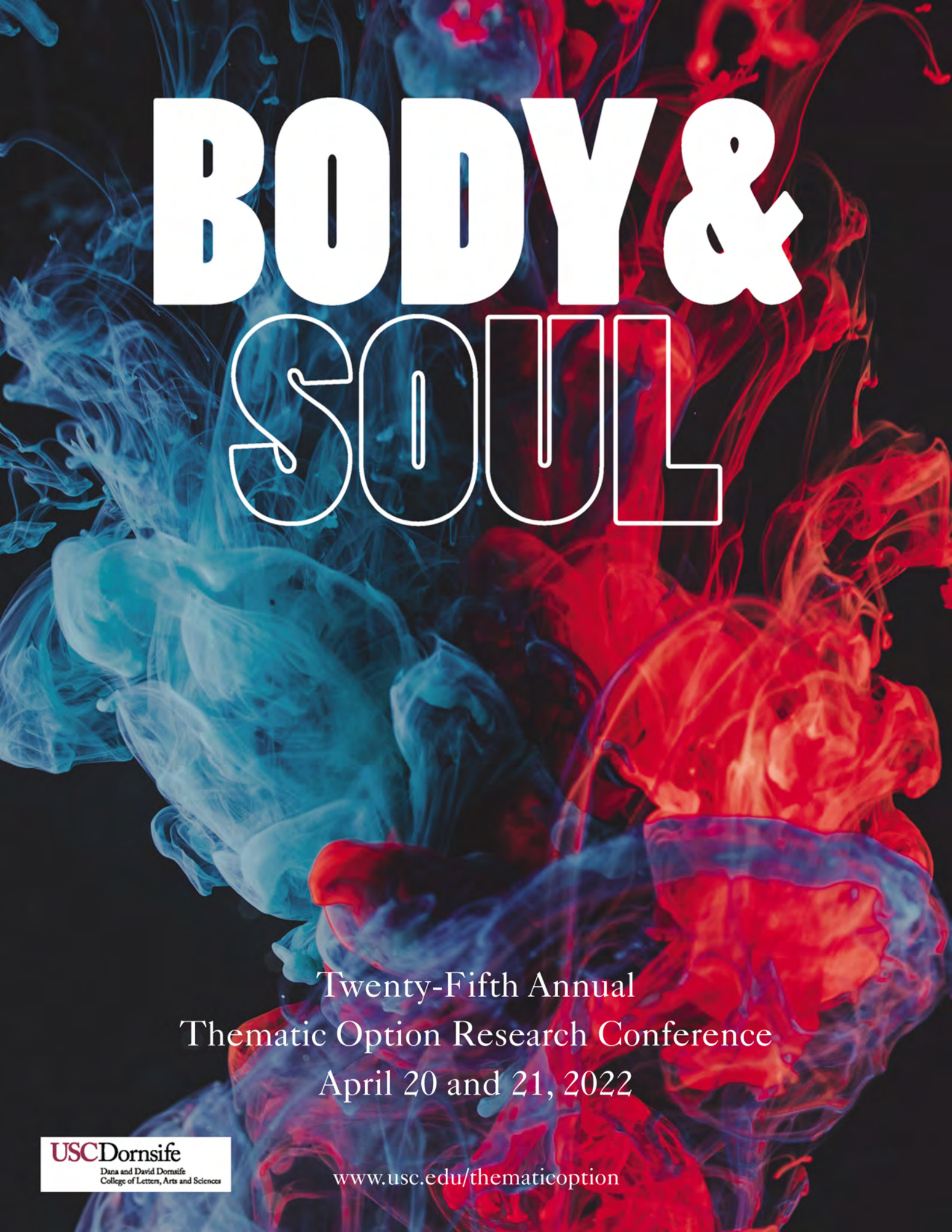

Twenty-Fifth Annual
Thematic Option Research Conference
April 20 and 21, 2022

USC Dornsife
Dana and David Dornsife
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

www.usc.edu/thematicoption

We are slowed down sound and light waves, a walking bundle of frequencies tuned into the cosmos. We are souls dressed up in sacred biochemical garments and our bodies are the instruments through which our souls play their music.
— Albert Einstein

Were it not for the leaping and twinkling of the soul, man would rot away in his greatest passion, idleness.
— C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

We are more alike than unlike, my dear Captain…I have pores. Humans have pores. I have… fingerprints. Humans have fingerprints. My chemical nutrients are like your blood. If you prick me…do I not…leak?
— Data, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

Embodiment means we no longer say, I had this experience; we say, I am this experience.
— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*

How come we've got these bodies? They are frail supports for what we feel. There are times I get so hemmed in by my arms and legs I look forward to getting past them. As though death will set me free like a traveling cloud . . . I'll be out there as a piece of the endless body of the world feeling pleasures so much larger than skin and bones and blood.
— Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*

But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.
— Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

I believe in a long, prolonged, derangement of the senses in order to obtain the unknown.
— Jim Morrison

To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.
— James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited, all my ancestors.
— Jorge Luis Borges

There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. As well speak of a female liver.
— Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics*

How does one get across the fact that the best way to find out how people feel about their gender or their sexuality—or anything else, really—is to listen to what they tell you, and to try to treat them accordingly, without shellacking over their version of reality with yours?
— Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Because the sunset, like survival, exists only on the verge of its own disappearing. To be gorgeous, you must first be seen, but to be seen allows you to be hunted.
— Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Is it possible, in the final analysis, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another? We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close can we come to that person's essence? We convince ourselves that we know the other person well, but do we really know anything important about anyone?
— Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

Many a book is like a key to unknown chambers within the castle of one's own self.
— Franz Kafka

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 a wide variety of 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, *Body and Soul*, to be presented as part of a panel. Each panel is composed of six to seven 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 dualities/binaries; inseparability; life and death; the mortal and immortal; reincarnation; the supernatural; anima and animals; vulnerability; sincerity and wholeheartedness; faith, religion, and spirituality; salvation; identity; mental health; neuroscience; identity; dis/ability; the organic and the synthetic; cyborgs; artificial intelligence; the ghost in the machine; altruism; existence; existentialism; embodied experiences; out-of-body experiences; near death experiences; drug use and abuse; illusion and reality; virtual realities; survival; essence; the essential; race and ethnicity; sex and gender; sexuality; love, lust, and sex; pleasure and pain; synesthesia; psychosomatic response; health and medicine; torture; enslavement; creation; the unknown and unknowable; inside versus outside; the body politic; body politics; or the student's own unique interpretation.

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keynote speaker
Professor Megan R. Luke
Department of Art History

Professor Luke teaches modern art, architecture, and art writing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Her research focuses on the histories of abstraction, collage, and photography, with particular interests in art reproduction, the history of sculpture, early cinema, exile studies, and theories of the image. She is the author of *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), recipient of the 2015 Robert Motherwell Book Award, editor of the comprehensive English translation of Schwitters's theoretical writing, *Myself and My Aims: Writings on Art and Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), co-editor of *Photography and Sculpture: The Art Object in Reproduction* (Getty Publications, 2017), and is currently at work on *Sculpture in an Age of Mass Reproduction: Critical History and the Crisis of the Object in Modern Germany*. Additionally, Professor Luke is pursuing projects dedicated to the photography of African sculpture; the mediation of interwar social housing through photography and film; and the transatlantic reception of postwar American abstraction. In tandem with these interests she has written on the work of Josef Albers, Ella Bergmann-Michel, Heidi Bucher, Walker Evans, Günther Förg, Frederick Kiesler, Max Klinger, Jackson Pollock, Albert Renger-Patzsch, and Frank Stella.

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

Hannah Brecher
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Shaneen Upal
Andrew Vu
Jake Wasserstein
Neha Yadav

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

schedule *and* table of contents

Wednesday, April 20, 2022 - *USC University Club at King Stoops Hall*

4:00 p.m. **Keynote Address** - *Scriptorium*
"Sculpture in an Age of Mass Reproduction"
Professor Megan Luke, Department of Art History

5:00 p.m. **Dinner** - *Main Dining Room*

7:15 p.m. **Break**

Thursday, April 21, 2022 - *USC University Club at King Stoops Hall*

6:15 p.m. **Dinner** - *Main Dining Room*

E Pluribus Unum

Moderated by Professor Peter Westwick
Thematic Option Honors Program and Department of History

Wednesday, April 20
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Carnegie

Saanvi Desai

Overstepping:
Drawing a Connection Between Home and the Tourism Industry

The region that is now Antigua was impacted by British colonial rule until it became an independent nation in 1981; after gaining independence, Antigua became largely dependent on its tourism economy. Jamaica Kincaid, in her essay "A Small Place," describes her home on the island of Antigua and how her connection to her home has changed over time. In my presentation, I will explore the ideas of neo-colonialism and endogenous tourism as concepts explaining why and how the region of Antigua was impacted. Incorporating the specific symbol of the library in my analysis, I will highlight the disconnect and the lack of belonging that Kincaid has experienced and continues to experience in Antigua. Kincaid's travel narrative, written specifically from the perspective of an Antiguan native, aids in our understanding of Antigua and creates a much-needed conversation about a tourist's influence on a region.

Jonathan Hayden

Breaking Out of the Machine and Becoming Byron:
Little Language in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

Virginia Woolf was a deeply experimental writer, and of her works, *The Waves* might be the most experimental—and of all the characters in *The Waves*, Bernard exemplifies this best through his concern with relationality and language. *The Waves* deals with six characters throughout their lifetimes, narrated to us in the form of stream-of-consciousness soliloquies. Important to these six characters is a seventh, Percival, who acts as a hero, leader, and friend. But when Percival dies unexpectedly, Bernard finds himself "outside the machine," and sees the world as if outside it. Time is linear, individuals are atomistic, life is causal—these are the myths of the machine, myths Bernard no longer believes in, myths the machine propagates through what Bernard calls "stories…phrases that come down… with all their feet on the ground." Instead of these stories of traditional grammar, plot, and phrases, Bernard longs for a "little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words." Through this little language, Bernard develops a "process of becoming" consistent with theorists Deleuze and Guattari, in which Bernard develops a new form of relationality to dispel with the myth that we as individuals are so separate after all.

Kiley Nomura-Huffman

Helga Crane and Her Metaphorical Quicksand:
An Examination of Identity in Relation to Self-Induced Exile and Errantry in Nella Larsen's Novel *Quicksand*

In Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand*, the title mirrors Helga's survivalist way of thinking, as Helga believes if she does not escape physical locations quickly, she will become metaphorically trapped in the identities forced upon her by those societies, similar to the phenomenon of sinking in quicksand. Traveling from the deep South, to Chicago, to New York, to Copenhagen, and back, Helga struggles to define her identity as a biracial Black woman in communities that ostracize her, as well as communities that objectify her, due to her unique complexion and cultural background. My examination of Helga's transient identities throughout her errantry will provide insight about how factors of gender, assimilation types, intersectionality, and non-violent subjugation influence the development of one's self-proclaimed identity in unfamiliar communities. I seek to challenge the idea that Helga's errant lifestyle serves as a detriment to her identity, and instead contend that her self-inflicted errantry is actually what allows her to authenticate her individuality. My presentation will argue that the fluctuations in Helga's identity, as a consequence of the various types of assimilation and non-violent subjugation she endures, reveal that errantry ultimately serves as an enhancement of one's identity despite initially harming it.

Vincent Hultsch

To Whom or What Are We Actually Connected?:
An Exploration of Interdependence Through Society and Nature Interactions

Connection has driven humans to form bonds and create entire civilizations. Traditionally, these ideas of interdependence are limited to those in which humanity creates a human-centric approach to life. This paper will focus on *The Land of Little Rain* by Mary Austin, a series of essays focusing on American southwest culture and environment, together with scholar Donna Haraway's expansive view of kinship to demonstrate a new perspective on community and expand what is deemed to have value in society. A reorientation of our idea of humanity is needed at this moment when issues of environmental development are of the utmost concern. The paper discusses Mary Austin beyond her legacy as an author to understand the influences on the work and the blurred lines of reality and romance that pervade the novel. Furthermore, the concept of environmental welfare and its relationship to broader community development will be

explored through the text and scholarly work. I hope to highlight the various types of kinship and forces that interact to allow for a more holistic understanding of the ecosystem to illuminate a relationship of interdependence between humans and nonhuman entities.

Michael Pincus

Just Like Paulina:
The Idolization of White Femininity in *Paris Is Burning*

Madonna's 1990 hit "Vogue" brought the underground New York City ballroom scene—populated primarily by queer people of color—into mainstream pop culture. In the documentary *Paris is Burning*, directed by Jennie Livingston, this was arguably achieved through cultural appropriation. Livingston's film, which focuses on the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1980s, has subsequently raised debate about white audiences' habit of exploitation and spectacularization. Yet, the members of the aforementioned ballroom scene may have inversely spectacularized, or idolized, whiteness themselves. Scholar bell hooks argues that members of the ballroom scene are at fault for perpetuating racism through their celebration of whiteness. However, I contend the competitors are rather victims of white supremacy and internalized racism. In *Paris Is Burning*, audiences are introduced to two ballroom competitors who idolize whiteness in different ways. Octavia St. Laurent longs for the fame and beauty of white icons like Paulina Porizkova and Marilyn Monroe, while Venus Xtravaganza wants to become a comfortable white suburban housewife. My paper will compare these two forms of idolization and analyze how the competitors' psyches and behaviors in the ballroom scene are impacted by an obsession with whiteness. I will argue that the white ideal influences how marginalized groups behave, even in their removed or private "safe spaces," suggesting that for these competitors there is no escape from racial harm so long as these white ideals pervade the fantasy life of the ballroom scene.

Kristina Shea

Are We Doomed?:
Human Hierarchy and Adaptability in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*

If she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be.
—Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

What happens when the social elite lose their power? Violence? Nuclear war? So it goes in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, which chronicles the story of Lilith, a Black woman who survives an apocalyptic nuclear war and is subsequently chosen by the alien Oankali race to help recolonize Earth. The Oankali claim humanity's conflicting characteristics—hierarchy and intelligence—doom them to their own destruction, and leave humanity with two choices: submit and produce hybrid children or go extinct via sterilization. Patriarchal Western order cannot exist in Oankali society, which represents an alternative, though imperfect, possible lifestyle. Many of *Dawn*'s characters cannot adapt to this new structure, especially the traditional hierarchical elite, who become vulnerable in their stagnation. Lilith, however, adapts easily, presenting hope for the human ability to alter social structures. The process of overturning Western structures, then, seems inherently dangerous because those in power will resort to violence before giving up their beliefs and positions. Hierarchical dualism, the subjugation of minorities by majorities and nature by humans, is essential to the construction of Western social structure. Therefore, in order to reject social hierarchies, we must entirely re-envision our relationships with the self, the other, and the natural environment.

