NORMAL

THEMATIC OPTION RESEARCH CONFERENCE

"Normalcy was declared. (Normalcy was always a declaration.)"
– Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

"There are ways of growing that are not growing up."
– Katherine Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*

"Every utopia . . . faces the same problem: What do you do with the people who don't fit in?"
– Margaret Atwood

"Sometimes the road less traveled is less traveled for a reason."
– Jerry Seinfeld

"What desire can be contrary to nature since it was given to man by nature itself?"
– Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

"For African Americans, unfreedom is the historical norm."
– Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration"

"The English language started out as a distortion in my life, but nothing remains the same, and so the distortion is now just normal. That is one of the things that will happen to all distortions: They become normal and turn into something else."
– Jamaica Kincaid

"The basic thing nobody asks is why do people take drugs of any sort? Why do we have these accessories to normal living to live? I mean, is there something wrong with society that's making us so pressurized, that we cannot live without guarding ourselves against it?"
– John Lennon

"Human beings are born solitary, but everywhere they are in chains—daisy chains—of interactivity. Social actions are makeshift forms, often courageous, sometimes ridiculous, always strange. And in a way, every social action is a negotiation, a compromise between 'his,' 'her' or 'their' wish and yours."
– Andy Warhol

"It is not possible to preserve one's identity by adjusting for any length of time to a frame of reference that is in itself destructive to it."
– Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

"Normal is nothing more than a cycle on a washing machine."
– Whoopi Goldberg

"The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time . . ."
– Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

"Heterosexuality is not normal, it's just common."
– Dorothy Parker

"Is anything as strange as a normal person? / Is anyone as cruel as a normal person? / Waiting after school for you / They want to know if you / If you're normal too / Well, are you? / Are you?"
– Arcade Fire, "Normal Person"

NORMAL

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, "Normal," 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 critiques and defenses of normativity; the figure of the outcast or pariah; the family; societal expectations surrounding gender, sexuality, and race; disability; good and evil; normative concepts that have organized thought over time, such as justice, truth, freedom, nature, and progress; the strange, the familiar, and the uncanny; standards and standardization; law, order, and chaos; the center and the periphery; aesthetic conventions; the category of the human; "normcore" fashion; the rhetoric of the "normie," the "basic," and the "random"; sanity and insanity; the pure and the grotesque; the ideal, the average, the ordinary, and the insignificant; desire, the forbidden, and the taboo; or the student's own unique interpretation.

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

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Nillani Anandakugan	Linnea Engstrom	Ashley Sacks
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Nate Delgado	Jess O'Connor	Kimberly Zhong

Many thanks to the faculty and staff who have played an integral role in the success of the Thematic Option Research Conference.

Schedule & Table of Contents

Wednesday, April 18, 2018 University Club of USC

4:00 pm　　　**Between the Normal and the Eccentric:**
　　　　　　　Edward Said and the Vocation of Philology

　　　　　　　Keynote Address by **Professor Veli N. Yashin**
　　　　　　　Department of Comparative Literature

　　　　　　　Scriptorium

5:00 pm　　　**Dinner** Main Dining Room

6:00 pm　　　**Panel Presentations**

7:15 pm　　　**Break**

7:30 pm　　　**Panel Presentations**

Thursday, April 19, 2018 University Club of USC

5:00 pm　　　**Panel Presentations**

6:15 pm　　　**Dinner** Main Dining Room

7:30 pm　　　**Panel Presentations**

Wishful Thinking

Moderated by Dr. Karin Huebner, Academic Director of Programs
Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study

Shauli Bar-On

Science Does Not Change Culture:
Extrapolating Discrimination Practices in *Gattaca*

The only color capitalism cares about is green—it's a belief to which advocates of a laissez-faire economic system subscribe. But how much can we trust the free market to end capricious practices such as workplace discrimination without government regulations? Andrew Niccol's 1997 film *Gattaca* gives us a potential answer. *Gattaca* portrays a futuristic world, one with weak government regulations on enterprise. The *Gattaca* universe, which allows parents to customize their children's characteristics, gives rise to a new form of nuanced discrimination, making discrimination practices more specific and systematic. Instead of employers acting out of prejudice when they hire based on race, parents act prejudicial at a much earlier stage in customizing their children to have lighter skin. The result of this free-market, capitalist universe, therefore, is not overt racial discrimination, gender bias, or religious prejudices, but perhaps something even worse: discrimination that is "down to a science," as the film describes it. Based on the film, it is clear that discrimination and racism are inherent in our culture and therefore cannot be solved in the free market alone. I argue that discrimination and racism can be *prevented* with government regulations, but a full eradication of these social issues requires a cultural reform.

Christopher Demas

The Extent of Reality:
Virginia Woolf's Sense of Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Reality, as viewed by Virginia Woolf, includes the whole expanse of space and time.
– Jill Morris, Time and Timelessness in Virginia Woolf

What is reality and what does it encompass? This paper interprets Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* as a reflection of Woolf's philosophy of reality, focusing especially on the mechanics of her writing. Through her manipulation of point of view and retrospection into the literary past, Woolf explores the connections formed with and by her characters' pasts, and these reflections ultimately shape these characters' identities. While these identities may seem to be solely shaped by what occurred in the past, Woolf also considers the counterfactual possibilities of what might have happened had things gone differently. In some cases, the possibility of an alternate, counterfactual reality shapes reality just as much as the events and outcomes that actually occur. Woolf asks her readers to consider their lives as part of a much larger reality by demonstrating how the lives of her characters hold to this dynamic.

Sophie Hammond

Romantic Friendship and "Sick" Sexuality:
The Complex Status of Lesbianism in *The Children's Hour* and in the Early Twentieth Century

You've got to know it. I can't keep it to myself any longer. I've got to tell you that I'm guilty.
– Martha, The Children's Hour

Lillian Hellman's 1934 play *The Children's Hour* catapulted her from anonymity to fame, fortune, and controversy. The play deals with the threat of lesbian sexuality: a student at a girls' boarding school wrongfully accuses her two teachers, Karen and Martha, of being in a sexual relationship with each other. The charge leads to the destruction of the women's careers, as well as Martha's realization that she is, in fact, in love with Karen. In an eruption of self-loathing, she confesses her feelings, calling herself guilty, sick, and dirty. In fact, Martha is so ashamed that she ends her confession by shooting herself. While the attitude of *The Children's Hour* towards homosexuality seems outdated, the play offers a searing and all-too-relevant exploration of queer shame. By situating *The Children's Hour* within its historical context—nineteenth-century women's colleges, the feminist gains of the 1920s, and Hellman's own queerness and internalized homophobia—we can achieve a greater understanding of the ways queer shame has persisted over the centuries.

Callum Pe

Desire in Migration:
Reevaluating René Girard's Theory of Mimetic Conflict through *Season of Migration to the North*

In Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, the Sudanese Musatafa Sa'eed embarks on a sexual and bloody conquest of England, driving his lovers to commit suicide and stabbing his wife to death. For many scholars, he serves as yet another example of violence resulting from a failed attempt by a colonial power to impose its culture on an unwilling subject. Although Sa'eed is Sudanese by birth, he was educated within the English system and exhibits little fealty to his home country. Might the source of his violence stem not from the resentment he feels towards the imperialism of the English, but from his desire to embody these values? In my paper, I will bring *Season of Migration to the North* into conversation with the philosopher René Girard's theory of imitative desire. In doing so, I will use Salih's portrayal of the intercultural transmission of values to add nuance to Girard's dire prediction of an imminent conflict between East and West, a conflict that he predicts will arise from the competition to fulfill rapidly converging desires.

Juliana Tichota

Imagining America:
National Identity and the Power of Mobility in *On the Road*

This is the story of America.
– Sal Paradise, *On the Road*

Every day, citizens around the world make the ultimate sacrifice in the name of "their nation." Though nationality is seemingly derived primarily from geographical proximity and not personal traits or values, nationalism is one of the most powerful motivational forces known to man. America, one of the most powerful, influential, and—as witnessed in recent politics—nationalist countries in the world, is also one of the geographically largest. This raises the question: if not proximity, what draws Americans together? Kerouac's American road novel, *On the Road*, alludes to mobility and archetypal rebellion as potential answers. Mobility throughout *On the Road* highlights the presence, implementation, and lasting effects of American ideology on the main characters, Sal and Dean. In routinely embodying two mutually exclusive aspects of the American Dream, Sal Paradise begins to find his place within the American community that the road has helped him imagine and conceptualize. Using these characters as a case study, I will determine the degree to which the contrasting motivations, upbringings, and American-nationalist sentiments of the two men affect both their relationships to American-Dream ideology and their ultimate "success" in terms of happiness and self-understanding.

Allison Zubeck

Bright Side or Dark Side?:
***Life Is Beautiful* and the Culture of Positive Thinking**

Should we always look on the bright side? Americans certainly consider it the key to success. According to popular positive psychologists, merely focusing our attitude on the positive can make the world conform to our wishes, and Roberto Benigni's 1997 film *Life Is Beautiful* seems to prove positivity's power. The film's protagonist Guido Orefice, a comic figure who uses his persistent optimism to shield his son Giosué from the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, appears to illustrate both the practical efficacy and the nobility of positive thinking even while sacrificing his own life. Scholars debate, however, whether Guido's comedy and optimism in *Life Is Beautiful* portray the tragic events of the Holocaust with disrespect. In *Bright Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*, Barbara Ehrenreich encourages us to apply the same question to the very philosophy of positivity. Is optimism truly an ideal approach, even in traumatic situations? What happens when excessive optimism causes us to laugh at the unthinkable? While *Life Is Beautiful* appears to support a falsely idealistic image of optimism, the film's comedy and fantasy also strategically emphasize the hidden struggles of adopting positivity. Placing the viewer directly inside the ongoing psychological debate over optimism, *Life Is Beautiful* reveals how positivity's innate denial of reality might encourage people to inappropriately overlook its burdensome aspects.

Standard Deviation

Moderated by Professor Hector Reyes
Department of Art History

Nastaran Far

And Who Might You Be?:
The Failure of Female Identity in *The Haunting of Hill House*

Maybe "we are only afraid of ourselves . . . of seeing ourselves clearly and without disguise." In Hill House, everything unknown is to be feared, from slamming doors to restless spirits, but the biggest unknown, the biggest fear, is oneself. In Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, Luke Sanderson, Eleanor Vance, and Theodora are called together by Doctor Montague in his quest to observe Hill House. In meeting strangers, each can redefine themselves. To establish their identities, I find that the female characters, Eleanor and Theodora, find stability in their names and freedom in their fantasies. First, names confirm their existence and control outside perception. Then, in fantasy, they freely define themselves through imaginative stories of who they may be. However, in analyzing these methods of identity formation (names and fantasy), I prove that both reinforce gender expectations and are thus futile. I find that, because of their ignorance, illusion of control, and internalization of outside patriarchal constraints, these female characters solidify the system that constrains them. It is necessary to recognize the behavior of actors within a system to understand why this system continues to exist. Under the system of patriarchy, Eleanor and Theodora inadvertently become their own oppressors.

Lena Foellmer

Fluid Forms and Transcending Shape:
Physical Transformation in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*

In Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, fairytales are repurposed and transformed in order to examine human sexuality and family in the modern world. The compilation is based on taking fairytales and manipulating them to reflect a novel message or plot. As in most fairytales, Carter's stories are preoccupied with the notion of romance and family. I intend to explore the complex relationship between male and female sexuality, family, and physical transformation in her short stories "The Tiger's Bride" and "The Company of Wolves." Many scholars read Carter's use of physical transformation as a pure embodiment of the beastliness inherent in male sexuality, but I would argue instead that Carter seems to use physical transformation as the repercussion of a choice between the sexual and the familial with which her characters are always presented: the acceptance of the sexual culminating in a physical transformation or a return to the family signaled through the rejection of that shape change. As this divide between the romantic and the filial is emphasized, Carter embodies the permanence of the heroine's choice through physical transformation in order to show the mutually exclusive nature of sexual and familial relationships.

Erica Noll

"Who am I?" and "To What Do I Belong?":
The Counterculture in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* as an Imagined Community

"The center was not holding." Joan Didion's essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" begins on this brief, yet ominous, declaration. Set in the summer of 1967, her essay provides a unique sociological perspective into one of the most turbulent and controversial eras in American history: the counterculture of the 1960s. As more and more young Americans aligned themselves with the counterculture's critique of middle-class society, the movement transformed from a group of kids living in the Haight District to a national insurgence against capitalism and middle-class values. This paper will track the rise, growth, and decline of the counterculture through the lens of Benedict Anderson's definition of an imagined community. In doing so, I will explore the aspects of the counterculture that complicate Anderson's definition and examine how these aspects contributed to the counterculture's fragmentation. By focusing on the common history, shared culture, and sense of purpose within the counterculture, I will bring to light the circumstances that made the counterculture one of the most powerful youthful rebellions in American history.

Asha Rao

A Soul Within the Unseeing:
Coraline's Button Eyes

Soon, you'll see things our way.
– Other Mother, *Coraline*

Coraline illustrates a girl tempted by a perfect life who must trade out her human eyes for button ones to secure that Other World. Although eerily outlandish, critics have overlooked how ill-fitting this pairing of child-inspired fantasy and nightmare is due to its status as a children's film. This paper asks that we do not dismiss the relationship children have with the button eyes' promises and threats, but instead seriously consider the presented dialogue on children's agency in the real world versus their own imagination. By disregarding children's literature and film, we reinforce the idea that children are not important members of society until they "come of age," building a barrier between them and the reality which will someday overtake them. Examining this film alongside the the concept of the uncanny valley reveals how *Coraline*'s craft and plot ask us to fear the button eyes because they are conditioning us to dread the very tools which enable this addictive escapism. *Coraline* exposes how harmful it is to push a child to dream so hard that they wake up in a different world.

Taylor Whittemore

Reestablishing Dichotomies of
Normalcy and Deviance in Marvel's *Runaways*

The concept of normalcy is reliant upon a dichotomy of deviance, for every normal only exists due to the related existence of an abnormal. Many television shows nowadays consider this dichotomy through the positioning of majorities versus minorities—white individuals against people of color, heteronormativity against the LGBTQIA+ community, neurotypicality against mental illness, and so forth. While it is crucial to facilitate discussions about these tensions within media, Marvel's *Runaways* instead attempts to transcend these dichotomies that define our everyday lives by focusing on a fictional dichotomy: that of the powered individual versus those without powers. The abnormality of the powers of the six protagonists is what sets them apart from the others at their high school and ultimately prepares them to confront the villains—their parents. This emphasis upon the fictional dichotomy of powered people versus those without powers allows for the other attributes that society would deem deviances to be normalized within the context of *Runaways*, granting the show the ability to foreground superheroes of varying races, sexualities, religions, occupations, and family structures. Ideally, this deconstruction of constructed dichotomies within the diegetic space could then encourage audiences to examine the dichotomies that define normalcy in their own lives and question their validity.

