

siren's call

"I generally avoid temptation unless I can't resist it."

— Mae West

"I desire the things that will destroy me in the end."

— Sylvia Plath

"Even though we all know the facts, it's hard to resist the lure of a tan."

— Jane Krakowski

**"It's not my responsibility to be beautiful. I'm not alive for that purpose.
My existence is not about how desirable you find me."**

— Warsan Shire

"The more things are forbidden, the more popular they become."

— Mark Twain

**"And if you can find any way out of our culture, then that's a trap too.
Just wanting to get out of the trap reinforces the trap."**

— Chuck Palahniuk

"To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger."

— James A. Baldwin

"When one with honeyed words but evil mind / Persuades the mob, great woes befall the state."

— Euripides, *Orestes*

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

— Winston Churchill

**"It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.
We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake."**

— Frederick Douglass

"What am I living for and what am I dying for are the same question."

— Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*

"Show me a hero and I'll write you a tragedy."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

**"Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous
are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions."**

— Primo Levi

**"Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who
are doing something you don't believe is right."**

— Jane Goodall

"What I hear when I'm being yelled at is people caring really loudly at me."

— Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), *Parks and Recreation*

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, is the University of Southern California's honors general education alternative: an interdisciplinary program marked by academic rigor that encourages exciting and vibrant discussion within its community. Each year, approximately 200 outstanding freshmen from all majors participate in its unique combination of core courses, writing classes, tutorials, and events.

The Thematic Option conference provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to enrich their academic experience by publicly presenting their ideas and research. In response to a general call for papers, Thematic Option students developed topics under this year's theme, **Siren's Call**, to be presented as part of a panel. Each panel is composed of five to six students, with a faculty member serving as the panel's chair and respondent. A question and answer session follows the presentation of papers in each panel. Topics are reflective of students' various disciplines and interests and focus on issues ranging from politics to popular culture. Possible themes include temptation; desire; ambition; progress; hubris; silence; warnings and danger; the forbidden; dreams and nightmares; monsters; fear; love; confrontation; listening and hearing; communication; technology and technophobia; social media; journalism; accidents; tragedy; triumph; the hero's journey; sanity and insanity; or the student's own unique interpretation.

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

Emma Arroyo
Hanna Fahsholtz
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Jasper McEvoy
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Many thanks to the faculty and staff
who have played an integral role in the success
of the Thematic Option Research Conference.

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Always On My Mind

Moderated by Professor Heather James
Departments of English and Comparative Literature

Monday, April 17
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Scriptorium

Alexander Bosch

Why Translate: Racism and Orientalism in *Lost in Translation*

Tokyo, a city of neon signs, tall skyscrapers, and massive numbers of people. Yet understanding it costs more than just a plane ticket and a week's stay—it requires dedication. In Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*, an aging movie star and a recently married, lost soul not only attempt to find themselves, but connect again to the world around them. Using Edward Said's definition of "Orientalism," I intend to focus on these foreigners' reactions to Japanese culture to highlight the diverging approaches to the "other" represented in the film and argue for Charlotte's more silent, open, and open-hearted response. On a broader level, Bob and Charlotte's experiences in Japan pose a challenging question for all of us: Is it best to try to understand the "other," with all the barriers between us, or simply to accept that we will never truly understand?

Sanam Mohan

Tragedy and Destruction: The Emergence of a New Resilient Human Spirit

With the imminent danger of climate change and the overpowering influence of fear-based media stories, humanity is currently in an era in which we are unable to clearly imagine what the future will look like. The popularity of post-apocalyptic novels, movies, and stories is a result of humanity's obsession with imagining the future and trying to visualize something we can never truly know. One such post-apocalyptic story is Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film *Children of Men*, which follows Theo, an isolated, morbid man who finds motivation in his mission to protect Kee, the only pregnant woman on a planet that has been infertile for 18 years. While this post-apocalyptic film ends in the deaths of central characters, it is not their ultimate survival that we as an audience must look to for comfort; it is their journey of resilience that reveals humanity's potential for success in the face of loss. Psychologist Froma's research of her patients reveal that these events of destruction and trauma revitalize the human spirit and render humans superior to the individuals they were before. Through my paper, I argue that devastation and destruction will bring about a new kind of motivated, resilient spirit that human kind has never seen before.

Sydney Prange

Scared of Heights: An Analysis of Disability Representation in *Gattaca*

Sometimes the most inspiring stories are the ones most fraught with harmful ideas. In the 1997 film *Gattaca*, society exiles the genetically "invalid" Vincent Freeman, but his passion helps him achieve the impossible: he uses the genetic code of Jerome Morrow, a genetically "superior" man, to achieve his dream of exploring space. With its depiction of a society that excludes people with genetic impairments, *Gattaca* ostensibly portrays the social model of disability as described by Tom Shakespeare. In her criticism of the film, however, Kathleen Ellis notes that *Gattaca* instead depicts the individual model of disability by suggesting disability is the responsibility of the individual to overcome. Building from Ellis's argument and connecting it to both "Narrative Prosthesis" by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder as well as Valerie Palmer-Mehta's arguments about mental illness and disability, this paper contrasts the characters of Vincent and Jerome through the lens of disability models and contends that *Gattaca*, by portraying the individual and medical models of disability, promotes the dangerous idea that people with disabilities must overcome them to live happy, successful lives.

Jamie Salinger

**Is the Sun Setting on the Accurate Depiction of Mental Illness in Film?:
An Exploration of the Emergence of Psychological Disorders in the
Culture Industry Through the Lens of *Sunset Boulevard***

As declared by Cecil B. DeMille in *Sunset Boulevard*, one of Hollywood's most effective and entertaining self-reflective critiques, "A dozen press agents working overtime can do terrible things to the human spirit." This human spirit, a fragile, ephemeral, and intangible being, has become the victim of an abusive relationship with the culture industry, a term coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their text "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," to explain the corruption in the production of popular culture. Visible particularly in Billy Wilder's film, *Sunset Boulevard*, the subsequent trauma may escalate to such severity that mental illness prevails. The investigation of this unfortunate connection must begin then with the following question: is the proliferation of mental illness in the culture industry a result of individuals with previous psychological disorders, having difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy, being drawn in by the offer of an easy escape from reality or rather of the culture industry's tendency to shape the psychological identity of those who simultaneously contribute and surrender to it? Wilder's depiction of Norma Desmond, an eccentric, psychologically unstable, and washed-up Hollywood star, supports the viability of both options and further incites in audiences a wonder of the broader implications imposed on directorial obligations of accuracy or creativity. They wonder what the culture industry's responsibility is to those who are employed by it. They wonder whether living perpetually in a fantastical world entirely severs ties to reality. They wonder if the culture industry is redefining art as we have previously known it.

Leah Starr

**Immersion Therapy for Those on a Budget:
Why Cheryl Strayed into the *Wild***

Jean-Marc Vallée's 2014 memoir-turned-movie, *Wild*, documents Cheryl Strayed's 1,100-mile journey across the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Cheryl needs to leave everything behind and journey into the PCT to deal with the grief of losing her mother and to find acceptance for the mistakes she made. With this paper, I will describe the allure and magnetism that nature possesses and its explicit authority over the human psyche. I will specifically focus on examining nature's qualities through a literary lens, an unconventional study for a vastly indeterminate science. Outside in nature, the sun lathers us in vitamin D, the endorphins rush through the bloodstream from the heightened physical activity, and the ancient earth we stand upon connects us with the thousands of generations who stood in the very same spot. Maybe it's not the *mystical* power of nature, but the power nature brings out of us; the power we attain, but cannot recognize until the sun beaming down on us can illuminate it.

Avik Wadhwa

**Trigger Heart:
Emotionally-Based Violence in *The Autumn of the Patriarch***

Violence is all too often thought of in pragmatic terms. For the most part, scholarly discourse focuses on the instances in which such behavior is motivated by rational reasoning and is directed towards a tangible goal. This paper thus attempts to redirect our attention to violence that is an emotional response to negative external stimuli. Examining the General's violence in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, I argue that it results from isolation and loneliness. Isolated from others based on the extent of his own power, the General feels completely alone and feels a deep longing for the establishment of a meaningful relationship. This paper finds that in the two key instances of his emotionally-based violence, after Patricio Arogon reveals his hatred for the General and following an assassination attempt on his life, these feelings of loneliness are heightened. By highlighting that the General's violence is closely correlated with his feelings of isolation, I offer a novel framework for understanding the genesis of violence. Indeed, I reveal that individuals resort to violence when they feel unable to cope with their own internal pain and confusion.

False Idols

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp
Department of English

Monday, April 17
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Carnegie

Nate Delgado

American Heroes or Vagabond Con Men?: Evaluating Kerouac's *On the Road*

Do our worst stories deserve praise? Disney's *Song of the South* is racist, *Lolita* is sexist, and *Huckleberry Finn* may be both. Popular, even canonized works, become controversial all the time, often surprising us and making us question their validity. I argue that *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac is no exception. The novel's original manuscript sold for over \$2 million and has toured the world, sharing the frantic lives of its protagonists with anyone lured by the promise of adventure. The book is ubiquitous, yet much of its content is obnoxious at best and detestable at worst. A greater awareness of the consequences behind our books allows us to separate good stories from bad characters. The tremendous influence of Kerouac's work amplifies the importance of asking: at what point does a story go too far?

Xiao Liu

Propelling Privilege: The Exclusion of Minority Voices in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*

Although it is popularly deemed the "voice of a generation," Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* fails to represent the majority of the population. The novel follows the reckless travels of a group comprised of inherently privileged characters: economically well-off, white males—three traits that place these characters at the top of America's social hierarchy. While giving a voice to an exclusive section of the population, Kerouac glosses over the poor, women and ethnic/racial minorities. By merely reinforcing a societal hierarchy by only giving the dominant class a voice, the interpretation of the novel as the voice of an entire generation is misrepresentative of the time period the novel depicts and thereby incorrect. Rather, *On the Road* is the voice of privilege.

Alisha Nagarkar

The Pleasure of Homogenization in *The Virgin Suicides*

The unidentified boy narrators in Jeffrey Eugenides' 1993 novel *The Virgin Suicides*—who function impossibly as a single entity—discover the power of communal identity through their observations of and fantasies about the five Lisbon sisters. Many scholars have condemned the way the boys treat the sisters as a unit rather than as distinct individuals, arguing that this homogenization results in a problematic objectification of the female characters. However, this paper reveals that the boys desire to attain the very same homogeneity they project onto the girls. Our male narrators mirror the undifferentiated state of the Lisbon girls in an effort to experience for themselves—together, as a group—the close bond and intense sense of companionship that the sisters share. The boys bring to light and yearn to partake in a certain subtle pleasure of homogenization that we cannot—or don't want to—bring ourselves to admit out loud because it goes against our ingrained societal norms. Ultimately, the boy narrators in Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* who revel in their desire for sameness are queering our individual understanding of identity, as well as group behavior and relationships.

Namita Prakash

Real Talk: Implications of Race and Gender on Identity and Disguise in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield are mysteries. As two lighter-skinned black women in Nella Larsen's *Passing*, they have the rare ability to "pass" for white. While Clare does decide to pass, Irene chooses not to. This choice is a difficult one to make and, as I argue, the fact that both characters are women complicates the decision. Margaret Gillespie theorizes that pale black people like Irene and Clare face marginalization from both black and white communities because they do not fully belong to either group. I believe that gender creates an additional layer of marginalization, one that puts both characters into a smaller niche that forces a connection between them regardless

of their wishes. This forced relationship chips away at the personas they present to the outside world, illustrating how much each woman disguises her real self from others. As the personas fall away, however, instead of revealing the real Irene and Clare, the weakened facades simply reveal an inward disguise that manifests in the form of denial. This divide can be directly attributed to factors of race and gender that dually construct Clare's and Irene's identities into ones largely founded in disguise, both from the outside world and themselves.

Urmila Venkat

***A Tropic Thunder Blunder:
Pretension in the Culture Industry***

If he were real, five-time Academy Award winning actor Kirk Lazarus, one of the protagonists of Ben Stiller's *Tropic Thunder*, would have been ecstatic at the news of Robert Downey Jr.'s Oscar nomination for his portrayal of him. However, he might not have sensed the irony in an American actor getting nominated for playing an Australian actor who plays a black soldier—in blackface. Though controversial, Stiller's choices in the film to portray the film industry as obsessed with the notion of accolades and tokens of worth—to the point where it becomes insensitive—reflect the mirroring of film and reality, the facet of the culture industry that is self-reflexively mocked in *Tropic Thunder*. The culture industry, a term coined by German philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, is defined in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the capitalistic industry of mass media and how it controls the lives of those who consume it. It is also the focus of *Tropic Thunder*'s satirical look at the tribulations of a group of actors whose goal is to make an award-winning Vietnam War movie. *Tropic Thunder*'s critique of the pretension in the culture industry is hinged on this conflation between reality and the events of the film, as well as its awareness of these intentional—and even unintentional—satiric exaggerations.

Talia Walters

***Beautiful Little Fools:
How F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby Perpetuates
Female Objectification in Society as Fictional Pieces***

Recently, much of the feminist conversation has been focused on the hypersexualization and the enforced inferiority of women, known as objectification, on a multimedia platform. However, as Catharine McKinnon states in *Feminism Unmodified*, "Admiration of natural physical beauty becomes objectification. Harmlessness becomes harm." Objectification doesn't always come in one recognizable and demonized form, and a lack of criticism allows for other formats, specifically positive female objectification—the idolization and desexualization of women. I argue that F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* perpetuates positive objectification through the language Gatsby uses to describe Daisy. Gatsby idolizes Daisy through the novel while refusing her sexuality to preserve her perfection. His positive objectification, ultimately the catalyst of his death, is almost entirely ignored in literary analyses and romanticized by readers. We must recognize all forms of objectification, including positive objectification, if we desire to solve the problems in gender relations.

Family Ties

Moderated by Dr. Michael Petitti
Thematic Option Honors Program

Monday, April 17
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Gutenberg

Fedja Čelebić

Why Robot Sex Matters While Nothing Else Does: Existentialism and Evolution in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*

Are human beings the only creatures capable of asking about the existence and meaning of life? Historically, we have defined humanity through our exclusive access to scientific and philosophical thought. But the robots portrayed in Karel Čapek's 1920 play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* introduce new variables in determining the definitions of "existential," and "biological," demonstrating traits which I argue categorize them into the same philosophical and scientific classifications as humans. Drawing on Camusian existentialism and post-Darwinian theory, I therefore argue for an expanded definition of both categories. With a profession of love at the end of the play, the robots Helena and Primus demonstrate how biology is in fact more closely tied to reproduction than to organic material, and that their reproductive purpose furthermore lays out an argument for the necessity of a future in the definition of "existentialism." Karel Čapek's robots are not real—humans have no existential counterparts but humans are still also reproductive and evolutionary beings. Thus, in order to be both existential and function under the expanded definition of biology, I argue that a future, specifically reproductive future, must exist.