Lights! Camera! Action!

Moderated by Professor Olivia Harrison
Departments of French and Italian, Comparative Literature,
Middle East Studies, and American Studies and Ethnicity

Wednesday, April 20
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Zichen Cai

***Princess Mononoke*:**
Interconnection and Interdependence

The Forest Spirit gives life and takes life away. Life and death are his alone.
—Moro, *Princess Mononoke*

Rapid industrialization began in Britain, starting with mechanized spinning in the 1780s, with high growth rates of the steam engine and digital technology, which is also the central topic of Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*. In *Princess Mononoke*, the young Emishi Prince Ashitaka acts as a bridge between nature (San and The Forest Spirit) and people (like Lady Eboshi). However, the discussion is not limited to finding a way to coexist between nature and people. *Princess Mononoke* incorporates ideas from Taoism, an ancient Chinese school of philosophy, especially the concept of "Yin and Yang"—how opposite forces may be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. For example, Lady Eboshi's social structure and hierarchy within nature or animals, patriarchy and protofeminism commenting on the pre-modern issue of gender equality, and modern technological progress alongside the cyclical way of nature. These are all large-scale social and ecological changes that come with modernization. Although they seem to contrast with one another, they somehow interrelate with each other through "Yin and Yang."

Juan Pablo Moreland

***The Harder They Fall* and Its Place Within an "Americanized" Genre**

My paper will focus on the 2021 film *The Harder They Fall*. Mainly reviewing the work of critics, I find that this Western film with an all-Black cast presents a fast-paced plot including classic, generic tropes. The film grips the viewer with "a Tarantino-style energy and grim wit" and a striking revenge-based plot. The use of a contemporary score with R&B and hip hop music along with various unique characters bring distinctiveness to the project. These modernistic elements allow for a fresh take on a genre that includes many tropes and stereotypes that the film breaks. At times, though, the film struggles to build a consistent plot or create an ethos for its characters. Thus, ultimately, *The Harder They Fall* hinders the intersectional message it hopes to send by somewhat chaotically underdeveloping its characters, but still makes a statement which, while not overly political, does have a place within the discussion of race in America.

Michael Musker

"I'm sorry that I peed a lot":
Frank Depictions of the Body in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendor*

Around twenty minutes into Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 2015 film *Cemetery of Splendor*, there is a nearly minute-long unbroken shot of an anonymous man squatting, defecating in the jungle. The shot is not for gross-out humor or even related to the story, but it is illustrative of the theme of the body in the film. The film follows the story of Jen, a volunteer nurse with one leg much shorter than the other, as she works with a soldier who is one of many that has fallen under an inexplicable sleeping spell. Besides the two central medical issues, ideas of body image, aging, sex, and sensory experience are discussed in the film. By investigating the frank and uncompromising way Weerasethakul deals with the body and its functions, discussing and depicting them nonchalantly, I argue that the film depicts the body outside of the Western sensibility. For Weerasethakul, the body is not just a vessel for the mind, but a transcendent entity in itself, inextricable from the magical elements of Thai culture all treated with the same honesty by his camera.

Conor Reid Patten

Examining the Morality of Self-Preservation
Within *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and "Crocodile"

Well, whatever you do, however terrible, however hurtful, it all makes sense, doesn't it?
In your head. You never meet anybody that thinks they're a bad person.
—Tom Ripley, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

How far would you go to preserve your job? Your reputation? Yourself? These are questions that are asked in the 1999 thriller film *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as well as a 2017 episode of the British anthology *Black Mirror*, entitled "Crocodile." Both works feature characters who commit seemingly morally gray actions and end up plunging down the slippery slope of the morality of self-preservation. Although they commit actions that are objectively similar in nature, we as viewers are somehow made to sympathize with Tom and to

despise Mia. In this paper, I explain exactly how and why these effects are achieved through the use of filmic techniques like mise-en-scene and editing. I will also be entering into scholarly conversations regarding Tom and Mia's morality, where the discourse coincides with the emotions that the filmic techniques are intended to elicit. Moreover, I will evaluate whether *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and "Crocodile" are correct to portray Tom and Mia in the light that they do by examining their actions through a rigid moral framework laid out by philosopher Thomas Hobbes. I will also discuss at what point these characters went morally astray whilst in pursuit of self-preservation, once again, within the context of Hobbes.

Abdullah Rafique

"Who's Home?":
Ancestry and Ownership in *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*

In Joe Talbot's 2019 film *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*, Talbot explores the complexities of gentrification, family, and belonging. We follow Jimmie Fails in a changing San Francisco as he attempts to take care of and regain ownership of his childhood home. Like his father, he lies and tells everyone who will listen that his grandfather built the Victorian-style mansion that he grew up in. He does this with his best friend Mont, who later reveals to the audience that the house was built decades earlier by strangers, making Jimmie's claims invalid and his quest seemingly unreasonable. Thus, Jimmie's lie poses a question: what is the relationship between ancestry and the validity of ownership? Analyzing the portrayal of gentrification, the connections between owners and their belongings, and broader cultural settings shows a nuanced portrayal of heritage and ownership. While inheritance does justify some level of ownership, Jimmie's lie does not invalidate his feelings; instead, it signals a sense of defensiveness created out of a lack of inheritance born out of an unjust history. Jimmie's lie is formed out of a need to create an unnecessary identity and one he does not have because of centuries of oppression. In other words, while ownership is important and tied to heritage, observing *The Last Black Man in San Francisco* helps demonstrate how it does not define a person.

Yunxiu "Coco" Tang

Does Individualism Really Exist?:
A Close Reading of *Sorry to Bother You*

The aim of this paper is to discuss the definition of individualism and whether it really exists in Boots Riley's film *Sorry to Bother You*. In the film, Cassius, a Black telemarketer, gets promoted by making more deals with a white voice. After that, he abandons his previous coworkers with whom he was striking for more wages and joins the elite white group. This action falls into the common definition of individualism: valuing one's personal interests over others. Literary scholars Rebecca Lefebvre and Volker Franke expand on the common definition and claim the essence of individualism is "freedom, independence, and uniqueness." Using Lefebvre's definition, this paper looks into Cassius's case and argues that he only enjoys illusionary individualism. In fact, his betrayal of his Black coworkers, usage of the white voice, and attempt to fit in with the white group demonstrate his inability to accept his racial identity and true self, which removes him from individualism. As an example, Cassius shows the viewers that maybe no one can reach real individualism, as people can never escape the group they once belonged to.

Tiyana Wong-Greene

Race, Performance, and Representation:
Capitalism Costing Authenticity

How are we able to determine if something is authentic or not? As individuals we are often given a stereotype based on our ethnic representations. Specifically, within minority communities, there is a norm to act in accordance to our given ethnic capabilities. Within a capitalist society, these stereotypes can be misconstrued, leading to the misrepresentation of identity. Ultimately, this leads to the central idea of ethnicities being manipulated into an economical niche. Passions that were once a force of love and identity are now used solely for monetary value. A prime example of this cultural appropriation is the 1940s film *Stormy Weather* which features an all-Black cast. There is a way in which the profession of dance manipulates the true expression of individuals such as the racist projections of African Americans. This performance in the film, once stemming from a love of rhythm, is now defined as "educated feet" for African Americans. As a result, this cast is seen for entertainment comedy rather than appreciation. It then brings us to question how we can preserve our cultures to remain genuine and authentic, without losing true value.

Relationship Status: It's Complicated

Wednesday, April 20
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Moderated by Professor Nancy Lutkehaus
Departments of Anthropology and Political Science and International Relations

Ryan Barnes

A Hero Without a Villain:
Unraveling Ashitaka's Perfect Morality in *Princess Mononoke*

In *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao Miyazaki explores conflict and reconciliation between the human and natural worlds. The film is set in the land of the Forest Spirit, a forest inhabited by spirits and divine animals that is being rapidly encroached upon by human industrialization. Rather than providing a straightforward good versus evil narrative, Miyazaki uses the film to investigate how humankind can peacefully coexist with Nature. Compared to the film's continually combative characters, Lady Eboshi and San, the protagonist, Ashitaka, seeks to prevent the conflict between the humans and the animals of the forest. While Lady Eboshi and San's animosity towards one another comes from their opposing desires for the future of the forest, Ashitaka's neutrality stems from his ability to remain "truly present," in the words of Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Through his lack of attachment to the past or future, Ashitaka widens the scope of who he considers to be kin to all those on "earth, including human and other-than-human beings," allowing Ashitaka to support both sides.

Joelle Chien

From *Oruguitas* to *Mariposas*:
Reading *Encanto* Through Edouard Glissant

Disney's animated film *Encanto* has brought intergenerational family trauma to the forefront of popular media in the couple months since its release. The film not only examines the effects of said trauma but also how it comes to be and how its cycle can be broken. *Encanto*'s plot follows the story of Mirabel Madrigal as she navigates finding an identity as the sole Madrigal without a magical gift and as she works to save the family's waning magic. Through flashbacks, the film also follows another story: Abuela's founding of the family and the birth of the Madrigal magical gift. This paper aims to explore the tense relationship between Abuela and Mirabel through the lens of French philosopher Edouard Glissant's essay "Errantry, Exile." Taking his concepts of the totalitarian root and errantry, I will apply them to Abuela and Mirabel to explore how and why they become who they are after going through similar displacements—Abuela from her physical home and Mirabel from the rest of her magical family. Approaching *Encanto* through the perspective of Glissant demonstrates that Mirabel's errant and relational identity is what allows her to avoid becoming like Abuela and perpetuating the cycle of trauma.

Andrea Morfin Valencia

A Daughter's Blending Relationship
Between Politics and Family

A Cuban-American daughter, Pilar, is left in the middle of her family's political clash. *Dreaming in Cuban* presents how a daughter's life intertwines with the political dissonance within her family. Pilar is raised with Cuban and American ideals throughout her life by her family. Despite this, her matrilineal family is divided by her mother Lourdes' capitalist ideals and her grandmother Celia's communism. Both of these women strongly support their political parties through their baking and music. But are both Lourdes and Celia's ideas too clear-cut? Pilar brings forward a new perspective on the generational blending of political ideas to define her family. I will analyze how different forms of rebellion in each generation portray a similarity with defending their political affiliation. I will further prove how Pilar uses her communism and capitalism to form the newly merged ideal that will lead her family. Exploring her use of Punk music and intersectional relationship in her family, this paper will demonstrate how Pilar's political identification leads her to question the overall effects politics has on her family.

Olivia-Jewel Pirrello

Those We Forget:
How John Carpenter's Original *Halloween* Has Diminished the Role of the Victim

Everybody knows the names of the most famous horror film villains, but what about the victims? Those who have suffered at the hands of psychotic killers are often ignored in favor of the men causing their suffering. Unfortunately, this trend exists not just in movies, but in real life as well. The portrayal of serial killers without clear desires or development creates the image of an immortal, inhuman, and unbeatable force striking out against oblivious teens. This belief is not only false, but does a disservice to the real victims of violent crimes as it teaches the audience to overlook their stories. Killers like John Wayne Gacey, Edmund Kemper, Ted Bundy, and David Berkowitz often receive the same treatment as slasher villains. This cannot be allowed. Any shred of morality refuses to glorify evil, and yet the phenomenon of slasher killers practically forces us to do so. But those impacted by violent crime should be allowed to tell their

stories. By exploring the image surrounding serial killers in horror movies, we can see what filmmakers need to change in order to shift the narrative away from the antagonists and towards the real owners of these stories, the victims.

Nikhita Rao

Villainizing Intimacy:
An Exploration of the Divides, Bonds, and Human Connections in *Heathers*

From lobotomies for breakfast to transforming into a serial killer before your senior prom, Michael Lehmann's *Heathers* is a social monstrosity. The 1989 film follows the alluringly vindictive Heather Chandler's clique, "the Heathers," their progression, and the subsequent social effects through the eyes of cluelessly self-unaware protagonist and honorary Heather, Veronica Sawyer. Within "popular mean girls" tropes, critics often focus on the lack of intimacy between the members, but fail to discuss why this is the case. Unlike most films of its kind, *Heathers* calls attention to the sinister duality of positivity and negativity that intimacy can hold within multifarious relationships. Through an analysis of the psychological boundaries of Veronica, an academic reading of concepts such as "relational aggression," and a blunt portrayal of the toxicity of Heather Chandler, my paper uncovers the degrading mental and social effects intimacy has the potential to unleash when misused by power figures. *Heathers* demonstrates how intimacy itself is often misunderstood and, through its portrayal on the big screen, has become a social construct often used to uphold unhealthy power dynamics in relationships.

Izzy Ster

Ram-Don for the Soul and Social Class:
Food Symbolism and Cannibalism in *Parasite*

Most people would not associate the famed phrase, "you are what you eat," with the 2019 black comedy/thriller *Parasite*. Maggie Kilgour's article "From Communion to Cannibalism" establishes cannibalism as an unique literary lens that examines the relationship between the "eater" and the "eaten" and highlights a possible dissolution that is able to occur within the two independent entities. Although scholars typically note *Parasite* for portraying disparities between the upper and lower classes, through the Kim and Park families, the usc of metaphorical cannibalism suggests an inherent similarity between the classes: a mutual consumption occurring in the families. There is a strong sense of metaphorical cannibalism cultivated through the film's usage of food symbolism, which visually implies the mutual consumption occurring in the families. The most prevalent example of this is the Ram-Don scene, in which the rich meat and cheap noodles overwhelm one another, invading the other's environment. The aesthetically edible and cinematic elements ultimately work towards emphasizing the malevolent actions between the two classes.