Lena Ye

Seeing Isn't Believing:
How Viewers Shouldn't Feel Good After Watching *Atonement*

Joe Wright's *Atonement*, a film that transports viewers to an idyllic memory of upper-class life in Britain between wartimes, is undeniably beautiful in moments when Keira Knightley lounges in an immaculate white bathing suit during a lazy summer afternoon, or when James McAvoy stands in a perfectly fitting three-piece suit in front of sprawling country grounds. However, this attractive show of wealth seems out of place when juxtaposed against a plot that overwhelmingly villainizes the wealthy. Financial psychologists define this contradiction as "money ambivalence," or in other words, hating the rich, but also wanting to be the rich. This dichotomy of both condemning the wealthy and utilizing their status as a way to attract viewers is not only hypocritical, but can also reinforce viewers' prejudices. My essay explores how *Atonement* may look like a socially liberal film meant to evoke empathy for the oppressed but actually cultivates the attitudes that contribute to social inequality.

S.O.S.

Moderated by Professor Elinor Accampo
Department of History

Alexander Burch

"Fish Are Friends, Not Food":
Pursuing Completion in Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water*

When he looks at me, he doesn't know what I lack, or how I am incomplete. He sees me for what I am, as I am.
– Eliza Esposito, *The Shape of Water*

This powerful line from Guillermo del Toro's Academy Award-winning film evokes an entire history of pain that stems from being perceived as incomplete. What, then, makes an individual "complete"? I explore how both societal contexts and platonic and romantic relationships contribute to making a complete individual within the movie's setting, Cold War Baltimore. By analyzing American society as a human body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas describes in her book *Purity and Danger*, I conclude that individuals more centrally integrated into society will approach completion the same way that society does. Marginalized individuals, on the other hand, can approach completion in whatever way they deem fit. Just as Cold War America sought to impose its doctrine upon every country it could, so do the privileged individuals of the movie, generally using violence or threats to impose their authority. The marginalized, on the other hand, pursue completion by forming healthy platonic and romantic relationships, even if that romance takes place between a mute woman and a merman.

Karan Nevatia

Rewriting Trauma:
How Narratives in *Beloved* Inform Identity

The U.S. Constitution's 13th Amendment is hailed as marking the end of slavery—it officially declared that the practice would cease to exist in the United States. But the trauma that slavery caused did not suddenly vanish. The narratives of slavery that became ingrained in the identity of slaves did not magically disappear. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, set a few years after slavery officially "ends," centers on Sethe, a former slave who killed her third child in order to ensure that she and her children do not return to slavery. Sethe must address her traumatic experiences through her relationship to the ambiguous character Beloved, who functions as a narrative manifestation of Sethe's dead child. I will explore how Sethe's interactions with Beloved's story help Sethe eventually move past her trauma. I will tackle the ways in which narrative can serve to rebuild identities harmed by trauma, and I will consider the importance of the form of a narrative to redeveloping identity. I will also explain that some experiences can be so traumatic that it is impossible to put them into words. Morrison's treatment of narrative throughout *Beloved* reveals that traumatic experiences, through the narratives developed around them, become one's identity.

Ezra Robinson

Chortle the Plague Away:
Laughter as Solace in *The Day of the Locust*

"Comedy equals pain plus time." So goes the adage. This equation, like most analyses of comedy, sees laughter only as an outcome, not something productive in itself. However, there is abundant evidence of laughter solving problems, perhaps never more frequently than in Nathanael West's overwhelmingly grotesque1939 novel, *The Day of the Locust*. Existing analyses of the comedy in the novel examine laughter as satire, as masochistic, and as poststructuralist affect, but none of these interpretations get to the heart of what laughter can do. In the book and in reality, all laughs—from the most self-aware, performative giggles to uncontrollable, hysteric guffaws—help contribute to people's self-understanding. In a terrible, phony, oppressive world like the depression-era Hollywood of *The Day of the Locust*, laughter can even pacify the instinct for rash behavior in retaliation to the horribleness of life. Meanwhile, those who cannot laugh quickly turn violent. This manifests on all levels of the novel's narrative: for the characters' reactions to events, for the readers' ability to cope with the bleak picture West paints, and for the author himself as he grapples with his own identity through his writing. Ultimately, laughter serves as a means to come to terms with reality and to comprehend the terrible.

Rafael Xu

The Dichotomy Falls Apart:
Okonkwo's Suicide in the Context of the Colonial Dichotomy in *Things Fall Apart*

Okonkwo is a self-made man; through hard work he became one of the most honorable members of his village, Umuofia. Ironically, despite being a staunch defender of Umuofian culture against colonial influence, he commits suicide, a terribly dishonorable act in Umuofian culture. Why does Achebe choose the unsettling and puzzling end of suicide? I contend that Okonkwo's death was a means to defeat the dichotomy between colonizers and the people they colonized. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes the power this dichotomy has yielded in ascribing identity to colonized subjects. The stories of the colonized are often written by colonial authors who lack a genuine understanding about the colonized people, resulting in the generalization of a diverse group of colonized subjects as an unspeaking "other." Okonkwo's suicide turns him into an abomination for Umuofians, but his actions maintain his identity as anti-colonial, meaning that there is no accurate way to categorize Okonkwo in a colonizer-colonized dichotomy. Thus, Okonkwo's death emphasizes the individual's agency against powerful, categorical structures like this dichotomy.

Sullivan Zack

A Dangerous Game:
How Guido's Game in the Film *Life is Beautiful* Complicates the
Fundamental Academic Understanding of Games

Imagine an eight-foot tall, green-skinned ogre with fangs and a spiked club brawling with a freckled, red-bearded dwarf. This fantastical scene may be what comes to mind for some when they think of games. Others may envision the bloody splatters of violent first-person shooters or perhaps a table full of friends playing Settlers of Catan or Uno. Roberto Benigni's 1998 Holocaust-seriocomedy *Life is Beautiful* depicts a game of its own. To protect his son's life and his innocence, Guido, the film's protagonist, spins the events of the Holocaust into a game for his son to play. My paper will examine Guido's game as it challenges the fundamental understanding of games. Through the work of game academics such as Johan Huizinga and Tracy Fullerton, my paper will examine the challenges that arise when a game no longer is for play, but is actually a game of life or death.

Let My People Go

Moderated by Kyunghee Eo
Department of English

Reese Armstrong

Hell on Earth:
The Immediate Consequences of Sin in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

In the narrow way, the way of the cross, there awaited him only humiliation forever . . .
– James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

In James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, the character Deborah displays piety and moral fortitude with intense dedication. A gang of white men raped her when she was sixteen. Taking a dehumanized role as the community's "holy fool," Deborah surrenders her sexuality and personal development, adhering totally to her church's strict moral code. The church's behavioral policing in *Mountain* extends to the entire sainted community. In this paper, I argue that the white-dominated society in *Mountain*, and the terrorism it entails, forces black characters into the safety of the church. White authority decides the parameters of sin in black communities and punishes deviations immediately, making hell an earthly reality. However, while religious-based behavioral restrictions limit black agency in *Mountain*, within the democratically structured church rests immense social and political potential, a potential harnessed by Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement. This collective force can attempt to reorganize the power structures in oppressive societies and lend agency to marginalized groups like the community in *Mountain*.

Colette Bartel

Salvation or Subjugation?:
The Role of the Oankali's Dominance in *Dawn*

After Earth is destroyed, the "Oankali" aliens from Octavia Butler's *Dawn* save the humans, then hold them captive and forcefully breed with them. As the relatively stronger species, is it morally acceptable for the Oankali to exert their dominance over the humans? Why do they abuse humans, and how do they get away with it in *Dawn*? Scholars have located racism as the driving force for the Oankali's unethical treatment of humans. I argue that the issue goes deeper than *race*: the humans are treated as lesser because they are a different *species*. Richard Ryder's theory of "speciesism," the idea that no species has the right to dominate another because all should be considered equal, is the theoretical lens for my argument. I use the theory of speciesism to outline a list of rules for determining the morality of the Oankali's actions, including themes of pain, consent, perception, and intentions. While analyzing *Dawn* in the context of these rules, my argument centers on an analogy between the Oankali's fictional treatment of humans and real human experimentation on animals. Synthesizing racism and speciesism, I prove that dominance and superiority do not condone a moral right to exploit or abuse a weaker species.

Jahnavi Kishore

Old Maids and the Working Woman:
Regression of Post-war Gender Roles in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*

They say that behind every great man is a great woman; evidently, no one subscribes to this statement more fervently than Frank Capra, the director of the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*. In the film, George Bailey and his family are a celebration of postwar idealism, and, according to Capra, George is the everyman of Bedford Falls. Without him, the town turns to debauchery. But there is a crack in the rose-tinted lenses through which we view this heartwarming Christmas classic. Mary, George's wife, is markedly more intelligent than George, and often resolves conflicts that George essentially flounders through. Each time Capra excuses George's failure as an everyman, he allows Mary to shine—until, that is, George is removed from the picture. Only then does Capra show his true colors and drain Mary of her individual value in order to establish a premise for George's necessity, a premise that is shaky at best. But how do we reconcile the beloved film with its various anachronisms? Can we train ourselves to see the faults contained within a spoon of sweet nostalgia, or are we forced to accept the continuation of outdated beliefs that come along with a timeless classic?

Gabriella Margarino
A Teacher's Pet Off Leash:
How Repressed Sexual Desire for Teachers Functions in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

As the contemporary idea of shameless sexual freedom continues to gain momentum in younger generations, an important question increases in volume: how should sexuality be addressed in the classroom? While some may argue it should not be discussed at all, others, like Miss Jean Brodie in Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, believe otherwise. Eccentric and unconventional to an alarming degree, Miss Jean Brodie openly shares her sexual endeavors with her exclusive "Brodie set," one of whom is particularly impacted by Miss Brodie's sexual freedom. This student, Sandy Stranger, adores and reveres her notoriously unconventional teacher at first, but, in the end, she quietly "betrays [the] tiresome woman" on a variety of fronts. Why this sudden betrayal? Drawing on Spark's novel itself and theories on the desire and development of student sexuality, I contend that Sandy's hatred is a result of a suppressed sexual desire for her once-beloved teacher. Miss Brodie's sexualized teachings lead Sandy's adoration to evolve into an intense lust for Miss Brodie. It is the shattering of Miss Brodie's perceived infallibility and her manipulative behaviors that leads to Sandy's merciless betrayal of Miss Brodie at the end of the novel.

Anna Niesman
"Why Should You Be Any Different?":
Kathy's Agency in *Never Let Me Go*

Critics have struggled to place Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* into an appropriate genre. Ishiguro approaches a science fiction topic, using clones for organ donation, in an atypical fashion. Instead of the traditional hero protagonist so common in these dystopian novels, Ishiguro employs the narration of a clone, Kathy, to illustrate the inner working of the society. Current scholarship views Kathy as a sympathetic narrator, one through which readers can discover the hierarchy ingrained in her society. However, I contend that this typical argument underestimates Kathy's own agency. Instead of Kathy being a gateway to understanding this problem in her society, I claim she is a symbol of why the problem still exists. Specifically, when Kathy and Tommy, her significant other, are denied a deferral of their donations, readers discover the powerful influence of Kathy's narration. I argue that this scene symbolizes the discomfort Ishiguro tries to instill in his readers as he urges them to change their own styles of thinking in order to avoid complicity and, by extension, inequality in their own societies.

Ethan Wilkerson
Intangible Power over the Body and the Mind in *1984*

The State was nowhere to be seen.
– Henry David Thoreau

According to Margery Sabin, the body was "a supreme measure of truth" for George Orwell. The body is not only physically tangible but intimately personal; it is the only avenue through which one's mind can experience the world. By oppressing the bodies of its citizens, and therefore their experiences, the Party in *1984* is able to control their minds and their actions. The life experience of each citizen who is not part of the inner circle of the government is dictated by physical oppression, and yet Big Brother, the Party's source of legitimacy, is immaterial and intangible. The power of the Party has been separated from physical reality. This disembodied power enforces itself through physical oppression, which Winston and Julia rebel against through physical acts. By reclaiming their bodies through sex, they attempt to accept the "evidence [of their] eyes and ears," allowing them to regain control of their minds. *1984*'s horrifying implications reach far beyond its prophetic visions about mass surveillance and censorship. The novel meditates on the harmful effects of disembodied power on individuals through the bodily experiences of its characters.

Construction Junction, What's Your Function?

Moderated by Sanders Bernstein
Department of English

Hana Ayoub

Wired to Kill:
The Effects and Consequences of Murder's Appeal in *Strangers on a Train*

"People are mesmerized by murder. It commands our attention like no other human phenomenon," writes psychologist David Buss. Murder's proliferation in media further demonstrates this point. Director Alfred Hitchcock capitalizes on the compelling nature of murder in his film *Strangers on a Train*, not only as a means to draw in audiences, but also in the way that he crafts the plot, his characters, and their interactions with one another. In this story of criss-cross murder, Bruno Antony manipulates the fascination with murder to compel stranger Guy Haines to kill Bruno's father if, in exchange, Bruno kills Guy's wife. Bruno recognizes this fascination with murder in himself and in others. But where does this interest stem from? Buss argues that it is innate, a means of survival. But why do we remain interested in murder even when we ourselves have no intention of committing it? This paper examines the cause of this appeal to infer that a fascination in such a morbid topic can lead to dire consequences, among which include further acts of violence and transgression, as well as an endless cycle of desensitization to the atrocity that is murder.

Jeffrey Loh

I Don't Want to Have Your Babies:
How Ignorance Ruins Everything in *Lilith's Brood*

How does fear impact how we perceive another's notions? As the world becomes more globalized, more and more people migrate to foreign nations in search of new lives. Unfortunately, many times these migrants are not welcomed by the indigenous. Preconceived ideas and instinctive fear of foreign groups lead to negative feelings. Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* depicts a situation like this, except the encounter is between humans and aliens. In this text, humans have destroyed civilization, but aliens called the Oankali save the surviving humans and vow to rebuild earth and humanity. In return, the humans must agree to a gene trade so that descendants of both species will share traits of the other species. However, the humans do not want this trade. While this idea villainizes the Oankali, I will use Samuel R. Delany's *Some Queer Notions About Race* to argue that the Oankali are not intentionally taking advantage of them. It is the humans' xenophobia as well as the Oankali's neglect of human culture that creates tension and misconceptions, demonstrating how empty assumptions and close-minded beliefs can turn a potentially symbiotic relationship into a cultural clash.

