For the past few weeks, I have been helping Professor David Hecht in the History Department with research for his upcoming book, *Rewriting Oppenheimer: Constructing Scientific Icons in post-World War II America*. Since I am an English major, I have primarily been exploring the literary aspect of public image; specifically, how scientists are represented in novels and drama in the nuclear age. While allowing me to be extremely independent and pursue themes that are of particular interest to me; for example, how atomic scientists are or are not coded as Jewish figures, these explorations provide Professor Hecht with a comparative basis for the main subject of his study, Robert Oppenheimer.

Delving into the particular figures and subject matter that have occupied most of my time, I began my research with the most iconic (and most fictionalized) character in science in the last century: Albert Einstein. Professor Hecht was particularly interested in Einstein because of the degree to which his celebrity, informed by “non-scientific” attributes of his personality and image, influenced his public image. Oppenheimer experienced a similar phenomenon, depicted more on horseback than actually scientifically engaging, but by reading a number of plays, novels, letters, and obituaries surrounding Einstein, I was able to better understand how the two figures were both inter-related and vastly different.

Next, since Professor Hecht is working on an article about Rachel Carson, I thought it would be interesting to delve into the gender dynamics of how scientists are portrayed. Returning to the era of our overlapping interests, WWI and WWII, Professor Hecht and I agreed that Marie Curie would be an excellent figure through which to complicate the evolving depictions of family vs. career decision-making that the female scientist had to navigate. I also read a few novels, but mostly watched postwar science fiction films, many of which costar female scientists (most significantly as love interests, but don’t get me started).

Another figure that Professor Hecht and I have addressed is that of the mad scientist, a model onto which Oppenheimer’s contemporary Edward Teller, proponent of Reagan’s SRI plan, was squarely seated. Both through exploring more mythic figures, such as Faust and Dr. Frankenstein, and those invented closer to 1945 (such as those by H.G. Wells, Philip K. Dick, or Kurt Vonnegut), I have sought to explore the nuances of the relationship between sin and science articulated by Oppenheimer, and better address the question of what makes these characters so “Other” (i.e. their foreignness, their isolation, their Jewishness, etc.). Ultimately, through this project, I have sought to provide Professor Hecht with a better sense of the literary histories of and between various scientist archetypes, a vocabulary that Professor Hecht can connect to his historical knowledge of Oppenheimer as a public figure.

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