Cindy Xia

Frank or Fake? A Backstabber?:
Variations in Interpreting Cynthia in *Working Girl*

Aside from Tess McGill, the protagonist who bends the rules, breaks the ceiling, and realizes her dream as an executive, supporting roles in *Working Girl* spark investigation. Cynthia, Tess's working class best friend and former colleague, stands out due to her exaggerated makeup, her friendship with Tess, and her class standing—the lowest among the characters. Upon first impression, Cynthia is a sincere and precious friend always standing behind Tess, supporting her with words and actions. Yet in situating the film in the late 20th Century and scrutinizing the seemingly routine conversations between the two characters, Cynthia seems to be a hindrance to Tess and actually demonstrates superficial solidarity, preventing Tess from climbing up the social ladder. While acknowledging the many ways that Cynthia seems to be a genuine female friend who is indispensable to Tess' success, I argue that Cynthia ultimately is a problematic character that presents fake solidarity and tries to impede Tess from promotion.

Sign of the Times

Wednesday, April 20
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Gutenberg

Moderated by Professor William Deverell
Department of History, Spatial Sciences Institute, and Environmental Studies Program

Emilia Bracey

Dangerously Influential: The Power of Celebrity Complicating Individuation in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*

A white, tone-deaf pop-sensation with more money than sense: sound familiar? Zadie Smith's Madonna—sorry, Aimee—embodies issues of performative activism and cultural appropriation in the celebrity sphere. Such humble humanitarians are both lauded and scrutinised in the public eye, yet what of their accomplices and apologists who stand idly by? Smith enters into this discussion, relating her novel *Swing Time* from the perspective of one such accomplice: an unnamed narrator who grapples with feelings of separation from her own identity, instead clinging to those around her to gain a sense of belonging. Thus, when she becomes swept up in the high-society life of her employer, Aimee, she finds herself quickly embroiled in a quest to white savior-hood. Yet, what is it that causes Smith's narrator, a mixed-race woman herself, to so nonchalantly dismiss Aimee's blatant microaggressions and appropriations? Has she perhaps become so immersed in Aimee's world that she forgets her own identity? And, as a result, what does Smith's novel say to those who simply turn a blind eye? In guiding her reader through the narrator's desperate process of individuation, Smith reveals the poignant reasons behind her passivity.

Claire Fogarty

A Statement Overshadowed: The Pinterestification of Ari Aster's *Midsommar*

"Anything with a midsommar aesthetic to it is my WEAKNESS 😂😍" says Twitter user @missoliviasart, and she is not alone. There is no denying that Ari Aster's 2019 folk horror film *Midsommar* is an aesthetic marvel. The film is about American graduate students who visit Hårga, a bucolic Swedish village. They are met with sunshine, flower crowns, rolling hills, and generous offers of psychedelic drugs. An untrained eye may mistake Hårga's Midsommar festival for Coachella, so it makes sense this aesthetic caught fire on social media. A quick Pinterest search reveals thousands of posts using *Midsommar* to inspire wedding planning, interior design, and art. However, these posts omit what is at the heart of the film: a dark metaphor about fascism and tribalism. There are many scholarly readings of the social commentary the film makes, but in the popular conversation, *Midsommar* is often reduced to its surface-level aesthetics. In my paper, I argue that the virality of the film's aesthetics distracts from Aster's attempt at social commentary, thus rendering the message ineffective.

Arat Guneri

***Princess Mononoke* as a New Way to Perceive Otherness During Industrialization**

Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* is an environmental fable that has inspired audiences for decades. The film portrays the relationship between modernization and nature, between humans and nonhumans. However, there is a certain ambiguity about what Miyazaki means to do with this film: is he just trying to show us the world as it is, or is he trying to push us to make particular kinds of change? His depiction of the industrialization of society shows all the good things that come with modernization, yet it also shows viewers its dark side. Although this particular nuance complicates the view of Miyazaki as an activist, I believe that he is still trying to make us start a change. He questions how otherness and nature can coexist in such a rapidly evolving world. In this sense, Miyazaki is an activist trying to deliver what he has in mind about all the issues industrialization has brought to us and nature. It makes us wonder if coexisting with otherness is as bad as Lady Eboshi (who tries to take the forest for her industrialized town) believes it is.

Alissa Rojas

Beware What You Eat: Cultural Consumption and "To the Man"

Where do we draw the line between humanity and objectification? Although the answer may seem obvious, in "To the Man Who Shouted 'I Like Pork Fried Rice' at Me on the Street," Franny Choi accurately portrays just how blurred this line may actually be. In American society, identity and culture are often viewed as being virtually inseparable. This can be quite problematic, especially when dealing with issues such as cultural commodification, because it is not just cultural objects and practices that lose their significance, but the value of human life as well. In "To the Man," the man completely ignores the speaker's humanity and chooses instead to view her as an object of sexual desire, reducing her down to nothing but a cultural object to be consumed for his pleasure. Choi compares his perception of the speaker to food, even calling him a "candid cannibal" in order to clearly express just how ingrained this blatant objectification is in our society. I will argue that the man's perception of the speaker is comparabale to how culture is viewed in American society due to the "commodification of Otherness" as described by bell hooks. Furthermore, by analyzing the effects of

consumerism and globalization, I will examine exactly how this disconnected perception of culture leads to the further dehumanization of the "other."

Adam Wadhwani

Current Labor: Mechanical Turk and *Sorry to Bother You*'s WorryFree Company

This paper analyzes the business and advertising practices as well as the socioeconomic demographics of the workers of WorryFree, the fictional corporation from Boots Riley's 2018 film *Sorry to Bother You*, and compares them to that of Amazon's crowdsourcing platform Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The analysis finds that WorryFree and MTurk share numerous similarities, including their self-promotion message, business model, workers' socioeconomic demographics, and source of revenue. This paper also determines that Boots Riley's purpose for creating the fictional WorryFree corporation was to warn about such companies coming to exist in the future. However, the similarities between WorryFree and MTurk show that the type of companies that Boots Riley is warning about for the future already exist.

That Was Rhetorical

Moderated by Professor Margaret Russett
Department of English

Wednesday, April 20
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.
Scriptorium

Ann Chen

Tour by Words:
Education on Postcolonial Society in Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small Place"

Recalling the moments when we were scolded by our parents, the only two thoughts that really come to mind are: 1. I did something wrong. 2. My parents are angry. Through the passing of time, we then gradually understand where our parents are truly coming from. A similar idea is demonstrated in Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small Place." In this extended essay, she gives readers a tour around Antigua from the local perspective, presenting many of her childhood memories and the overall development of Antigua's society. However, alongside these compelling images, Kincaid conveys her dissatisfaction with the ignorant manners of modern-day tourists and the rationalization behind government corruption. Most readers assume Kincaid's attitude too abruptly and refuse to look beyond her straightforward voice. This paper seeks to analyze the transition of tone and the different literary techniques Kincaid applies in her writing. Rather than merely expressing her own emotions, Kincaid is educating the public as children, hoping to reach a mutual understanding of the aftermaths of colonialism in Antigua through literary tourism.

Krissie Essilfie

Where Do We Begin?:
A Journey Through Time in Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

How do we experience time? From beginning to end in an uninterrupted stream, or more like a roller coaster: starting, stopping, and looping around, only to end at the same place we began? Time as expressed in N. Scott Momaday's memoir, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, is more similar to the latter description in that the main body of the book is sandwiched between three introductory sections and two concluding sections, each one mentioning the idea of beginnings and endings many times. In this presentation, I will explore how this repetition of beginning and end creates a non-linear sense of time as experienced by the reader and serves as the context for the journey explored in the rest of the book: the journey of the Native American Kiowa tribe. The introductory and concluding sections of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* reveal that the journey of the Kiowas is in fact many complex and overlapping journeys that operate within a circular sense of time. This ultimately suggests that the Kiowa culture is not truly dead, but evolving and continuous.

Shiloh Gonsky

Dance and Music:
The Inability to Connect to One Without the Other

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* tells the story of a young biracial girl growing up feeling disconnected, unseen, and unheard. Throughout the plot, the narrator struggles to connect to ballet and the classical, white, western music that accompanies it. When the narrator realizes she has a gift for singing—not necessarily a technical gift, but one with charisma and emotion—the punctuation in the paragraph includes a number of dashes, which evokes a sense of discontinuity. The narrator's realization that she loves singing and that her gift does not include ballet presents itself in Smith's writing as incoherent thoughts and tangents. In my presentation I hope to explain that if there is a disconnect between music and dance, then it is inherently more difficult to connect your mind to your body. Music and dance utilize both mind and body, but in different ways—music is more sonic and aural, whereas dance is physical. The technicality of ballet and emphasis on precision and perfection can often discourage musicality and the emotion that comes with music. So, the connection to music or lack thereof can affect how one dances or understands music in itself. Like the narrator in *Swing Time*, I too was turned off of ballet because of its rigidness and lack of groove. I was not able to be fluid and creative with my body the way I wanted to. But I felt a connection to the music, which is partially why I decided to play classical music when ballet was not satisfying both my body and my soul.

Rianna Herzlinger

Adrift in a Sea of Grey:
False Dichotomies in *Answered Prayers*

To what ends would you go to write "the truth"? In his novel *Answered Prayers*, Truman Capote writes about the wealthy "cafe society" of New York he was intimately ingratiated in as he transforms his friendships with these high-class women into literary fodder. Due to its salacious nature, *Answered Prayers* has garnered much critical attention; yet most of the responses have concentrated on thematic patterns and public reception, neglecting to interact with Capote's unique writing style. My paper examines the textual language Capote—who is known for his astute and humorous metaphors to describe his characters—uses to mimic his larger thematic emphasis on the inherent ambiguity of social interactions. Capote elucidates how his clique felt secure in their ability to characterize others

as they vied to always know the most gossip—yet these rumors inhibited real understanding of one another. Breaking down the boundaries of truth and illusion, Capote operates within and exploits the grey space between these two binaries. Thus, *Answered Prayers* offers a specific lens by which to judge others, raising the question: at what point do our lies become preferable to truth, a better truth?

Azriel Czerniak Linder

The Lost Desert:
Effects of *The Land of Little Rain*'s Historical Nostalgia

Mary Austin's 1903 book *The Land of Little Rain* uses careful and precise language to describe the landscape and wildlife of the desert and allude to its strange serenity and beauty. Austin blends romantic language and realist descriptions in her prose to create a unique spirit of a desert that not only audiences nostalgically long for, but that she did as well. The desert landscape is currently going through a drastic change, and it was too at the turn of the century when Austin wrote her series of essays. Austin describes the desert that once was, largely before the perils of capitalism, industrialization, colonialism, and even tourism took over. She wrote at the beginnings of the conservation movement that she herself became a part of. Today, we face the consequences of these problems more than ever and the environmental movement thrives. I will explore the effects from the book's overwhelming nostalgia of a changed desert. Nostalgia can have negative consequences such as a refusal to accept the present, which Austin addresses in her chapter titled "A Bret Harte Town." Even so, to what extent is nostalgia a positive feeling? Does it inspire people to take productive action against a problem?

K. Sey

Consumption and Connection:
The Role of Cannibalistic Metaphors in *Beloved*

Everything in this room is eatable. Even I'm eatable. But that is called cannibalism,
my dear children, and is, in fact, frowned upon in most societies.
—Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Eating, a relatively ordinary affair, becomes somewhat uncomfortable to discuss when the eater and the eaten are of the same species. This is cannibalism, a term that too often names bodies of color as the cannibals. Toni Morrison's 1987 thriller novel, *Beloved*, explores slavery's destruction of identity through the story of a family of formerly enslaved African Americans who are haunted and symbolically cannibalized by the reincarnated spirit of one of slavery's countless victims. This paper analyzes the many cannibalistic metaphors used to illustrate the relationships in *Beloved*, highlighting how they deliver a powerful critique of slavery in the U.S. while combatting the image of the stereotypical Black cannibal. I reference the research of several scholars and the work of Morrison herself to explain how, although cannibalistic metaphors possess the ability to damage the image of Black bodies by linking them to an unsavory topic or reducing them to an item to be consumed, Morrison's focus on the vulnerabilities of the novel's Black characters amidst the inhumane acts committed by and against them serves to humanize these characters. Through her productive use of cannibalistic metaphors, Morrison flips the image of the Black cannibal on its head, making slavery and its proponents the true consumers.

Race Matters

Moderated by Jennifer Heine
Department of English

Wednesday, April 20
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Carnegie

Avinash Chauhan

Death by Misadventure:
An Exploration of Ambiguity and Identity in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

Have you ever heard of an identity crisis? Identity is often distinguished as a personalized sense of stability and congruence that typically allows one to derive a sense of meaning. Colloquially, it typically refers to any given community that shares a number of commonalities. However, Nella Larsen pushes the limits of the traditional understanding of identity in her novella *Passing*, which highlights the phenomenon where biracial individuals are able to be perceived as part of either racial group. The ambiguity inherent to the phenomenon of passing is mirrored within its ending, where one passing individual (Clare Kendry) falls out of a window to her death, yet Larsen never makes it clear whether Clare's death was a suicide or a murder by her sometimes-white-passing friend Irene. The ambiguity is only deepened considering that Larsen changed the final paragraph in newer editions to end with no confirmation of Clare's death or of Irene's perceived innocence. This paper will describe how this ambiguity de-emphasizes the importance of the killer and emphasizes the inevitability of Clare's death. In effect, I will highlight how Larsen portrays passing as an intrinsically negative identity crisis, effectively dismantling the concept of identity as an absolute binary.

Natalie Fortunato

All Mixed Up:
An Analysis of Racial Identity Crisis

Dark eyebrows. Thick, dark curly hair. Hazel eyes. Round face. Full lips. Rounded nose. Umber skin. No one race holds a monopoly over these characteristics, yet so much of who Westerners are is supposed to be determined by racial identity. Racial groups allegedly form the basis of families and communities, yet these foundations splinter once mixed race people enter the conversation. Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* examines the never-ending search for identity of an unnamed, mixed race narrator who finds herself caught between her outspoken Jamaican immigrant mother's progressiveness and her quiet, white father's contentment. *Swing Time* ultimately highlights the direct correlation between upbringing and identity and specifically cultural identity. Smith is able to scrutinize fine details by crafting a story in which a few differences among a countless number of similarities result in two incompatible philosophies. Throughout *Swing Time*, dance acts as both a physical and expressive medium. Smith uses the metaphor of dance to represent how two biracial girls can each spring and glide into their places in the world. Smith's writing sheds light on the paradoxical reality that multiraciality presents: being a member of many cultures may actually be more isolating than molding to one.