S. Marcelle Saulnier

Finding a Heart:
Personhood in *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*

Critics have traditionally underestimated the vital power of children in literature. Particularly in the children's fiction genre, scholars assume that individual character development is simplified for the younger audience, but this devalues the process of childhood. This paper extracts the meaning of personal identity in Kate DiCamillo's novel *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* in order to complicate our interpretation of children's place in the world. I examine the main character, a toy rabbit named Edward, to redefine the concept of humanity as it informs relationships and individual autonomy. Edward, as he discovers love and purpose, serves to illuminate our own identities: his journey represents the human experience of childhood as it weaves together the mind, heart, and soul that shape personhood. In this way, a toy rabbit, as written by DiCamillo, has the ability to be human, too.

Reese Weingaertner

What Would Science Do?:
Discrimination in *Gattaca* Through Rational Choice Theory

Andrew Niccol's 1997 science fiction film *Gattaca* centers on the prominence of genetic discrimination—"genoism" as it's called in the film—as a result of the advent of genetic engineering. Several scholars have attempted to determine the root of *Gattaca*'s insistence on a future in which class-based divides are reorganized and amplified; why does the futuristic society of *Gattaca* continue to stratify and segregate groups? *Newsweek*'s French Anderson reflects a popular conclusion that discrimination is a direct result of the genetic engineering phenomenon. Alternatively, David A. Kirby argues that the divide is a result of a mindset of genetic determinism. With these considerations in mind, I argue instead that the genoism portrayed in *Gattaca* is a direct result of a capitalist system and poor governmental policy. This conclusion emerges from my utlization of rational choice theory, which I use to examine the decisions of characters and corporations and how they justify decisions that perpetuate the divide between the genetically modified "valid" and unmodified "in-valid." Moreover, a research study by Shibly Shahrier et al. suggests that people transition from pro-social to pro-self as their society becomes more capitalistic. Ensuing from this critique of the capitalist structure is a proposal for governmental changes that may reduce or eliminate genetic discrimination.

Emily Yin

"A Final Act of Kindness":
The Cinematic Evocation of Empathy in Joe Wright's *Atonement*

"I want to strangle Briony in her sleep. While skinning her alive." This comment on the official trailer of Joe Wright's adaptation of *Atonement* summarizes the displeasure of many viewers, academics and laymen alike, towards Briony's character. The film follows Briony Tallis as she searches for a way to make amends for the false testimony that ruined the lives of her sister Cecilia and Cecilia's lover Robbie. Despite her efforts, many viewers still believe that she deserves to suffer for accusing an innocent man of a crime he did not commit. But is Briony truly deserving of our hatred? Though the plot condemns Briony to this fate, the filmmakers actually want us to believe the opposite, using camera angles and other cinematic techniques to illustrate that Briony was also a victim of circumstances and to highlight her growth as a character throughout the film. The cinematography of *Atonement* is the film's "final act of kindness" towards Briony, subtly encouraging the viewer to understand her perspective and allow her to atone.

Jessica Zellmer

We Make the Criminals We Fear:
Kerouac's Dean Moriarty and the Causes of Delinquency

There was a mean cop in there who took an immediate dislike to Dean; he could smell jail all over him.
– Sal Paradise, On the Road

One in three American youth are arrested before they turn 23. Yet, not every youth is equally at risk. According to recent research, youths from lower-income families hold a higher chance of incarceration. However, this does not mean that these youths are innately more dangerous or criminal. In fact, most impoverished adolescents are profiled as criminals before committing any crimes. When labeled as a delinquent and forced into the juvenile justice system, a youth faces many psychological and structural consequences that lead them into life-long cycles of poverty and incarceration. In Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, Dean Moriarty conforms to the criminal role that society creates for him and other underprivileged youth. As a result of his impoverished background, Dean is labeled a delinquent at an early age. Fulfilling his criminal identity and attempting to provide for his economic needs, Dean turns to illegal activities which eventually lead him to jail. After leaving the juvenile justice system, Dean's criminal identity limits his educational, social, and employment opportunities, thus leading him to future delinquency. Dean Moriarty is a vivid cautionary tale for the cycle of poverty and incarceration which continues in the United States today.

Power Play

Moderated by Dr. Stephen Pasqualina, Program Coordinator
USC Dornsife Honors Programs

Bryant Cong

Programmed for Violence:
The "Human" in *Ghost in the Shell*

Omnis vir lupus.
– Pierce Brown, *Golden Son*

For a film about the blurring of boundaries between the nonhuman and human, critical literature surrounding Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* has failed to adequately define the distinctions between the two. This essay fills in the gap by defining a "human ontology" as presented in the film, arguing that a tendency towards conscious violence constitutes it. Humans in the film display much more varied forms of violence— physical violence, gendered violence, and violence against nature—than the nonhumans. To explain this, this paper considers Arthur Schopenhauer's idea of the "Will" and the brain in the vat thought experiment. Schopenhauer presents the human Will as an egoistic force that strives to dominate existence, which, combined with the desire of *Ghost's* humans to prove that they are not just simulated brains in a vat, explains why violence arises. Meanwhile, the gynoids (female sex robots) present a case study of how this is not necessarily true for the film's nonhumans. Concluding with a pessimistic view of human nature, this essay exposes problems with the liberatory potential of posthumanism and postmodernism—particularly Donna Haraway's figure of the "cyborg"—raised by the persistence of violence.

Tavis Cote

"They Bought It":
Fascism and Mass Movement Theory in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

Ferris Bueller. Universally loved. Habitually popular. Oh, and also a manipulative cult leader attempting to establish a dictatorship. This paper examines the fascist underpinnings of John Hughes's *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* through mass movement theory, group psychology, and the political economy of high school. For all Ferris Bueller's charm, his relationships, adventures, and private asides suggest a much more sinister approach to power. He crowdfunds fifty thousand dollars from minors under false pretenses, habitually lies to subvert authority, racks up half a million dollars of property damage in a single day, and routinely commits trespassing and identity fraud for the sole purpose of feeling powerful. Yet, despite all of this, the message Bueller sells is so convincing that people still buy Save Ferris t-shirts in a rush to associate themselves with his image. It is the ideology behind Ferris Bueller's rise to power that allows him to pilfer the city, an ideology this paper seeks to expose, identify, and connect to its true purpose: fascist rule.

Katherine Hayes

Redefining Masculinity in *Gattaca*

Aside from the unsettling, eugenics-driven future presented in the science-fiction film *Gattaca*, perhaps the most intriguing element of the film is the unusually close relationship between main characters Vincent Freeman and Jerome Morrow. In a mutualistic symbiosis, both men benefit from the other codependently: by allowing Vincent to adopt his superior genome and identity, Jerome is regifted a purpose for living despite his restrictive disability while Vincent can escape his bleak and predestined "faith-birth" future. This male-to-male dependency is rarely seen in the media because of hypermasculine tropes of self-reliance and independence. The intimate bond these characters cultivate not only draws them outside of conventional molds of "masculinity" but also alludes to homosexuality and homoeroticism, emphasizing their redefining of this mold. Jerome's disability further bends the conventional mold of "masculinity" but simultaneously reveals the film's inability to deconstruct the stigmas surrounding disability. In the end, Vincent and Jerome implore the audience to reflect on the norms we blindly abide by.

Elisa McAtee
It's Anybody's Call:
The Physical (and Virtual) Dimension of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*

A classic civil rights text, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and its sprawling message—that racism can end if black and white people work together—still ring true considering the black body remains stigmatized today. However, the practical use of this text, which Baldwin himself emphasizes, may not necessarily be as effective in our times. Here I formulate a real-world application of *The Fire Next Time*'s racial theory using a critical concept called "boundness." "Boundness" can be summed as Baldwin's belief that black and white Americans are physically and thus morally intertwined through slavery and its legacy. When applied to *Fire*, the notion of "boundness" suggests the "love" that Baldwin emphasizes throughout the text manifests through physical relationships between black and white people. I will argue that Baldwin's theory of "boundness" has become less relevant since the dawn of the internet. By making many perspectives of people of color widely available to white people, the internet displaces the physical work of "boundness." I will illustrate that this fact explains why successors to Baldwin, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates, are significantly bleaker in their views of the United States.

Ali Nassef
"It Makes Monsters of Us All":
The Monstrosity of Power Feminism within Guillermo Del Toro's *Crimson Peak*

Guillermo Del Toro's *Crimson Peak* is a tale filled with ghosts, corpses, and crumbling manors. However, the most monstrous thing in the film's narrative is its human antagonist: Lucille Sharpe. Lucille appears to be guided by the critical notion of "power feminism," a concept that states the only way to combat patriarchal oppression is for women to become the aggressors themselves (as opposed to what power feminism proponents term "victim feminism," a concept that encourages women to feign weakness in order to reach their goals, a strategy often epitomized in Gothic literature, to which *Crimson Peak* often refers). However, Lucille Sharpe, just like the power feminist ideology that she embodies, victimizes other women in *Crimson Peak*. I will argue that Lucille ironically becomes a surrogate for the very patriarchal oppression she is intent on destroying, and that she becomes just as harmful to women as the patriarchal systems from which she intended to break free.

Lauren Oberreiter
What's in a Name:
Supporting a White Savior Complex in *Hidden Figures*

Katherine Johnson, a NASA "human computer"—a worker who performed mathematical calculations—went from hidden to household name after the release of the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*. Despite being instrumental in winning the Space Race, black women working at NASA were overlooked next to their male colleagues. Yet, even in a film highlighting these women, *Hidden Figures* emphasizes the white characters' roles in aiding them. In my presentation, I will demonstrate how the use of names and titles in the film creates a "white savior" complex. While most viewers may watch *Hidden Figures* and not notice these details, their subtle influence is what makes them powerful; they inform the viewers without their knowing that they are being manipulated. *Hidden Figures* goes to great lengths to point out issues of naming and titles. By having the white workers "solve" these issues, the film undermines the important contributions of women like Katherine Johnson.

Once Upon a Time

Moderated by Professor Lyn Boyd-Judson, Director
Levan Institute for Humanities and Ethics

Ariella Amit

How to Get Away with Murder:
Framing Suspects with Narrative in Angela Carter's "The Fall River Axe Murders"

Lizzie Borden took an axe / Gave her father forty whacks /
And when she saw what she had done / She gave her mother forty one.

Popular depictions of nineteenth-century murder suspect Lizzie Borden impose myriad narratives on her, portraying her initially as either a murderous fiend or a woman in need of societal protection. After the second wave of feminism, these depictions shifted, framing Borden as a feminist icon rebelling against a stifling patriarchal environment. Angela Carter's 1981 short story "The Fall River Axe Murders" presents a fictional account of the 1892 historical Borden Axe Murders, presenting Lizzie Borden as a sympathetic suspect through a second-wave feminist lens. In crafting a narrative out of the historical murder, Carter draws attention to the need to critique the legal case against Borden for its unnecessary and unjust focus on her gender. My presentation will analyze the various methods Carter uses to offer these critiques in her narrative on Borden, thus demonstrating how narrative can obtain, as scholar Janet L. Langlois puts it, "authority over history."

Stella-Ann Harris

Getting Language Out of the Way:
"Rememory" and the Unspeakable in *Beloved*

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.
– Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Although it often seems natural, almost automatic, language is a construct. It is contrived, subjective, limited, and limiting. And yet, it remains one of our most powerful tools to communicate human stories and truths. What does it mean, however, that there are stories that language can never do justice to? That its limits extend beyond the frustration of finding the perfect word and into the realm of knowledge itself? That is, how does one tell a story that has been rendered "unspeakable" or "unwritable," not only because it hurts too much, but also because the knowledge of the story itself has been erased? This paper will tackle these questions by exploring how Toni Morrison, in her novel *Beloved*, uses ambiguous, experimental, and "abnormal" narrative techniques in order to circumvent the limits of language and knowledge. When writing of the Middle Passage, for example, it proves impossible for her to recreate a wholly accurate narrative, as the experience killed, silenced, or erased almost all who endured it firsthand. Morrison's atypical stylistic choices therefore jar readers into reflecting on what it means that there are millions of these narratives that shape(d) the physical and personal worlds that have been lost. I will examine Morrison's confrontation with this loss through her technique of "rememory," which allows her to tell a story that is "not to [be] pass[ed] on," but also must be remembered.

Leo Houts

Gods and Writers:
Meta-Mythology in Lily Hoang's *The Evolutionary Revolution*

What is a genre? What separates a book of poems from a novel, or a fable from a myth? Mikhail M. Bakhtin argues that each genre has a unique relationship between time and space, and he calls this relationship a "chronotope." In most cases, readers can intuitively understand the genre of a work without a specific analysis of time and space. However, Lily Hoang's *The Evolutionary Revolution* explores the boundaries of different genres and therefore does not easily fit within any of the categories of modern literature. In my paper, I use the theory of the chronotope to show that *The Evolutionary Revolution* is not a novel or book of poems but a mythology, a collection of stories explaining an aspect of the world. But Hoang's mythology does not explain human emotions or natural forces as most mythologies do; rather, it explains narratives, how we create them, and how they affect our lives.

Jina Hur

What a Time to Be Alive:
Temporal Destruction in Fuentes's *Aura*

Try as he may, this man will never reach immortality in his dreams . . . Be they etched by steel edges or
drawn by felt tips, be they drawn or dreamt, his efforts are doomed to failure.
– Rosario Ferré, *The Youngest Doll*

The human quest for immortality is an undeniable reality. The female protagonist in Carlos Fuentes's *Aura*, Consuelo, is no exception to the common struggle of accepting impending death. While scholars have discussed the use of language and narration to achieve a distortion of time in *Aura*, I argue that this distortion leads to a complete destruction of chronology. The anachronistic furniture, the darkness that deceives the senses, and the disposal of clocks characterize the timelessness of the house, which the characters never leave, and the trance that the male protagonist, Felipe, falls into. Consuelo tries to "kill" time through the mysterious Aura, distorting chronology to a point where it no longer matters; the passage of time has no bearing on immortal beings. In an attempt to eternalize her past self, Consuelo commits a sin, and, consequently, traps herself and Felipe in a timeless world. This *contrapasso* punishment—a punishment reflective of the sin committed—stops time rather than extending it.

None of the Above

Moderated by Zachary Mann
Department of English

Jake Eom

Looking Outward:
The Source of Replicant Will in *Blade Runner*

With recent advancements in the field of artificial intelligence, the issue of synthetic sentience has plagued both scientific and philosophical communities, with scientists pondering the possibility of truly artificial sentience and philosophers debating the exact definition of what it means to be alive. It is difficult to reconcile the means by which a machine may gain the ability to think and feel from a purely philosophical perspective. To put the reality of artificial sentience in perspective, this paper employs the concept of machine learning as the basis for how a machine may gain sentience. Inspecting Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* through the lens of machine learning roots the film's characters in reality rather than in a faraway future. I argue that replicants in *Blade Runner* derive sentience and free will from machine learning, and that they employ these attributes to find purpose in serving others in selfless ways. Specifically, I analyze the final scene with Roy Batty's monologue to support my claim. The question of replicants has never been about whether or not they are human; rather, it is about if they are human enough.