Hannah Chong

Fata Morgana: The Fallacy of the Father Figure in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

Nursery rhymes are disturbing. Children dance around, reciting euphemisms for the Black Death and the depredations of the London Bridge, and as they grow up, they realize that much of what they accepted as innocuous is not as harmless as it seemed. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud argues that as children, we aspire to be like the father figure and internalize the father's esteem as the superego, or a sense of morality, and in this he makes the mother figure secondary. However, I use Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle* in tandem with psychologist Abraham Maslow's "A Theory of Human Motivation" to challenge Freud's father figure theory and argue that the mother figure is essential. Vonnegut's novel creates a world without a mother figure and links her absence to a lack of empathy, and Maslow's theory proposes human needs are hierarchical, the needs traditionally fulfilled by mother figures taking precedence over the needs traditionally represented by father figures. Vonnegut turns science, religion, technology and father figures into Fata Morganas, or complex mirages, that are less important than the characters, and Freud, make them out to be. The characters of Vonnegut's world become engrossed in a desperate chase for self-esteem and self-actualization, the upper tiers of Maslow's hierarchy, falling victim to selfishness and losing empathy for others, allowing them to propel the world's destruction.

Breana Norris

Trump, Voldemort, and Other Enemies of the Child: Our Childish Relations to Politicians as seen in *The Child In Time*

What do American Trump supporters and J.K. Rowling's Death Eaters have in common? In Lee Edelman's incendiary book *No Future*, he posits that our society is grounded upon the belief in attaining a better future for our children, an endless cycle of eternal optimism. "The Child," as Edelman defines it, is a socially constructed image of purity and vulnerability that we collectively construct and protect, often at our own expense. He claims that this construct is infallible, that we are offered no alternative when the figure of The Child is invoked. Yet I offer a challenge to this theory. I believe the 2016 presidential election offers proof that the majority no longer prioritize the future of our children. By exploring "Make America Great Again" and other subversions of Edelman's "infallible" construct, this paper argues that there is a global trend of redefining what norms we expect our politicians to conform to. I will also be using Ian McEwan's *The Child In Time*, which tells the often-sensationalized story of a man mourning his abducted child. Through this grief-stricken lens, McEwan explores our child-like deference for politicians as the protagonist struggles to banish the figure of his lost child.

Shreya Tatkar

**Miscommunication, Missed Communication:
Untangling Cultural Barriers in *Crazy Rich Asians***

Kevin Kwan's indulgent debut novel *Crazy Rich Asians* first hit shelves in 2013 and was immediately catapulted to the top of summer best-seller lists with good reason. The story follows the manic lives of the aforementioned crazy rich Asians, the Youngs, and the fallout that occurs when an interloper by the name of Rachel Chu interrupts their monied bliss. Rachel, an American-born Chinese professor, finds herself unable to understand why these people seem to despise her, and in turn, the Youngs find themselves mystified by this woman they believe to be a poor, young gold-digger. This miscomprehension finds its roots in culture and tradition, and a long history of diametrically different habits. By delving into the cross-cultural historical contexts behind the characters in *Crazy Rich Asians* and the modern-day implications thereof, I will endeavor to unravel these crossed wires of communication to ultimately reveal how and why we, as Western readers, seem to fall prey to the same miscommunication errors as the characters themselves.

Tyler Vincent

**The Subliminal Tension in EC Comics during the Post-World War II Era:
How Breakaway Female Comic Book Heroes Influenced a Generation**

Jennifer Holt, a second-wave feminist, described the 1940s model of "ideal" feminine behavior as the "Ideal Woman"—a dutiful, passive, and housebound caregiver. In the Post-WWII Era, the American male-dominated society still expected women to be this "Ideal Woman" despite their crucial contribution to war industries. Critics condemned the educational message that mediums of popular culture such as comics were sending, bringing to light the themes of sexualizing women, domestic abuse, sadism and obligatory domestication. The breakout female roles in EC Comics' horror/sci-fi stories contradicted gender norms and the "Ideal Woman" model and cast light upon positive messages of gender equality and women's re-constitution. The women were targets of male killers, con-artists, and patriarchates. Not only did women retaliate however, but they also sent a message to readers of disregard for the status quo. The women in EC Comics demanded recognition and self-constitution, often breaking gender norms and revealing patriarchal systems. This essay re-examines gender portrayal in three EC Comics stories, reframes the educational message EC Comics sent to readers, and reconsiders the sources of ideology that make up our beliefs and values.

Sarah Wagner

**Lights, Camera . . . Babysitter?:
Balancing Hollywood's Destructive Tendencies with Parenting Responsibilities**

Lindsay Lohan, Amanda Bynes—we know that fame can corrupt actors. The capitalist focus of Hollywood means that actors are treated more like props than people, creating toxic psychological results. But what happens when these celebrities have children? To facilitate this discussion, I will examine Joan Didion's 1970 novel *Play It as It Lays* and Sofia Coppola's 2010 film *Somewhere*, exploring how Hollywood has impacted the lives of the protagonists and their children. I will also integrate theory from critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who call our modes of mass culture and communication "the culture industry." Ultimately, in this paper, I will demonstrate that the culture industry has the capacity to cause detriment to the relationship between a parent and their child.

Help!

Moderated by Professor Brett Sheehan
Departments of History and East Asian Languages and Cultures

Monday, April 17
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Addison Adkins

Men Struggling with Women Gaining Power: An Analysis of Women's Roles in the Novel *Carrie* and Its Film Adaptation

The highly successful mass-market paperback *Carrie* by Stephen King and the subsequent film directed by Brian De Palma are, at surface level, about a young, unattractive, persecuted girl who uses her newfound telekinetic powers to take revenge on her persecutors: the women in her high school. Both the novel and the film were produced during a tumultuous period in American politics where women were gaining unprecedented rights. Some consumers think King and De Palma succeeded at developing women characters in a reflection of the new rights women had and even consider *Carrie* feminist in its portrayal of women. However, upon analysis, both De Palma and King ultimately fail at depicting women as more than sinners that need to be repressed in order to maintain societal order. De Palma's use of the male gaze, Laura Mulvey's idea that movies are made with the male audience in mind and treat women purely as objects of pleasure, is an extension of King's use of the male-gendered narrator. Not only do both the film and the novel sexualize women and reduce them to their physical appearances, the endings of the works glorify domesticated women and vilify empowered women—women that act like men.

Sydney Ahmed

Honey, I'm Home: *The Virgin Suicides* and America's Obsession with Happiness

Animosity brews in suburbia. The perfectly plotted houses snuggled between white picket fences are too crafty to ever reveal the rancor raging within. But it's there. In his novel *The Virgin Suicides*, Jeffrey Eugenides manipulates the cheery suburban landscape, exposing the contradictions of suburbia—in what it promises its inhabitants but ultimately provides. The social contract that residents sign when moving into the neighborhood is enforced through suburban surveillance. Perhaps a clearer image of suburbia would be “the first weekend after leaf fall, [when the neighbors] began raking in military ranks, heaping piles in the street. Different families used different methods.” When the Lisbon family does not participate in this mass mobilization, the neighbors all become angry, in fact some consider going over and raking their leaves for them. The neighbors' reaction speaks to the larger expectation suburbia places on its residents: you're expected to maintain your lawns just like you're expected to smile and wave from behind your white-picket fence. There's an unspoken contract. The neighbors of Grosse Pointe, Michigan struggle to live in a world of repressing public conformity, a world with no catharsis, no relief. With so many restrictions, it raises the question: why do humans choose to live in the suburbs? This presentation will delve into the uglier sides of suburbia as seen in *The Virgin Suicides*.

Sophia Arbess

One Love One Blood: Dissecting Otherness in Lawrence's *I Am Legend*

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* is the ultimate “us” vs. “them” story: the reader observes protagonist Robert Neville hunt the flesh-eating “others,” hoping to save his kind as the last human on earth. With this in mind, I contend that the changes made by Francis Lawrence in his 2007 cinematic rendition of Matheson's novel are not merely for art's sake, as often assumed, but are intended to be critical of a post-9/11 America that is increasingly concerned with the perceived threat of foreigners (regardless of the supposed spirit of inclusion the nation boasts). By replacing the white, blue-eyed Neville of Matheson's original novel with Will Smith—a popular African-American icon—alongside a number of significant allusions to Bob Marley and an overt and unexplained change in setting from Los Angeles to New York City, the director attempts to align the film with the spirit of American social progressivism. I will argue, however, that Lawrence's *I Am Legend* is rather a manifestation of the misguided tendency to regard America as a united fusion of beliefs and cultures that dismisses the troubled reality of a system built upon the internalized exclusion of “others”—flesh eating, or otherwise.

Lucas Bohlinger

**Beautiful Nothingness:
The Outlaw Couple and the Dangers of Postmodern Conformity**

In 1967, *Bonnie and Clyde* divided cinematic history. Six years later, another outlaw couple film, *Badlands*, did the same. These films were indispensable in the creation of the Modern and Postmodern eras, respectively; they were revolutionary, violent, sexy, and true. Defined by a critical, and even ironic take on modern life, these new eras represented Hollywood's departure from Classical melodrama. Two decades after *Badlands*, Ridley Scott offered an even more unorthodox outlaw couple in *Thelma and Louise*. I will argue that Scott's film exposes this rebellious and ground-breaking genre as paradoxically compliant with mainstream expectations. Ultimately, despite *Thelma and Louise's* place in feminist history, the film can only offer marginalized viewers, as Thelma says, "something to look forward to."

Anne Dao

**The Nightmare on Sunset Boulevard:
The Role of Performance in *Sunset Boulevard***

"Alright, Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up!" One of Hollywood's most iconic lines, in one of Hollywood's most iconic films, delivered by one of Hollywood's most iconic characters. Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* is about a delusional, retired silent film star named Norma Desmond who is so determined to make a "return"—not a "comeback"—to the big screen that she begins to confuse reality with film, performing as though she were in a movie at all times. Though most critics argue that Norma's dramatized behavior and overboard passion to become a celebrated star again are what makes her a villain of the film industry, Norma is actually a victim of the culture industry. The culture industry, defined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, is a factory that produces mass media cultural goods to manipulate people into submission, "denying its audience any dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination." Thus, Norma is a victim of this phenomenon, exhibited through her detachment from reality, loss of agency, and lack of genuine human interaction, which suggests that the culture industry subverts those who have fallen into its clutches.

Madison Seeley

**Rebel Without a Cause, but Not Without an Effect:
An Exploration of Privilege in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause***

Not all teenage rebellion is causeless. In fact, underprivileged individuals often rebel out of necessity to defy a society rife with injustice. In my paper, Nicholas Ray's epochal film *Rebel Without a Cause* is used as a narrative tool to understand the role privilege plays in teenage rebellion, specifically investigating socioeconomic, gender, and heterosexual privilege by analyzing each of the three main characters: Jim, Judy, and Plato. I hone in on Plato as a case study of heterosexual privilege, whose rebellion is catalyzed by a lack of love and validation as a result of his sexuality. I further argue that although many critics praise this film for its celebration of sexuality, the film actually functions as a subliminal regression to the homophobic tendencies of 1950s society and reinforces the power of privilege. I assert that privilege prompts causeless rebellion and insulation from its effects, whereas lack of privilege yields necessitated rebellion and much more devastating consequences. My paper concludes by noting the parallels between privilege then and now, while encouraging further introspection and dialogue because injustice will never be remedied if we do not talk about it.

Under Construction

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd
School of Philosophy and Gould School of Law

Monday, April 17
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Shir Attias

Self-preservation and Minority Feminism: The Double-edged Sword of Intersectionality in *Kindred*

Intersectionality, coined in 1989 by activist Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes identities such as race and gender not as “unitary, mutually exclusive entities” but rather as “reciprocally constructing phenomena.” Crenshaw’s intersectionality explains that as a function of society’s discrimination and race-gender expectations, race and gender are inseparable; to be a black woman has implications that cannot be described as just black or just female. Known for highlighting women of color in the otherwise white genre of science fiction, Octavia Butler, in her novel *Kindred*, engages with race, gender, and responsibility through the story and empowerment of Dana, a black woman living in 1960s California who is transported back in time to the antebellum south. When considered through an analysis of identity and the lens of intersectionality, Butler’s work is particularly influential in creating a dichotomy of advocacy for those of one’s identity—here black women—and self-preservation. Ultimately, Dana is empowered with the ability to save herself and not her black female peers, underscoring the challenges of intersectional advocacy and advocating for self-preservation to overcome race-gender boundaries.

Zia Bedi

Now I Ain’t Sayin’ She’s a Gold Digger: Socioeconomic Status and Infidelity in Kevin Kwan’s *Crazy Rich Asians*

When we try to envision the uber-rich, we think new—the newest cars, the newest fashion, the newest technology. So why is it that, despite this obsession with what’s new, the wealthy’s views on infidelity are so . . . old? Kevin Kwan’s 2014 novel, *Crazy Rich Asians*, illustrates this contradiction through the failed attempt of self-made, middle-class Michael Teo to fake an affair so that his born-rich, high-society wife, Astrid Leong, would ask for a divorce. While Astrid’s high levels of confidence, intelligence, and independence are consistent with progressive views on women, her insistence on remaining with Michael despite her belief that he is unfaithful defies our expectations for what a woman with her qualities would do. This paper will argue that the sources of wealth and status—tradition and legacy for the elite, compared to progress and innovation for the middle-class—are ultimately responsible for shaping our views on infidelity and divorce.

Maggie Bendersky

The Search for Freedom in the North and Warmth in the South: The Apocalypse through the Lens of Gender and Race in Morrison’s *Beloved* and McCarthy’s *The Road*

We have come a long way from the days where many believed that evolution had shaped and divided homo sapiens into two distinct roles: women as care-takers of the world, and men as warriors. While centuries of cultural evolution have reinforced, enhanced, and, in some cases, erased or blurred these divisions, there is no doubt that men and women view the world differently, especially in the face of trauma. Two novels reflect this different lens through which we can view the world: Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. On the surface, these novels feel as unrelated as can be imagined. Both are set in different time periods. One is written by a white male and focuses on a white male protagonist, while the other is authored by and concentrates on an African American woman as heroine. One is a sci-fi-esque account of surviving an unnamed civilization-ending disaster, while the other is a historical fiction narrative about surviving the horrors of slavery. As different as they are, a comparative analysis reveals that both novels are concerned with questioning the role and responsibilities of parenthood, utilizing children as symbols, and confronting death in all its forms. Interpreting each novel within a gender-race context not only offers a new perspective on the reasoning behind each parent’s actions in their respective narratives, but also allows us insight into what I argue is an upsetting of the traditional hierarchy of American gender and race power

dynamics as the disadvantaged slave women in *Beloved* ultimately triumph over the apocalyptic events of their lives in ways in which the white male protagonist of *The Road* fails.

Amanda Chan

**A Negation of Neocolonial Culture:
Buying into Freedom in Paul Beatty's *The Sellout***

What does it mean to have self-determination? What happens when self-determination is thwarted, and what is the force that does the thwarting? Two theorists of national liberation in African anti-colonial resistance movements, Kwame Nkrumah and Amílcar Cabral, answered these questions with their conceptions of neocolonialism: an advanced form of imperialism. Resistance to neocolonialism formed a practical part of their struggle against colonialist oppression. The same force that they analyzed is alive today in the contemporary United States, or so seems to say Paul Beatty, author of the 2016 Man Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sellout*. This satirical novel recounts the tale of a man—and a society—consumed by warped ideas of liberatory politics in their quest for self-determination for the Los Angeles suburb Dickens through the reinstatement of segregation and slavery. I argue that the forces of oppression in *The Sellout* parallel those which the Pan-Africanists described, and that through his satire, Beatty offers a way out, toward true freedom.