Judy Lee

The Race of Time:
Multiple Realities in Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom*

Tick. Tick. Tick. The hands of the clock inch forward, each movement marking the end of a moment in time—or so it seems. Alongside this clock exists another time transcending the standard structure of chronology, in which past, present, and future merge together—Black time, as proposed in Calvin Warren's "Black Time: Slavery, Metaphysics, and the Logic of Wellness." With this concept, I turn to Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom*, a retelling of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook." *The Ballad of Black Tom* centers on Tommy Tester, a Black hustler who accepts a gig at a white millionaire's party and discovers the Outside, the world of the monstrous Elder Gods. I plan to focus on a small motif within the novella—the conjure song of Tommy's mother, Irene. In exploring the time irregularities associated with this song, I will argue that Irene's conjure song allows Tommy to unlock another reality of Black time. However, Tommy's grim fate points us to the shortcomings of this alternate time and reality against the systemic oppression Tommy faces. Thus, we ask the question: can Black time ever overcome white supremacy? If so, what is the key to unlocking Black time's full potential?

Theresa Luo

The Asian American Scramble in the Wild and Racist West

Old Western-based literature has remained one of the largest and most popular avenues in media since the turn of the 20th Century. With wild story lines, satisfying endings, and alluring archetypes, the Old Western genre satisfies any watcher's craving. However, these films and books fail to include some of the largest immigrant populations that made these times possible. When examining this genre's respected works like *My Ántonia* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*, Asian American erasure is prevalent. With no mention of our contributions to building up a modernizing nation and the realities of exclusivity legislature, we cannot seem to find our "fit" in America. Additionally, our erasure in literature, society, and politics, has resulted in generations of internalized racism, hatred, and conformity struggles. Now, however, a new Eastern Western genre emerges; one that reclaims the Old Western genre for us. With

Asian American authors like C Pam Zhang reinserting Asian American voices and narratives, we begin to reclaim and redefine what it takes and means to be Asian American. However, as she tackles the model minority myth, we question if this is the answer to rebuilding our identity.

Abitha Nunis

The Dichotomy of *Us*:
The Complexity of Dualism Within Abjection

The most important kind of freedom is to be what you really are. You trade in your reality for a role.
You trade in your sense for an act. You give up your ability to feel, and in exchange, put on a mask.
There can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution.
—Jim Morrison

In Jordan Peele's film *Us*, the theme of abjection drives the power struggle of Red and Adelaide, who exist as tethered mirrors of each other. Two bodies—sharing one soul—fight to the death to assert their claim on the world above, both abandoning the underground shadows of the "tethered" ones. In my dissection of *Us*'s theme of political home invasion horror, my research analyzes the disconnection from the "antagonist" that created the "tethered" or two-soul experience while inspecting the "final girl" perception of purity and how that drives Red's choice for communal abjection. I also explore how the differences between humans create a perpetually polluted innocence towards those less privileged, as per the effects of post-colonial hegemony. I will draw from horror film analyst Carol Clover's The Final Girl Theory, French psychoanalyst and novelist Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, and M. Keith Bookers and Isa Dariseh's "Lost in the Funhouse: Allegorical Horror and Cognitive Maps in Jordan Peele's *Us*," thus, connecting the dots to the real antagonist of *Us*—not the tethered souls, but their creators.

Allie Vasquez

Liberation Through Community:
How "Industry Baby" Presents New Roads for Black Resistance

Though Americans' attitudes about race have come a long way since the era of slavery, systems that oppress and deny rights to Black people are still prevalent. The threat of prison and depictions of it strengthen the foreboding presence of the prison in Black mens' lives. However, some creators, like Lil Nas X, are using the prison to make a new statement. In his video "Industry Baby," he redefines the community of Black men that exists in a prison as a force capable of breaking down hypermasculine gender norms and the walls that contain them to achieve liberation from both. He produces a video that on one level is an anthem for the pride he feels in himself and his success, but on another illuminates a new path for resistance of the white supremacist power structure of prison. "Industry Baby" presents a different look at the prison by using it as a setting to show confidence and pride in identity. It eventually displays a literal prison break to symbolize Lil Nas X breaking out of the expectations and rules that other people have placed on him. In doing so, "Industry Baby" presents a new look at how differently Black suffering and Black joy are valued, and raises questions about where the line between exploitation and reclamation lies.

Head Space

Moderated by Dr. Richard Edinger
Thematic Option Honors Program

Wednesday, April 20
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Rachelle DeSantis

Looking Beneath the Surface of Unlikable Characters:
Work and Mental Health in *The New Me*

Halle Butler's character Millie in *The New Me* is often misjudged by readers as being an unlikable woman with a poor attitude and lack of ambition. Millie is a thirty-year old who floats between temp agency jobs, spends her time self-deprecating, drinking, and zoning out in a state of exhaustive depression—and it is understandable to see why her character does not necessarily give readers the best first impression. But this view is an incorrect portrayal of what Butler intends Millie to represent. Millie's character and her struggles are representative of a larger generation of individuals whose mental health is constantly wrecked by capitalistic pressures. In this paper, I explore how Millie's character functions as an individual struggling with symptoms of depression and burnout caused by a detrimental work culture. Her character must be viewed in the context of a hyper-capitalist world where people are obsessively defined by their work-life and productivity. This paper claims that empathizing with Millie as a complex individual struggling with work-induced mental health issues reveals Butler's deeper commentary about the harmful effects of capitalism on one's mental state.

Shreyas Iyer

Forgetting Facts:
Exploring Gaps in Narrative Recollection in *Passing*

A true story is only as truthful as its narrator. Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* tells the tragic tale of a light-skin woman's introduction, acceptance, and eventual expulsion from Black society through the lens of a light-skin peer. Importantly, the story is told enigmatically; the narrator, Irene Redfield, has significant trouble remembering facts surrounding the plot. She rarely seems to "know" things; rather, she "recalls" things and "seems to know" things. To seem to know something, or to at least admit that the story is based on an individual's memory, seems to imply that important information is omitted. While the use of words like "recall" or "remember" may seem mundane, and, as a result, might be skipped over, they have significance in the way readers interact with information presented in the text. Larsen presents Irene as a deeply troubled young woman who struggles with repressed trauma that arises from her desire to be like her more attractive and charismatic peer, Clare Kendry. Her consumption with this idea obscures her version of reality. Understanding the basis behind Irene's narrative gaps in *Passing* gives insight into the subtle yet crucial methods by which Larsen obfuscates seemingly clear details about the selected text.

Aivy Levan

Rx—Dance:
Dance Therapy in Joseph Cassara's *The House of Impossible Beauties*

The body says what words cannot.
—Martha Graham

Life is defined as the time period bound by birth and death. But what does it mean to live in the face of death? In Joseph Cassara's *The House of Impossible Beauties*, dance is revealed to be a mode of expression that reconnects people to their bodies, allowing them to confront their mortality on a physical and psychological level. In order to cope with his AIDS diagnosis, Hector unknowingly employs dance/movement therapy (DMT): the psychotherapeutic use of movement that furthers the emotional, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual. Cassara alludes to the potential of DMT to utilize the candor that exists within movement, allowing individuals to literally and figuratively move through their emotions without necessarily ascertaining them. He paints dance through a lens of duality to foreground its ability to make someone "so happy and so sad" in concert, which drives home the importance of dance and its application in medicine and beyond. This is the impossible beauty of dance. The efficacy of DMT when used by patients, both old and young, is tangible evidence of this impossible beauty of dance, paving the way for limitless future possibilities.

GracenPeace Okafor

Distorting the Narrative:
Exploring the Contrasting Displays of Idolization Within *The Bling Ring*

She's got the whole world in her hands…"she" referring to director Sofia Coppola and "the world" being audiences of her biographical film *The Bling Ring*. The film dramatizes and documents the 2009 teen robberies of celebrity homes in the luxurious Hollywood Hills. Coppola translates the criminal events to the film medium to highlight the teens' reasoning behind their robberies. She argues that they were fueled by their idolization of and desire to embody the physical celebrities, exemplified by their treatment of Lindsay Lohan. This narrative, I argue, alters the reality of the film, as in actuality their obsession with the celebrity lifestyle is the main motivating

factor for the teens. Scholars tend to conform to this point of view, citing how often the teens use their acquisitions to replicate the extravagant life of the rich and famous, but hesitate to expose Coppola's manipulation of the audience. My paper rises up to the challenge, simultaneously revealing how editing techniques like slow-motion and continuity editing help to construct Coppola's falsified narrative whilst further exploring the teens' idolization of the celebrity lifestyle. As the teens illegally accumulate luxuries, they fall victim to the glamorized world of Chanel, Prada, and Louis Vuitton.

AnnaOlivia Schwedt

Mental Manacles:
Intangible Prisons and Their Presentation in *Moonlight*

Do me a favor: pull out your phone, go into your search browser, and type in "what is a prison?" Did you do it? If not, it is okay; I am about to spoil the surprise of what you would find. Your web engine will produce millions of results that contain words such as "building," "facility," or "center"—words that are synonymous with physical structures in which individuals are held for reasons regarding a crime. But who is to say that a prison can only be a tangible construct designed to incarcerate those who have committed wrongdoings? In a research study conducted by Julia Brailovskaia and Tobias Teismann, they discuss how internal and external pressures work together as a "unidimensional construct" to confine an individual to the insides of their mind. In Berry Jenkins' *Moonlight*, a film that follows the coming-of-age experiences of Chiron, a Black, queer man, the reality of this mental entrapment is revealed. The film's cinematic elements unveil Chiron's intangible prison, and I explore the ways in which both his sexual identity and his environment work in tandem to incarcerate him and the impact this has on his relationships and his ability to embrace himself.

Audrey Todd

Performance of the Self:
The Illusion of Identity in Borges's *The Maker*

Instinctively, he had already trained himself to the habit of feigning he was somebody, so that his 'nobodiness' might not be discovered.
—Jorge Luis Borges, "Everything and Nothing"

Who are you right now, at this very moment? Heraclitus said that we cannot step into the same river twice. Neither can we have the same experience twice. Our experiences are fleeting and ever changing, and none can be said to be exactly the same between any two people, or indeed even within the same individual. Can we step into the same identity twice? Or is it too like the river, ever-changing from moment to moment. Are we one or are we many? Jorge Luis Borges in his collection of short stories titled *The Maker*, explores this concept of the nothingness of the self. And what about you? Are you the same person you were ten years ago? What about ten minutes ago? Are you a different person after having read this sentence? It is clear that we all change and grow, but is it our constant identity that goes through accidental changes and yet fundamentally stays the same? Or rather are we ourselves change? Who are you right now?

Xinyan Tong

Magic of Reparation:
Magic, Vulnerability, and Intergenerational Trauma in *Encanto*

Magic, fiction, and trauma have always been intimately intertwined, observes scholar Eugene Arva on the notable presence of trauma memories in magic realist texts. In the recent Disney movie *Encanto*, about a magical family living in an enchanted hidden corner of Colombia, magic is likewise more than simply a plot driver and a flashy attraction for the audience. In fact, magic is created by the Madrigal family's traumatic past and continues to be shaped by the aftermath. In this paper, I explore how the transformation of magic (or the characters' attitudes towards magic) indexes the gradual reparation process the Madrigals undergo to reconcile with trauma. Through character and scene analysis, I argue that magic in *Encanto* is a political space where remnants of trauma pass down and play out, where vulnerability is rejected, reworked, and then embraced, and where necessary healing happens.

Human/Nature

Moderated by Professor Stephanie Payne
The Writing Program

Wednesday, April 20
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Gutenberg

Luke Alati

Gods Among the Forest:
The Divine Nature of *Princess Mononoke*

Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* demonstrates the brutal effects of modernization through a brightly-styled animated movie. The film depicts a fantasy interpretation of feudal Japan where forest gods are threatened by industrialization. While there is substantial conversation surrounding industrialization in *Princess Mononoke* in regards to recent modernization, little exists comparing the film to older ideological movements. This paper discusses the impacts of industrialization in *Princess Mononoke* in contrast with the impacts of the Enlightenment as detailed by Friedrich Nietzsche and Francis Bacon. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche pronounced that as a result of the Enlightenment, "God is dead … And we have killed him!" while English philosopher Francis Bacon detailed how Enlightenment-era science should make "nature your slave." While Nietzsche and Bacon wrote about the destruction of religion and nature separately, Miyazaki blends religion and nature. In his book *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan*, Aike P. Rots discusses how Japan's ritualistic Shinto belief system views nature as divine, comparable to how Miyazaki portrays gigantic forest animals as gods. This paper argues that by viewing *Princess Mononoke* through the Shinto belief system, Miyazaki asks the question: if nature is considered to be divine, can the natural world exist alongside modernization?

Jackie Booth

Migrants Through Time:
An Exploration of Universalized Migrancy in *Exit West*

What is a migrant? Conventionally defined as a person who moves from one place to another, the "migrant" label is selectively imposed on those in the act of relocating. The novel *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid challenges this definition, insisting that the "migrant" label belongs to every human being regardless of their physical movement. The novel narrates the journeys of two migrants, Nadia and Saeed, as they flee their war-ravaged city. In their desperate search for escape, they hear word of magical doors positioned in seemingly random places throughout the city, able to relocate people in an instant. My paper will explore how these magical doors erase the physical act of migration from the migrant experience, thus allowing for a more expansive definition of "migrant." Through various plot-based and grammatical techniques, Hamid universalizes the meaning of the word, demonstrating that humanity's shared existence through time relates all of us in a state of perpetual migrancy.

Melissa Chen

Tigers in the American West:
Humanizing Immigrant Representation in *How Much of These Hills Is Gold*
Refuses to Commodify Culture and Trauma

Hostile and discriminatory attitudes often support pushing racialized immigrants to the margins of American society. Chinese immigrants arriving in the 1800s to the West Coast were soon seen as competition for jobs and "threats to society," and faced several targeted exclusionary acts. In the early 2000s, immigration moved under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security, and verbal attacks from public figures have continued to criminalize and degrade immigrants. Attempting to increase positive immigrant representation, some novels, like the 2020 undocumented Mexico-U.S. border-crossing "saga" *American Dirt* end up commodifying stories and characters, packaging them for the reader's self-serving consumption and feeding an attitude no less harmful to immigrants: fetishization of their otherness and trauma. I argue that *How Much of These Hills Is Gold*, part of a new wave of "Eastern Westerns" inserting Asian Americans back into written histories of the West, helps lead a truly uplifting representation of immigrants. The novel transforms anti-immigrant rhetoric and carefully crafts its language to create a humanizing portrayal of a historically marginalized group while consciously refusing to exploit their culture and trauma.

