have been organized around the idea of god as a tree, or a mountain or the sun. Technological societies, failing to find god in physical phenomena, set god as a spirit, apart from the physical universe. But God remains as the explanation for the mysterious, for questions beyond our technology.

As science expands its venue, the domain of God is periodically challenged. In this century the death of God, or rather our ideas about God, has been firmly established. Even now, God is being transformed.

Continued inquiry into the structure of our universe will bring us more answers as to where God is not. It may also bring us a better understanding of what we cannot know.

Here we again will place God. But this time, it will be a more subtle God, more deserving of the universe where we find ourselves. God will not be the champion of the victorious army. God will be unknowable. We will come to understand that we must construct our own morality, that God won't do it for us.

The meaning of our life is another of the unknowable questions of existence. We can seek to construct meaning for ourselves, but it will always be tenuous. Even now, G. floats aimlessly amidst a sea of lost meaning. But the sea is warm and familiar.

Longsine is a senior international affairs and economics major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Exploring space key to Earth's technology

From time to time, I have read articles in the DN that provoke debate. Of them all, the one that stands alone in near-sighted, one-dimensional thought is Chuck Green's column, "Earth has priority over stars" (DN, Oct. 2).

If utopian beliefs are his priority, then by all means he will not be hurting anyone's ideas by removing himself from the technological world. Go ahead, try it. But please, try it without the knowledge we gained from our space program. I surely hope that Chuck can survive off pre-1930s technology; we began design and research in that decade.

I am by no means condoning disease, hunger or war, but I am condoning the extreme importance of space exploration. America is every day finding new methods to combat the evils of society, and in no way is the space program conflicting with its works; it has only been augmenting, if not leading the way.

By using the untapped resources of space, we as a world people may indeed one day live Green's dream of reduced world needs. But don't for a moment fool yourself into believing that humankind will solve all its problems by dissolving the space program.

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