Warren Poh

**The Vacation Diaries:
A Marxist View of Film Tourism in *The Motorcycle Diaries***

“This isn’t a tale of heroic feats. It’s about two lives running parallel for a while,
with common aspirations and similar dreams.”
—Ernesto “Che” Guevara

While Che does not begin his journey throughout Latin America as a hero, he ends his journey as one. In *The Motorcycle Diaries*, a biopic based on the diary entries of 23-year-old Che Guevara, Che travels on a motorcycle, observing the poverty surrounding him. Salles promotes Che’s character development through his vulnerability to the world on a motorcycle. I will argue Salles portrays Che as a hero and examine our responses to such a travel narrative. While Salles intends the *The Motorcycle Diaries* to be a recollection of growth and travel, people often view the film in a reductive lens, left with a feeling of “wander-lust.” Does this film-induced tourism enable us to pursue genuine travel, or just another vacation? By attempting to travel with a purpose, or search for fidelity on the road, we often do just the opposite.

Alec Vandenberg

**Be Cool:
Suppression of Aggression in the 1960s**

“Be cool,” a desperate lead singer Mick Jagger pleads with the crowd. Although the Altamont Free Concert served to epitomize the Hippie mantra of “make love, not war,” it quickly escalated into violence, revealing the limits of “being cool.” Joan Didion, a literary journalist who helped define the 1960s, sheds light on this notion in her collection of essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, which details her experiences in California during the age of the hippies. In an era consumed by the violence of the Vietnam War and the chaos of protest movements, the Hippie Counter Culture Movement arose to sedate the masses and to embrace “peace and love” in the midst of hate and hostility. But the story isn’t as rosy as it seems, as instead of repressing societal aggression, the Movement merely channeled it, resulting in a lack of conviction or even overt episodes of violence. Ultimately, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* not only questions the effectiveness of the Hippie Movement in sedating or channeling aggression but also reveals how behind the Movement’s allure to transcend the violent status quo in favor of achieving inner and outer peace, the sirens of aggression and complacency lurk.

Blurred Lines

Moderated by Amy Cannon, MFA
Thematic Option Honors Program

Monday, April 17
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Scriptorium

Catherine Atkinson

**Thank You For Sharing:
The Advantages of Permeable Boundaries in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides***

Though teenagers' obsession with social media and self-promotion may say otherwise, our society values privacy. On the watch for Big Brother, we lock our phones, our doors, our computers, continuously concerned with, as Deborah Nelson describes, the frightening permeability of our bounded spaces, whether that be our nation, bodies, homes or minds. Yes, privacy and its potential fragility is concerning, but, it can also be advantageous. As seen in Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, the permeability of our private spaces can function beneficially—in a literal and metaphorical sense. This paper argues communal privacy, a result of this permeability in which specific communities share ostensibly private spaces, often results in a heightened connectivity between members and can mediate against harmfully homogeneous spaces, such as racially exclusive suburbs.

Annelise Bui

**Us and Ours vs. Everything Else:
The Emergence of the Human Ego with Society in Post-Apocalyptic Literature**

Why do humans attempt to “escape the fate of other creatures” when they themselves are a product of the same natural processes that have given rise to all living things? Where does this ego originate? More importantly, will that same ego lead us to our own destruction as a species? As Yuval Harari argues in his book *Sapiens*, this erroneous belief in the anthropogenic superiority and invincibility of the human species not only leads to a sense of group security but further solidifies the belief that the world is one that can be comfortably divided into one of humans and non-human. While produced over a half century ago, these same themes are explored in George Stewart's 1949 novel *Earth Abides* as his main character Ish is forced to reintegrate with nature following a civilization-ending apocalyptic event. In Stewart's imagining, Ish finds an intimate balance with the natural world that evaporates once he begins the process of community building and interacting with other humans after a period of isolation. While through the character of Ish, Stewart warns readers of the dangers of the human drive to seek purpose and develop value systems that rely on the dominance of other species outside of their own, my intention is to analyze the stigma around this sense of superiority and question, if, as Harari argues, it is part of human nature to derive greater importance from their actions and seek differentiation, why do these constructions carry a negative connotation? Who is to say these behaviors are not natural? Humans.

Virginia Bullington

**Holy Goofs:
Questioning the Nature of Rebellion in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road***

Although Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* is said to have been the novel that defined the Beat Generation (which was the precursor to the counterculture movement of the 1960s), I am unconvinced that this story is subversive in a meaningful way. Kerouac himself had an aversion to the idea that his novel inspired the hippies, considering the Beats “pure” and the hippies “unpatriotic.” This language reveals Kerouac's own conservatism, which was ignited by left-wing praise after the novel's release. In fact, Kerouac's political views are evident throughout the novel. From Sal and Dean's abuse and neglect of women to their appropriation of black culture, the story as a whole feels like a resistance against social progression. Yes, it weaves a tale of two young men rejecting the expectation to be responsible, family men. However, in avoiding these obligations, Sal and Dean prove that the repressive atmosphere of mid-century America does not really apply to them. They are allowed to break the “rules” put in place by society, a privilege which is not available to women and racial minorities. In fact, they get away with their nonconformity because they reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes that oppress these groups.

Amanda Douglas

**A Feminist Façade:
Stephen King's Gendered Language and Patriarchal Construct of *Carrie***

What are the limitations of female power within a patriarchal household? How do we psychoanalytically react when repressed under a patriarchal authority? Stephen King's *Carrie* faces a difficult dichotomy of power and gendered repression. While he appears to give both female figures, Margaret and Carrie White, power, their power remains a by-product of patriarchal influences. Margaret's religious and abusive power serves as an extension of the original patriarchal source, Ralph White, who used her for his own pleasure and impregnated her with Carrie. Thus, Margaret White acts as a patriarchal surrogate by repressing Carrie's womanhood and sexuality. Carrie's telekinetic powers function as an innate defense mechanism against the very source repressing her. According to Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, it is because of these repressive demands placed on the individual's psyche and the internalization of guilt, that forces the individual to inherently react with aggressive impulses. King works with these aggressive impulses and paints women in a masculinized manner, which reveals his fear of women obtaining their own power. As per *Carrie*, women may obtain power, but are ultimately forced to function under the demands and social constructs of a patriarchy, causing them to lash out.

Inkoo S. Kang

**Spotting His Tell:
How We Can Know That Gabriel Garcia Marquez's
The General Is Much More Rational Than We Think**

In poker, during moments of high stress, even the most disciplined players can make an unwise hand gesture, eye roll, or stutter, commonly known as a "tell." The General in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, likewise shows this weakness when he himself commits error. While the critic William Kennedy suggests the autocrat is a "mindless blood beast," I argue that The General is a highly rational actor operating within extreme circumstances, even if he commits the occasional misstep. As our perceptions of rationality are overly intertwined with morality, I use economic principles of rationality to clearly separate those matters. Using the Rational Choice Theory, this paper argues that The General is not a capricious lunatic, but a highly calculating if immoral politician. In instances when economic principles indicate the dictator acts irrationally, the narration styles subtly yet noticeably changes to reveal a clear "tell." Based on these scenarios, it appears the times when The General acts like a lunatic are not when he rapes, pillages, and murders but when he is checkmated and has no idea how to escape from a stressful situation. Thus, this essay ultimately reveals how the demand to reconsider the General as a rational actor develops from Marquez's own words.

Shelby Wong

**What Happens on the Road Doesn't Really Stay on the Road:
The Idolization of American Road Narratives**

Freedom of mobility is crucial to the American identity. This liberty is vividly represented through Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, a thinly veiled autobiography that illustrates the possibilities the road has to offer—wild abandonment, reckless behavior, spontaneity, drugs, alcohol, and one-night stands. Through the two main characters, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, readers experience the carefree anonymity found solely in travel. However, this paper will discuss how the evolution of society through technology has ensured that we will not be able to recreate the experience. We continue to idolize the American road narrative genre for this very reason—if we cannot live the adventure ourselves, our only alternative is to experience it through the eyes of others.

I Know You Are, But What Am I?

Moderated by Dr. Stephen Pasqualina
Department of English

Monday, April 17
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Carnegie

Diandra DeCampos-Kundahl

She's the Man: Depictions of Gender in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

Can fairy tale characters break free from the limitations of their respective biological sex and embody a different gender? The possibility was doubtful until 1979 when feminist essayist and creative writer Angela Carter wrote *The Bloody Chamber*, a collection that rebels against the typical fairy tale form. Carter does this by empowering her females through the expression of their sexuality—exemplified in the sadomasochistic relationship between the protagonist and her Marquis husband in “The Bloody Chamber,” based off Perrault’s character, Bluebeard. Feminist author and literary critic Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* is used as a lens to read these characters and their relationship as political, or “power-structured, whereby one . . . is controlled by another.” While Millett aims “to prove that sex is a status category with political implications” in her book, Carter extends this argument to gender by reversing gender norms to empower the woman and emasculate the man. Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” ends in female dominance and male subordination (the opposite of its beginning) through the transformative use of gender of the main characters, achieved primarily through symbolic imagery and language.

Rosie Halpin

Humanity Dies, Behaviors Arise: Exploring Human Nature in the Wake of Apocalypse

Even with increased attention to issues surrounding the negative impact that human activities are having on the planet, we continue to make self-centered decisions, not realizing (or caring about) their detrimental effects on current and future populations. While this sense of human superiority may have been prevalent in society for centuries, artists and scholars wrestle with the notion that there must be more that drives human nature than this. Take the imagined post-apocalyptic scenario explored in literature and film. It is a place where all human rules, customs, and culture have lost meaning, and the survivors continue to reflect core human traits we all share. As the societal rules that had originally restrained them fade away, these essential traits are more easily seen. An example of this type of narrative can be seen in Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel *I Am Legend*, where Matheson portrays a world taken over by a vampire virus. As the last human survivor fights against the overwhelmingly increasing ranks of vampires, his internal, psychological battles reveal the many existential struggles that readers can identify with. Using *I Am Legend* as our primary lens, this paper argues that Matheson reveals that after the excess baggage of “civilization” has been stripped away, there are three essential aspects of human nature that will always remain: the need for love/companionship, control, and an instinct towards violence.

Roma Murphy

Murder, But Only in My Dreams: Voice-over, Violence and Teenage Girl Fantasy in Terrence Malick's *Badlands*

Badlands' Holly Sargis is not on the top of most people’s lists of feminist icons. Throughout the 95-minute film, she merely follows and observes as her boyfriend kills eight people, without a word of protest. But Barbara Jane Brickman argues in her book, *New American Teenagers: The Lost Generation of Youth in 1970s Film*, that Holly’s voice-over establishes her as the storyteller, and thus the *creator*, of the film. In my paper, I use Brickman’s suggestion of Holly’s powerful narrative role to explore questions about *Badlands'* place in the female coming-of-age genre. Does the idea of Holly’s narrative control negate the misogynistic aspects of the story? If Holly dreams of murdering eight people, including her father, what does it mean that she has her boyfriend pull the trigger? Does *Badlands* subvert typical generic conventions of female coming-of-age stories by placing Holly in the role of “writer,” or does the story she tells destroy all of the film’s feminist potential?

Jessica O'Connor

**To Bra Or Not to Bra:
How Fashion Complicates the Subject v. Object Dichotomy**

Are you wearing a bra? If you're a woman, you probably are. Have you ever thought about why you put one on every day? Have you gone through the "why do I wear this relic of patriarchal restriction" phase? Here's an idea: maybe bras aren't as oppressive as we might think, and maybe femininity can be empowering, rather than degrading or objectifying. In her 1964 book *Sex and the Office*, Helen Gurley Brown provided working women with a practical guide to using their "feminine wiles" to woo successful men, and become successful women themselves. Brown's attitude about female sexuality echoed tropes in advertising at the time, including Maidenform Brassiere Company's "I Dreamed" ad campaign. Maidenform ads were criticized for objectifying women by presenting them as eye candy for the male gaze. While the way women were portrayed by Maidenform was reductive, people have historically used fashion to self-objectify for social and economic gain. The women in *Sex and the Office*, in particular, reaped these benefits by playing up their femininity—which involved some pandering to the male gaze. If conscious self-objectification benefits us, are we still objects, or autonomous agents forging our own narratives?

Sabrina Rivas

**Stick to the Stuff You Know:
Negotiating Social and National Identity Through Peer Pressure,
Individuality, and the Theatre in Disney's *High School Musical***

The central conflict of Disney's *High School Musical* lies in the breakup of East High's clique system after basketball star Troy Bolton and math genius Gabriella Montez rebel against their social roles by auditioning for their school's musical. It is a conflict between the allure of theatre and peer pressure, between individuality and conformity, singularity and equality. Yet, there is a duality and contradiction in the film's resolution, as Troy and Gabriella choose *both* theatre and basketball/scholastics, declaring that "we're all in this together," while at the same time maintaining that "everyone is special." These are the contradictions and dualities at the heart of twenty-first-century progressive American ideals: how can everyone be simultaneously equal and individually special? Is society moving toward an egalitarian, almost socialist breakup of social classes, or must we preserve the status quo? Can people truly have it all, as Troy and Gabriella demonstrate, and become everything they want and more? This paper examines the role of theatre in bringing about social change, and, conversely, the role of tradition and peer pressure in responding to that change. It also addresses the implications of using a teen movie musical to present these political ideals to young audiences.

Meng Shen

**Female Gaze:
The Role of Annie Dillard in American Nature Writing**

"I am no scientist."
—Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard plays an original role: that of a woman alone in nature. As a Pulitzer-winning nature writer, Dillard is known for exploring facts in nature through literary lenses. I will argue how her female identity helps shape a unique creative perspective, and sheds light on the relationship among women, men, and nature. Dillard is subversive in this men's world of nature writing. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she embraces subjectivity, thereby breaking the tradition established by Emerson and Thoreau, who assert authority over truth found "outside" of civilization. Although critics point out that Dillard substantially inherited her voice from Thoreau, I will argue that their fundamental differences outweigh their similarities. Even though Dillard intended to hide her female identity, I will assert that by blurring rather than concealing her gender, Dillard has in fact transformed American nature writing.

Eye of the Beholder

Moderated by Professor Trisha Tucker
Thematic Option Honors Program

Monday, April 17
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Gutenberg

Yumeng (Shirley) He

Women as Artworks as well as Spectators: The Dual Nature of Women in *Vertigo*

Countless scenes and motifs in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film *Vertigo* suggest that men both inside and outside the film have a desire to fetishize women. However, the film dramatized the moment when women also desire to be the object of men's fetishism. John Berger suggests that there is a split of wanting to become subject and object at the same time within women, which he found examples of in many traditional Western nude paintings. Concerning the connection between the film's intentional reference of artworks in its mise-en-scene with traditional Western art, this paper will discuss how female characters in *Vertigo* embody the split in women Berger discusses. Scenes that clearly reference earlier paintings, such as Carlotta Valdes' portrait and Midge's adapted self-portrait, all have the same implications of female's split. Therefore, the female figures in the film are similar to the nude female in artworks as they are all aware of male gaze, but consciously present themselves to be the object of desire.