Margot Dayan

Quantum Waves of Consciousness:
Understanding Existence Through Quantum Mechanics in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* is an experimental novel concerned with identity and existence through the stream-of-consciousness monologues of its six principal characters. Because Woolf has constructed this literary universe using the inner monologues of her characters, there is no objective reality in *The Waves*. Instead, readers get the subjective experiences of six people and their common search for unity. Woolf's exposure to quantum mechanics by her father provided her with an arsenal of metaphors she uses to illustrate the nature of union and separation between consciousness and the universe. If the universe is an ocean, consciousness is a wave, both distinct from and a component of nature. I argue that, in *The Waves*, Woolf identifies observation as the mechanism separating

consciousness from nature by treating identity as a quantum particle. She likens observation to the collapse of Schrödinger's wave function, which, like the breaking of the wave upon the beach, is a conscious moment in which we are briefly distinct from that which we compose. The seminal death of a character in Woolf's novel suggests that it is only in death when we are free from the limitations of observation that we become unified with nature.

Will Frederick

The Hot Mess:
Temperature as a Representation of Character in *Passing*

Author Nella Larsen lived in and wrote about a 1929 American society where light-skinned Black women must "pass" as white to access parts of society that are only available to white women. Some, like character Clare Kendry, fake their identities to enter into marriages with wealthy white men. Other characters, like Irene Redfield, only "pass" briefly when absolutely necessary. As the novel progresses, a subtle trend emerges: Irene consistently seeks to escape warmth, while Clare embraces hot environments. When Clare tragically dies at the end of the story, Larsen uses this recurring temperature symbolism to make a clear statement about the consequences of Clare's death. I will argue that Irene achieves a chilling emotional liberation from Clare's suffocating presence while Clare fails to balance her fiery Black and white identities. Through this conclusion, I will explore how Nella Larsen makes a statement about the dangers of passing, and how society naturally prohibits people from assuming multiple identities.

Maggie Parsley

Nature, Globalization and the Self in Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*

So the universe is not quite as you thought it was. You'd better rearrange your beliefs, then.
Because you certainly can't rearrange the universe.
—Isaac Asimov, "Nightfall"

Science Fiction has long captivated our imaginations with both fantastical, idealized imaginings of humanity's future and stark warnings of evils to come. As a literary form, it emblematizes both society's desires and innermost fears. Yet, since Western society is structured by and for systems of whiteness and patriarchy, these realized hopes and fears of humankind are too often grounded in a strictly white, male imagination. Nigerian-American author Nnedi Okorafor's novella *Binti*, by contrast, presents an alternative vision of human advancement: an organic future that embraces the feminine, the natural, and the distinctly African. Although Okorafor's globalized future rejects imperialist logic and hierarchies, I argue that competing pressures still emerge in her writing between aspirations to revel in universal interconnectedness and the desire to stay true to one's cultural roots. Thus, even in postcolonial imaginings of human future, the proliferation of digital landscapes causes tensions within rural and culturally isolated communities between preserving their ancestral ways of life and the desire to integrate into a globalized world.

Mixed Media

Wednesday, April 20
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

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

Casey Fleming

Sonic Storytelling:
How Non-Lyrical Elements of *Encanto*'s Soundtrack Amplify the Narrative

Disney's 2021 film *Encanto* follows the story of the extraordinary Madrigal family, each of whom—with the notable exception of protagonist Mirabel—is blessed with a magical gift. Familial tension over Mirabel's inexplicable lack of a gift reveals larger cracks in the Madrigal family dynamic, inciting the plot of *Encanto*. Much of this story line is told musically: eight critically-acclaimed songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda support narratively crucial moments. But, as my paper argues, take away the lyrics of these character-driven songs, and they still tell the same story through clever uses of instrumentation, time signature, coordination and timing of singing, and motifs. These details hidden behind the lyrics do the quiet, effective work of drawing thematic connections across characters and plot points. The distinct non-lyrical choices made by *Encanto*'s soundtrack sonically separate Mirabel from her family and reflect the dynamic of the Madrigals at each step of their journey towards eventual reconciliation, painting an auditory portrait of intergenerational trauma and acceptance.

Jordan Hanes

Playing God:
Deconstructing Divinity and Religion Through Role-Playing Games

Today...we use our power to fell a god...and then...seize our destiny!
—Shulk, before killing Zanza in *Xenoblade Chronicles*

Christianity has had a strong grip on world culture for a millennium. Numerous scholars have written about these effects on the world, and we ourselves can see how Christianity impacts our daily lives. Only within the past few centuries have people like Friedrich Nietzsche been free to critique and analyze a culture so dependent on God. One hundred and forty years after the publication of his book *The Gay Science*, an overlooked medium follows in his footsteps: role-playing games. While many view video games as purely entertainment, games are just as much a way to communicate stories and ideas as they are a way to pass the time. Role-playing games fit into a larger cultural tradition of media critiquing Christianity through metaphor and narrative tropes. Examples include corrupt churches and false gods. In *Final Fantasy X*, the world religion of Yevon, heavily inspired by Christianity, subtly manipulates history and the masses. *Xenoblade Chronicles* asks what a god truly is and whether the right to dictate the fate of the world should lie with them or humanity. Role-playing games serve as cultural snapshots of our relationship with the divine in the modern era and how we critique it.

Sara Mendoza

Razors and Justice:
Portraiture as the Key to Understanding Utopia in *Pet*

This paper explores what the titular figure in Akwaeke Emezi's novel *Pet* reveals about utopia through its representation in a portrait within the novel's fictional society, Lucille. The way that we look at portraiture can help us to understand more about the society that created it, and using this method to analyze the portrait of Pet reveals that symbolic visual elements likely relate to problems in the society of Lucille. In order to accurately evaluate the symbolic meanings in Pet's portrait, it is also necessary to consider the context of the painting through a brief evaluation of Lucille, as well as further contextualizing the meaning of the novel with regards to our own society. At the heart of the issue of forming interpretations about Lucille and its utopian facade is the subjective understanding of what utopia exactly means. Ultimately, however, I argue that *Pet* demonstrates how prioritizing peace cannot turn a society into a utopia.

Naru Nakamura

I'm Not Writing for You:
Frank O'Hara's Relationship with the Reader

What is it like to see the world through another person's eyes? Frank O'Hara's poetry does just this, transporting the reader into the world of O'Hara. Heart-wrenching agony and a fiery passion for love, the perplexing discontentment of living in New York City, and emotional turbulence with the self, are experiences described in O'Hara's poetry and those that are particular only to him. Because of this, O'Hara's work is often labeled as hard to understand or inaccessible. O'Hara himself admits that his style "may be the death of literature as we know it." However, I argue quite the opposite. In this paper, I study how O'Hara's commitment to specificity serves to establish the reader in a niche of instability and that this niche is where the reader and O'Hara find a common ground. This effect

creates an environment where his work can be understood through emotions rather than detail. Although O'Hara's work is entrenched in a myriad of personal experiences, his writing paradoxically becomes the clearest when distanced from the tangible world.

Dox Raskin

How Illustration Forces Empathy Within Damian Duffy and John Jeggings' Graphic Adaptation of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Dana is a Black woman from 1976 who suddenly finds herself repeatedly sucked into the Antebellum South in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Dana's mission is twofold: save her white great-grandfather and, simply, survive. In pursuit of this goal, Dana learns to adapt to slavery, compromising her morals and aiding the very system that subjugates her. In order to persevere, Dana goes so far as to help her white great-grandfather rape her slave great-grandmother. As a reader, this moment seems unforgivable. Nevertheless, a full and active understanding of the trauma of slavery is necessary to forgive Dana for her actions. This is difficult to accomplish, however, with Butler's writing as her style prioritizes fact over emotion and the story is only visualized in the reader's head. However, when presented with the accompanying illustrations from Damian Duffy and John Jeggings' graphic novel version of *Kindred*, the inherent violence of slavery is forced onto the reader. This works to augment the reader's capacity to empathize and understand Dana's situation. Through my presentation, I hope to emphasize the merit of graphic narrative as a means of expressing mature themes and the potential value of illustrating trauma.

Colman E. Sun

Asian or American? Why Not Both?: An Analysis of Barriers to Identity Realization Taught Through Multimodal Storytelling

More than 7% of the United States' population is Asian American. That is Asian American, not Asian, not American—Asian American. For many Asian Americans, their intermediary role in between cultures is a struggle. For instance, those of Korean blood born in a foreign country are called 교포/*kyopo*—those who have no association with their Korean roots. Thus, many Korean Americans find themselves with feelings of unbelonging, neglected by white people for their "chinky" eyes, and by Koreans who label them as "other." Asian Americans have thus been forced to forge their own cultural identities while overcoming the stereotypes they face, pressuring them to conform to a culture they are not native to. Karen Tei Yamashita utilizes different forms of reading—ranging from text, comics, and imagery—to preach the embracement of Asian American identity, a concept foreign to many. She utilizes this multimodality as a key strategy to guarantee retention of her message. Her writing empowers Asian Americans to break out of the white-normative expectations for Asian identity conformity. In doing so, the wall of historic oppression which utilized Asians as "proxy whites" begins to show cracks.

Queer I

Moderated by Lindsey Skillen
Department of English

Wednesday, April 20
7:30 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
Scriptorium

Sophia da Costa

Don't See, Don't Tell:
The Absence of the Body as a Tool of Gay Advancement in *Suddenly Last Summer*

Of all the works produced by legendary playwright Tennessee Williams in his career, perhaps none is more hated than the infamous one-act *Suddenly Last Summer*. The play chronicles the tragic life and gruesome death of Sebastian Venable, a closeted gay man who meets his demise as he is trampled and eaten alive by a mob of children, many of whom he used to solicit. Sebastian's actions, his horrible death, and the fact that he is never physically portrayed in the play combine to form an argument that *Suddenly Last Summer* is indefensibly homophobic. Many scholars have contradicted this argument, both by analyzing the intention behind the lack of a physical presence for Sebastian and evaluating the power of the play as a work of theater, yet the interconnectedness of these two approaches has not been meaningfully explored. In this essay, I will argue that the choice to not physically portray Sebastian in the play was indeed an act of anti-homophobia, a move that only worked because *Suddenly Last Summer* is a work of theater. This argument will hopefully shed new light on not only Tennessee Williams' intentions with this play but also the power of the theater to convey messages that cannot be fully captured through any other form of media.

Stella Horns

Realness:
Medusa as a Lens to View the Transfemme Experience in *Paris is Burning*

What makes a real woman? And does the perceived "realness" of her womanhood make her more or less dangerous, and more or less endangered? Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* was one of the first films to depict queer and transfemme lives when it was released in 1991, following, among others, femme realness queen Venus Xtravaganza through her struggles, her hopes, and her eventual murder. By taking Venus' experience and paralleling her journey with the mythic figure of Medusa, another woman judged a monster and killed, we are able to see how Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze affects their interactions with their own appearances and the world around them. With the additional lenses of Levi-Strauss' cultural binaries and the theories of queerness and liminality, we can follow their shared journey through the various demands of society. In the patriarchal societies in which both of these women lived, social performances of womanhood can be both a path to fame and fortune and a death sentence.

Marcel Lacey

Intersectionality and Constructive Grief in Danez Smith's *Don't Call Us Dead*

This paper intends to observe, define, and contextualize the notion of marginalized grief in Danez Smith's *Don't Call Us Dead*. First, it orients itself within the collection of poems, pointing out instances of what appear to be a unique feeling of grief directly correlated with the unjust systems and treatments of Black people. In their collection of poems, Danez Smith is able to reinvent a Black haven for victims of institutionalized racism: one that transcends traditional notions of haven in contemporary society. In doing so, they intentionally point to the need for such a place highlighting the uniqueness and complexity of disenfranchised grief. Secondly, the paper uses commonly understood models of grief to juxtapose the uniqueness and similarities of Black grief to what is the seemingly universal white-observed grief, stemming from a life without racism. Thirdly, the last section intends to contextualize these findings with modern anecdotes of Black grief and strife all while considering the social political landscape to be current and ethical when pointing out the need for more recourse as it relates to this new form of grief: Black grief.

Abby Lutes

Defenestrate the Women!:
The Relationship Between Femininity and Male Homosociality in *Rio Bravo*

What lifestyle do you associate with cowboys? Fierce independence? Brooding heroism? A spunky damsel? Heteronormativity and gender norms run rampant in the Western genre, perpetuated by these masculine tropes. But Howard Hawks' *Rio Bravo* presents a functional homosocial relationship between the principal male characters and their unique interaction with the female character, Feathers. The film details the adventures of Chance (John Wayne) who, while facing an ominous villain, must preserve the close friendship he has with his sheriff team and its coexistence with his relationship with Feathers. Discussions surrounding the film center primarily on the performative and toxic masculinity demanded by Western films. And any mention of Feathers resorts to a summary of the oppression of women as a result of toxic masculinity. I intend to examine the intersectionality of these discussions, considering the complexity of both masculine kinship structures and femininity. Through an examination of such visual declarations as the symbolic defenestration of femininity as well as spoken affirmations of homosocial love, I will highlight how male homosocial relationships absorb femininity through the domestication of women in order to legitimize and strengthen their own structure.

Tomás Manea

Queering Doesn't Make the World Work, [It Changes It]:
Queering as the Universal Solvent

How do we change the spaces we are in? Some of us use silly gestures, loud sounds, even sly facial movements. All of these are physical changes. Now, imagine this change, but include it as part of a greater movement to change not only the physical space, but to redefine rigid social norms. This form of action—truly a movement that exists both physically and metaphorically—can be considered as queering. This verb originates in the Queer community, a community that has long challenged the norms of being cisgender and heterosexual, but the action can be committed by truly anyone, even anything. Part of my rhetorical assignment lies in demonstrating how—much like the verse of Emanuel Xavier's "Club Kid"—queering can be accomplished through grammatical mechanics, one of many mediums available to the subject queering. Something as simple as the ambivalence of gerunds can be seen as a gateway to understand how the active choice to queer is a way to liquidize the binary, and introduce the fluidity necessary for unadulterated expression in a given space.