Garrett Flynn

Augmenting Reality:
Neuromancer and the Body of the Real

In William Gibson's cyberpunk classic, *Neuromancer*, cyberspace becomes a fully immersive digital environment frequented by computer hackers who mock the flesh in favor of disembodied consciousness. The novel revolves around Henry Dorsett Case, a washed-up "console cowboy" whose deeply rooted addiction to the matrix, familiarity with neural implants, and compromised ability to access cyberspace has intensified his own dualistic outlook on the body and mind. However, Case finally appears to recognize the overwhelming illusion of cyberspace when he has digitally mediated sex with his murdered girlfriend, compelling him to embrace the warmth of the flesh. Yet, does this experience really normalize Case's conception of reality? By viewing *Neuromancer* through the lens of Michael Persinger's neuropsychological experiments, this paper argues that no sharp divide exists between artificially induced and natural perceptions. I reveal that something more radical than mind-body dualism—namely, a unified conception of disparate experiential states—is hidden in Case's cybersexual encounter. I hope to demonstrate that bridging the fact and fiction of neural augmentation irrevocably augments our own notions of what is real.

Andrew Knechel

Just How Long is "Ever After" to You?
How Angela Carter's Fiction Manipulates the Fairy Tale Formula to Redefine Gender Norms

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Although the wolf of fairy tales is traditionally a malevolent figure, author Angela Carter rejects this perspective. In her collection of revisionist fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter reworks such ubiquitous stories as "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Beauty and the Beast" by injecting sexual imagery and complicating the familiar "happily ever after" narrative. In "The Company of Wolves," for example, the story mirrors "Little Red Riding Hood," with a young girl arriving at her grandmother's house to find that a ravenous wolf has killed her grandmother. However, Carter's Red Riding Hood seduces the wolf, and the narrator proclaims "See! sweet and sound [Red Riding Hood] sleeps in the granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf." My presentation analyzes the endings of "The Company of Wolves" and "The Tiger's Bride," one of Carter's manipulations of "Beauty and the Beast," as deviations on the fairy tale formula, especially since prior scholarship on Carter has shortsightedly ignored this avenue of analysis. Through the quasi-happy endings of these two stories and scholar Joanne Trevenna's analysis of Carter's feminist perspective, I will illustrate how Carter's fiction exposes the destructive nature of the male-female gender binary.

Diana LaFollette
These Chauvinist Pigs Empower Women:
Dean and Sal in *On the Road*

Drugs, alcohol, and girls, girls, girls—*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac oozes with misogyny and degenerate behavior. There is no question that Dean and Sal's behavior towards women, such as frequenting whorehouses and gazing pedophilically, is unacceptable by today's standards. In some significant moments, however, Dean and Sal display surprisingly progressive behaviors not only for the novel but for the 1940s time period as a whole. Through their treatment of women as equals financially and their not shaming those who stand up to them, a more liberated role for women develops. By using oral histories and biographical information on Kerouac to develop an accurate portrayal of the time period, I will identify and analyze these surprisingly progressive interactions and discuss their effect on the true impact of *On the Road* as a predictor of positive social change rather than an inspiration for scandalous lifestyles.

Theo Vasiloudes
Birds of a Feather Flock Together:
The Allegorizing of Cinema in *The Birds*

Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see.
– René Magritte

In 1962, Alfred Hitchcock released *The Birds*, calling it "the most terrifying motion picture I have ever made." Critics disagreed. Nevertheless, academics have spent the past half century dissecting the film line by line and frame by frame, using a wide array of theoretical frameworks, ranging from the Lacanian to the Gothic, to understand the film. The most common interpretations revolve around either the shifting Oedipal dynamics of the film's main family or the complex interplay of language and the cinematic image—both motivated by the film's central mystery: the unexplained bird attacks. I will show that these readings are not mutually exclusive and that combining the two approaches reveals more about Hitchcock's thriller than either one could alone, producing a reading of the film that argues for the supremacy of cinema over other artistic modes.

Stephanie Wicburg
Definitions and Definers:
Reclamation of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* tells the story of Sethe, an ex-slave, and her family as they attempt to reconcile with the past and the apparent return of Sethe's first daughter, Beloved. Morrison uses the fluidity of narration and identity in *Beloved* to emphasize the arc within which all of the characters reclaim their identities from Beloved's influence. This strategy ultimately illustrates how the characters are able to redefine themselves on their own terms rather than the terms determined by others. The flux of narration and identity throughout the novel also helps reveal Morrison's stance that narration and identity share a reciprocal relationship. The reclamation of identity and the reciprocity of narration and identity can be seen especially through the main characters of the novel: Denver, Beloved, and, most importantly, Sethe. Through Morrison's writing, Denver is able to cast off her shroud of protector and once again become a part of the community, just as Sethe is able to finally begin understanding herself as "her most important thing." These transformations suggest a powerful meaning for the future of African-American ex-slaves in Morrison's novels, who may all shed their role as defined and become the definers of their futures.

House Arrest

Moderated by Kendra Atkin
Department of Comparative Literature

Maximillian Dykeman

Not Sane:
Societal Norms of Gender and Sexuality in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

Shirley Jackson's ghost novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, centers on Eleanor Vance and her friends, who are summoned by a paranormal investigator to investigate the rumors of ghosts in Hill House. Most scholars have focused their analyses on psychology and family, but they have missed the mark on the central thread of societal norms. Jackson uses Eleanor to criticize the stringency of societal norms, as she derives her happiness from deviations from the norm, such as her romantic attraction to Theodora, her decision to go to the haunted Hill House, the hallucination created by the house, and her descriptions of the house itself. In my presentation, I make the case that Jackson's *Hill House* argues that strict societal norms, especially in the areas of gender and sexuality, are harmful both to those who deviate from them and to society itself. This reading has wide-ranging applications, because it clearly recommends that we reconsider the justice of society's norms, especially in a time when many old norms are starting to be questioned.

Charlotte Kim

Never Fully Free:
Women's Lack of Agency in Space in *It's a Wonderful Life*

The woman is free . . . free to live in restriction. Director Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* emphasizes female characters' inevitable lack of agency in different settings. By counterpoising the behaviors of Mary Hatch and Violet Bick with their scenes in the Bedford Falls and Pottersville communities, the movie emphasizes the continuous theme of restrictions placed on women. As they struggle to find an independent foothold in the slippery world of fixated gender roles involving the domestic sphere and men, the film highlights their attempts to overcome the "norm" through fleeting scenes of female empowerment. However, these moments of supposedly "true" agency diminish just as quickly as they start. In this way, the film highlights the value of the domestic sphere and how it significantly binds to societal identity. Viewers can then witness the internal power struggles faced by Mary and Violet in both setting-spaces and the reasons why they would—if they could—choose the domestic sphere. To them, this is the only way to be viewed as women, not childlike girls.

Chelsea Moon

My Body, My Choice:
Female Autonomy in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ammu, despite her family's wealth, owns very little due to her status as a divorced mother alienated by her family. Arguably, Ammu's most important possession is her body because it grants her agency to exercise decisions against the grain of familial and patriarchal expectations. Female autonomy has been historically linked to sexual independence, and Ammu boldly exercises her own agency to love most notably through her illicit sexual relationship with the untouchable Velutha. Yet many feminist critics argue that Roy's detailed descriptions of Ammu's body and sexuality only reduce Ammu to nothing more than a symbol of "skin-deep" female autonomy achieved through superficial sexual independence. Additionally, feminist scholars argue that the autonomy of women protagonists becomes compromised in the face of sexual violation and manipulation by males. However, Roy's narrative style combats objectification of Ammu's body through the use of rhetorical devices and unique syntax that shield Ammu's body from prying eyes of the reader and male characters. While detailed depictions of Ammu's body can be perceived as an invitation for objectification, Ammu's body instead asserts female autonomy by constantly changing form and evolving, challenging notions that the female form is defenseless against a violating male gaze.

Amrit Singh
Come to Bed with Me:
Challenging Yi-Fu Tuan's Simplistic View of the Significance of the Bed

Our beds lie at the center of our lives. However, the significance of this location varies immensely based on the person and situation. To some, the bed is a private space made for relaxation and comfort—an idea geographer Yi-Fu Tuan supports in his article "Place: An Experiential Perspective." However, for others, the bed can represent a battleground or even a performance space. In this paper, I will study the latter expressions of this space primarily through the significance of the bed in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, challenging Tuan's simplistic view of this location. We live our lives tethered to this focal point; how does this introduction to the complexity of the bed space change our interactions with it?

Jack Wooton
Sex in the C Sharp Minor Impromptu:
Music and the Piano in Chopin's *The Awakening*

Music is "the most spiritual and yet the most sensual of the arts," at least according to Dr. Da Sousa Correa, one of the leading members of the International Association of Word and Music. And yet, despite music's sensual powers, music and the piano served as a symbol of conservative domesticity for women throughout the nineteenth century. It is because of this duality in symbolism that Kate Chopin made music and the piano a focal point in her most popular novel, *The Awakening*. Chopin introduces Edna, the main character of the novel, to two pianists: Madame Ratignolle, who uses the piano to reinforce domesticity, and Mademoiselle Reisz, who uses the piano to awaken Edna's sexuality and freedom. Chopin uses this dichotomy of domesticity and sexuality, symbolized in the piano and music, to argue that these two ideas are not necessarily contradictory. Chopin argues that female sexual freedom and pleasure need not be antagonistic to enjoying the pleasures of motherhood within the domestic sphere.

Go Fake Yourself

Moderated by Dr. Richard Edinger, Executive Director
USC Dornsife Honors Programs

Nicholas Boveri

You Don't Know Me, Man:
The Power of Personal Perspective in *The Truman Show*

We've all thought about it. What if everyone around me is an actor? What if everything that happens to me is precisely controlled by a team of people? What if everything is fake? In our social-media-saturated world of the twenty-first century, custom-tailored to our every need by Google's and Facebook's computer algorithms, perhaps there is some truth to our suspicions. *The Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir, follows Truman, a man born and raised within a reality TV show, as he gradually discovers the truth behind his reality. The creator of the show, Christof, clearly demonstrates a belief that he is omniscient in Truman's world and, therefore, in control of Truman himself, but a reading of the film through Donna Haraway's theory of "situated knowledges" reveals that this is far from the case. While both the critics of the film and Christof appear to be "above and beyond" Truman, Truman's championing of his own perspective allows him to become independent of the reality given to him and to become a "Tru-man."

Andrew Hariri

"Impurity" Subtracted:
Conflicting Identities During the Japanese Colonization of Korea in *The Handmaiden*

Identity is often perceived as an additive process. Individuals start with a base set of traits when they are born—character aspects like ethnicity or sex—and, over time, they absorb certain traits from their environment that melt together, building, molding, and shaping the individual. But what if identity was a method of subtraction, a series of abandonments, a sanding or whittling down of the individual, a gutting of the very impurities that "obstruct" their ability to achieve their ideal self? *The Handmaiden*, directed by Park Chan-Wook, explores the constructability of the self, not as an additive process but as subtractive. The film is set during the Japanese occupation of Korea in the 1930s and explores Uncle Kozuki's identity. Kozuki, regarded as the apex patriarchal figure in the film, abandons his Korean identity and acquires Japanese identity markers. Kozuki embodies what many in Korea would call *Chinilpa* (친일파): ethnic Koreans who, during the Japanese occupation, gave up their Korean identity and betrayed their fellow citizens out of self-interest or a desire for preferential treatment from the Japanese. By including such a perverse character in his movie, director Park Chan-Wook comments on the mental state required both to discard your own identity and to become a part of an oppressor's culture.

Jason Jiang

For There Clarissa Was:
Understanding Identity Through Connections in *Mrs. Dalloway*

In a novel in which we primarily understand Clarissa Dalloway through the lens of others, *Mrs. Dalloway* fittingly ends with Peter exclaiming, "for there she was." Stemming from this ending, we are naturally interested in how others see Clarissa. Indeed, many academic discussions have centered around the question: Who is Clarissa Dalloway? I will show that Clarissa's identity cannot be understood in isolation from other characters and must incorporate the idea of group consciousness—a shared awareness among characters. Clarissa's identity will be explored in the context of the essential, meaning her identity is immutable and inherent. Ben Wang believes Clarissa makes "rooms of isolation" from other characters, arguing that group consciousness and essential identity are paradoxical. However, I will reveal that Clarissa and other characters share public consciousness without compromising private identity. Furthermore, I will determine how Clarissa uses her party at the end of the novel to strive toward a sharing of consciousnesses. Lastly, as *Mrs. Dalloway* ends at the party, so too will the judgement of Clarissa's identity. By redefining what it means for identity to be essential, we can understand how Clarissa forms her identity through the perceptions of others.

Tejas Ramdas

To Doublethink or Not to Doublethink:
Psychological Manipulation and Political Supremacy in George Orwell's *1984*

The concept of "doublethink"—untainted faith in one view with the complete knowledge of the truth of the opposite—is the basis of brainwashing for the totalitarian government of Oceania in George Orwell's *1984*. It is interpreted as the Party's primary defense mechanism against external rebellion. Orwell explains that an integral aspect of successful doublethink is becoming unconscious of one's own act of hypnosis. However, the slogan "Ignorance is Strength" seems to contradict this definition: it constantly reminds the people of Oceania of their unconscious ignorance in the first place. Orwell's purposefully self-contradictory treatment of such a convoluted topic asks us to read between the lines. This paper reconciles this conflict by arguing that doublethink transcends its conventionally perceived role as a tool for controlling freedom of thought for the Party; rather, it is constitutive of the Party itself. By paralleling doublethink with Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of self-deception and by closely analyzing the sociopolitical architecture of Oceania, I demonstrate that, in a society characterized by the ephemerality of truth, doublethink is the one enduring and necessary concept that supports the government's indefinite dominance. Ultimately, I argue that *1984* should be interpreted not only as a cautionary tale against mass surveillance or widespread indoctrination but as a profound commentary on the ramifications of leaders failing to acknowledge their uncertainty and aimlessness.