Elena Perry

The Uncategorized Woman: Kerouac and the Various Female Identities in *On the Road*

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* degrades and sexualizes women in nearly every chapter. From Sal, the main character who scrutinizes female bodies, to Dean, the best friend who cheats on his ignorant wife as he travels across the states, the sexism covers a wide range of scenarios. It is easy to assume Kerouac was a women-hating proponent of the patriarch, as some scholars argue through a more traditional feminist critique. However, Nancy Grace, co-editor of *Beat Women in Beat Writing*, dissents from this conclusion. She decides rather than chalking Kerouac up to be a white misogynist, his complex identity must be scrutinized to find a reason for his portrayal of women. Grace's perspective is the foundation for my argument. I contend Kerouac's whiteness and the societal influence of the 1950s are not the sole motives behind his disturbing prejudice. Did Kerouac's upbringing influence his creation of female characters? How can the traditional critique be altered to account for the individual man? My essay is shaped by these questions, as well as the challenge of analyzing an author who cast women as worthless toys.

Maryalice Rosã

Fifty Shades of Blue: The Evolution of Bluebeard from Bloody Chamber to Red Room

"I am alive and have not succumbed to Bluebeard . . . or perhaps I have"
—Anastasia, *Fifty Shades of Grey*

As author and feminist theorist Angela Carter found, "each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste." In 1979, Carter turned to the malleable structure of fairy tales to reinterpret Bluebeard—the tale of a young woman's infatuation with a wealthy business man whose sadistic desires remain veiled beneath the door to his hidden chamber—in light of second-wave feminist discourse. Infusing film theorist Laura Mulvey's idea of the male gaze into "The Bloody Chamber," Carter ultimately examines the gaze as a force that not only relegates women to objects which exist to be looked at, but transforms their concept of desire. Recently, the evolution of the Bluebeard tale took a radical turn when E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* arose as a world-wide phenomenon. While Carter questions and deconstructs the power of the male gaze, E.L. James reasserts the power of the gaze as a force of arousal and manipulation—not only for the narrator, but for the trilogy's primarily female audience. Putting Carter's text in conversation with its 21st century counterpart, I investigate how a sophisticated horror story became "mommy porn" in just a few short decades.

Lily Sumrow

**Suicide Is the Answer:
The Exploration of Identity and Value Within *The Virgin Suicides***

When we encounter an event that defies explanation, our instinct is to assign it meaning. Books and movies that present ambiguous elements emphasize the power of interpretation, because to contextualize something is to give it significance. But as Jeffrey Eugenides's 1993 novel *The Virgin Suicides* powerfully illustrates, this practice can cause problems, at least when we try to assign motives and meanings to other people's actions. This novel presents an unanswerable question: why do these five teenage sisters kill themselves? They leave no note, no trace of an explanation, only the huge temptation to fill their empty space with meaning. This is exactly what the novel's narrator, a group of neighborhood boys, does, interpreting the sisters' actions throughout the novel. By doing so, though, they imply that the girls' importance stems from the universal truths their existence can reveal to the boys. When, in the end, none of the explanations the boys create are truly satisfying, Eugenides points out that an individual's true intentions can only be derived by that individual. This is not to say that ambiguous intentions are insignificant. Rather, importance is derived simply from the person's existence, not its ability to shape others' understanding of the world. By creating this unfillable gap, the novel allows us to explore the relationship between extrapolating meaning and appointing value.

Mya Worrell

**Medusa-Children:
Octavia Butler's *Dawn* and Gorgonian Imagery**

Octavia Butler's ability to weave the past and present into her works is well-known. As Cathy Peppers states in "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's *Xenogenesis*," Butler "puts [an] 'already known' story into dialogue with an 'alien' story of another evolution." In doing so, she reintroduces lost narratives and alternate endings to established myths. In my essay, I argue that Butler has put the Medusa myth in dialogue with the alien race, the *oankali*, by using gorgon imagery to reimagine the *oankali* as Medusa. Butler's rendition of Medusa differs from other retellings; here, Medusa returns to her monstrous roots. Her historical traits of terrible transformation and never-ending gaze are expanded in alien ways to not only dehumanize the *oankali*, but also reveal Medusa's inherent healing abilities. Both the *oankali* and Medusa are dual beings: they bring with them death and life. Through them Butler reveals a story of transformative healing, underneath a myth full of destructive trauma.

Nickolas Wroblecki

**Which Hearts are Really Lonely:
An Analysis of the Perception of Physical and Mental
Disabilities in McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter***

In Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, a Depression-era account of a southern mill town, a deaf-mute man is considered a model listener while another man who desperately tries to explain economic inequality in the face of institutional injustice is a radical nuisance—but why? I explore why we so often blame and even ostracize those appearing to be mentally impaired while we tend to subconsciously revere the physically impaired as especially wise individuals. John Singer, the deaf man, is physically impaired; the latter, Jake Blount, appears to be mentally impaired, and this perception of Blount's mental state is integral to understanding why the others treat him the way they do. As an alcoholic and seemingly depressed man, Blount quickly becomes a victim of the other characters' scorn and ridicule, who appear to blame him for his perceived insufficiencies. Singer, on the other hand, becomes a confidant for all the other protagonists, even though he shows no sign of deep understanding or agreement with them. I will discuss blame assignment, cognitive bias and discrepancies in the stigmatization of various disabilities.

May the Force Be With You

Moderated by Brianna Beehler
Department of English

Monday, April 17
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Rex N. Alley

Rules of the Road: *American Vertigo* and Post-9/11 Policing of American Travelers

The average American is all too aware of the effects the 9/11 attacks have had on contemporary domestic movement. Long lines and awkward pat-downs at airports have served to dampen the efficiency of our fastest and most reliable means of travel. This paper is intended to examine the American post-9/11 era in the context of such new legal norms. The paper examines the effect of modern national security policy on Americans' identity and freedom of movement. I analyze a primary text, *American Vertigo*, in which a Frenchman observes a strict and somewhat paranoid policing system in his travels across post-9/11 America. I also consult various sources from the realms of law and political science that reveal the impact of 9/11 on America's social and political culture. I assert that post-9/11 travel regulations in America use hegemonic forces to enforce ideals of stability and conformity. These regulations attempt to confront and control a modern world of chaos and power diffusion, in which fear of outside security threats is nearly constant. The paper concludes that these post-9/11 regulations are an active threat to American liberty rather than a mere inconvenience to travelers.

Martin Anquetil

Performance in *Sunset Boulevard*: The Fading Line Between Life and Fiction

"I am big! It's the pictures that got small!" Norma Desmond's words in *Sunset Boulevard* epitomize the condition that afflicts many actors—the troubling duality between their personal identity and their acting career. The culture industry, the capitalist system behind the complex creation of film and media, encompasses these actors and influences them in ways they may not be aware of—they can lose track of themselves, slowly growing into their characters. They can develop intense doubt, uncertain of whether they or their characters are gaining popularity and societal approval. With this, many questions arise about the presence of a line between life and films, authenticity and performance, and actor and character. By studying the extravagant persona that director Billy Wilder created with *Sunset Boulevard*'s Norma Desmond, we can better understand the issues that arise with actors' unhealthy relationships to the culture industry. Specifically, Norma's obsession with her faded fame and her dramatic antics are hyperboles of the symptoms that can be found across professions within the culture industry.

Renee Cai

***Passing*: The Pursuit for Complete Racial Identity**

Nella Larsen's *Passing* is praised for its complex portrayal of racial identity as it follows the journey of Clare Kendry, a biracial woman passing for white. Throughout the novel, Clare models the obstacles many biracial people face. This essay is an interpretation of how Larsen uses Clare to emphasize the struggles of racial identity that multiracial people face in the current world of strong racial divides. While analyzing Clare's identity shifts between black and white, I establish three types of identity: true racial identity, outward identity, and complete racial identity. I use these three types of identity to determine Larsen's definition of a complete racial identity and the steps necessary to achieve a complete racial identity. My goal is to answer the questions: why is a complete racial identity necessary, and why is it difficult to achieve? Following passages describing Clare's alternating identity throughout the novel, I reveal how Clare and those around her are harmed by unforgiving racial divides. By exploring Clare's inability to identify with one race, I conclude that *Passing* is a warning against strong racial divides, a warning that is still relevant to the modern world.

Allie Famiglietti

**The Power of Privilege:
Amplifying Class Difference in *The Leopard* Through Relative Silence**

In the 1860s, a series of isolated rebellions broke out across Italy and evolved into outright revolution within a matter of months. A hundred years later, Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* catapulted audiences into the complex realm of the aristocracy during this *Risorgimento*—the Italian struggle for unification. Throughout the course of the film, Visconti brilliantly juxtaposes the violence of insurrection with an unsettling sense of detachment on the part of the protagonist, Prince Fabrizio, and his family. In this paper, I will analyze the ways in which Visconti contrives this unnatural distance between a highborn family and the rest of the Italy, specifically focusing on the truncated portrayal of the *Risorgimento* in the film. Although revolution was wreaking havoc on Sicily, most of the onscreen time is dedicated to the more trivial matters of the family's life. By de-emphasizing such an influential event, Visconti speaks to the privilege of wealth and the ability of a class like Prince Fabrizio's to go about its daily life—agonizing over marriage prospects, for instance—while the country's foundation crumbles.

Claire Mauss

**Need for Thneeds:
How "To Build a Fire" and *The Lorax* are Uncovering
the Roots of Today's Environmental Crisis**

While for some, it seems obvious that the Earth is facing an onslaught of human-influenced environmental issues such as rising temperatures, changing climates, and major biodiversity losses, many Americans struggle to acknowledge and tackle these crises. In my paper, I intend to use Jack London's "To Build a Fire" and Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* to reveal how these texts reflect what I argue are not only two contradictory mindsets that exist within society, but are also the source of our failure to address today's environmental emergency. "To Build a Fire" demonstrates the first mindset, in which man is seen as a mighty ruler of nature, while *The Lorax* demonstrates the other, in which man is seen as helpless against nature. As a society, we continually alternate between these two viewpoints, shifting the responsibility of our environmental dilemmas to either a weak or powerful nature and away from ourselves, allowing for perpetual inaction. I argue that these texts showcase, and in fact warn, of the disastrous ramifications of this line of thinking, as the fatal ends of the texts foretell. To quote *The Lorax*, "unless we do not start caring a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

Abhiram Reddy

**The Sierra Scam:
A Critical Analysis of the National Park Service**

The summer of 1869 saw famed naturalist John Muir venture into the wilds of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Northern California, the records of which were transcribed into his journals bound together as *My First Summer in the Sierra*. Muir's journal entries repeatedly advocate for a balance between conservation and recreation. However, the eventual by-product of Muir's legacy, the National Park Service, seems to have almost immediately diverted from this path. This paper launches into a discussion of the century-long story of the NPS from its early days as a federal agency towards reforms in the 70s and beyond. Examinations of wolf reintroduction and other conservation practices draw the NPS into a prominent, but problematic spotlight. I will delve into a conversation of the agency's future, specifically in light of recent political changes. Ultimately, this paper asks whether our country's relationship with the wild has made tangible progress towards "the father of the National Park Service," John Muir's, form of conservation.

Sexual Healing

Moderated by Richard Edinger
Thematic Option Honors Program

Monday, April 17
7:30 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Stella Balsmini

Behind Every Bad Man: An Inquiry into Subversive Power of the Partners of Patriarchs in *The Master*

Can extreme complicity be an act of subversion? For women framed by the dynamic that Freud describes as the Madonna-whore complex, wherein fascistic men exclusively desire either motherly figures to pedestalize or attractive women to demean and sexualize, this question is of utmost importance. Idealized women bound to such partners are faced with few opportunities to assert personal agency, but arguably find ways to achieve control covertly within their expected roles. In Paul Thomas Anderson's 2012 film *The Master*, Peggy Dodd (Amy Adams) achieves power from within her position as a Madonna figure. For much of the film, Peggy publicly stands to the side with a smile as her husband pontificates about his Scientology-esque new religion. While Peggy initially seems perfectly submissive and complicit within both her husband's cult and the cult of domesticity, I argue that her character finds autonomy through subversive submissiveness. I explore how Peggy self-consciously occupies her role, exercising power from within her maternal spaces and duties. Thus, I argue that resistance to the patriarchy can be secret rather than spectacular, and that there are covert forms of rebellion that masquerade as complicity.

Danielle Collins

Conrad Comes Out of the Closet: The Nameless Russian in *Heart of Darkness* as a Representation of Conrad's Hidden Homosexuality

Joseph Conrad had his own "heart of darkness"—his hidden homosexuality. But he kept his secret well-hidden beneath meticulously crafted writing techniques. Specifically, the nameless character of the Russian sailor in *Heart of Darkness* covertly represents Conrad because of the factual and sentimental similarities between author and character. The Russian, like Conrad, tries to keep his homosexuality a secret, but his subtle hints allow us to pick up on his true feelings. Why would Conrad feel the need to hide behind such an elaborate mask? Living in a homophobic Victorian society, Conrad needed a way to express his homosexuality without admitting it and facing persecution. He does so by carefully constructing his writing to indirectly come out of the closet, thus forcing his audience to read between the lines. The Russian goes unnamed so that he can serve as a fictional representation of Conrad, therefore acting as both an outlet and disguise for Conrad's own homosexuality in a restrictive Victorian society.

Madelyn Douglas

Sasha's Unspoken Prominence in *Orlando*: The Role of Foreignness in Deciphering Sexual and Gender Fluidity's Transcendence of Language

"Despite words like 'failure,' 'inexpressible,' and 'indescribable,' the objects and passions [in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*] are nevertheless evoked," Victoria Smith asserts. Orlando's first love, the Russian Princess Sasha, exemplifies this idea. Given the longest description in the book, Sasha is paradoxically beyond words. She is depicted in metaphors and comparisons to natural, exotic objects that are not immediately tied to gender or sex. Orlando struggles to describe her fluid rarity: "Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? [She is] none of these... [but] like nothing he had seen or known in England." I will argue that Sasha is defined by her indescribability, foreign to Orlando in her culture, androgyny, and language. Moreover, this foreignness signifies Sasha's sexual and gender fluidity and mirrors her fluidity's transcendence of more familiar, binary language. The language barriers posed by Sasha's foreign culture and foreign body—impossible to describe, as it is like nothing Orlando has seen before—work together to emphasize the need for the expansion of binary language.

Griffin Meyer

**Conceal, Don't Feel:
A Critical Analysis of Sexuality in Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley***

According to Edward A. Shannon, Anthony Minghella, in his overtly sexual cinematic adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, completely inverts the sexual context of Patricia Highsmith's original text, using "Tom's class to critique contemporary ideas of sexuality." This piece explores the relationship between Tom Ripley's sexuality and how it affects his ever-changing identity within his elliptical narrative. The examination of Tom's sexual affairs during his evasion from the law illuminates an inadvertent regression of his own sexuality as an integral component of his identity to behavioral singularities as a means of corroborating his disguise. Tom, once an abhorrently repressed homosexual, ejects his homosexuality as a component of his core identity which allows him to engage in behaviors of varying sexualities in order to maintain the facade of being Dickie Greenleaf. Tom's actions were once driven by sexuality because of how central to his identity it was. It's only later in the film when Tom is forced to assume his disguise to evade the police that he realizes he must detach from his sexuality and mutate it in various ways to galvanize the effectiveness of his disguises, primarily with Meredith Louge and Peter Smith Kingsley.