Emily Starr

If You Were a Man:
The Reframing of Homophobia, Gender, and Blackness in *Moonlight*

Men are strong. Men are tough. Men fight back. This is all that Chiron—the young, Black, gay protagonist of Barry Jenkins' film *Moonlight*—is told throughout his life. In fact, the valorization of traditional masculinity is so prevalent that he spends his childhood and adolescence being bullied for being weak, or more specifically, for seeming gay. This is until about two-thirds of the way into the movie, when the presentation of his masculinity completely flips: Chiron goes from a skinny, soft-spoken teenager, to a buff, hyper-masculine man. This paper explores why this switch occurs. While I concede that one might see Chiron's change in the presentation of his masculinity as a manifestation of internalized homophobia, I argue that Jenkins actually steers us away from this association. By drawing on other analyses of *Moonlight* as well as research about the effect of mass incarceration on Black culture, I find that the film portrays weakness as the problem, not homosexuality itself. In doing so, the movie separates Blackness from homophobia, which inherently establishes the compatibility of Black and queer identities, demonstrating another, more nuanced way *Moonlight* represents the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality.

Ergo Sum

Moderated by Professor Daniel Richter
Department of Classics

Thursday, April 21
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Carnegie

John Belton

"My Funny Valentine":
The Mysterious Usage of Chet Baker's Masterpiece in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Popular culture attempts to define sexual identity and gender as binary. Straight and gay, male and female, masculine and feminine. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, a 1999 film directed by Anthony Minghella, these defined gender lines are blurred. A fundamental way this was accomplished was the highly prevalent use of jazz music in the movie. Scholars have described jazz music as a way for male musicians to bridge the gap between masculinity and femininity. That is shown in no better way than through the recurrent usage of Chet Baker's classic song, "My Funny Valentine." Anthony Minghella uses specific directorial choices to create ambiguity regarding male sexuality. The ambiguous lyrics develop a tone of acceptance unique to moments when jazz music is being played. "My Funny Valentine" is the most relevant example of this phenomenon within the film and deserves to be analyzed. Through this essay, I prove why this song is so influential in the movie.

Alexandra Cardona

Nonconsensual Cyborg Identity:
Voice of the Black Female Body in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*

What is a cyborg identity built in a cage? "A Cyborg Manifesto" by Donna Haraway, the leading theorist on the cyborg identity, says a cyborg combines and transgresses boundaries of technology, race, and gender, recrafting the human body. In Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, the Oankali capture Lilith and the last humans from the uninhabitable, post-nuclear war world and place them on an inescapable spaceship far from earth. The Oankali genetically augment Lilith to increase her strength, memory, and sensory capabilities, cure her cancer, and strengthen her immune system. Lilith Iyapo is no longer genetically identical to humans. She is between human and the Oankali extraterrestrials, between her past genetic identity and a new superior one—a cyborg. Lilith crosses the boundaries of her own Black female body to create a more flexible and liberating identity, but we must also consider that there is a price to having a cyborg identity. I argue that the Oankali as advanced technological beings and her captors, have control over Lilith. Though they have helped her live longer and survive on the spaceship and given Lilith freedom, the Oankali have diminished one of the greatest parts of human identity—the ability to give consent, most importantly the value of speech.

Furui Guan

A Fear Beyond Death Revealed by *Malignant*:
Our Fear of Losing Control of Ourselves

In many horror films, we see a common theme of multiple souls sharing the same body, from dissociative identity disorders to having the devil take on the protagonist's appearance. What does this common "one body shared by multiple souls" motif in horror films reveal about ourselves and our fears? James Wan's film *Malignant* gives us an answer: that we are scared of losing control of ourselves more than almost anything, even death. This movie depicts horrible events caused by Gabriel, the protagonist Madison's parasitic twin that shares her brain and body. The "parasitic twin" in this movie combines the idea of "twins," which are considered ominous by many ancient cultures worldwide for allowing two physically separate people to be considered as "one" socially, and also a form of "multi-personality," a psychological disorder having two (somewhat socially) distinct people in one physical body. Both elements imply that we lose control of our own body since another entity is sharing our "selves." Whatever fear the body-horror film *Malignant* aims to provoke, it stems from something deep in our hearts that we might not even be aware of: our fear of losing our "selves," or our need to feel in control of ourselves.

Joshua Yee June Hwang

Dream-Like Cinema:
A Liberated Understanding of the Filmgoer's Experience in *Cemetery of Splendor*

The term "dream-like" is frequently employed to describe films of a somewhat ineffable quality. Some films are labeled as such according to their aesthetic qualities, while others force viewers to question the narrative's reliability. Both aesthetics and unreliability are highly present in Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasetakul's 2015 work *Cemetery of Splendor*. The film follows a volunteer named Jen as she cares for Itt, one of many inexplicably comatose soldiers at a clinic. Jen's time with Itt coincides with the gradual blurring between the mundane and supernatural. Encounters with a spirit medium, two self-purported goddesses, and cryptic notebook scribblings thoroughly perplex both Jen and the audience. Casual conversations about sex, melancholic phone calls, and spirit channelings piece together a devastatingly intimate portrait of Jen, hint at Thai political subtext, and lull the viewer into a trance-like experience. Conventionally, such varied inclusions might attract criticism. Yet I argue that by communicating an incoherent amalgam

of dream-like emotions rather than laterally presenting themes or plot, Weerasethakul sheds the didacticism of film and thereby allows it to carry unprecedented nuance and thematic range. I propose that *Cemetery of Splendor* is thus a seminal work in the canon of dream-like cinema, innovative in its free-form structure and viewing experience.

Justin Lenderman

Perception in Defining Our Identity

Our identity is supposed to be something we control, a way we get to choose to think of ourselves, but it is not. More often than not, our identity is out of our control and instead influenced by external factors such as experiences, values, and social constructs. Another way of looking at it is our self-perception is how we create an identity, but everything that we perceive or even imagine has traces of external influences. Jorge Luis Borges, a famous Argentine short story writer, explores the idea of identity and lack of control we have over our identity. More specifically, he looks at the intersection between reality and fiction and plays with this idea in his writing. This paper uses Borges' ideas to explore the level of control we have over our idea of identity and how our perception of external factors actually defines who we are.

Temi Ogunade

Does Anyone Else Have Mommy Issues?:
An Exploration of Shadow Work and Identity in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*

Within every teenage movie lies the moment when the angsty teen faces their parents. In Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*, this metaphorical door slam arises when the nameless narrator angrily states that her mother "doesn't exist." Beforehand, the narrator reduced her whole identity to abiding by her mother's wishes. Yet, even with her mother's tight grip, it was clear she neither stood first nor second in her mother's line of priorities. Internalizing this childhood neglect, or, some might say, quirky flaw, the young speaker begins to look to the world and not her mother to validate her desire for acceptance. Through this vulnerable state, our character falls victim to the strong personality groups she encounters. She loves the feeling of being a part of their tribe because she does not have to fully establish her identity to join, all she has to do is follow someone else's lead. However, in doing so, the speaker seems to always find herself not only excluded, but forced to exist in the middle—the shadow between body and soul, amplifying the painful reminder of her severed maternal relationship. In this shadow her identity can take the form of multiple things contrary to the stillness of her body.

Gavyn Stagnolia

Boys Must Be Boys:
Gendered Socialization in *Moonlight*

Gendered socialization of children is a phenomenon that no one is unaware of. Picture pink versus blue, toy trucks versus dollhouses, and gender reveal parties. From the moment a child's sex is made known, society begins to picture how that child should look, sound, act, and present. This gendered iron grip is a central message in Barry Jenkins's 2016 film *Moonlight,* as a young, queer man by the name of Chiron tries to navigate a largely binary world. As it is presented, Chiron is required to hold tight to the messages and morals taught to him by his addicted mother, and other role models in his life in order to take care of himself where others cannot. These messages are brimming with notes of societal gender roles, undertones of homophobia, and an aroma of forced masculinity. Chiron's struggle with identity, presentation, and what it means to be a man all fall back on his heteronormative upbringing, and so, using *Moonlight* as my guide, I will be arguing that raising children to fit gender norms, particularly those of "being a man," is a hindrance to their long term ability to express themselves. I will also work to explain how *Moonlight*'s portrayal of its protagonist's identity struggle is a product of society's desire to maintain the status quo by raising our children of the male sex to "be men."

Gender Trouble

Thursday, April 21
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Moderated by Professor Devin Griffiths
Departments of English and Comparative Literature

Evi M. Alonzo

***Princess Mononoke*:**
Remodeling the New Princess Look

When swimming in the ocean, the water is often opaque, making us nervous because we cannot see what is below us. Similarly, in the 1997 animated feature film *Princess Mononoke*, the people of Iron Town exclude themselves from the spiritual forest, viewing it as an inhuman environment. Their state of mind impacts how they react to the female protagonist, San, also known as Princess Mononoke. San's cross-gender boundary is othered through the wolf-like presentation that connects her to the forest. At the same time, there are two different embodiments of interests: San protecting the spiritual forest and Lady Eboshi, the leader of Iron Town, striving for an exclusively human world. Lady Eboshi transgresses gender boundaries by employing women as ironworkers. The film showcases relationships between men and women as a social norm with San and the male protagonist, Ashitaka. Incorporating other animated films like *Pocahontas*, *Moana*, *Encanto*, and *Ferngully,* this paper will compare and contrast the female protagonists to San. Throughout Hayao Miyazaki's film, the titular Princess Mononoke redefines gender norms in human and animal dynamics.

Ashley Cates

Cowboys Aren't Real:
An Investigation of the Hegemonic Masculinity Hierarchy within *Rio Bravo*

Rio Bravo is a classic Western showcasing the impenetrable masculinity of Hollywood's most famous cowboy, John Wayne, playing the character of Sheriff Chance—but what "ropes" this persona all together? Wayne's resistance to engaging with femininity—whether this means refusing hot women, refusing help from his posse, or refusing to offer gentle sympathy to his friends in need—helps to fuel his trademark as the roughest, toughest cowboy in the wild west. Each member of Sheriff Chance's crew has a different "tragic flaw" that limits their adherences to hegemonic masculinity, including addiction, emotional baggage, immaturity, and lack of physical strength, all of which Sheriff Chance is shown to be resistant to. In my paper, I will examine how the pillars of hegemonic masculinity help to shape the cowboy archetype and make John Wayne's character who he is, explaining how vulnerability and femininity is framed as a character flaw among the other characters in the film. My explanation of the film's masculinity hierarchy will expand upon how the unrealistic presentation of Wayne's character represents an idealization of masculinity that is frankly unattainable yet highly encouraged in both the past and present.

Mac Dilatush

The Subtle, Misunderstood Satire of
Violent Masculinity in David Fincher's *Fight Club*

David Fincher's *Fight Club* exerted an obvious influence on popular culture after its 1999 release: multiple men started their own fight clubs—places where two men fight while others watch—imitating the movie. To scholars like professors Henry A. Giroux and Suzanne Clark, such actions reflected *Fight Club*'s message: that male violence is necessary, good, and even "regenerat[ing]." However, like the men who founded fight clubs, Giroux, Clark, and other scholars misunderstand the film's stance on violent masculinity. *Fight Club* does not endorse it. Rather, it subtly condemns male violence through the unnamed narrator's gradual rejection of the fight clubs and their founder, Tyler Durden. The movie does encourage some masculine actions, though. It depicts men gathering in groups and benefitting from engaging with each other in attentive, vulnerable ways. Accordingly, I will delineate how rather than encourage violence, *Fight Club* promotes other forms of masculine gathering through a few examples of men's groups in the film.

Shari Hill

***Sorry to Bother You*'s Misrepresentation of Black Women Cannot Be Dismissed**

This essay examines the way race and gender are discussed in Boots Riley's film *Sorry to Bother You*. Leshu Torchin, the author of "Alienated Labor's Hybrid Subjects: *Sorry to Bother You* and the Tradition of the Economic Rights Cinema," sees the movie as a demonstration of the ways capitalism and greed affect the Black community. Riley and author Michael Martin explore Riley's aim for the film in the conversation "Boots Riley on *Sorry to Bother You* and the Matter of the 'Good Fight.'" *Sorry to Bother You* cannot be said to address the problems of the Black community if only men are represented. Detroit is the only Black woman in the film. She is an activist who uses her art and voice to make a difference. Her persona, on the other hand, embodies numerous misconceptions about Black women that are debated in the Black community. Because of her puzzling character, the great attributes that the film gives her may easily be overlooked. This essay does not suggest that Black women are depicted in such a way that they add nothing to the film, but rather that our absence and failure to make a strong message—as the Black men in the film do—is the problem.

Gage Miles

Border and Body:
The Geography of Imprisonment in Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*

The connection between land and body has become an indelible feature of the Western genre, emerging prominently in the works of early 20th Century author Zane Grey and his wildly influential novel, *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Preeminent scholars Kirsten Mollegaard and Emily Werner are fascinated by Grey's descriptions of geography, particularly his attention to border. Both scholars contribute to a larger discussion of spatial limitation as an analogue for social commentary, especially its applications towards the separation of the sexes. In my own study, I expand on the gendered connotations of limit and border and how they manifest through the imprisonment of women in *Riders of the Purple Sage*. I argue that Grey presents a dichotomous understanding of imprisonment as both captivity and sanctuary for women, and I examine specifically the case of Jane Withersteen's imprisonment and her own escape from Mormon captivity. I bring in literary scholarship, as well as art history, from the works of Mollegaard and Warner to analyze the geographical symbolism of Jane's imprisonment and how she reclaims her agency through an increasing command of nature, until she finally topples the oppressive patriarchy that once held her captive.