Sasha Reiss

Independence Through Originality:
The James Dean Archetype

My purpose in life does not include a hankering to charm society.
– James Dean

The rebel archetype is a particularly potent American image that fundamentally connects to the founding of the United States. However, despite the resistance instilled in this country since its birth, America sometimes loses its sense of rebellion and individuality. Specifically, the American mindset shifted during the 1950s as a direct result of World War II. During the war, Americans unified under one authority in order to challenge the Nazi war machine, sacrificing their individuality in order to fit in and contribute to the highly bureaucratized war effort against the enemy. After the war, this "cog in a machine" ideology infiltrated daily life and a corporate lifestyle emerged as the norm. This shift was exemplified both in bureaucratic workplaces and rigid homes revolving around the nuclear family. My paper focuses on the new American youth that were itching to break free from rigid social constraints and how they discovered their voice in James Dean and his character in *Rebel Without A Cause*. Dean presents a rebel image that appealed to Americans because it balances the freedom of a rebel with the stability of a family. This duality showed Americans that, moving forward, even in the face of societal rigidity, there are still realistic alternative ways of life.

Goldie Roth

Flying Under the Gaydar:
Performance, Identity, and Sexuality in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

How many murders does it take to convince the world that you are not gay? This sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but it turns out that, at least in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, there is a correct answer: two. Despite the incredible charm and socially performative talent of protagonist Tom Ripley—seen by many as the ultimate "chameleon"—he cannot escape others' assumptions that he is gay. Yet, sexuality in Highsmith's text is significantly more complicated than a hetero/homosexual binary. What is so appealing to characters in the novel, then, about simplifying Tom's sexuality down to just "gay"? To explore this question, I turn to prominent queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, who brings a discussion of power into our exploration of the ties between performance and sexuality. Finally, Highsmith as a writer is quite often characterized as "subversive," an author who rejects order and embraces chaos. Can we see this aspect of her writing in her murky inversion of the stereotypical "gay villain"?

Writing Wrongs

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp
Department of English

Hanna Adams

Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga **(Something Bad is Coming. Run.):**
A Look at Black Stereotypes in Film Through the Soundtrack of Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

Traditionally in horror films (and American cinema in general), African American men have been stereotyped to the point that their stories become irrelevant in the grand scheme of the film. In *Get Out*, the score illustrates the damage of the typical filmic black masculinity tropes that have been placed on African American men since Hollywood's beginning. In order to illustrate this, I will exhibit how the score in *Get Out* brings to light the importance of finally portraying African Americans as what they are: human (rather than a stereotype, as in classic Hollywood cinema). The violence of abstraction occurs when people are regarded as an abstract concept rather than human beings. This was common in the early United States, as suggested by the relatively small number of slave narratives compared to the records of countless captives taken in slave ships. *Get Out*'s score plays with this notion of giving a voice to all of those who never had the opportunity to tell their stories. With *Get Out*, composer Michael Abels and Jordan Peele collaboratively created a film that portrays the violence of abstraction and the importance of accurately and effectively telling African American history.

Jack Bekos

On Wednesdays We Wear Pink:
Female Solidarity in Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*

"Ex-boyfriends are off-limits to friends. That's just, like, the rules of feminism." The defining feature of *Mean Girls* is the way it satirizes the intrasexual competition of females. Yet, even this film, in which female characters fight to become queen of the social hierarchy, comes to the conclusion that solidarity is the key to the success of the female sex. Guillermo del Toro's film *Crimson Peak* also reaches this resolution. Specifically, protagonist Edith Cushing represents a product of her early twentieth-century patriarchal society. However, Edith differs from other female characters throughout the film because she possesses the characteristics of a self-sufficient woman with career aspirations. Nonetheless, throughout the film, she falls into the trap of both female conflict and the domestic system, only to be saved by supernatural entities. Building off Evangelia Kindinger's analysis of the film's female ghosts as metaphors for the traps of domesticity, this presentation will investigate every female character's role in Edith's survival. Furthermore, my presentation will also analyze Edith's choice to accept the help of her fellow females and why this demonstrates that female solidarity can guarantee the triumph of the female sex.

Sara N. Gong

Immoral Insanity:
An Existentialist Critique of Murder in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Ordinary and monstrous, Tom Ripley has bludgeoned his way into the modern American consciousness, committing murder in the ruthless pursuit of personal gain. Yet, he suffers from a terrible anxiety that belies this cold pragmatism. A feeling of psychological danger and disconnect haunts this character, hinting at the madness within that drives him to violence. In an exploration of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in connection with the thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre, I examine a man who appears to be free from the rules of morality but, paradoxically, denies his freedom in a more significant, self-constructive, existential sense. For Tom Ripley, beneath his façade of amorality, is inextricably caught in the social order. Through an antihero who aspires but fails to transcend good and evil, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* offers insights into postwar America as an age of inauthenticity.

Elizabeth James
The Ingenuity of Heterogeneity:
The Power of Religious Alternatives in Igbo Society

We make choices by examining our options, evaluating each, and deciding which one provides the most benefit or best aligns with our personal values. In a society with a single option, individuals lack this power of choice. When new ideas and options are introduced, so is the ability to determine which set of ideas individuals identify with most. Nwoye, a young Igbo man in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, has grown up in Igbo society with Igbo religion as his only choice. Though he follows along with the religion, he disagrees with many of its values, such as the Igbo's tradition of killing twins. In addition, he is seen as weak by his father and many others in the Igbo religion for exhibiting feminine qualities rather than the encouraged masculine ones. Holding an alternative set of values and being underappreciated by his people leads Nwoye to feel like an outcast in Igbo society. The introduction of Christianity from European missionaries allows Nwoye to compare the different sets of ideas and choose one that better fits his values. Christianity, and, more importantly, its new set of ideas, brings competition to Igbo society, exposing weaknesses in both religions and highlighting hierarchal structures that are harmful to the powerless. This paper is not meant to be a comparison of two religions, two cultures, or even two continents; rather, it examines the benefits of heterogeneous societies and the opportunity for individuals to choose for themselves. While colonialism is never justified, its introduction of a second option grants Igbo people the power of choice, which they did not previously have.

Erin Sweeney
Finding Faith, Forgiveness, and Futurity
in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It On The Mountain*

In his book of autobiographical essays entitled *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin writes, "I did not intend to allow the white people of this country to tell me who I was, and limit me that way, and polish me off that way." Yet, this is the very thing that influences so much of the black American experience for his characters in *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. Gabriel, an often vilified character, feels constrained by preconceived notions placed upon him because of his race. It is only through his abuse of power within the church community that he can reclaim his agency. However, despite these bleak circumstances, Baldwin's novel is not devoid of hope. In fact, Baldwin uses his characters to help us reexamine our own biases and institutions in order to understand the motivations of others. In opposition to his father's essentialized view of race, John comes to embrace his belief that our society can move beyond labels like race and religion to tell us who we are and how we should be perceived. I argue that Baldwin shapes John as the story's protagonist in order prove that there is a way to rid oneself of these identifiers and to believe in an evolving perspective of racial identity in the United States.

Katelynn Tran
Morality is a Sinking Ship:
How Self-Preservation Limits the Extent of Morality in *Night*

Would you give a dollar to the homeless? How about your *last* dollar? Would you help the homeless if it meant giving up your life? With each question, the inclination to say "yes" grows weaker. You would probably spare a dollar so that people do not judge you as greedy, but you would most likely not choose to give your life away to help someone else. In the latter scenario, your moral conscience would not bug you as much because, at some point, a good deed becomes a sacrifice, and a sacrifice is a huge offense to humanity's nature of self-preservation. But prioritizing yourself does not mean you are a bad person. As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel shows in his memoir *Night*, morality has its limits in the face of situations that endanger survival. When Wiesel describes a son abandoning his dying father in the concentration camps, he does not want us to judge the son as immoral but rather to understand the difficult situation that forces the inmates to abandon morality as if it were a sinking ship.

It's All Relative

Moderated by Professor William Thalmann
Departments of Classics and Comparative Literature

Kruthi Annigeri
Walt Berkman's Squidlife Crisis:
Pretense and Identity Formation in *The Squid and the Whale*

Like father, like son. In Noah Baumbach's 2005 film *The Squid and the Whale*, 16-year-old Walt takes this notion to the extreme and copies his father to a very precise level. However destructive this imitative behavior appears, however, I argue that Walt gains more than he loses by crafting his identity on pretense. When his parents choose to get a divorce, he unilaterally sides with his father, a literature professor, and antagonizes his mother, a new writer. Walt regurgitates his father's musings on literature, takes interest in his father's romantic interest, and even claims to have written Pink Floyd's "Hey You." He crafts an identity that matches the way he prefers to see himself or the way he would like others to perceive him. However, he fails to convince them of this identity, as those around Walt notice his blatant dishonesty with himself and others, as he unrelentingly forms his identity around pretense and mimicry. Why does Walt pursue this imitative identity if others clearly see through him? Drawing from Donald Winnicott's theories on imagination and contemporary research on power dynamics within the family, I contend that Walt's pretense-based identity and its failure ultimately benefit him. When he finally reaches a turning point, Walt can confront the conflict within his family from his own perspective rather than through his father's mind or by copying others.

Huiyeon Eim
Daddy Issues:
Investigating the Father-Daughter Relationship in Carter's "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon"

"Daddy issues" is a comical, even sarcastic term that refers to the father complex, a group of unconscious associations related to the image of the father. The term is fairly modern, but the concept has been around since the invention of fairy tales and haunts the female protagonists in them. Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon" is a parody of the beloved fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" laced with piercing criticisms of patriarchy and gender stereotypes. Carter adds deeply sexual elements to the original story to depict Beauty's sexual awakening and desire, which are discussed by some scholars as Beauty's grand escape from patriarchy. However, I argue that Beauty never saves herself from the patriarchal values she inherits from her father, who domesticated her to internalize capitalist patriarchy and the sex contract. Beauty is chained, and the influence of her father remains unbroken, leading Beauty to her relationship with Beast, which only further institutionalizes patriarchy.

Katherine Montes
"A Boy's Best Friend is His Mother":
Mulvey, Misogyny, and the Pressures of Motherhood in *Psycho*

In *Psycho*, one of Hitchcock's best-known films, a young woman is brutally killed on a stormy night in a motel shower. What is apparent in the film, besides the fact that something about Norman is not normal, is its misogyny, a feature increasingly commented upon in Hitchcock criticism. Hitchcock's films are not new to analysis, especially when it comes to his severely ambivalent position on women. I argue that the consummate victim in the film, Mrs. Bates, casts a deep and dark shadow on its plot, despite never actually appearing. Through her, Hitchcock enforces popular attitudes held toward women at the time, especially unrealistic expectations when it came to beauty and independence and the societal pressures they faced, especially mothers. Through his one-sided portrayal of Mrs. Bates, he also displays his fear of being emotionally dependent on women and his need to constantly exert control.

Riyaz Razi

Who to Believe?:
Tim O'Brien's Fake Daughter in *The Things They Carried*

Typically, we see reality and fiction as two distinct entities. After all, they appear mutually exclusive because, by definition, what is real cannot be fake. Tim O'Brien complicates this idea in *The Things They Carried*, as he intersperses fiction throughout his stories of his service during the Vietnam War. As he states in one chapter, "often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness." However, throughout the text, we feel a sense of awareness about O'Brien's use of fiction, mainly because of his admission that he lies. Yet, there is one falsification O'Brien never admits to creating: his own daughter. Despite being a pivotal aspect of the story, O'Brien had no children while writing *The Things They Carried*, and the knowledge that she does not exist raises the questions of why O'Brien would fake such an intimate relationship and what O'Brien was attempting to achieve in doing so.

MacKenzie Starr

Mother Knows Best:
Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* and Understanding Mother-Daughter Attachment

Caregivers and their parenting methods shape our character and, consequently, influence us long after we leave the safety of our homes. Our interactions and attachments with parenting figures determine how we view other future relationships and mold our mechanisms for coping with stressful situations. In Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird*, the mother, Marion, did not have a proper mothering role model. As a result, she struggles to foster a loving and communicative relationship with her daughter, Lady Bird. The women fight frequently, rarely seeing eye to eye. While some may argue that a relationship lacking support and understanding will cause maturing issues with the child, this paper claims that dysfunctional relationships such as Lady Bird and Marion's can lead to the child's resilience. Drawing from social psychologists such as James Bowlby and David Winnicott, this paper argues that the maternal disappointments Lady Bird experiences motivate her to find the strength to define her identity independent from her mother, thus solidifying her self-confidence.

Qianze Zhang

Curiosity Killed the Black Boy:
Channeling Parental Anxiety into a Praxis for Intellectual Labor in *Between the World and Me*

Parents strive to afford their children freedom to form their own beliefs through carefree exploration. But what if encouraging such intellectual freedom meant putting your child in physical danger, or, arguably worse, perpetuating false hope? Author Ta-Nehisi Coates's answer to this question is his book *Between the World and Me*, his seminal work on contemporary black and white race relations that takes the form of an epistolary memoir addressed to his son, Samori. Coates asserts that attempting to erase racism in America is hopeless; the most honest way to live as a black person in America is to pursue questions about race knowing that their answers cannot include solutions. My paper analyzes the work as a project of producing a framework for black intellectual thought that is compatible with the oppressive profile of America Coates sets forth. I argue that Coates's anxiety regarding Samori's racial oppression leads him to a laborious praxis for intellectual thought that proves unsustainable for its failure to suppress a natural inclination to hope for a "truer" version of intellectual freedom.

I Know You Are, But Where Am I?

Moderated by Professor Alison Renteln
Department of Political Science and Gould School of Law

Alyssa Czaban

WASPs and Other Predators:
Why Ethnic Immigrants Struggled to Achieve the American Dream as Seen Through *Middlesex*

Representations of the 1920s typically conjure images of an unrestrained world of possibilities, which may have been true . . . for some. Yes, the American Dream was alive and well: rags-to-riches novels were flying off shelves, while most immigrants were stuck in rags. The great contradiction of the American Dream in the first half of the twentieth century is that society lauded those who stood out for their achievements but concurrently discouraged most immigrants and people of color from thriving by compelling them to assimilate. In Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, a novel that questions the societal binaries of identity, Greek immigrants Lefty and Desdemona Stephanides feel obligated to become "typical" Americans but struggle to balance their new society with the culture they left behind. Pressure to assimilate was facilitated by the prevalence of low-skill industrial jobs in the booming twenties as well as not-so-friendly competition during the Great Depression in the thirties, which polarized "native" white workers against immigrants. In this paper, I will distinguish the fine line between integration and assimilation and argue that ethnic and cultural identity affected upward mobility, as assimilation presented immigrants with an obstacle to achieving success in America.

Maya Fine

Ticking Time Bombs:
Detonation and Self Deception in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*

Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* navigates the lives of Tod Hackett (a disenchanted artist), Homer Simpson (an emotionless midwestern migrant), Harry Greener (a tragic clown) and other fringe Hollywood wannabes living in Los Angeles. To stimulate emotional investment in their own lives, these characters have violent emotional responses to minor offenses. The sterile desensitization caused by societal expectations in Hollywood creates individuals who are emotionally and physically volatile, people who suppress emotions until they explode and fracture everything—and everyone—around them. In *The Day of the Locust*, the film industry inspires a falsified Hollywood Dream void of actual fulfillment. Tod's, Harry's, and Homer's characterizations demonstrate the inevitable emotional volatility that results from this shallow trajectory, exposing individual's inescapable self-preservation. I argue it is not Hollywood that is the false prophet but the idea that fame or wealth or beauty is a means to an end. The belief in the power of a lifestyle or recognition to create happiness is what causes dangerous self-delusion and the inevitable unhappiness blessed upon those starstruck by unfulfillable dreams.