Trevor Sochocki

**The Trees and the Bees:
Janie's Sexual Awakening in *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

The perfect sexual relationship can be found between trees and bees, as Janie Crawford believes in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This paper contests the commonly held idea amongst scholars regarding *Their Eyes* that Janie could only live her life with the validation of men. While these academics argue that Janie's love interests did not allow her the agency she dreams of in the beginning of the novel, when she glimpses a bee in a loving and equal embrace with—pollinating—a pear tree. For Janie to enjoy and comprehend the sexual awakening she experiences when witnessing the pollination process, she needs independence to avoid a dysfunctional, codependent partnership. I will assert, in contrast to some readers, the claim that in each of her marriages Janie learns more about reality, other people, and most importantly, herself. Thus, by killing Tea Cake and accepting what a relationship is and might become, she finds the autonomy she needs to survive in the world and understands her sexual desire.

Ryan Zubery

**Lying with the Wolf:
Bestiality as a Metaphor for Hybrid Female Sexuality
in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber***

"The combination of human and animal traits is one of the most ancient grotesque forms." The revulsion most people feel towards bestiality, itself a combination of the human and animal, seems natural according to this statement by feminist critic Kristine Jennings. The human, in its idealized form, is above the animal, so their sexual union smears these idyllic notions of humanity with animal connotations of primal sexuality and violence. But while this attitude has ample outside support in opposition to bestiality, it's more problematic when leveled against female sexuality. The pubescent girl that's both masculine and feminine is a similarly liminal concept as the bestial relationship, but the disdain directed at her has little backing it. The postmodern writer Angela Carter draws on this relationship and a history of young women and animal bridegrooms in children's fairy tales in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*, and by juxtaposing the latent bestial unions in these fairy tales with her female protagonist's own sexualities, Carter questions discomfort with these multifaceted, hybrid sexual identities necessary for meaningful sexual expression.

Check All That Apply

Moderated by Professor Natania Meeker
Departments of French and Italian and Comparative Literature

Tuesday, April 18
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Scriptorium

Nillani Anandakugan

“They Ain’t White”: How Fear and Prejudice Define the American Identity

What does it mean to be American? In a country with diverse ethnicities and races, Americans use labels to identify the different groups living amongst them. These labels are often used by Americans of European-descent to mark non-white citizens as not fully American. However, “whiteness” is merely a political fantasy that does not adequately address the multiplicity of the American identity. Labels actually exemplify expressions of fear and prejudice against Americans of non-European descent. Politicians such as Donald Trump use xenophobic rhetoric to manipulate this fear in order to bolster their election campaigns; the Wall and the Muslim Ban are prime examples. This paper examines how John Ford’s film *The Searchers* serves as an allegory for the prejudiced discord catalyzed by Trump. The film portrays a society in which the people are under attack which justifies their trepidation and hostility towards the terrorizers. This turbulent fear of the “other” in *The Searchers* remains extant in America despite the lack of any immediate threat. I will demonstrate how fear and prejudice against Americans of non-European descent therefore continue to divide the American identity.

Lisa de Rafols

Under the Cover of Revolution: Black Consciousness and Common Culture in *July’s People*

We’re all familiar with the history of apartheid in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela led a people to take back their country from colonial powers. Yet when author Nadine Gordimer wrote *July’s People* in 1981, a post-apartheid South Africa only existed in the imaginations of the oppressed. In her novel, Gordimer envisions a revolution where the black majority has taken up arms against the white minority, forcing a liberal white family into the refuge of their black servant’s village. With the principles of the Black Consciousness Movement as described by scholar Edward Powell guiding one of the main characters in the story, Maureen, through a series of realizations of her subconscious role as an oppressor, we witness the collapse of white moral power. Though the arguments of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) are powerful ones, in this paper I argue against BCM’s notion that a so-called “common culture” cannot be formed between the two disparate groups. On the contrary, I see in the novel a dramatic example of how the shared experience of suffering through a revolution will allow the children of the village and the children of the white families to bridge the racial gap that plagues the adults and form a common culture that can thrive into a post-Apartheid future.

Callie Rosanky

And the Tiger and the Lamb Lived Happily Ever After: Black Sexuality as It Complicates Beauty and the Beast

“The tiger will never lie down with the lamb; he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers.” Angela Carter places these lines in the midst of her story as a reflection that belongs more to Carter than to any of her characters. At the core of Carter’s story “The Tiger’s Bride” is an examination of what is often left unadvertised in the time-honored pedagogic fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast.” Marriage is not a magical panacea for women. In true postmodern fashion, Carter depicts the patriarchal system of exchange that force women into Beauty’s situation and the inevitable violence which occurs in a relationship between woman and “beast.” But beyond her vivid illustration of the desire and sexual forces that hold Beauty and the Beast in tension with each other, she offers new depth to the Beast himself. The Beast is no longer symbolic of a mere “beastly” male, he is something different, something not fully mapped out. The space Carter leaves uncharted allows for the introduction of black identity and sexuality. And this nuance to marriage and its destructive forces lays down a path for empowerment so that women too can run with the tigers.

Megan Ryu

**Be Yourself:
Authenticity Amongst Adolescent Girls in *Thirteen***

“I’ve just got to be me!” “Be unique!” “Be yourself!” All of these phrases are key quotes and themes in many children’s books, shows, and movies like *Winnie the Pooh*, *Arthur*, *Happy Feet*, etc. Many forms of media that are geared towards children claim that society wants children to be completely authentic. However, Stephani Etheridge Woodson, a scholar who has studied the socialization of children, tells us that “childhood literally exists as the site of enculturation.” According to Woodson, children are expected to learn by imitating the “enculturat[ed]” people around them. Society says they are letting children be unique, then turning around and attempting to “socialize” them by imposing certain identities on them. Tracy Freeland, the protagonist from Catherine Hardwicke’s film *Thirteen*, seems to be falling into drugs, sex, and corruption...or she seems to be doing the most perfect job of “socializing” herself. The film portrays her previous wholesome self very differently from her newfound corrupted self, revealing that “true authenticity” is just another social construct. Subconsciously, the filmmakers, characters, and audience alike all fail to notice society’s *only* definition of authenticity and what this implies about “being yourself.”

Daniel Shebib

**Judge, Jury, and Executioner:
Irene’s Verdict on Clare’s Racial Identity**

Nella Larsen’s *Passing* is considered a seminal text for its exploration of racial identity in the 1920s. Much has been discussed about the transgressiveness of Clare and Irene and the flexibility of racial identity that is revealed by their ability to “pass.” Part of the power of the novel lies in its accurate depiction of racial tension during the time period in question, and its inclusion of historical scenarios and references. One such reference is the landmark Rhineland case, in which a husband sued his wife for divorce because of questions about her racial identity. In addition to adding a sense of historical importance to the novel, this case highlights the dissonance between the flaws with the determination of racial identity and the importance of racial identity in social and legal spheres. The dissonance between the lighthearted jabs at how race is determined by others and the serious consequences of that racial determination highlights the importance of those flawed methods in society. By exploring this dissonance, Larsen draws attention to the importance of the methods of racial determination as a means of exploring the flaws with racial identity and its usage in society.

The Changing of the Guard

Moderated by Professor Lucas Herchenroeder
Department of Classics

Tuesday, April 18
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Carnegie

Anubhav Garg

The Individual's Almanac: Analyzing Aldo Leopold's Personal Responsibility Model

In a political climate where environmental concerns are frequently weighed against the health of national commerce, important questions about environmental policy remain unanswered. As a result, academic discourse in the field of environmental economics is more crucial than ever. I will argue that Aldo Leopold's poetic and persuasive contributions to academia would enrich the usually bland tone of environmental economics literature. Unfortunately, while many of Leopold's contributions have been well documented, several remain unacknowledged. In particular, Leopold's view of personal responsibility, discussed in *A Sand County Almanac* as the role of an individual in managing environmental resources, is routinely dismissed. Considering that this poetic style would provide an especially persuasive reason to value academic models, this paper will suggest that academic research should integrate more of Leopold's thoughts. Since both environmentalists trying to save the world from climate change and economists trying to save countries from financial collapse depend on environmental economics heavily, motivating the best environmental economics analysis is crucial for the stability of our world. This paper serves as a conversation starter for how to best generate that essential motivation.

Isaac Gilles

Dissociated and Polarized: Examining the Causes and Effects of Modern Social Disorder

"F*** Donald Trump!" "Lock Her Up!" Those were the mantras of last year's deeply contentious presidential election. Yet, while these mantras focus on the candidates, the reality is that 2016's political enmity was a product of the intensification of social disorder in the last half-century. This social disorder is the product of two factors, which are distinct but operate in tandem: social dissociation and political polarization. In 1967, their coexistence was detailed by acclaimed American author Joan Didion, who observed members of the 1960s counterculture movement. Didion's analysis, entitled *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, vividly illuminates the pernicious effects of dissociation and polarization upon the health of a democracy. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that, while modern social disorder reflects a threat to political efficacy, it has also accompanied great progress in a variety of civil rights movements. Thus, I will apply Didion's analysis, along with scholarship on political psychology and American civics, to address the following question: If resolving what Didion called "society's atomization" means sacrificing the progress made by oppressed and marginalized groups, then should we re-stabilize, or should we accept polarization and dissociation as the costs of social progress?

Mattie Harris-Lowe

It's My Story, Too: How *The Fall* Utilizes Foreign Language to Critique the Culture Industry

What does it mean to understand someone? Does understanding someone constitute knowing literally what they say and mean, or is it something deeper? Does it mean to know how someone thinks and feels? Tarsem Singh's *The Fall* presents a commentary on human capability to understand one another. Through chronicling the relationship between a young Romanian girl who can barely speak English and an American man, Singh manages to capture the intricacies of human connection by taking away not only the characters', but also the actors', ability to communicate with ease. By not only utilizing the actors' own languages and cultures, but actively supporting their input in the content of the story, the film manages to subvert elements of alienation often present in what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer define as the "culture industry," or the factory-like production of cultural goods. This paper centers on the minutiae of communication in the film and how it effects the characters and the audience. Specifically, how culture and communication intertwine to build the meaning and understanding behind certain words and how embracing individuality—in culture, language, and all other aspects—is tied to survival.

Tatiana Karadimitriou

***Rebel Without a Cause:*
A Case Study of Pop-Freudianism in the 1950s**

James Dean's most famous film, *Rebel Without a Cause*, is a bit of an oxymoron. Though its three teenage protagonists are defiant and unruly, they enjoy life in white, middle-class suburbia, complete with an education and supportive families. Why, then, do they have cause to rebel? Director Nicholas Ray uses what film scholar Thomas Doherty calls "pop-Freudianism" as a lens by which to explain the behavior of these teenage protagonists. Fashionable at the time, this pseudoscience allowed Ray to fabricate justifications for rebellion where it logically should not have existed. His reluctance to attribute his characters' behavior to social evils, like alcoholism or abuse, reflects the strong social values of the 1950s—an era that idolized suburbia and the security it offered. Indeed, Ray walked a fine line in his effort to portray teenage rebellion in a way that was believable, while avoiding alienating his conservative audience in the process. *Rebel Without a Cause* has much to teach us about the climate of the 1950s, but moreover leads us to reconsider our psychologizing of teen pathologies and the cultural shifts that have resulted in our understanding of teenage rebellion today.

Sajani Raja

**Voice, Vanity, and Void:
The Symbolism of Doctor Copeland's Throat in McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter***

How does our perception of our bodies relate to our sense of self? In Carson McCullers' novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Biff Brannon answers this question with the notion that everyone subconsciously guards the part of their body that corresponds most to their insecurities. For Doctor Copeland, a Black doctor living in a sleepy Southern town in the 1930s, this body part is the throat: the source of the voice. McCullers' repeated use of throat imagery to describe Copeland's body language alludes to his desire to incite his people to liberate themselves from economic slavery. Compounding this is the Biblical symbolism surrounding the throat, which underscores Copeland's urgent need for recognition, equality, and betterment of his people. Halfway through the novel, McCullers shifts to lip imagery when describing Copeland to mirror his transition to a more externalized style of activism: a role normally reserved for White characters. Thus, Copeland transcends the typical White Western literary portrayal of the objectified black man. However, Copeland's defeat at the end of the novel punishes him for crossing racial boundaries, demonstrating that McCullers, as a product of her time, fails to fully break from the literary tradition of passive Black characters.

Annamaria Sauer

**Once Upon a Time in Male-Occupied Feminism:
A Brief Examination of Feminist Representation in *Inglourious Basterds***

Quentin Tarantino's World War II-themed black comedy *Inglourious Basterds* is famous for its strong female protagonist, Shosanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent), a young orphaned Jewish woman who sets out to end the war by killing the leaders of the Third Reich. While Shosanna is painted as a feminist character throughout the film, the brush slips at the end as she is tragically and "romantically" shot by Nazi war hero Fredrick Zoller (Daniel Brühl), who spends the film unsuccessfully vying for her attention. Her ultimate triumph against the oppressive patriarchal forces in her life lends itself to an analysis of her character through the lens of feminist theorist and film analyst Carol Clover's "final girl" theory, which describes a character archetype common in horror films in which a "final girl" is left at the end to defeat the antagonist. However, Tarantino's use of "torture porn," or over-the-top violence and gore, particularly against women, along with Shosanna's romanticized death at the hand of the man she rejected, complicates this analysis and partially reverses her nature as a powerful female protagonist. In this presentation, I will explore these complications and the possible explanations behind them in order to evaluate Shosanna and her compromised role as a feminist character.

You Can't Sit With Us

Moderated by Dagmar Van Engen
Department of English

Tuesday, April 18
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Gutenberg

Sarah Cibula

The “Other” in *Lost in Translation*

Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* explores and confronts “otherness” as it follows two privileged white Americans, faded movie star Bob and newlywed Yale graduate Charlotte, on their separate vacations to the neon metropolis of Tokyo, Japan. Here, the two characters confront and wonder at the “other,” a concept that has come to the fore as communities have interacted and interweaved with one another more and more. While many criticize the film for exploiting stereotypes of Japanese people and culture for laughs and for the character development of the two American leads, I argue that Coppola “others” much more than just Japan through the characters of Bob and Charlotte—“othering” becomes a strategy for depicting a much more pervasive sense of loneliness and separation. Language obstacles, silence, human disconnect, materialism, and fragmented human existence show us how we can really translate *Lost in Translation*.

Julia Ehlert

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter but the Body Finds Its Perfect Match: Queering Carson McCullers

The human body is a tempting host for literary symbolism. But this practice of assigning thematic priority to a body ultimately reduces or totalizes the human inhabiting that body. Many scholars consider John Singer, a deaf-mute character in Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, a mirror symbol, and suggest that his silence makes him an appealing confidant to other characters in the novel. This “mirror symbol” reading fails to take into account the humanity and empathy of the characters McCullers constructs, so I propose an alternate, more moralistic reading of the text. Rather than focusing on a reductive interpretation of Singer, I consider what he *does* have that might attract others; he possesses qualities that make him “body-deviant”: someone who is perceptibly distinct from the social physical norm. His body-deviance is apparent in his disability and his queerness, which may be visually expressed through gender-fluidity, and these attributes draw Mick Kelley, Jake Blount, and Biff Brannon to Singer because they are also body-deviant.