Emiko Ohta

White Authors Telling Black Stories:
Critical Race Media Literacy and Postmodern Literary Approaches in *The Final Girl Support Group*

The Final Girl archetype, so dubbed by Carol Clover in 1992, describes the last-standing girl frequently found in 1970s slasher horror films who is left to her own devices to confront the killer. By nature, an archetype is usually exclusive, but the Final Girl archetype is also racially exclusive, as all famous Final Girls are white. As a piece of postmodern literature, Grady Hendrix's *The Final Girl Support Group* challenges both the antiquated concept of the Final Girl and the difficult subject of writing across racial boundaries, as he, a white author, makes the decision to include the narrative of a Black final girl named Adrienne. However, Adrienne's narrative is not only weakly developed, but she is also murdered not even twenty pages into the novel. Using critical race media literacy, an intersectional approach applying both critical race theory and literary analysis to media in order to strategically examine the representation of race, I intend to argue that although *The Final Girl Support Group* fails as a piece of postmodern literature to appropriately consider how narratives involving race should be approached, it provides us with a strong example of how literature can serve to reimagine concepts of the past.

Alice Waldow

Blurring Binaries:
Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

Stereotypes are society's way of shoving people into theoretical boxes, and no stereotype does this more so than the gender binaries of "women" and "men." In his novel, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Manuel Puig constructs stereotypical gender binaries between the two imprisoned Argentinian cellmates Molina and Valentin, where Molina operates in a strictly feminine world and Valentin operates in a strictly masculine one. What is even more interesting is that Puig places these characters together in an isolated environment—a prison cell—literally forcing their two identities to put up with and slowly influence each other. I argue that their stereotypes are broken down throughout the novel as the two men come to know and eventually care for each other. I will discuss how and why Puig does this by sketching the charged political climate surrounding the subject of gender in the 1970s in Argentina and the United States. Puig writes his ideal scenario in the novel, where his two wildly different characters come to look past their initial gender stereotypes of each other and even start to display each other's traits, to the effect of convincing Argentinian society to become more united in a divided climate.

Inside Out

Moderated by Professor Frederic Clark
Department of Classics

Thursday, April 21
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Judah Adkins

You Will Never Be Free

You wake up, clear the debris from your eyes, wash yourself, eat, and at some point comes the mask—the cover you put over your soul when you first come into contact with another person or leave your door for the first time in a day. I do not say this as a statement of defeat, but instead a warning of this condition of mortality. It can seem impossible to break the mold that life puts on you, but I propose that there is an antidote to this syndrome: "performance." Zadie Smith helps concoct such an antidote. Smith's *Swing Time* depicts the life of a young Black girl becoming the victim of culturally-appropriated "homogeneity"—a state of conformity. Through this narrator, Smith communicates a view of free expression in our modern-day white-oriented society. The narrator's comfort, escape, and even identity is based on the freedom she gains from performance. Her life is told through Smith's open-ended three-act structure, an origin, climax(es), but no true resolution. This open-endedness shows her views to be "nomadic," as Kurpick describes them, and subject to change as one grows. But through that, she somehow tries to find a way to pierce the veil of commericalized thought and claim a sense of identity and freedom through the minutiae. *Swing Time* goes to show how performance and the arts are one of the only ways that human expression can create freedom, and, inversely, how art has been used as the greatest tool to create homogeneity.

Martin Aguirre

Smoke Signals From the Fire of Paris:
***Paris Is Burning* and Its Interactions with Gender, Fluidity, and Social Norms**

A fire can be contained or can be wild; it can be massive or minute; it can be devastating or comforting. But the fires that ravage throughout *Paris Is Burning* take on multiple of these qualities and pose the question of which is more relevant: the fire or its aftermath. There is no literal fire burning in Jennie Livingston's 1994 documentary about the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals of color in New York City in the 1980s. However, much of the critical acclaim it received was for causing the notions of gender and sexuality to "burn," i.e., to be deconstructed and rebuilt in "new" ways. Whatever "burned" in this documentary, however, sent smoke signals that speak to a different outcome from the promotion of diversity. Using Marlon M. Bailey's work on performance and race, Paul Verhaeghe's research on psychoanalysis and gender, and Nancy J. Chodorow's writings on gender fluidity, I explore how Pepper LaBeija's and Venus Xtravaganza's portrayals in *Paris* interact with "masculinity" and "femininity." Moreover, I aim to dissect these portrayals to show how they commit to an oppressive, rigid, heteronormative nature of the film, that turns the social complexities it conveys against those whom it is thought to support.

Sara Kahn

The Power of Gender Is Uncaged in Prison

Femininity is often viewed as a powerful currency, but this is far from the truth, particularly in prisons. Imprisoned women's femininity is used as a tool to keep them helpless and subordinate. *Caged* is a piece that exemplifies how abandoning femininity and adopting a more masculine, butch energy is a means of tacit resistance against the carceral system. Marie, the film's protagonist, is placed in an Illinois penitentiary, entering as a doe-eyed, naive young girl and leaving as an independent, self-sufficient woman who no longer depends on men for protection. Scholars have examined this phenomenon of gender presentation in women's prisons, with scholar Jack Halberstam stating, "The innocent prison women…in most prison films, enter prison as young ingenues but leave as street-tough dykes." Many have viewed this trend as an example of giving in to the carceral system by becoming more criminal, but I disagree. Instead, I will examine how Marie's alteration in gender presentation is an empowering choice that redistributes the power from the prison system into her own hands. This view of the film changes its narrative conception into a story of resistance against the carceral system.

Mario Maravilla

Societal Beauty Standards:
Delving into Body-Dissatisfaction in Relation to Race, Gender, and the Status Quo

During the holiday special of *Euphoria*, viewers of the show were given a deeper perspective on the beloved character Jules. Jules is a transgender girl, and throughout this episode she undergoes psychotherapy and dives into how she perceives her gender and her body. The way that Jules describes her perception of her gender, one can conclude that fundamentally she does not know who she is. Jules has tailored her life and her womanhood around the notion of "what men want." The perceived desirable traits a man would want from a woman are all inherently derived from the notion of Westernized beauty standards—standards that uphold women who fit them, and bring down women who do not. In this essay, I seek to break down the ideals of Westernized beauty standards and showcase how fundamentally racist they are. These Westernized beauty standards idealize a white person, and this devalues the beauty within women

who do not fit into this categorical stereotype. Additionally, I will explore how Westernized beauty standards also harm the gender development of transgender youths, utilizing Jules as the main example, as she describes how her gender identity remains in question during her psychotherapy.

Janelle Nwakuche

***Binti*:**
Creating Space for the Exploration of Black Women's Hair Through Science Fiction

…science fiction is uniquely suited to the herculean task of allowing our species to experience, understand, and accept the varied ways in which people express what it means to be human.
—Janelle Marie Evans

Her hair holds codes created by her father and taught to her by her mother and aunties. Always, she jumps to inform others about the significance of each braid. Traveling to a planet far from home, she holds her hair close and to high standards—until it is replaced with tentacles without her permission. This is the experience of the titular character Binti as written by Nnedi Okorafor. How can we judge the changing of her hair against her will in order to communicate with a species so alien to her? Naturally, our minds jump to the dichotomy of moral and immoral when trying to assess situations of seeming injustice. They elicit strong emotions, polarizing us to the extreme of one or the other. Should it have happened or should it not have? Choose one. It feels incorrect to let our judgments fall in the middle, until we are brought into another world where we allow our thoughts to wander, making sure to run through every objective and idea. Through highlighting the ways it can ease our minds when thinking of intense situations, I contend that science fiction is the creation of that other world where we can analyze situations with fluidity.

Karthik Srinivasan

The Misfortune of Pursuing Dignity Through Work
in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*

Anchored to the time period of the Second World War, this presentation will explore the psyche of Kazuo Ishiguro's protagonist in his novel *Remains of the Day*. After three decades of working as a butler under the late Lord Darlington, a rich and influential man of the time, Stevens tells us stories of his younger years when he serviced Darlington Hall leading up to WWII. As Stevens narrates, it becomes clear that his philosophy towards living is one defined by utmost dedication to his profession, forgoing the development of any personal life apart from it. However, reflecting back on his past from the postwar year of 1956, he becomes evidently struck by conflict over whether this philosophy was in fact as "dignified" as he once believed. This presentation proposes that Stevens' conflict over prewar values colliding with new ones is representative of postmodernism, a late 20th Century movement characterized by a widespread reimagining of established ideals and beliefs. Using this lens, we are consequently able to understand the prewar significance of Stevens' lifestyle, along with the pitfalls that await those that undertake such a lifestyle.

Andrew Wilk

Defending Jazz in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Anthony Minghella's film *The Talented Mr. Ripley* deviates from Patricia Highsmith's original novel in one fundamental way: jazz music is ubiquitous in Minghella's text. Minghella's directorial decision to bring jazz to the forefront of the Tom Ripley narrative is rooted in his choice to make Dickie, one of the main characters, an amateur jazz saxophonist, rather than a painter as he was in Highsmith's novel. This paper engages with "Passing Tones," a chapter from Krin Gabbard's 2004 book *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture*. In it, Gabbard contests that Minghella's use of jazz is problematic as *The Talented Mr. Ripley* does not acknowledge the race of the African American jazz artists in its soundtrack, excludes Black characters from its narrative, and fails to interrogate the "white Negro aesthetic" of some of its main characters. Although Gabbard raises valid concerns, I will show that, overall, Minghella's use of jazz is not problematic. Rather, his film honors African American jazz artists, accurately depicts the burgeoning jazz scene and racial demographics of 1950s Italy, and actually does critique the problematic "white Negro aesthetic" of some of its characters.

System Failure

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

Thursday, April 21
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Gutenberg

Andrea Arcia

Humanity for Profit:
Alienation in *The New Me*

In *The New Me*, protagonist Millie embodies the self-sacrifice many laborers experience as they surrender their lives to capitalism. Throughout the novel, temp worker Millie renounces her individuality to comply with societal standards. Believing social success will ensure her happiness, Millie abandons her intrinsic qualities to serve the capital. Yet, this lifestyle leaves her empty and unfulfilled. As she becomes increasingly alienated from her selfhood, Millie's life embodies Karl Marx's theory of alienation, proving that capitalism is a threat to individuality and the human identity. Using Millie as a catalyst, this paper explores the consequences of submitting to the capitalist vendetta and proposes a possible solution to remaining authentic in an increasingly superficial society.

Jonathan Fan

"This Land Is Not Your Land":
Racial and Cultural Otherness in *How Much of These Hills Is Gold*

The very title of C Pam Zhang's *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* questions how much the American dream—the pursuit and promise of wealth and belonging—is a lie. The novel follows two orphaned siblings with identities in limbo. Though raised as Chinese-American, neither side fully accepted them. I argue that, through the lens of an Asian-American family searching for fortune in the gold rush, *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* depicts racial and cultural Otherness as a condemning factor leading strictly to rejection in both the microcosm of the family and the macrocosm of Western society. To develop this argument, I will apply the Othering theory that creates an asymmetrical out-group versus in-group dynamic to Zhang's novel alongside a close reading of the text. Additionally, I will use sources exploring Asian representation in the Western genre as well as societal microcosms and macrocosms to further my investigation of the novel. Though a particularly interesting paradigm shift occurs between the out-group and in-group of the family microcosm, inquiry of both develops commentary and questioning of societal standards in past, present, and future.

Ava Kalenze

Skateboarding as Subversion in *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*

The dynamic between oppressive systems and the opposing cultures that are born from oppression are often what drive social change. In a neoliberal society that prioritizes economic productivity and innovation, gentrification runs rampant. San Francisco, a prime example of gentrification, is the backdrop for director Joe Talbot's *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*. San Francisco is more accurately described as a character in this film, at least given the relationship that the two main characters have to the city. Skateboarding is also present, both in the greater cultural landscape of San Francisco and as a motif in the film. The culture of skateboarding is relevant to this motif as it is a greater social niche for the characters to fit into—skating culture at odds with a society that prizes individualism. A metaphor for movement in itself, skateboarding acts as a point of reference for the characters as their ever-changing city slips further from what they know. In my essay, I explore the dissonance between the neoliberal culture and the skating subculture as it applies to the narrative of *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*.

Morgan Kessler

The Ongoing Cannibalization of the Black American Soul:
***Beloved* and Current Race Discourse**

A traumatic past and history cannot be ignored, and not addressing it will lead to a greater manifestation of the effects of trauma. My presentation will show how recent protests and changes within race discourse in recent years can be attributed to the ongoing, passed-on cannibalism of the Black soul in America with *Beloved* by Toni Morrison as my guiding reference and example. *Beloved* is a novel revolving around the main character, Sethe, who is a runaway slave living post-Civil War, as she deals with memories and physical manifestations of her past trauma as a slave and her killing of her newborn baby, Beloved, to save her child from being put into the terrible institution she had escaped from. Most academic discussion has focused on the novel's cannibalistic nature of race trauma, however, there is limited analysis put forth connecting *Beloved*'s demonstration of history's impact on the present to current events in America and how generational trauma is relevant to today. My presentation seeks to bridge this gap as I argue the way Sethe's past consumes her present through emotional and physical manifestations, resulting in the passing on of trauma to her other daughter, Denver, can and should be applied to the current discussions of racial disparities and arising problems in America.

Emily Nobel

Pick One:
Black or White? It Is Truly that Simple in the Antebellum South

Entertain the idea of time travel—what if you were thrust directly into a time period in which some of the biggest crimes against humanity were actively occurring—what would you do? Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*, transports the reader between 1970s California and the Antebellum South through the perspective of the protagonist, Dana, a young Black woman. She has one goal—keeping Rufus alive to preserve her lineage—but at what cost? There are many instances in which Dana "others" the slaves and Black people she interacts with in the novel despite verbally expressing beliefs of equality. Outwardly she may express care towards the Black community but it is to an extent which ultimately benefits herself. She is complicit in Rufus's crime of raping Alice (Rufus's childhood friend turned slave/lover) as it "allows" history to run its course. There is a prejudice Dana exhibits against people of her own race, and this internal basis is projected onto her relationship with Alice. The willingness to submit to the white man's needs and wants is a disastrous reflection of her own struggles with identity.

