

**Panel 34**  
**Intermediality in Popular Culture**

**Marilyn Monroe as Blonde: The Actor, The Body, The Fiction, The Biography**

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In this paper I read how Joyce Carol Oates' magnum opus, *Blonde* (2000), the fictionalized biography of Marilyn Monroe experiments with writing strategies and forms such that the actor's life, her films, her iconic sexuality, and her politics coalesce to craft an epic narrative that leaves the reader both spellbound and mystified. When one thinks of Monroe, one cannot help but visualize her iconic blond curls, her pout, her voluptuousness, her husky voice, and her raw sex appeal. Cognizant of the untamable aura and myths surrounding the late actor, Oates brings to us a narrative that transcends the written word to represent a chaotic, ambitious, intelligent, and charming woman who, for popular appeal, chose to deliberately embody excess. Oates presents *Blonde* as a collage of the actor's life, her failed relationships, her thwarted emotions, her disnarrated experiences of exploitation, and her tragic death and, in so doing, crafts a biography rich in detail and eccentric in tone, much like the actor herself.

In this paper, I therefore read *Blonde* as a literary work that combines the visual, the imaginative, and the experimental. Augmenting my reading with visual clippings from the actor's life, I read the novel as a compelling and confusing attempt at outlining the life and times of an artist who refused to be categorized or defined in simple terms.

**Biography**

Srirupa Chatterjee is Associate Professor of English, Gender Studies, and Critical Body Studies in the Department of Liberal Arts at IIT Hyderabad, India. Her research interests include multiethnic American literature, gender and body image, masculinity studies, and travel narratives. She is the editor of *Global Literatures and Cultures of Modernity: Critical Perspectives from India* (NY: Routledge, 2025), *Female Body Image and Beauty Politics in Contemporary Indian Literature and Culture* (Temple University Press, 2024), and *Gendered Violence in Public Spaces: Women's Narratives of Travel in Neoliberal India* (Lexington Books, 2023). Her forthcoming works include books on body image and contemporary American fiction.