Hannah Hunt

Why He Did It: An Examination of Suicide and Postcolonial Identity in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

What happens when your culture completely shifts out from underneath you, transforming from a familiar way of life into something unrecognizable? We see this tension play out in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, primarily through the character of Okonkwo. Noted early on in the novel as “one of the greatest men of his time,” Okonkwo goes from being a thriving member of his society to hanging dead from a tree branch, killed by his own hand. How did this man—a warrior driven by a love of strength and success—reach this degree of despair? Though it's easy to blame British colonialism for directly causing his death, the truth is more complicated. In this paper, I use sociologist Emile Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness to argue that the destabilization of tribal group identity is what ultimately caused Okonkwo to kill himself. Moreover, using Achebe's novel as a guiding narrative, I also explore the effects this sort of cultural instability has had on African identities in postcolonial times. Colonialism essentially lumped tribal groups together within arbitrary borders and diminished their cultural backgrounds in favor of a European standard. Consequently, if African tribes lost their sense of past identity, how can African nations now be expected to have a unified vision of their future?

Hansuh Lee

**The Desire for Meaning:
The Manifestation of the Absurd Hero in Terrence Malick's *Badlands***

“I rebel; therefore I exist.”
—Albert Camus

The meaning of life. This elusive concept has tormented humanity since its inception. Humanity is plagued with an inherent desire to find meaning in some form. However, according to philosopher Albert Camus, the universe is, in contrast, defined by its meaninglessness. The conflict that occurs when humanity attempts to find objective meaning in something inherently meaningless is what Camus calls “the Absurd.” How can this paradox be resolved? Camus argues that we must become the “absurd hero” by rebelling against the futile state of our human nature. By analyzing Terrence Malick's *Badlands* through the lens of Camus' Absurdism, I will argue that protagonist Kit Carruthers wholly embodies the ideals that define Camus' absurd hero. Kit will be analyzed and used to consider the compatibility of the absurdist lifestyle with the commonly held moral values and laws of the modern world. Camus argues that finding peace with the indifference of the universe is, what we should all strive to do. However, becoming the “master of one's days” may foster a freedom that is not only incompatible with the law of the land, but is potentially chaotic and destructive.

Kristen Mascarenhas

**“I Would Never!”:
The Omniscient Narrator's Role in Our Perception of Characters,
as Explained through *Lord of the Flies* and Donald Trump**

When reading *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, one quickly distinguishes good leadership on the island (Ralph) from bad leadership (Jack). Ralph, with his concrete plans for rescue, is a far more qualified leader than Jack, who prioritizes hunting and entertainment. So why do the boys not see the inevitable consequences of supporting Jack that are so obvious to us as readers? I argue that our perceptions of the characters in the novel are largely dictated by the omniscient narrator, whose rhetorical promptings create the stark dichotomy between Ralph's conscientious leadership and Jack's myopic leadership. Devoid of hints from the narrator's diction and tone, however, the boys are left on their own to choose who they think would be the more beneficial leader. Without the guarantee of rescue, Jack becomes the clear choice, as the boys are allured by his charismatic presence and promises of entertainment and temporary protection. In the current political atmosphere, many of us find ourselves in the same position as the boys: without the guidance of a clairvoyant voice, are we making the most prudent political decisions for ourselves, especially in light of the recent election of President Donald Trump?

Kayla Soren

**Internal versus External Exile:
Redefining “Refugee” in *The Bell Jar* and *I Am Legend***

We can all recollect a time when we, or someone we know, experienced emotional confinement, the feeling of entrapment in one's own body—a desperate quest for escape from skin and bones that no longer feel like home. While we generally perceive refugees as those in need of physical refuge, there is no doubting that many refugees experience the familiar symptoms of PTSD and depression that some of us know all too well. Using this as a foundation, I intend to open the preconceived notions and broaden the discourse surrounding the needs and definitions of refugees by comparing the protagonists in *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. On the surface, these novels could not appear more different. While Robert Neville in *I Am Legend* is the last human in a world full of vampires, Ester in *The Bell Jar* is a well-off young intern in New York City. While Robert represents the traditional characterization of what we might consider a refugee, I argue that the similarities in thought between Ester and Robert can help us better understand the impact of mental illnesses on those who share a common outsider status. In addition to physical relocation, these stories reveal the ways in which countries must also consider expanding aid to help refugees cope emotionally, whether that be fostering inclusivity within communities or providing mental health support. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of mental needs within the refugee community within this context will also allow us to understand and empathize with the ways in which many of our own citizens can be considered “internal exiles,” lost in a place where one's own body no longer feels like home.

Mirror, Mirror

Moderated by Professor Bruce Smith
Department of English and the School of Dramatic Arts

Tuesday, April 18
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Joseph Allen

Beyond Taken: The Evolution and Relevance of the Modern Captivity Narrative

When Albanian sex traffickers take the daughter of Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson), the protagonist of the 2008 thriller, *Taken*, he begins his long search to find his daughter in a foreign, unfamiliar land. His journey reflects a distinctly American genre: the captivity narrative. The genre has taken several forms, but, in this movie, it involves a white, American man overcoming obstacles in order to rescue his daughter who was kidnapped by foreigners. The captivity narrative originated in colonial America, when Mary Rowlandson wrote about her own captivity experience, but since has evolved to depict new enemies and different racial conflicts. The captivity narrative has persisted because the plot seeks to alleviate American insecurities by presenting a U.S. man's triumph over whatever savage culture opposes him at the time. *Taken*, therefore, represents the 21st century version of this narrative because it portrays an American's journey to a foreign land to overcome Muslim enemies, in a post-9/11 United States. I, however, believe that these narratives not only attempt to reassure American society of their dominance, but they also inform U.S. interventionist foreign policy, such as the Truman Doctrine and George W. Bush's War on Terror.

Claire Bai

You, but Better: An Analysis of Objectification and Politics in *Crazy Rich Asians*

A successful story should take readers on a fantastic adventure. In fact, it should allow us to temporarily remove ourselves from reality and engage with a cast of characters often more stimulating than the ones we interact with on average. However, in Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, the extravagant language and sensational subplots feed into the human hunger for materialism and escapism, while the monochrome main characters act as objectified avatars for readers to live through vicariously. The hackneyed tale of a rich boyfriend's family rejecting a less-rich girlfriend on account of supposed gold-digging intentions serves well because of its clichéd reputation; gossipy material does not stale. In this paper, I will discuss how the writing of *Crazy Rich Asians* and its resulting popularity showcases human greed, therefore acting as a parallel to the way contemporary politicians and leaders entice the masses with dramatic narratives and seductive platforms.

Natasha Balogh

The Force behind the Face: How "Mask Theory" Interacts with *Ghost in the Shell* to Inform Symbolism in Daily Life

Where does your brain end and mind begin? Can you mark a general area where your psyche lives? Shirow Masamune's futuristic techno-manga, *Ghost in the Shell*, deals with these issues of defining the line between physical and incorporeal. This relationship is slowly illuminated through the unraveling of stories concerning a crime-fighting female cyborg named Major Motoko Kusanagi. As a cyborg, Motoko Kusanagi makes daily decisions about her physical appearance and social roles. Drawing on discourses of "mask theory," I claim Kusanagi's roles are performative masks, both malleable and symbolic. For Kusanagi and her friends, masks cannot suggest deeper characteristics, such as the existence of a ghost. I argue, however, that they can offer information about how the entity chooses (or is forced) to express itself. I use mask theory as both a literary and an epistemological lens that helps us to consider bodies as symbolic, therefore allowing us to reconsider ongoing issues of dominance based on essentializing labels.

Anahita Dalmia

**Willful Ignorance:
Why *Badlands* Looks like Fantasyland**

Can humans really change when we distance ourselves from the larger repercussions of our small actions and gloss over the “badlands” of reality to perceive them as a harmless fantasy? Terence Malick’s movie *Badlands* is based on a true story about young Charles Starkweather and his even younger girlfriend who go on a murder spree, killing eleven people, including her entire family. However, *Badlands* looks more like a fairytale with a hint of horror than a horror movie at all. I will argue that Malick’s cinematic choices depicting the movie as a fantasy can be justified using Margaret Heffernan’s theory on “willful ignorance” which suggests that “our blindness grows out of the small, daily decisions that we make.” In this paper, I will show that by making the characters act in such a “normal” manner, Malick makes the audience feel the gap between their actions, reactions and consequences. This in turn forces the audience to reflect on their own decisions, which ultimately gives them the power to change.

Elizabeth Moeser

**Bear in Mind:
The Harmful Sentimentalism of Wild Animals**

“There’s so much more to a bear ... than this I-love-you, you’re-my-friend,
I’ll-protect-you stuff. They’re in a higher realm.”
—Larry Van Daele, Nick Jans’ *The Grizzly Maze*

From Winnie-the-Pooh to SeaWorld, the sentimentalization of wild animals is pervasive. By perceiving and treating wild animals as their plush counterparts, we reduce them from complex and dignified creatures to nothing more than manipulatable objects of our amusement. *Grizzly Man* is a biographical documentary that tells the story of Timothy Treadwell, a man who contributed to this trend by spending 13 summers living among grizzly bears in southern Alaska. Although Treadwell ultimately died at the hand of one of the bears, I will argue that the deeper cause of death was his fantasy that wild animals are cute and cuddly, a dangerous oversimplification of their true nature. A sentimentalized perception of wild animals undermines their inherent intelligence. By introducing current research on animal intelligence through the lenses of language, behavior, and empathy, I will explain what is overlooked in this reductive view of wild animals. In the face of news stories like “Grizzly Watcher Ignored Our Advice, Experts Say” and “Another Baby Dolphin Killed by Selfie-Seeking Tourists,” the human-animal relationship has never been of greater relevance.

Sofia Tavella

**Sculpting a New Reality:
The Role of Clay Figures in *Heavenly Creatures***

Heavenly Creatures is a retelling of the infamous Parker-Hulme murder case, where two fifteen-year-old girls commit matricide. The film follows the girls as they create “the fourth world,” a “paradise of music, art and enjoyment.” Within the imaginary world, Pauline and Juliet play King and Queen, and they rule over a kingdom of monstrous—and sometimes violent—clay figures. As they immerse themselves in fantasy, the clay figures cross the boundary of imagination and the violence they had fantasized about becomes reality. The clay, sculpted to reflect and control their desires eventually becomes unmanageable. The girls lose their authority over the happenings in their fantasies and the clay begins to control them instead. Their parents, falsely concerned with their friendship, try to keep the girls apart. However, as James Owain predicts, a parent’s “attempt to cross the adult-child boundary can be problematic, colonizing, patronising and possibly violent,” and in this case, ends in matricide. This paper aims to explain the development of the girls’ imaginary worlds and the origins of violence, in terms of the way they sculpt the clay to mirror their desires.

Reality Bites

Moderated by Dr. Pernelope Von Helmolt
Thematic Option Honors Program

Tuesday, April 18
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Jason Emmett Collins

Fatal Anachronism: Fetishizing Myth in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*

Many artists, authors, and philosophers of the Western world consider themselves indebted to the foundation laid by notable figures of antiquity. By and large, such personas of antiquity are revered to the point of receiving a certain mythical status, but with due recognition of the difference between antique and modern cosmology and morality. This is not the case with Gustav von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Faced with a personal crisis of pedophilic desire, which flies in the face of his consideration of himself as a disciplined, morally upstanding figure, Aschenbach resorts to rationalizing his behavior by comparing his imagined relationship between himself and the boy Tadzio to the ideal of love in Plato's *Phaedrus*. In this paper, I will examine the text in critical comparison with *Phaedrus* to show how grievously different Aschenbach's situation is from Plato's antique ideal in spite of all of his attempts to rationalize the two as similar. Further, I will argue that *Death in Venice* represents a warning against using ancient myth in a social and artistic milieu that it has long since surpassed.

Rachel Dabora

Nostalgia: A Wrongly Overlooked Sentiment

"Anyone can cook."
—Gusto, *Ratatouille*

Sometimes food we eat transports us back to a moment in the past. For example, the movie *Ratatouille* portrays one of these moments when Anton Ego, a famous food critic, takes a bite of the french dish ratatouille. Many viewers don't realize this iconic scene is based on the idea of involuntary memory, an idea first mentioned in Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*. The main question I address is: does involuntary memory and our ability to be taken back to a time through food have anything to do with nostalgia? Many say no, but I argue scholars should begin to look at Proust's famous novel through a lens of nostalgia, thus mixing Proust with commercialized pop culture in a new way as was successfully done in *Ratatouille*. Just as great moments can arise from anything, even something as humble as childhood food, great analysis can come from pop culture sentiments, even one as commercialized as nostalgia.

Celeste Goodwin

Meaningful Misogyny: Differentiating Between the Author and the Narrators' Thoughts in *The Virgin Suicides*

It's easy to get so wrapped up in a book that you feel as if you're in the story yourself, empathizing with the narrator and feeling their emotions. Sometimes this is the author's goal, but other times our desire to empathize with the narrator can lead us to misread exactly what the author is trying to show us. This disconnect between the author's thoughts and the narrator's thoughts is displayed in *The Virgin Suicides*, by Jeffrey Eugenides. The novel is narrated by a group of boys who continuously objectify the Lisbon sisters, who live across the street. This may make it seem as if the novel is misogynistic. However, in my paper I will argue that Eugenides uses specific phrases throughout the novel to invite the reader to read against the grain and reject the blatant sexism that the boys present. I will also prove that this technique can be useful to elucidate cultural issues that we may not notice without seeing them through the narrative lens.

Sarah Haskins

**To Talk or Not to Talk, That Is the Question:
An Analysis of *Singin' in the Rain* and the Rise of Technology**

“I told you talking pictures were a menace, but no one would listen to me.” In what could be considered the biggest understatement of the entire film, these words are uttered at the onset of *Singin' in the Rain* to an audience that does not yet recognize the implications they hold. This film highlights the shift from silence to sound through an attempt to cover the disaster the transition left in its wake, specifically by crafting a love story that symbolically defies the villainy of those stuck in the past of the film industry. However, in his essay “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” Theodor Adorno explores the fine line between the ability to distinguish reality and fiction within the film industry, which presents itself frequently as blurred in *Singin' in the Rain*. In combining the grim view Adorno holds regarding the stranglehold the film industry has over audience perception and the volatile relationships both amongst the characters and the studio within *Singin' in the Rain*, this paper will argue how the underlying reality behind this seemingly colorful love letter to the world of film in light of advances in technology suggests a disguised truth of manipulation and discontent.

Jackie Hwang

**Treacherous Dreams:
Gatsby's Escape from Reality through the
Creation of Dangerously Alluring Personal Myths**

“Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark side cornices and blinding signs.” Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* observes how Gatsby's idealization of Daisy has turned her into a “disembodied face,” an object in his life. His ideal of her drifts along all parts of his life, decorating all aspects of it—somewhat like a beautiful, ornamental cornice. In his powerful desire for her, Gatsby constructs a compelling personal myth for himself: one where he dreams of he and Daisy being together. However, in his desperate attempt to achieve this dream, his personal myth ultimately objectifies Daisy, merely turning her into a goal he must obtain. In this paper I argue that Gatsby's personal myth and objectification of Daisy renders him unable to empathize with her. This is where the danger of personal myths lies: a lack of empathy translates into a disconnect from reality and inability to truly understand the human condition.