James Hebish

An Epic Understanding of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*:
Peering Through *Paradise Lost*

When an author narrates as a detached observer, the audience often struggles to draw the connection between the text and its designer. We might ask whether a text is merely fictional or if its plot projects from the author's own life. James Baldwin's novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* certainly has this effect. Baldwin's impartial narration of the cruelty that John Grimes suffers at the hands of his father leaves us asking whether the author is complicit with such abuse—or if he is trying to make an example of it. To answer this question, I will look to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as an epic model through which we can understand Baldwin's inclinations and biases. Though Milton exposes us to Satan's unfiltered contempt for God, the epic elements present in the poem provide us with Milton's unwritten commentary on the relationship between God and Satan. Thus, by deriving these epic traits and applying them to *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, we can locate the "leaks" of Baldwin's life and biases found in his characters. In doing so, we discover not only hints that are useful to understanding how Baldwin coped with his race and sexuality but a roadmap for calculating what will happen to John Grimes in the future of the novel.

Miles Kay
Honey, I'm Home?:
Struggles to Re-establish Definitions of Home and Place in *Season of Migration to the North*

As colonial regimes collapsed in the wake of the Second World War, former colonies were left in a state of limbo. These fledgling nations, and the people within them, struggled to define their own identities following the extended imposition of a foreign culture. Tayeb Salih depicts this struggle in his novel *Season of Migration to the North*, a work lauded as the most important Arab novel of the twentieth century. By following the experiences of two migrants who venture between Sudan and England, the novel's unnamed narrator and the enigmatic Mustafa Sa'eed, Salih reveals a divide between the ideas of the imperialistic "North" and colonized "South." This separation and the circumstances surrounding the migrations of Mustafa and the narrator from South to North and back again cause readers to realize that these characters are displaced both physically *and* psychologically by movement between these places. Failures to reconcile their differing experiences with the North and the South ultimately lead to grave consequences for both characters. Mustafa and the narrator do not feel fully compatible with either region, and, as a result, struggle to develop stable definitions of home. Thus, *Season of Migration to the North* portrays the unintended side effects of migration between the diametrically opposed South and North, with broader implications for the legacy of colonialism in today's society.

Brendan Morey
Sites of Sameness:
Spatiality and Rebellion in Terrence Malick's *Badlands*

McDonald's operates an astounding 36,899 locations internationally from Italy to Azerbaijan. Yet, the inside of a McDonald's in Rome is not much different from the inside of a McDonald's in Los Angeles: the same golden arches, the same play place, and just another dollar menu. In one's mind, they are both generic fast-food joints. French Anthropologist Marc Augé describes these kinds of places as "non-places." Augé believes globalization and commercialism has deprived places of their unique history and local relationships. Instead of family-owned restaurants where friends and neighbors are known by name, we get more non-places like McDonald's and Whataburger. Likewise, the film *Badlands*, directed by Terrence Malick, concerns Kit Carruthers escaping on a murder spree from a town that seems to offer him no identity, history, or relationships. Thus, I view Kit's hometown as a "non-space," alienating Kit and driving him to rebel. The film offers important insight into the alienating effects of non-spaces.

Ramida (Prim) Phoolsombat
Are Women at Home?
Space in *The God of Small Things*

"Women belong in the kitchen." How many times has this common, misogynistic generalization been said in the past minute, hour, or decade? What if women cannot belong in the kitchen, or at home, or in any space at all? This is the reality of the eclectic cast of women in *The God of Small Things*, including Ammu, her great-aunt Baby Kochamma, and her mother, Mammachi. They perceive that they are able to have control over certain physical spaces: a bedroom, a factory, a garden. But, the patriarchal and societal pressures of their community and male family members in 1960s India leave them wishing for stretching room, or at least a door lock, as they are the true authorities over space. Though scholars such as Michael Meyer, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Sharmita Lahiri offer different perspectives on the significance of space in the novel, none address how the women cannot control any spaces—they simply use them. It is through this squeeze that they must find freedom and sanctuary in other spaces, especially in mental fantasies where they can build imagined spaces. Their pursuits of such spaces reveals the sad truth: in and out of their house, women belong nowhere.

Capital Punishment

Moderated by Professor Andrew Stott
USC Dornsife College Dean of Undergraduate Education and Department of English

Marisa Johnson

Slave or Mother? Why Not Both?:
An Investigation of Social Roles in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

The first relationship that a person has is with their mother, and this connection generates a perceived ownership between mother and child. In relationships formed by human interactions, individuals find ways to identify themselves in a variety of contexts: mother, daughter, wife, and so on. There are several sociological studies that investigate these manners of identification through social ownership. Yet, the ways natural interactions form the inner-self conflict with how capitalism defines societal roles, as demonstrated in Octavia Butler's fictional slave narrative *Kindred*. Since slavery is rooted in capitalist prioritizations of profit, slavery is a capitalist system. Capitalist slavery ignores all secondary selves, and the identity of "slave" becomes the singular identity that is allowed to exist. In *Kindred*, slaves on the Weylin plantation are assigned the role of "slave" as their only self: all identities based in social interactions are irrelevant. But capitalism cannot invalidate the physical link between mother and child nor the role of motherhood. In my presentation, I will argue that, within *Kindred*, capitalism prioritizes the role of "slave," causing conflict to arise when enslaved women are forced to give up the role of "mother" and return to the identity of "slave" after the birth of their children.

Sunhee Seo

The Boulevard of Broken Dreams:
The Blind Artist in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*

Art is dead. And Hollywood killed it. Set in the 1930s during Hollywood's studio era, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* uncovers the grotesque nature of the film industry. The novel follows Tod Hackett, a young artist, as he attempts to criticize Hollywood's culture industry through his painting of a mob in "The Burning of Los Angeles." The "culture industry," a term coined by theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, can be understood as an all-encompassing industry that pursues profit by selling a commodified culture, especially, in this case, through the medium of film. As Tod plans for his painting to capture the nature of the culture industry, he creates a dichotomy between the roles of the artist and the prophet. Tod's differentiation of the roles of the prophet and the artist shows the culture industry's ability to blind the artist to the reality of the world around them. I will explore what Tod's delineation of these roles reveals about the culture industry's effect on the mind of the artist and how this blindness kills art as we know it.

Brandon Shin

Everyone Hates Briony:
Narrativization in the Film *Atonement*

Joe Wright's 2007 film *Atonement* features a thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis falsely accusing Robbie Turner of raping a socialite. The film follows Briony's attempt to find atonement for her wrongdoing. Unsurprisingly, Briony is popularly criticized and hated by the end of the film. Yet, the film is told from Briony's point of view. So, why does she let herself seem so despicable? She attempts to recount the experience, but does so with skewed perspectives. Rajko Petkovic and Petra Perkov explain that, as Briony matures and changes, so too does her perspective, consequently affecting how she retells her story. Her perspectives however, construct a lie about Robbie and Cecilia, and, although it is a delightful lie, it is nonetheless fake. The audience cannot help but despise Briony further. What was an attempt to seek atonement through the story of Robbie and Cecilia only ends in misfortune for Briony: failure to find atonement and utter hatred from the audience.

Jorge Rojas-Ortega
Playing with Fire:
Pixar's *Toy Story* as Decentralized Post-Modern Third Cinema

In effect, to recover the concept of a third cinema is not to simply assert cultural solidarity among cultural producers in the global south, but to raise questions that postcolonial and cultural theory must address eventually: Whatever happened to decolonization?
– Frieda Ekotto, *Rethinking Third Cinema*

Sixty years after Bandung and the Tricontinental Conference, the Third World Project has deteriorated, and with it its calls for decolonization and the creation of liberated national cultures across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While the existing literature on the failure of the Third World Project has centered on the role modernist thought had in shaping the movement's rhetoric of revolution, there has been scarce analysis on why apparatuses of national culture creation have failed to adapt in the face of globalization. In this paper, I explore how one of these apparatuses, "Third Cinema," has stagnated in its mission to radicalize colonized viewers into revolutionary action. Expanding on Barthes' and Berger's postmodern conceptions of the viewer as author, I analyze the 1995 animated film *Toy Story* through a militant, anti-imperialist lens to showcase the necessity of incorporating postmodern and poststructuralist theory into Third Cinema and, more broadly, into decolonized cultural creation. I conclude by advocating for a democratized approach to film creation in which the viewer's ability to remix capitalist cinema into subversive revolutionary manifestos decentralizes the power to create new revolutionary media and the ability to form national cultures across the global south.

Rhys Richmond
Angel, Second Class:
How a Rogue Spiritual Dimension Defines *It's a Wonderful Life*'s
Commentary on Capitalism, Community, and Apotheosis

Frank Capra's beloved *It's a Wonderful Life* features a legendary tussle between the everyman of everymen, George Bailey, and the amoral bourgeois villain, Mr. Potter. In the midst of the fray—banker against banker, one set of capitalist ideals grating against another—another player operates unobserved: a wingless, unfashionable, and bizarre "second-class" Angel, Clarence Odbody. Critics, viewers, and even the FBI have tended to let Clarence's suspiciously capitalist behavior slip and slide by; the peculiar phenomenon of angels without wings, the classist Heaven, and Clarence's incentivization to aid George are all analytical opportunities teeming with underdeveloped insight. Why does Capra's heaven—a place frequently portrayed to be "above" the profane, earthly grind of proving oneself—exhibit hierarchies and a capitalist system for attaining wing-worthy status? Capitalism's impact in Capra's heaven is not unidirectional: Clarence's heavenly status, among other characteristics, greatly boosts his capitalist success. Overlaying works of sociological theorists Max Weber and Oscar Lewis onto Clarence's operation of capitalism recasts *It's a Wonderful Life*'s entire discourse on the (im)purity of motivation and the requisite elements for all communities, both sacred and profane, to function.

Ana Telfer
A Dip into the Uncanny Valley:
How *Alien* Taught Us to Fear

Is imitation the sincerest form of flattery, or is it just plain insulting? In Ridley Scott's space odyssey *Alien*, the latter is the case. Taking a twist on usual critiques of the film, this paper will seek to prove that the worst evil in *Alien* is not the actual extraterrestrial, but Ash, an android on the crew who successfully convinces his peers that he is an actual human being. Connecting this film to Masahiro Mori's "uncanny valley"—a theory detailing how interactions with robots who mirror humans too closely can quickly descend into eeriness—I argue that there are greater psychological reasons for the crew's repulsion towards Ash. He is the most terrifying and overlooked deviation from the normal in *Alien*, for the crew's aggressive hatred of him reflects a greater fear of imitation and replacement within our own context. Ash evokes—not just in each character, but within Scott's entire audience—a deep desire to protect individualism against the forces that would will us to be replaced or forgotten. In the face of a system obsessed with and disturbed by the perfection of society, *Alien* is a desperate plea for humanity.

Battle of the Sexes

Moderated by Ali Kulez
Department of Comparative Literature

Rebecca Clemmons

Becoming the *Crème de la Crème*:
False Feminism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

It is no secret that the relationship between students and their teachers is an important and impactful one for both parties. For many years, fiction has been concerned with these student-teacher relationships, and the nuances within them that can blur lines of appropriate friendship and inappropriate lust. When discussing these fictional works, critics and their analyses typically focus on the teacher or professor, neglecting to pay attention to the impact of these nuanced relationships on their students. Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* falls into this category of school-centric literature: a coming of age tale that features blurred lines of student-teacher relationships, an exploration of sexuality and gender roles, and a subtle but effective display of the innately problematic aspects of the secondary school institution. Through a focus on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* informed by references to other theoretical works, this paper explores the potential of salvaging Brodie's "school story" for feminism and reveals what these flaws say about the education system overall.

Madison Jones

The Monotony of Individuality:
The Essential Identity of the *Middlesex* Narrator Cal/Calliope

In *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, Cal recalls the events that lead to his possession of two recessive alleles that result in Cal's identity as an intersex individual. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler discusses gender as a constructed identity resulting from a temporal process. Butler also, however, mentions the essential identity of the individual, an identity not based on the continuity of standards determined by the norm. Given that Cal experiences many years as a female and many years as a male, his constructed gender identity is enigmatic, but the identity that defines Cal is not relevant to his gender. Cal's essential identity is something that would have been present regardless of Cal's genotype or phenotype. By analyzing both Cal's relationships as a young child oblivious to his condition and the actions of the older Cal, I demonstrate that his ability to view a situation from a variety of perspectives is something he has always possessed, something essential to his identity. The sympathetic nature of Cal often manifests in the unlikely form of apathy. This apathy is more noticeable in Cal as an adult but just as present throughout his childhood. Cal's apathetic nature is a result of Cal placing others' emotions above his own.

Sarah Orsborn

Land of the Freeway:
How *Angel Face* Critiques American Optimism

Otto Preminger's 1953 film *Angel Face* bursts America's bubble of post-World War II optimism to expose the American Dream as mere façade. The titular Angel Face is Diane Tremayne, a young British émigré who, haunted by her mother's wartime death, kills her step-mother, father, lover, and herself. Thus, the promises of postwar Los Angeles seem to ring hollow for Diane and her victims. Preminger echoes this disillusionment through Diane's murder weapon, the most iconic feature of postwar aspirations: the automobile. Cars in *Angel Face* systematically break their symbolic promises of autonomy, social mobility, wealth, and love. By using cars to question the optimism of American society post-World War II, Preminger calls attention to the undercurrent of war trauma being smothered by optimistic societal narratives. In essence, *Angel Face*'s cars reprimand 1950s America: faith in social progress can make us blind to weakness and regress, especially when the rest of the world is in ruins.

Jack Schwartz

Gender Roles:
Bitter but Restorative Medicine

Can conforming to traditional gender roles be a good thing? The current discussion of gender theory includes many critiques of the overly restrictive nature of traditional gender structures. However, in her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison uses these traditional gender structures as a positive and restorative tool for Paul D and Sethe, two ex-slaves from a particularly brutal plantation. Using Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity from her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, I show how Paul D's and Sethe's treatments on their plantation heavily restricted their gender expressions by limiting the performative aspects of their genders. By including analyses from scholars Nancy Peterson and Pamela Barnett, I underscore how severely dehumanizing the stripping of gender identity can be. Ultimately, Morrison restores Paul D's and Sethe's gender identities by having them take on the prescribed behaviors of the performative aspects of their genders. While this embrace of traditional performativity is potentially restrictive, it offers the couple a re-humanizing release from slavery's painful memory.