Kathleen Xue

**Freedom of Speech Isn't Enough:
Internalized Racism in *July's People***

Critiquing the contemporary race environment, writer Frantz Fanon once noted that “there is one destiny for the black man. And it is white.” His words struck a chord not only in their bold riskiness but in their brutal honesty as well. In fact, current psychologists and theorists contend that internalized racism continues to thrive even in politically liberated societies; that perhaps political reform actually encourages increased self-debasement and social inequality while discouraging public discourse and transparency. Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People* attempts to explore this paradox in a post-apartheid setting: her depiction of the relationship between the Smales family and their black servant July reveals the oft-neglected racial divide that prevents honest empathy and understanding. Examining her work through literary theorist Gayatri Spivak's subaltern lens, my essay asserts that it is not enough to simply allow the previously oppressed the freedom of speech. It will make the case that, given the opportunity, the subaltern *can* speak, it just won't speak to defend itself. Further, I will argue that, fundamentally, political change itself is not enough to generate social equality.

The Great Divide

Moderated by Professor Hector Reyes
Department of Art History

Tuesday, April 18
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Scriptorium

Adriana Bernal Martinez

Perfect Turned Unnatural:

Analyzing *The Haunting of Hill House*'s and *Black Swan*'s Overlooked Tragic Love Stories

What do we define as platonic? Two young women having a sleepover and painting each other's nails? Or, perhaps these same young women going out to a party and later going home together? Maybe both? Maybe neither? Maybe what we view as platonic today is not so different from what we viewed as platonic fifty years ago. Through analyzing *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Black Swan* and the works' treatments of potentially queer subtext paired with overarching heteronormative narratives, I will examine the treatment of homoeroticism in the 1950s and today. By focusing on the compulsory competition in lieu of romantic sentiment between each of our potential queer relationships, I will apply Chrys Ingraham's theory regarding obligatory heterosexuality as a "regime of exploitation" for those that struggle beneath a patriarchy. Ingraham's theory provides insight into how each of our protagonists and their relationships suffer due to there being certain expectations of assumed heterosexuality from their surrounding environments. This will help demonstrate that, regardless of the presumed progress we have made since the 1950s, the stigma against two women being capable of liberating themselves from a patriarchal structure and expressing their sexuality is still prevalent in today's cultural norms.

Sofia Bosch

Everything Is Not what It Seems:

Looking Beyond Perceptions of Nature in Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Do perceptions matter? Do we have the ability to control them? Annie Dillard's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* argues that there exists a paradoxical experience of perception, a choice between "looking" and "seeing." After Dillard spends an extended amount of time alongside a creek, she makes conclusions on man's relationship with nature. Dillard implies that humans have the ability to choose whether they "look" through a clouded medium or if they "see" clearly. This paper argues that Dillard's interpretation is dangerous and incomplete. Engaging with various scholars, I will argue that there is a complexity to consciousness. I will explore how factors such as access to information, bias, and technology are equally as important determinants in the formulation of our everyday perceptions.

Carey Crooks

Mechanical Gods:

Fowles' *The Collector* as Insight into the Fear of Artificial Intelligence

"It's me he wants, my look, my outside; not my emotions or my mind or
my soul or even my body. Not anything human."
—Miranda Grey, *The Collector*

In John Fowles' *The Collector*, Frederick Clegg, an anti-social and delusional lepidopterist, kidnaps the young, idealistic Miranda Grey, collecting her as if she were one of his butterflies. However, the great tragedy of Miranda's captivity lies in Clegg's inability to understand her as anything but an object. Clegg only possesses her for the sake of her "outside," a distinction Miranda makes to highlight all that he fails to perceive: those very things that make her human. Miranda's fear develops from the realization of the insurmountable rift between herself and her captor. Thus, at the root of Clegg's terrifyingly indifferent imperialism and Miranda's ultimate demise is a failure of empathy. This fear of an entity endowed with human intellect, but lacking human compassion, sets up the novel as an allegory of the dynamic between man and machine, or, more specifically, society and artificial intelligence. While artificial intelligence offers exciting possibilities, it also incites a fear of what these machines could potentially lack despite their power. This paper claims that through the relationship of Clegg and Miranda, captor and captive, we can analyze this fear of being controlled by a power that cannot understand you. Ultimately, both Miranda and society

fear the rule of an un-empathetic god, a mechanical god, with the implications of this fear reaching as far as the parameters of “humanity.”

Kelsey Keranen

**There Can Only be One:
The Queer Connotations of Female Rivalries and Film and Their
Implications within Queer Representation, the Male Gaze, and the Feminist Film Canon**

Queer women in cinema are often relegated into the roles of two film tropes that I have carefully titled the “Queer Female Rivalry Complex” (QFRC) and, at the helm of this queer activity, the “Predatory Alpha Lesbian.” The QFRC is a blanket term that refers to the animosity/power imbalance/negative connotations often associated with suggested or evident queer female relationships. The power balance between queer female characters consequently creates the Predatory Alpha Lesbian, or the queer female character who wields significant power over the other beta queer woman. In my research, I seek to answer a few imperative questions. What is it about queer female relationships that makes them simultaneously volatile and homoerotic? And, is there a more effective way to demonstrate queer female relationships on the big screen? To answer these questions, I analyze the gender and sexual dynamics within three films: Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*, Karyn Kusama’s *Jennifer’s Body*, and Todd Haynes’ *Carol*. Each film produces a distinct image of queerness, and I argue that it is *Jennifer’s Body* that rises above the rest as the most valuable representation of queer female relationships.

Seema Snitkovsky

**Clare’s “Having”:
Forces of Motivation in Nella Larsen’s *Passing***

“Clare always had a – a – having way with her.”
—Nella Larsen, *Passing*

In Nella Larsen’s novel *Passing*, Irene Redfield wastes no time in condemning her estranged childhood friend Clare Kendry’s decision to pass as white as being reflective of her greedy, selfish, “having” ways. Though Irene also often chooses to publicly pass as white rather than as black, she still looks down upon Clare’s decision, blind to her own hypocrisy. Irene continues to cast Clare in an unabashedly condemnatory light throughout the novel, influencing Larsen’s readers to assume her dislike and distrust of Clare’s disloyalty to her own race. I contend, however, that with a close reading of the two women’s childhoods, Clare’s narrative will be fundamentally altered. She will be cast not as immoral and “having,” but instead as a sympathetic bi-racial woman seeking a good quality of life comparable to the one that her character foil, Irene, has the luxury of taking for granted. Through an analysis of the class bias inherent in Irene’s perception of Clare, as well as the two women’s disparate experiences and understandings of Clare’s exodus out of the black community and into white Chicago, I will demonstrate that Irene’s vilification of Clare’s passing is unjust and unfounded.

Victoria Yu

**Technology:
A Tower of Babel in a New Age**

Imagine a unified world where there is no such thing as nationality or race and there exists only one language. According to biblical texts, a world like this did exist before the fall of the Tower of Babel. Since the writing of these biblical texts, communication and language technologies have advanced, allowing humans to communicate with one another across vast distances and to translate between languages instantaneously. But, has this led to greater social unification? In this paper, I analyze allusions to the Tower of Babel in two early 20th century texts that explore the relationship between technological change and communication: Fritz Lang’s classic film *Metropolis* and Czech playwright Karel Čapek’s play *R.U.R.*, or *Rossum’s Universal Robots*. In both texts, technology is portrayed as the primary medium humans use to create either division or unity between themselves. I argue, however, it is not technology or language itself but hierarchical desires that enforce social relationships, determining whether communication technology is a force of division or unity, destroying or building up a new Tower of Babel in the modern age.

Pick On Someone Your Own Size

Moderated by Dr. Robert Yusef Rabiee
Department of English

Tuesday, April 18
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Carnegie

Natalie Cohn-Aronoff

“Two Boys Kiss, and then a Massacre”: Queerness, Violence, and Masculinity in *Elephant*

What drives a young man to slaughter his classmates? In the years post-Columbine, psychologists, parents, politicians, lobbyists, and popular media have all sought to figure it out. Yet, while no consensus has been reached, there seems to be a general agreement that the school shooter is an outsider. He’s bullied, unpopular; perhaps he’s more sensitive than the other boys, more emotional. Particularly, since school shooters often work in pairs, rumors of homosexuality often circulate. Yet *Elephant*, a 2003 film loosely inspired by the Columbine massacre, refuses to blame the sensitive, effeminate, or queer boy, despite invoking many of the common tropes of the school shooter. Alex and Eric, the film’s Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, share a kiss, which at first seems to lend credulity to speculative links between queerness and violence. But *Elephant* uses queerness—in its characters, narrative, and filmic technique—to intentionally provoke fear and discomfort. In doing so, the film investigates questions of the social role in school massacres rather than the motive behind them. When analyzed with queer theory, film theory, and psychology, *Elephant* exposes its audience’s institutional anxieties about queerness and masculinity, and exploits them to make a tense, unsettling, and provocative film.

Autumn Gupta

Gender Identity in *Locas*: Choosing One’s Feminine Identity in a Male Dominated World

Exploring the gang-related activity that dominated Echo Park and Eastern Los Angeles, *Locas* is not only dazzling in its content, but more so by the choice of narrators, Cecilia and Lucia. As these two girls become women, the intriguing moments stem from how, despite sharing similar backgrounds and home lives, Cecilia and Lucia portray two very distinct responses when faced with the same situations surrounding gang involvement. What is it about them as individuals that prompts such diverse experiences? To truly answer this question, we will discuss the importance of the female psyche and, by using psychology as a lens, we can better analyze what factors influence Cecilia and Lucia’s decisions. To make matters more interesting, both characters seek the gang as a solution to their various personal problems, and ultimately use members and aspects of the gang lifestyle to their own personal benefit. *Locas* provides a fictional platform to question the complexities surrounding female identity, and more specifically, how this male dominated world influences the development of differing female identities, in turn speaking to the experience of *all* women in today’s society.

Chandra Ingram

Silence of the Mules: The Power of Voice in Breaking Hierarchy

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* takes place during the post-abolition era in the United States, and depicts a realistic view of the new social structure that followed slavery. The narrative exposes the oppression of African American women in society through the protagonist, Janie, and her three marriages that exclude her participation in the community and silence her voice. Her grandmother states it frankly: “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see.” Frequently experiencing oppression, Janie’s relationships with her male partners parallel the former master-slave relationships. The male-dominated society discredits her intelligence and strips away her freedoms. I argue Janie obtains a strong, influential voice, but ultimately she settles into the hierarchy rather than resisting and speaking out against it.

Jordan Kessler

Gerrymandering the Lines of Sexuality and Gender in *Thelma and Louise*

Attraction and sexual desire have become synonymous. Therefore, when we go to the movies and witness two people in close proximity with many similarities, we recognize the attraction and impose the sexual component. While we have condensed the capacity of human connection, we continue constraining the breadth of the individual, labeling one another as either male or female, straight or gay, in love or out of it. While Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* does begin to deconstruct these initial binaries, it replaces them with a new system of gender-, sexuality-, and attraction-based constructs. My essay points out the remnants of these old world binary perspectives in our modern scholarship and suggests how awareness can improve our current social landscape.

Christopher Lindsay

**Fear and the Corrupting Pull of Power:
Understanding Authoritarian Societies through Gabriel Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch***

Erich Fromm argues that many people are willing to give absolute power to an authoritarian leader because of a desire for purpose, which the leader promises to realize. This dynamic can be seen in varying degrees in contemporary authoritarian governments such as those in North Korea and Russia. In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, we see an authoritarian society from the inside, through the dictator's perspective. By examining this interior perspective, this paper will argue that the authoritarian's eventual mistreatment of his people occurs because the people relinquish power to the Authoritarian who then becomes unable to see his people as distinct from himself. When the Authoritarian sees himself as the state, he only makes decisions to benefit himself, not accounting for the needs of the society for which he is responsible. *Autumn* thus helps to reveal that the power relation between an Authoritarian and his subjects corrupts the leader and damages the state. The subject therefore holds a responsibility to voice their needs and thus find their own purpose to ensure the Authoritarian recognizes that his subjects are different and distinct from himself.

Matt Parker

**Opening the Gate:
Authoritarianism from *The Queue* to the USA**

Every government has its central building: The Capitol building, the Palace of Westminster, the German Chancellery. In the 2013 novel *The Queue* by Basma Abdel Aziz, the government is a building: the Gate. A looming structure dominates life in an unidentified Middle Eastern state, passing out laws and orders that cannot be fulfilled due to the gate's indefinite closure. The novel was written shortly after the Arab Spring by an Egyptian author, and there are strong parallels between the revolt in Egypt and the "Disgraceful Events" referred to in the novel. Like President el-Sisi's regime, the Gate uses surveillance and fake news to exert total control over the country. As citizens are lulled in by the sense of safety, their freedoms are slowly chipped away and facts are eliminated from the news. This is happening now in our own country, and, in my talk, I will use *The Queue* to show how surveillance and fake news are leading the U.S. towards a semi-authoritarian state.

The Way I See It

Moderated by Professor Roberto Diaz
Departments of Spanish and Portuguese and Comparative Literature

Tuesday, April 18
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Gutenberg

Claire Ha

It's Not About You: (Self-)Consciousness in Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Beyond

In her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, nature writer Annie Dillard defines pure consciousness as a “heightened awareness,” while she defines what she believes is its opposite, self-consciousness, as “the glimpse of oneself in a storefront window.” These concepts and their impacts on perception are integral to Dillard’s quest for connectedness to nature, as, in her view, her successes result from pure consciousness and her failures from self-consciousness. However, these concepts are more nuanced than Dillard’s black-and-white categories paint them to be. I contend that there are varying degrees of self-consciousness, each of which interacts with pure consciousness differently. Thus, I explore the relationship between pure and self-consciousness, particularly whether and with what outcomes they occur simultaneously. I purport that, though deemed all but useless by Dillard, self-consciousness can have a purposeful significance, raising the following questions: What is the role of self-consciousness in our engagement with nature? What if, in fact, it were a vital part of our own contribution to the natural world?

Hailey Ordal

Venturing into the Unknown: An American Tradition as Observed in Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*

In his autobiographical travelogue, *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck wonders: “Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are . . . ?” Indeed, mobility is a ubiquitous cultural theme in America, so much so that there is an entire literary genre devoted to the narratives of those who travel along America’s roads. This paper will identify the source of this love of mobility, arguing that America’s modern travelers are philosophical descendants of pioneers. I will draw on historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis regarding the importance of the frontier in American development. Furthermore, I will illustrate how the United States’ expansion solidified a culture of mobility within America that continues to be relevant today. From the pioneer to the road narrative protagonist to the modern traveler in America, this is an exploration of our cultural roots as Americans and how we are shaped by America’s geographic expanse and the people who traveled across it years ago.

Elizabeth Shakhnazaryan

We're Carrying the Fire: The Complexity of Time and Its Relationship to Nature in *The Road*

Many see fire as a destructive force that brings an end to man’s accomplishments and threatens his progress. However, in the ruination of one thing, sometimes a much greater future emerges from the ashes. In Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, a father and son journey south across a burned, desolate America in hopes of reaching an uncertain fate on the coastline. The pair relies on one another for the companionship and morale to carry on in this new-found country, but being raised in different worlds, the two interpret their present in contrasting ways. How do these differing interpretations, as well as the novel’s recurring themes of strength and fragility, hope and disillusionment, and, of course, fire, explain the flaws in man’s simplification of time? For time is not a clean linear path, but instead a tangled mess where the past bleeds into the present, the future echoes the past, and events repeat themselves indefinitely. Through examining *The Road* and scientific theories about the Big Bang and forest regeneration, ultimately, I will prove that the end of things, like the world after a great fire, brings us to regeneration, to a beginning.

Angela Wang

**Magic Mirrors:
The Relationship between Art and Identity in *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

Art has always been linked to the human experience, whether as a reflection or an expression of the individual soul. However, in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde takes this idea to the next level by creating a painting that quite literally replicates the protagonist's inner self. Written against a backdrop of aestheticism, the movement that championed appreciating art for its own sake, *Dorian Gray* incorporates art into many different aspects of Dorian's character development. This paper will explore and analyze the role of art and aesthetics in Dorian Gray's identity evolution, including his first seeds of self-awareness, his relationships with other characters, and his perspective on his own soul. I will employ Lacanian mirror theory to examine Dorian's initial self-identification stage and his idealization of his identity, then evaluate how his personal construction changes as he falls in and out of love, which ultimately leads into his moral decline. Through the filter of Wilde's aestheticism, I will observe and scrutinize the multiple, crucial functions of art in the individual identity journey.

Elon Wertman

**Coming to Terms with Disorder:
Joan Didion's Perspective on Mental Health in America**

In the 1960s, author Joan Didion was functioning "in impaired fashion at a barely average [intellectual] level," at least according to her diagnosis for multiple sclerosis, which she includes in full in her essay, "The White Album." And yet, her take on California culture is remembered today as one of the most revealing and interesting perspectives on the counterculture in America. What allows her writing to retain its authority when it is so candid about its shortcomings? By analyzing both her narratives and her rhetoric, we can trace a clear path through the evolution of American culture—and understand how the mental illness perspective, once thought "deficient," became seen as legitimate.

Alexandria Yap

**"You can't repeat the past?":
The Great Violence of Cliché in *The Great Gatsby***

Gatsby first says his catchphrase as he invites Nick to try out his hydroplane after a brief introduction at his raucous party. And later, ordering Klipslinger, his servant, to play the piano, Gatsby repeats his coined tag. Then, in another completely different context, he slights his rival, Tom, to leave Daisy alone, once more exploiting the now hackneyed address: "old sport." Gatsby's number of offenses accumulate as he shallowly approaches everyone and anyone as "old sport" 32 more times in the novel. Consumed with the retrieval of his idyllic fling of 1917, Fitzgerald's titular character employs this particular clichéd and insincere language in order to recapture the past. Yet, devoid of authentic expression, Gatsby cannot recuperate his past love in the end. His stale language fails him. The disparity amongst Gatsby's more innocent cause, inauthentic method, and striking ending is puzzling. Why does cliché fail to merge past and present? In his work *Male Fantasies*, German writer Klaus Theweleit argues that proto-fascist men, when threatened with "the living movement of women," also wield cliché, but instead for the purpose of destruction. Alluding to the devastating nature of cliché, Theweleit offers us elementary clues to understand Gatsby's ultimate failure. Thus, through Gatsby's abrupt silence and death, we can take the opportunity to explore the underlying violence of cliché and its failure and price to reclaim past beauty.

Diff'rent Strokes

Moderated by Dr. Patience Moll
Thematic Option Honors Program

Tuesday, April 18
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Jane Clark

All in the Name of Writer's Block: Mythology as Justification in *Death in Venice*

The current discourse surrounding the mythological allusions of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* focuses nearly exclusively on the aesthetic choices of Mann and the direct interpretation of the allusions in the novel. Very little of the discourse relates back to the character, Gustav von Aschenbach, and what these allusions reveal about his deteriorating mental condition. The allusions are not merely creations of Mann for aesthetic purposes, but are machinations that Aschenbach uses to justify his deplorable actions while trying to create some great form of art in Venice. Aschenbach initially sets out on this vacation because he has writer's block, but during Aschenbach's stay, Indian Cholera is running rampant, and Aschenbach falls victim to the disease. He chooses to stay in the name of art. Aschenbach creates mythological figures in his mind, such as the three fates and the horses of Apollo's chariot, to convince himself that there is nothing to be done about his illness, and that he must stay because his death is already fated. The mythological descriptions of characters are not present for aesthetic purposes as critics would claim, but the mythology is a creation of Aschenbach's mind to justify his staying in Venice.

Isa Hoban

"He does not even speak our tongue": Implications of Chinua Achebe's Use of English in *Things Fall Apart* for Individualism in Storytelling

Chinua Achebe makes the deliberate decision to write the novel *Things Fall Apart* in English. He also fuses elements of Igbo with the English narrative, in order to reflect a detachment from individual ownership of the story. I argue against removing oneself from an individual perspective, as attempting to tell stories in this sense will not only fail to represent all people despite the best intentions, but will also discourage intellectual conversation. Though Achebe criticizes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for its failure to represent the African perspective, I argue that it was never Conrad's responsibility to tell the story from an African perspective. An author is not obliged to represent every perspective on an issue, but rather must contribute to an ongoing conversation. When arguing against individualism, I believe that Achebe fails to consider the potential that Conrad's work may have been more problematic had he attempted to portray the perspective of a people he had no understanding of and no relation to. It is better that individually contribute their own perspective, and as readers we can engage with many different texts to develop a more holistic understanding on the conversation.

Ellen Murray

Dream a Little Dream of Me: The Ethical Implications of the Imagination in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

At the end of the novel, one of Murakami's characters in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* admits that "sometimes a certain kind of dream can be even stronger than reality." The events of the novel seem to confirm this supposition. Readers encounter dreams that ambiguously blend into reality, characters who straddle multiple realities, and a narrative that unabashedly abandons a linear and chronological structure. Even Murakami's protagonist Tsukuru struggles to maintain a clear sense of a reality within his life. Ultimately, Murakami's conception of an objective reality is a mirage—solid and unwavering from afar—but, upon closer inspection, nothing is what it seems. By disrupting the idea of a singular objective reality, Murakami prompts his audience to consider that if the line between dreams/imagination and physical action can be so tenuous, then culpability can extend to the mind, making characters responsible for the emotional and even physical harm that their thoughts and desires engender. Consequently, Murakami's ethically provoking narrative ultimately forces his audience to turn their attention to Murakami's own ethics as an author, and perhaps they will find him just as culpable as his characters.

Joshua Shaw

**The Current of the Past:
Fitzgerald and Proust Loving the Future**

“He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken.”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is known for how realistically it depicts the society of 1920s New York City, but Fitzgerald portrays both Gatsby’s and Tom’s loves for Daisy as unrealistic extremes on a spectrum of adoration. Similarly, Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way* frequents polar opposites and a theme of loving women as ideas, like Gatsby. Both works feature story-telling narrators; I argue that this profession of writing is an effort to change their pasts and that their flawed love is an effort to control the future. In examining both texts separately, one notices an abundance of similarity. In these parallels, I find that Marcel, Nick, and Gatsby all reinvent their past in an attempt to improve their present—and as Orwell points out, thus their future—and ask whether their authors try the same.

Sarah Sternbach

**Who’s to Blame?:
Reading and Meaning-Making in *The Age of Innocence***

How do we decide where to place blame? Does it depend on our own personalities, or on those of the people we blame? Do we always blame a person, or is it sometimes the fault of the situation? Psychology explains, through the fundamental attribution error, that we tend to attribute others’ failures to their inherent traits, while attributing our own to factors outside of our control. I intend to use this phenomenon to explain the different interpretations of Edith Wharton’s character Newland Archer in her novel, *The Age of Innocence*. Ultimately, I will use my own experiences with the book to argue that whichever way one reads Archer, the reading is more revealing of oneself than indicative of some correct or intended meaning.

Felipe Vargas

**Cinema Looks Within:
Intertextuality in *Mulholland Drive* and the Elusive Layers behind the Dream**

David Lynch’s 2001 magnum opus *Mulholland Drive*, considered the greatest film of the decade by *The Village Voice*, *Cahiers Du Cinema*, and half a dozen other publications, is a surrealist journey into a half-conscious dream of Hollywood past, a world of artificiality and illusion filled with intertextual references. Intertextuality, defined by literary scholar Julia Kristeva as “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a fixed meaning,” in *Mulholland Drive* extends to genres such as film noir, horror, and musicals, as well as films such as *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Through an intertextual lens, *Mulholland Drive* overcomes its loose and dreamy narrative to converse with these works of a nostalgic cinematic past. *Mulholland Drive* thus becomes a homage to cinema, a love letter to long forgotten genres and films, illustrating the nostalgic magnetism of Hollywood as a factory of dreams. On the other hand, Lynch exposes the façade of artificiality, critiquing the culture industry’s imbuelement of a false reality into our subconscious. Described as a “poisonous Valentine to Hollywood” by film critic J. Hoberman, *Mulholland Drive* utilizes intertextuality to both criticize and eulogize the love-hate relationship of audiences and filmmakers towards Hollywood.

Power Play

Moderated by Dr. Ryan McIlvain
Department of English

Tuesday, April 18
7:15 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Daphne Armstrong

The Revenge of the Orientalized: Reversal of Perceptions in *Crazy Rich Asians*

Although technically a satire, Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* could more aptly be described as an homage to the affluent Singaporean families, with an underlying moral: that certain antiquated Asian values must be jettisoned and replaced by the contemporary, democratic values of the Occident in order for them to stay relevant. In thinking about Kwan's implicit challenge, I will use and remold Edward Said's idea that the West (and Westerners) control and manipulate perceptions of the Orient. While the elite Singaporean in *Crazy Rich Asians* are exponentially wealthier than their Occidental counterparts, they still conform to Western values and physical ideals, such as the desire to be pale, have double eyelids, and big eyes. The novel is sprinkled with playfully malicious gibes at America that suggest a racial competition that can be traced back to the degradation of China at the hands of Britain. I will explore latent racial competition in this novel and the way these families rewrite the Western narrative under the long shadow of colonialism.

Marisa Caddick

Can You See What I See? An Analysis of The Common Man in *Barton Fink*

Barton Fink was a total flop at the box office upon its release in 1991. The Coen brothers, writers and directors of Academy Award winning films *Fargo* and *No Country for Old Men* as well as *Barton Fink*, were never discouraged by this; they just have a knack for creating meaningful films over popular ones. Critics love them for this, but the accessibility of their films waivers at some points for inexperienced theatre-goers. This is because the Coen brothers lack a conscience for what Theodor Adorno, the predominant voice on the culture industry, refers to as "mass appeal," or the symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and its audiences. *Barton Fink* itself does not adhere to culture industry norms, and acts as a microcosm for the dissolution of mass marketing and appeal for the sake of preservation of an audience's ability to form independent thought. This makes the film appear rather strange for viewers who are accustomed to, but not necessarily cognizant of, Hollywood's pandering. The Coen brothers set up their own straw man, known as "the common man" trope in the movie, to completely deconstruct the ideals of mass appeal and the assumption that people can be divided into types instead of wholly competent individuals. They refuse to compromise their vision in order to comfort an audience, which is proven through *Barton Fink's* push back against cultural industry expectations.

Julian Lopez Birlain

Mythologization of Power in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*

"... but we knew that no evidence of his death was final,
because there was always another truth behind the truth."
—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*

In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's the General maintains his power by convincing his subjects that he is a demigod. Indeed, for the people of the Caribbean nation in Garcia Marquez's masterpiece, the General has no limits. So present to them is his superiority that the General seems to rule from within their minds, and not from the presidential palace. Yet, scholarly work on *The Autumn of the Patriarch* fails to address such presence nor sheds light on the internalization of the General's power. Thus, this paper suggests that mythologization, the widespread association of fantastical gifts and feats to an individual in popular narrative, plays a central role to the cementation of the General's power in the popular mind. Using Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, which highlights the dominant role of ideology over repression in state power, this paper demonstrates that the

General perpetuates his rule, even after death, by constructing a common ideology based on his grandiosity and brutality. Ultimately, this paper reveals the central role of mythologization in the construction of power.

Kai MacLean

**Freedom on Wheels:
America's Roads Reevaluated in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road***

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* has been praised widely as the quintessential road story. Through the adventures of Sal Paradise, Kerouac rehashes his own memories of traveling throughout the 1950s United States, a journey complete with spontaneity, freedom, and an escape from responsibility. Though Kerouac's illustration is an enticing portrait for restless Americans who long for adventure, I will argue that *On the Road* serves as a defectively one-sided story of travel. I will discuss the inability of both the author and the protagonist to embody the struggles that minority groups endured during that turbulent time, and how this ignorance offers a misguided portrayal of the minority experience. I will unearth the realities of travel in the 1950s for a person of color, which will help to highlight the flaws in Kerouac's approach to the road narrative. Theorist Vanessa Veselka says that "the only thing more dangerous than having simplistic narratives is having no narrative at all, which is deadly." Through *On the Road*, I will investigate the importance of establishing narratives that provide Americans of different backgrounds a place on the road, especially with the prevalence of racial discrimination observed today.

Oksana Trifonova

**Pardon My French:
How Humbert's Foreign Lexicon Establishes His Control Over the Narrative in *Lolita***

Humbert Humbert, the pedophile narrator in *Lolita*, is notorious for his manipulation of the reader. It is widely argued that Humbert's elaborate style distracts the reader just enough for him to slip in his grotesque crime of pedophilic rape. But, what has not received any attention from the critics is Humbert's use of French, despite the fact that the entire novel is peppered with the foreign lexicon. My paper will argue that Humbert's use of French allows him to package lurid observations in refined language, establishing his scholarliness as an author and earning him respect from the reader. What really separates French from his other fancy writing is how it places him in a position of power over not only the reader, but also other characters. And yet, by the end of the novel, the power of French fails him when Lolita criticizes his speech, freeing herself and the reader from Humbert's grasp. His downfall is representative of the clash between his Old-World ideals and the progressive American culture of the 1950s.

Eleonora Viotto

**The Dark Side of Popularity:
The Evolution of the "Mean Girl" in Popular Culture**

This research paper seeks to find the root cause of our society's fascination with portraying popular girls as mean girls on the screen. *Grease*, one of the earliest entries of movies aimed for teenagers focusing on the idea of popularity, sets the stage for the archetype of the mean, popular girl by contrasting Sandy, the sweet ingenue, to the rebellious Pink Ladies, and by indicating that in order to fit in with the popular Pink Ladies, Sandy herself must fundamentally change to fit in with the group aesthetic. Subsequent, more recent entries into the canon, such as *Mean Girls* and *Gossip Girl*, show the evolution of the aesthetic of the archetype of the mean popular girl, as well as its staying power. Despite all of our claims to have become a more accepting, more progressive-thinking society, we are still fascinated by seeing mean girls take each other down on the screen. This paper analyzes this fascination using analysis from Freud's *Civilizations and Its Discontents* as well as more recent psychological writers, claiming that our obsession with watching mean popular girls on the screen is born out of wish fulfillment.

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