Ryan Vargas

Clamoring for Identity:
The Confrontation Between Chaos, Masculinity, and Adolescence in *The Squid and the Whale*

"Don't be difficult." In the most powerful and subtle command from Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*, Bernard instructs the world to adhere to him, to make life easier for only him. He demands passivity from others, and this demand exists as an extension of his reach for power, tied closely to his identity not just as a human being but as a man. Bernard represents a distinctly toxic form of masculinity, one that undermines and damages surrounding people with active precision. But what are the consequences of this masculinity in the life of his sons, Walter and Frank, who are in the murky transition between the innocent curiosity of childhood and the grounded reality of adulthood, and who must form their own identities? How can an identity even be formed in the shadow of such a chaotic and damaging force? Using psychosocial interpretations of identity formation and feminist theory surrounding masculinity, I argue that what Walter and Frank undergo in their identity formations illustrates the genuinely harmful effects of this toxic masculinity and challenges the assumed normative relationship between adolescents and domineering male role models.

You Can't Sit With Us

Moderated by Professor David Albertson
School of Religion

Mary Borchers

"The Thing That Made Her Beautiful":
Maureen Peal and Social Capital in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Scholars have written extensively about beauty, racism, and bullying as they appear in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, but most of the discussion has centered on the central figure and victim of the novel, Pecola. Far less scholarship has been devoted to the character of Maureen Peal, who offers a brief glimpse into the perspective of a bully as she leverages her skin color, wealth, beauty, and overall social capital against Pecola. My paper bridges this gap in scholarship by considering Maureen's culpability for her attacks on Pecola. Ultimately, through an exploration of Maureen in conjunction with Simone de Beauvoir's theory of narcissism in *The Second Sex*, I conclude that, as cruel as Maureen's actions are, she is not entirely blameworthy because her actions are a product of her society, which shapes her through forces beyond her control. This conclusion heightens the tragedy of *The Bluest Eye*, as Pecola's ultimate descent into madness is a direct consequence of the ineptitude of her society.

Justine Chen

False Globalism in Tech Noir and the
Exploitation of East Asian Cultures in *Blade Runner 2049*

Blade Runner 2049, the long-awaited sequel to Ridley Scott's original *Blade Runner*, represents a future in which our cities are congested with Asian culture, attempting to present a world in which America is overtaken and globalized by the greater world. However, this use of orientalism is problematic, for it uses East Asian imagery simply as an aesthetic commodity. By utilizing Asian imagery irresponsibly, *Blade Runner 2049* is a potent example of a broader trend in media: completely appropriating culture and redefining audience perspectives of Asian culture and people. While the film attempts to represent the world of intersecting cultures, it ultimately proves fraudulent in its globalism, as Eastern cultures and the image of Asians—especially Asian women—are appropriated, misrepresented, and manipulated through the lens of the white filmmaker.

Grace Fogel

Not All Identities Are Created Equal

In 1920s American society, the act of passing for another race involved tremendous risk, both physically and emotionally. Nella Larsen explores this topic in her novel *Passing*, in which a light-skinned black woman passes as white. Larsen raises questions about the reasons, benefits, consequences, and overall worth of passing, each of which I will investigate. When one chooses to pass for an identity other than her own, to what extent is she or her reputation permanently changed? Is a new identity formed? Some scholars have labeled the act of passing as a representation of freedom, though it has also been labeled as a threat in that it challenges the possibility of a stable identity. Identity is arguably subjective in that it is fluid and can change quickly and easily upon the simplest of actions. In the novel, protagonist Clare Kendry assumes multiple identities; but which, if any, is the "normal" one? The different versions of an individual's identity can ultimately influence the societal groups they are a part of, as is the case for Clare. She finds a place within the overlap of two racial groups, neither of which she can fully call home.

Mitchell Maruyama

How Ostracizing Leads to Violence in *Season of Migration to the North*:
The Connection Between Liminality and Aggression

*These girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa'eed but by the germ of deadly disease that assailed them a
thousand years ago . . . It was I who killed them. I am the desert of thirst. I am no Othello. I am a lie.*
– Mustafa Sa'eed, *Season of Migration to the North*

Recent television series such as *Criminal Minds* and *Mindhunter* have allowed us to gaze into the psyches of some of the most intriguing people: criminals and murderers. Their unfathomable crimes and acts leave us in awe yet pique our curiosity; we are left to wonder what could drive someone to commit such horrible acts. In my paper, I examine the actions of Mustafa Sa'eed, a Sudanese, enigmatic protagonist who travels around London seducing and tormenting European women into submission in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. By drawing on the concept of liminality—a transitional state of isolation and lack of identity—as a lens to further uncover the root causes behind violent crimes, I will explore the role of cultural isolation in outbursts of violence, how structural forces make violence appear as the only option, and what larger forces influence violent people.

Luca Mendoza

Walking the Tightrope:
James Baldwin's Relationships with Religion in *The Fire Next Time*

The separation of church and state, a founding aspect of this country, would suggest that religion should not affect secular matters. Yet, in *The Fire Next Time*, author and activist James Baldwin, non-religious himself, illustrates how he uses his experiences of religious disenchantment to identify the issues preventing racial progress. The book narrates his time as a Christian preacher, his disillusionment, and his simultaneously inspiring and unnerving dinner with the Nation of Islam's leader, Elijah Muhammad. In my analysis, I illustrate how these experiences formulated his ideals and philosophies, specifically the advocacy of universal love and the acceptance of history. Scholarly analyses speculate with varying results on the causes of Baldwin's religious disillusionment. I will synthesize these to explain his individualized philosophy, an individuality that I contend formed from his decision to reject mass consensus and formulate his own theory. In a time as racially turbulent as ours, Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* remains as pertinent as ever. Beyond its theory on racial relations, the text acts as a prime model for how we can utilize our own life experiences in shaping our own individualized views.

Julia Wada

Piggies Can Walk on Two Feet

What gives someone the authority to dictate another's story? Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* follows Ender, who committed xenocide as a child, as he tries to redeem himself as the "Speaker for the Dead" by telling the story of the alien race he destroyed. Ender's travels take him to a planet where humans have discovered new intelligent life called the Pequeninos, or Piggies, who experience several physical phases of life. However, a series of not only cultural but biological misunderstandings brews feelings of fear and hatred. In *Ghost Stories for Darwin: The Science of Variation and the Politics of Diversity*, Banu Subramaniam argues for more inclusivity in the sciences because of the inability for humans to be truly objective, as scientists find a way to inject their beliefs into the results of studies, as seen in the case of eugenics. I argue Card's novel plays with the idea that if the scientists used their imaginations, accepted they could be wrong, and listened to the Piggies they were studying there would have been less conflict. Even though Ender is a white male who comes to save the day, I believe Card ultimately argues for diversity in the sciences.

Write Your Misrepresentative

Moderated by Professor Sharon Lloyd
Departments of Philosophy and Political Science and Gould School of Law

Kai Brady

Redefining Rebellion:
Youth Identity in Media Over Time

Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* has been hailed as a quintessential representation of millennial adolescence, yet its portrayal of teen rebellion is much more subdued than the grandiose rebel films of the 1950s and 60s. Instead, *Lady Bird* and other millennial media tend to focus on identity rather than powerful activism and generational conflict. Through the lens of *Lady Bird*, I will examine sociological research alongside other media depictions in order to determine whether these portrayals are accurate. Are millennials simply less ambitious than those from the hippie generation? Has our focus on personal identity led to weaker forms of activism? Or, has the media simply chosen to portray us in this way? This paper explores all of these questions as well as the implications these dubious media depictions have on society as a whole.

Emerson Harris

Women & Work:
How *Hidden Figures* Perpetuates the Stereotypes of Working Mothers in Film

Hundreds of films present the phrase "based on true events" during the opening sequence, yet the power of this description is often forgotten by the end of the film. *Hidden Figures* is a unique case in which the phrase "based on true events" is not only remembered but assessed long after audiences leave the theater. *Hidden Figures* tells the story of Katherine Goble, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson: three working mothers written out of the "Space Race." Although the popularity of *Hidden Figures* suggests a debatable improvement in the cultural representation of history, in reality, the film's misrepresentation of working mothers unlocks the key to the issue of commercializing stories. *Hidden Figures* champions the ways in which the women's names transition from hidden to household, yet the specific portrayal of these characters' domestic lives sheds light on the broader implications of perpetuating the "norms" of portraying working mothers in film. The specific role of working mothers as "jugglers" is manifested throughout *Hidden Figures*, even in the film's trailer. Although *Hidden Figures* sparks a conversation about such issues as the strife between working mothers and their husbands, the ending of the film mistakenly suggests these problems are solved.

Joanne Lee

Can A Clone Find Meaning Through Memory?
Nostalgia in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Our natural reflex when something threatens our humanness is to turn to the security of our past. While nostalgia may seem an effective tool of escapism that converts the bleakness of the present into the beauty of the past, breathing meaning into our lives, Kathy, a clone, disrupts this naïve consensus in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Her unique perspective as a replicate in a world of human individuals confounds modern readers. For Kathy, rather than increasing positivity and existential purpose, remembering the past reinforces shame and meaninglessness. Even though she knows what she is doing is perilous, she lingers on a fictitious self-perception, prolonging a false sense of identity. When all else fails, she turns to her memories, the only things that are permanently hers, to regain dominion over herself in a society that claims her as its own. But ultimately, despite her obsessive inclination to organize her memories into graspable markers, their transience renders them unreliable. Whether it is more helpful or harmful, nostalgia is unavoidable for humans and human derivatives alike.

Matteo Mendoza

To Be Him or To Be with Him:
Examining Homosocial Behavior in *On the Road*

Admiration or infatuation? (And homophobia?) Such is the contradiction present in Sal Paradise's affections for Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*. Dean's spontaneous, primal energy and Beat spirit maintain a hold over Sal, who bears romantic feelings for Dean. Yet, their actual platonic dynamic and shared vitriolic attitude towards the gay community complicates any analysis of their relationship. A robust discussion surrounding this issue already exists. Drawing from critics such as Leerom Medovoi, Dan Napelee, and other Beat movement historians, my paper will argue that homosocial behavior in *On The Road* is informed by the Beat Generation's fraternal ideals, a genuine romantic attraction, and Kerouac's internalized homophobia. I will also discuss the parallels between this male-male relationship—which may appear paradoxical at first—and the pederastic system of ancient Greece.

Sharanya Suresh

How to Die from Terminal Illness:
The Problematic Single Story of "Dying in Character" in *When Breath Becomes Air*

How does one face a terminal illness? In *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi, a neurosurgery resident, has almost completed his training when he is diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of lung cancer. Scholar Jeffrey Berman posits that most people dying of illness would strive to "die in character," which he defines as the "consistency between the way we live and the way we die." Kalanithi's memoir upholds this idea by highlighting how he maintains his values and goals as well as essential parts of his identity. However, I argue this single story is problematic because it supports binary definitions of trauma and overcoming trauma. My paper raises essential questions about the process of trauma, terminal illness, and dying: How does the trauma of terminal illness affect a person's identity? What does *overcoming* trauma signify in the terminally ill? What are Kalanithi's answers to these questions, and what tensions surface from this discussion of trauma in the process of dying?

Elisabeth Vehling

On the Windowsill:
An Examination of the Threshold as a Spatial Metaphor in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing . . . a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone.
– Nella Larsen, Passing

The final scene of Nella Larsen's *Passing* comes to its crescendo in a single, captivating moment. Clare Kendry's sudden, fatal fall from the windowsill is both the briefest and the most intriguing, convoluted moment of the novel. Clare—a mixed-race woman who chooses to "pass" as white—is characterized by her tendency to constantly oscillate between her racial identities. In this paper, I will examine how the physical threshold serves as a spatial metaphor in *Passing*. Specifically, I will delve into the significance of the windowsill in the final chapter of the novel and how it serves as a physical representation of Clare Kendry's racial non-conformity. While Clare's continuous passing over the threshold between her black and white identities is fascinating, I believe it is more poignant to examine the questions that arise from her desire to linger directly on the threshold itself and exist between two identities. If the windowsill is a physical representation of Clare's attempt to exist outside of the binary, what fascinating insights might be gleaned from her abrupt demise at this symbolic point of passing?

System Failure

Moderated by Professor Lucas Herchenroeder
Department of Classics

Thursday, April 19
7:30 pm – 8:45 pm
Gutenberg

Bryant Chang

Gone Wrong, Gone Sexual:
Erroneous Education in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"

What if your favorite high school teacher secretly wanted to murder you—and you were powerless to stop him? This frightening scenario is what a young bride encounters in radical feminist author Angela Carter's retelling of the "Bluebeard" folktale, "The Bloody Chamber." In Carter's obscene rendition, a wealthy, bloodthirsty French Marquis abuses the system of education in order to completely control his impoverished and inexperienced bride. There is a distinct intellectual inequality between the Marquis and his child bride. Female education scholar Sarah Acker attributes this to "prior socialization," in which the patriarchy promotes boys to jobs in academia and the workplace, while females are condemned to a life of domesticity. I argue that, through a combination of graphic artwork and sexual intercourse, the Marquis uses his vast experience to objectify his bride and force her into helpless submission. By harnessing his bride's desire to search for his weakness, the Marquis closes his trap around her, proving that knowledge alone is not enough to escape brute force.

Victoria Friend

I Won't Grow Up:
Coming of Age in *The Bluest Eye*

You said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and harm them not." Did you forget? Did you forget about the children?
– Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye

The history of the Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, has primarily focused on nineteenth-century male characters in the Victorian novel; however, more recently, the term has been appropriated to include women and people of color in the literary pantheon of characters struggling to mature gracefully. Traditionally, scholars studying Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* have argued that the novel functions as a bildungsroman for the character Pecola Breedlove, as well as sisters Claudia and Frieda MacTeer. This focus on the children has kept critics from considering whether the parental figures who help or hinder their maturity ever came of age themselves. I argue that the parental figures of Cholly Breedlove, Mrs. Breedlove, and Mrs. MacTeer do not ever truly come of age. Furthermore, by passing on their childlike flaws to their daughters, they perpetuate a cycle of destructive immaturity in a society that already condemns young African-American women. For these unfortunate girls, their parents might be all they have—and all they must escape from.

Paige Godvin

Running With Tigers:
The Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality as Represented in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*

While strong male sexuality has always been a marker of defined masculinity, expression of female sexuality often carries connotations of promiscuity, dirtiness, and dishonor. These perceptions stem from the "colonization" of the female body by the male sex, or the assumption that the purpose of the female body is a tool for male pleasure. In Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, a collection of revised fairy tales with adult themes, the female characters featured are sexually liberated, empowered, and brutally violent—exceptionally different from the chastity usually mandated by society. Critic Merja Makinen describes the nature of the beasts in Carter's work and how they "signify a sensuality that the women have been taught might devour them, but which, when embraced, gives them power, strength, and a new awareness of both self and other." By incorporating colonization theorist Franz Fanon's "Concerning Violence," I will discuss this "decolonization" of the female body and the reason Carter chooses to frame her stories with violence. I will also explore the empowerment that arises from the expression of sexuality and discuss why sexuality is an integral aspect of the quest for equality between the sexes.

Claire He

Who Let the Dogs Out?
A Tale of Subjugation in *Rick and Morty*

Are we enslaving our pets? That is the question that "Lawnmower Dog"—season 1, episode 2 of *Rick and Morty*—compels us to consider. In this second installment of the hilariously satirical adult cartoon, dogs become intelligent and nearly execute a takeover of Earth as revenge for humanity's subjugation of their species. Though the plot, artwork, and jokes may all be rather ludicrous, "Lawnmower Dog" presents us with very real questions regarding the ethics of subjugation and domination. I will analyze those questions through the lens of Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* to claim that "Lawnmower Dog" aims to expose how modern society continues to perpetuate subjugation even as it outwardly rejects it, using a hypothetical timeline in which dogs enslave the human race to draw connections to the subjugation latent in our past, present, and future. In this manner, *Rick and Morty* threatens our sense of normality.

Ryan Q. Nhu

It Matters What You Call a Thing

It's possible to name everything and to destroy the world.
– Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam to Identity*

In her debut poetry collection, *Look*, Iranian-American writer Solmaz Sharif examines the precision, or lack thereof, with which the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are spoken about. By weaving into her poetry vocabulary from the Department of Defense's (DOD) *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*—vocabulary whose definitions convolute understandings of violence—Sharif exposes the normalizing effects of nomenclative practices. Using the work of Robert Orsi, this paper explores how nomenclature can limit conversations on any given topic, including the grotesqueness of war as depicted in Sharif's poems. I will consider how the grotesque, as narratologists Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund have noted, has historically figured into literature as a means of standardizing violence. Yet *Look* operates in an entirely opposite manner: it counteracts the DOD's seemingly ordinary words, which serve to abstract conceptions of war and violence, of loss and pain. By consulting Anna Journey's theories on how contemporary poetry can incorporate grotesquerie to present "diverse ways of being in the world," this essay posits that *Look* not only re-appropriates language stolen by the DOD, but, in doing so, also reclaims the history and narratives of Sharif and her people, both of which have been systematically silenced.

Katherine Shiu

Educational Brainwashing in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*:
An Exploration of Student Impressionability Under Fascist Educators

Fascism is all too often associated with European dictatorships of the early twentieth century. The political ideology centered on authoritative leaders evokes thoughts of Hitler and Mussolini, both of whom played a large role in the Second World War. However, an examination of Miss Brodie in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* reveals that fascist tendencies are found in normalized aspects of life, including aspects of the educational system such as standard academics and religious teachings. In fact, I argue that the subtlety of Miss Brodie's fascism is increased through her teacherly role, which makes her students unaware of the manipulation. In this paper, I reveal how Miss Brodie's personality and dedication to being a good teacher leads her to control the fates of the Brodie set. Furthermore, I offer that her rebellion against the school's curriculum shows how the education system is fascist in itself, and that perhaps it is important to have unconventional teachers who challenge the norm so as to facilitate more well-rounded growth in their students.

Stranger Things

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

Justin Hu

Actions Speak Louder Than Words:
Technology as a Hindrance to the Active Activist

In John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, Griffin documents his experiences with the white bystanders in the South who claim to support desegregation but never take meaningful action against it. Although Griffin's experiences took place decades ago, these issues are still prevalent. In the wake of numerous school shootings, most recently in Parkland, we have seen gun-related activism take flight. However, much of today's activism takes place online, fueling what researchers have called "slacktivism." Joining marches and posting online reinforces our own integrity, but is not sufficient to make us allies of modern social movements. Rather, many become the white bystanders of *Black Like Me*, thriving on privilege and idly watching the movement from afar. To be true allies, we must consider the role that technology plays as a tool of activism and distinguish the ways in which we can actually contribute to the causes we are passionate for.

Divya Narayanan

This Is What Dreams Are Made of:
Normativity and Marriage in *Inception*

This paper examines how Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception* redefines and shapes the concept of marriage through the relationship between Mal and Cobb. With the new technology of dream hacking introduced, Cobb and Mal are able to shape their idea of a perfect life and grow old together all within a single dream of a couple hours. By placing Cobb and Mal's marriage in the dream world and outside of cultural and societal bounds, *Inception* displays how the attempt to fit into a cookie-cutter version of success is, in fact, the basis for marriage and can corrupt the pure love that stems from marriage. After applying Lee Edelman's theory on reproductive futurism, Mal's character becomes the cautionary tale of what happens when we become so obsessed with "normal" standards for reality that we are willing to let go of our own hold on reality, when the ticking clock on the human life becomes so loud that we can longer hear the ones we love.

Anna Podkowski

(In)coherent:
The Narrative Ambivalence of *The Waste Land*

Since its release, the defining characteristic of T. S. Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land* has been its inaccessibility. Eliot writes in seven languages, skillfully weaving in both allusions and direct quotations from a variety of famous and obscure works, building unique barriers to immediate understanding. Current scholarship surrounding *The Waste Land* almost entirely perpetuates the impenetrability of the poem, dismissively labeling it as an incomprehensible anti-narrative. One salient example of this scholarship is Clare Kinney's essay "Fragmentary Excess, Copious Dearth," which attempts to dissuade readers from finding a cohesive narrative within the "frustrated and frustrating epiphanies" of the poem. Her warning is unmerited. Although *The Waste Land* is structurally and thematically complex, it draws upon clear narrative lines and is not the aesthetic bricolage many claim it to be. I will demonstrate the coexistence of moments of clarity and moments of confounding, most notably through Eliot's use of multilingual allusion, and show that confusion and comprehension are not mutually exclusive. It may sound impossible to simultaneously understand and not understand, but if there were ever a poem to effectively convey that cognitive dissonance, it is *The Waste Land*.

Abigail Song

How I Met (My) Mother:
Lesbianism in *The Haunting of Hill House*

The house was waiting now, she thought, and it was waiting for her; no one else could satisfy it.
– Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

"The uncanny" is the Freudian concept that identifies something as frightening because it is both familiar yet unfamiliar. Notably, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* incorporates the uncanny into its narrative about four characters investigating the supernatural properties of Hill House. Protagonist Eleanor Vance demonstrates a need for relationships, engaging in a relationship (with lesbian subtext) with Theodora, a female companion, only to realize that she belongs in a mother-daughter relationship with Hill House. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the uncanny prefaces moments of lesbianism and maternalism to suggest that, though seemingly disparate, these relationships are comparable to each other. Through the uncanny, the relationship between Eleanor and Hill House rationalizes supernatural events in a manner that connects horror to romance.

Sara Sowins

Dressed to Kill:
Adolescent Subcultures from the 1950s to 1970s

When you chose your outfit today, were you making a statement? What people wear influences others' perceptions of them. Teenagers are especially conscious of this phenomenon. This is reflected by the multitude of subcultural movements with recognizable fashion styles throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. These subcultures were a departure from society's standards of normalcy, and each took on their own rituals and styles, often following a specific icon. Focusing on the Rocker subculture and applying the sociological theory of the reference idol, I will illustrate the significance of *Rebel Without a Cause* actor James Dean's influence on rebellious style. By understanding the influence of a reference icon on the budding teenage mind, one can further understand the subculture as a milestone in adolescent development that we must redefine for generations to come.

Adeline Wang

Peele-ing Back the Layers:
Racial Feminism and Rose Armitage's Role in *Get Out*

The final scene of Jordan Peele's 2017 psychological thriller *Get Out*: protagonist Chris Washington sits shell-shocked in his friend Rod's car as Rod stares at Rose's body, still bleeding out, and admonishes Chris, "I told you not to go in that house." Rose Armitage, *Get Out*'s antagonist, seems to fit the widely perpetuated "psycho ex-girlfriend" trope, which reduces women and their motivations to a gimmicky sidenote. After all, she manipulates and nearly kills her boyfriend. However, I believe that Rose is only such a manipulator because of patriarchal and societal pressures. Film scholar Mary Ann Doane proposes that women who hyper-feminize themselves, or don false masks, do so in an effort to appear less of a threat to the patriarchy, and are then more able to secretly wrest some power back from it. I believe that Rose's delicate webs of coercion are so subtle that, though she cannot necessarily "defeat" the patriarchy, she is able to exert control over her own victims, at least within the short timeframe in which she retains influence. Thus, I would like to explore how her role is widely reflective of our inability to reconcile the puppets portrayed on screen with living, three-dimensional women.

Neither Here Nor There

Moderated by Professor William Handley
Department of English

Aaron Ghrist

We Are Our Projections of Ourselves:
Reconciling Active Identity Presentation in *Middlesex* with Butlerian Identity Continuity

I stood in the door for an hour, maybe two. I lost track after a while,
happy to be home, weeping for my father, and thinking about what was next.
– Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*

Middlesex by Jeffery Eugenides acts as a comprehensive analysis of both identity formation and the role of identity in relation to society. I will perform a close reading of crucial scenes relating to the formation of Cal's identity to better understand his active choices of identity presentation to individuals in society. I will particularly emphasize the significant difference between active identity choice and recessive determinism, focusing on how the former represents a nascent shift from previous foundational analyses of identity. With this new idea that the way in which we present ourselves as individuals is a major influence on our identity, we can turn to prominent identity theorist Judith Butler. I will engage with Butler's ideas of identity interactions in *Undoing Gender* to show how she does not directly address the complex relationship we observe in *Middlesex*. This will allow us to show connecting points between both texts to derive the effect that self-presentation has on identity. This "self-convolution" of both texts will forge a natural extension of Butler's ideas to show the underdeveloped relationship between the identity of the self and the ideas of social normativity.

Young-Kyung Kim

Programming the Future:
Rememory in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

A cyborg body promises unorthodox strength, an escape from flesh and blood, a choice to be programmed and not born—after all, birth seems to come with catches of all kinds. Cyborg literature embraces this dissatisfaction with the human body and desire for omniscience; it forgets the possibility of introducing human error into this new disconnect between the ghost and the shell. I will examine how that space becomes a foundation for existence as well as abuse. Specifically, I reconsider the spatial dimensions of trauma through the lens of Toni Morrison's concept of "rememory" in Mamoru Oshii's acclaimed film, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. Our futures and our bodies are neither really imagined nor real; they are spaces that can be manipulated. By allowing viewers to actually relive an alternative future and place in which to store their identities and their hopes, Oshii uses the setting of *Ghost* to reappropriate traumatic narratives and upend traditional hierarchies.

Claire Liu

Reappropriating the Appropriated:
Borrowed Rhetoric in *WHEREAS*

"Everything is in the language we use," remarks Layli Long Soldier in her 2017 debut book of poetry, *WHEREAS*. Long Soldier, an Oglala Lakota poet, emphasizes the power of language throughout *WHEREAS* to respond to the U.S. government's 2010 "Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans," which apologizes for the history of violence against indigenous peoples. This paper analyzes specific passages to examine how Long Soldier's experimental prose and manipulation of government rhetoric challenges the sincerity of the Apology. However, her appropriative and parodic techniques are not unprecedented. I cite both Guy Debord's strategy of *détournement* and Jason Edward Black's research on Native-colonizer relations to argue that Long Soldier's tactics continue an indigenous tradition of *détourning*, or repurposing, colonizing rhetoric. I also reference Ashley Woodson's research on master narratives and Craig Womack's motion for Native American literary separatism to understand *WHEREAS* through a narrative focus. Using the same rhetorical devices that were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to oppress Native Americans, the Congressional Apology defends the United States' colonialist and racist master narrative. Thus, I ultimately argue that Long Soldier's reappropration

of such devices presents *WHEREAS* as a Native American narrative that empowers the indigenous voice and counters the United States' master narrative.

Maya Rajani

Choices and Voices:
The Female Body and Power Dynamics in *It Follows*

David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* takes the audience on an emotional rollercoaster as the main character, Jay, experiences rape, objectification, and attempted murder all within the first twenty minutes of the film. This paper explores the objectification of the female body in *It Follows* and the consequences that unfold from this film's portrayal of female sexuality. Accompanying characters assume Jay, a teenage female, to be nothing more than an idle body for male consumption. This objectification of her sexuality leads to the transmission of a deadly curse into her body. While it is harmful to Jay in many ways, I will argue that it also leads to her ultimate realization that she holds much more power than she thought she did. Jay finds her voice in the form of autonomy. While Jay finds a way to transform this deadly situation into an ability to grow in strength, other characters are not so lucky. As men and women alike continue to objectify Jay, they slowly bring about their own demises. This is all an effort by Mitchell to make everyone more conscious of their actions after seeing an example of the maltreatment of women backfire onto the perpetrators.

Nathan Romo

Secular or Saved?:
James Baldwin's Mystical Tendencies in *Go Tell It On The Mountain*

Hellish and angelic visions delivered in biblical prose occupy the climax of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, when young John Grimes experiences salvation on his fourteenth birthday. As the demons come and angels fly away, John lies at the altar of his church, hoping to make his way to heaven. Baldwin's work, while an obvious critique of the church as an institution, supplies one of the most vivid and defensible salvation narratives in the American literary canon. And while its author remains outspoken about the dangers of the church, *Mountain*'s salvation narrative is legitimized through comparison to the broader history of the Christian tradition, specifically to American Pentecostals and medieval Beguines. I will explore the intersection between Baldwin as a secular author and John Grimes as a saved character. What would it mean if a faithless author like Baldwin created a faith-filled work? How does the mythology of an author affect literary criticism? Is James Baldwin a mystic? In my paper, I make critical distinctions and bold comparisons between Baldwin's theology and Christian history in an attempt to patch a hole of unexplored scholarship on the religious experiences of Baldwin's characters.

Shaunicy Sturm

The Truths of Travel:
How Cultural Insensitivity Affects Stays Abroad

You are walking down the street observing the neighborhood you have called home for ten years when you see a small child and her mother stop as the child asks, "Mommy, why is that man wearing a towel on his head?" It is endearing when a child asks questions about a world they do not understand, but unfortunately, we hear the same questions from adults on a daily basis. The cultural insensitivity displayed by travelers in new and foreign worlds creates an uncomfortable environment for both tourists and hosts alike. This frustration can be vividly seen through a thorough reading of some of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories in the collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, including the titular story itself. Delving further into the psychology behind cultural insensitivity gives an explanation for how it arises in people, and most importantly, how we might address the problem.

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