Ishaan Shrestha

Strategies of Domination:
Analyzing Surveillance in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

From fundamentalist militants conducting random searches in a war-torn city to domineering drones observing refugees in London to unassuming hummingbird-sized automatons keeping watch over a California shantytown—Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West* tells many stories of surveillance. The magical realist novel contains magical doors that take migrants, including the two main characters, Nadia and Saeed, to their destinations instantaneously. However, even with these portals, the monitoring is inescapable. This constant subjection to surveillance affects Nadia and Saeed in a variety of ways, from psychologically, as it changes the way they think and behave, to physically, as those who rallied for the installation of this surveillance become violent. In my presentation, I will analyze how the panoptic model of surveillance functions as a vessel that oppressive governments use to antagonize Nadia and Saeed. The couple eventually acquiesces to surveillance due to their constant exposure to it, and with this, they ultimately assimilate into the structures of white supremacy and global capitalism.

Thy Name Is Woman

Moderated by Professor Erika Wright
Departments of Medical Education and English

Thursday, April 21
5:00 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Scriptorium

Jane Cox

The Lawful Gaze:
Masculinity and Femininity in *Caged*

What perpetuates gender roles in society? Many of the voices discussing the existence of gender roles also argue for their abolishment, promoting instead gender equality and equity. In order to take action against these harmful societal standards, we have to understand where they come from. In movies like *Caged*, a story of a nineteen-year-old girl sent to a women's prison, we see a clear laying out of gender roles and an attack on femininity. My research looks at the most popular interpretation of this film—that it is a feminist argument for better treatment of female criminals—and challenges it by studying the power dynamic between the more traditionally masculine female characters and the more traditionally feminine ones. Using a phenomenon I term the "Lawful Gaze," this movie discredits femininity in a way that makes women appear powerless, and lauds masculinity as dominant and active. The "Lawful Gaze" is the intentional depiction of feminine people as submissive inferiors to masculine forces of power.

Leila Frederick

Do Not Be Scared of the Vagina:
The Role of Feminine Desire in *The House of Impossible Beauties*

Why are people so scared of the vagina? Maybe not the physical vagina (although some might find the physical version very daunting), but rather the metaphorical vagina—the manifestation of femininity and desire within each woman. In *The House of Impossible Beauties* by Joseph Cassara, the men are encouraged to channel the physical and metaphorical vagina: seemingly an odd choice for two gay men. Feminine desire is similar to a gay relationship in the 80s in that both are taboo, thus encouraging secrecy. This powers the dancing that Tyler and Hector participate in. Why do women feel as if they must be so secretive with their desires? The bridge between Tyler and Hector and feminine desire is not only a display of secrecy but a potent fear—be it of a gay relationship or femininity. By dancing, these men let readers take a glimpse into a powerful question: what if gay men were allowed to love? Through this connection, we can then address questions such as "what if women were allowed to openly desire as men are?" Further, we can begin to shift the paradigm surrounding the word "vagina" and finally take back its power.

Danielle Jones

Claiming Ground on the Prairie:
Opposing Female Marginality in *My Ántonia*

Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* is the life story of narrator Jim Burden as he grows up with his neighbor Ántonia, a working-class Bohemian immigrant girl. Though she is the central subject of the story, Jim invalidates Ántonia's personhood by restricting her character's greatest significance within the realms of motherhood and wifehood. Though muted, Ántonia manages to shine through the novel as arguably the true protagonist, surpassing Jim's misogynistic claims. Gathering gender presentation debates by American literature scholars, I will examine how Ántonia and secondary female characters prove that "the pioneer woman" is the actual leader of the American future Jim declares at the end of the novel. Ultimately, I explore how women can thrive as individual people despite social conventions and responsibilities placed upon them.

Sophia Lyman

John Wayne's World

For decades, even centuries, women have been socially allowed to have much more physical relationships with one another compared to men. Women can hug, play with each other's hair, and simply touch each other much more frequently than their male counterparts. It is considered rare, and even sometimes peculiar, when men publicly show affection to one another in a physical way, even if the relationship is entirely platonic. However, women, especially in the 20th Century, were never viewed as equal to men. This masculinity hierarchy is brightly displayed in John Wayne's classic cowboy film, *Rio Bravo*. Given that women had such little power at the time (even John Wayne agreed and portrayed this), how could it be that they had such a large influence on how men viewed physical touch? Is it women that caused men to stop being so free in everyday society, before the war? Or was it men who created this societal norm that they should be more conservative and keep to themselves in a society where they co-existed with women? My paper will focus on tackling these unanswered questions, looking specifically at men's lack of access to each other's bodies and how it is due to several societal reasons—both those that involve, and those that do not involve women and their roles in society in relation to men. We have been living in a John Wayne-inspired world for the past couple centuries, and it is time to understand why.

Lily Pfeizer

Écriture Feminine: The Feminist Art of Petrification and Embodiment

Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide… Her writing can only keep going…
daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns in him, her, them…
Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes it possible.
—Hélène Cixous

Though traditionally male-centric, classical mythology has attracted the interest of feminists. For feminists, myths contain narratives of resistance for undoing the "yoke" placed upon the female body. While it may appear that this controversial commitment to mythology exposes the incongruities within the feminist movement, these contradictions enable feminists to resist categorization and male projection. Feminist Hélène Cixous problematizes age-old Western philosophy that has purported logocentrism, confining reality within a rigid, binary lens. In my exploration of how language influences thought, I will uncover how Cixous deconstructs logocentrism through *écriture feminine* (feminine writing) in her theoretico-poetic work, "The Laugh of Medusa." *Écriture Feminine* refers to "writing from the body," and Cixous posits that self-knowledge derives from the body. It is the exploration of the libidinal. I will reference Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* as it offers insight into the patriarchy's drive towards classification, categorization, and hierarchization. As a means to devise an "impregnable" language resisting categorization, Cixous relies upon contradictions, primarily that of logos and mythos. She compresses these contradictions in the ambivalent figure of Medusa, known for her petrifying gaze. While analyzing how language constructs thought, I will integrate Medusa's petrification as an embodied form of expression that aligns with the principles of *écriture feminine*.

Monica Rodriguez

Woman of Color or Real-Life Final Girl?

Turn on the lights! Hit pause on the movie! But what if there comes a time when you cannot escape the fear? What if the trauma never ceases? Carol Clover addresses this very issue in her Final Girl theory. As Clover argues, slasher films center around a tomboy female who takes down the deranged murderer and becomes the sole survivor, or Final Girl. Clover also notes that a better term for this character is "tortured survivor." For women of color, however, such constant fear is their reality. Octavia Butler's science-fiction novel *Kindred* explores the realities that women of color, such as the novel's protagonist Dana, endure. Throughout *Kindred*, Dana must make difficult, sometimes unethical decisions in order to survive as she is plunged back into the Antebellum South. *Kindred* illustrates how every day, women of color are burdened with the complexities of intersectionality as they fight off their own villains: society and systems of oppression. In this way, women of color, like Dana, become Final Girls. Society must acknowledge the trauma of these Final Girls to allow the healing to begin. Examining Dana's story, we can recognize how the burdens inherited by women of color also allow them to break free from the cycle of the Final Girl.

Olivia Ross

Cultural Acceptance at the Cost of Sexual Liberation: Examining the Relationship Between Women's Intimacy and Cultural Identities in *Dreaming in Cuban*

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, author Cristina García chronicles the lives of the women in a transnational, multigenerational family with Cuban roots. The women hold various levels of attachment to Cuba and seek cultural acceptance dependent on their level of cultural pride. As the women increasingly crave acceptance into specific identity groups, they proactively attempt to alter their sociocultural statuses and adopt more traditionally masculine roles as a result. García represents the women's differing levels of femininity and masculinity through their sexual liberation. While it may initially appear that subverting gender norms and masculinizing oneself would bring greater freedom, García's use of sexuality reveals that seeking sociocultural acceptance is confining for women. I will explain how attempting to belong to a particular identity group causes women to lose sexual liberation in the novel, which represents how women are forced to allow cultural norms to inform their thoughts and actions in order to gain cultural acceptance. García's use of sexuality reveals the misogyny of cultural norms and demonstrates the confinement this causes women.

Adverse Effects

Thursday, April 21
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Alexandria/Jefferson

Moderated by Professor Hilary Schor
Departments of English and Comparative Literature and Gould School of Law

Annicka Caprariello

Trauma After the Horror:
How Grady Hendrix's *The Final Girl Support Group* Failed the Final Girl

In the case of Lynette Tarkington, the protagonist of Grady Hendrix's novel *The Final Girl Support Group*, her fear consumes her. For instance, Lynette remembers license plate numbers, just in case these cars were to follow her. Or, she stares down at shoes, knowing that if she sees the same ones twice, she might be in trouble. Lynette does this because she is a Final Girl: the trope theorist Carol Clover coined about the sole female survivor from a series of 70s and 80s slasher films. As a member of this particular Final Girl support group, Lynette and the other Final Girls gather to grapple with their trauma. As the support group begins to be targeted, Lynette undergoes a harrowing journey to stay alive. Hendrix presents a complex idea of Lynette's Final Girl experience and her path to gaining agency. However, while Hendrix tries to craft a realistic narrative of this trope, the execution is ultimately a harmful representation of trauma survivors. Essentially, I will argue that Hendrix may have tried to move this trope forward, yet this lack of representation asks whether this trope can be connected to readers and bring a new light to women in horror.

Isabel Chavero

I Cannot Relate to Your Adversities but I Can Try:
Understanding Systematic Racism Through the Narration of *Passing*

Humans are not and will never be mind readers. To know what another person is thinking or going through exactly, is simply impossible. However, Nella Larsen strives to take her readers as close to that goal as possible in her novel *Passing*. The novel is based on two biracial women (Irene and Clare) who are able to pass, or assume a white identity, in certain circumstances because of their skin being lighter. Despite both women being Black yet racially ambiguous, Clare chooses to lead a white life, while Irene does not, sending her into an internal battle. Irene's chaotic narration of her thoughts on Clare and passing, gives a closer look into the root of her problems: systematic racism. An unreliable narrator is not a reader's favorite, but Larsen depicts Irene this way with purpose. Irene's unreliability as a narrator offers an understanding that the way systematic racism targets Black people can lead one to pass, but even then passing is still not ideal. In my paper, I argue that Larsen's unique style of narration in *Passing* gives readers, especially non-Black readers, a better look into the emotional toll that systematic racism can take on those affected.

Cynthia Chockalingam

Distance Makes the Heart Grow Further:
An Analysis of the Depiction of Trauma in *Exit West*

To migrate means to travel, so to be a migrant inherently means to be someone who travels. However, does migration focus on the journey itself or the before and after of the trip? *Exit West*, by Mohsin Hamid, probes this question. Starting in an unnamed city, a couple—Saeed and Nadia—are forced out of their war torn country into another: Greece. From there, they travel to the United Kingdom to the United States. On this long journey, the story focuses on their experience in each location where they take a pause in their travel. However, the travel itself is magical: they step through doors that teleport them to the next destination. I will demonstrate that the choice to use doors as a vehicle of transition from one place to another was intentional in presenting the trauma migrants experience in their journeys of forced migration. My paper seeks to examine how and why the trauma of Saeed and Nadia—amongst the other migrants—are often overlooked by their new communities and how migrants themselves react to such trauma. Saeed and Nadia are surrounded by communities that do not accept them or entertain conversations about trauma caused by forced migration. The established norms that discourage such conversations mean the couple do not talk about this trauma behind closed doors either. This reaction—or lack thereof—results in Saeed and Nadia being unable to understand how the other copes—because while their migration experiences are similar, their reactions are vastly different; consequently, they were driven apart from one another. As migrants—like Saeed and Nadia—are not able to deal with unresolved trauma, they close the doors on their relationships with one another that are difficult to ever reopen again.

Bartholomew Chu

***The Group*:**
On the Inevitability and Necessity of "Hysteria"

Who gets to define the symptoms of a psychological illness? And when that group or individual does so, who pays the consequences of these actions? Mary McCarthy explores these questions in her novel *The Group*, where a newly wed woman, Kay, navigates a toxic marriage which leads to her eventual admittance to a mental clinic for "hysteria." In this paper, I build off Freud's formulation that "hysteria" emerges as a motivated response to both psychological and social factors, and in doing so, I explore the implications of the

word itself. Additionally, it is my ambition to map how an existential responsibility to display "hysteria" emerges as a rejoinder to the social circumstances that give rise to it. Kay's life is dominated by men at many levels of analysis, and McCarthy uses Kay's story to expose the forms masculine domination takes over females—and ultimately, to shine light on the mental life of women in this social milieu. Through the vicarious cringe, we are asked to consider what ways these characters are able to express their individuality in response to the patriarchy's temperament.

Andreya Elizabeth Guest

Inevitable Emotions from a *Euphoria* Perspective:
A Metamorphosis of Rue Bennet

As seen in *Euphoria*, grief has the power of affecting people with an immense negative impact. Rue's experience of grief is severe, but crucial to understanding a successful grief story. We see that losing her father forever, someone who truly matters, had a significant toll on her mental health. Her father had much influence on who she was at that moment. So, when she lost him it was understandable for her to lack emotional maturity at the age of 14. With Rue, we witness that some individuals let the moment of losing someone change their whole life, though it should be noted that everyone has a different experience and challenge when they are going through the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). Rue's process of grief is without a doubt a metamorphosis, because looking at her from Season 1, Episode 1 to Season 2, Episode 8 she is a completely different person. The metamorphosis is needed to positively affect the development of her emotional maturity, giving her the opportunity to become a new person while acknowledging and learning from her past mistakes. It allows her to understand that grief is an inevitable emotion.

Dilan Kuders

Intimacy as Abolition:
Masculinity and the Prison in *Moonlight*

Moonlight's final shot is of the ocean—a vast, frame-encompassing expanse punctuated only by a young Chiron, his skin as blue as the water beneath his feet. This movie is his story: a tale of intimacy and, ultimately, I argue, a tale of abolition. Over the course of the film, Chiron finds himself trapped again and again. His community fails to foster an environment in which queerness and male intimacy can be openly expressed, while similarly, but in a more physical sense, *Moonlight*'s second act concludes with Chiron being sent to a juvenile detention facility, punished by the system his educators operate under for standing up against a homophobic bully. Come third-act, Chiron is an individual who has suffered the consequences of the carceral system, molded into a hyper-masculine figure detached from his identity. Through its framing and set design, *Moonlight* conflates the societal boundaries placed on Black male intimacy with the isolating nature of the prison system—explored in the text through water imagery. Because Chiron is only able to move towards self-acceptance by dissolving these boundaries, I argue the text asserts that carceral sexual and gendered boundaries can only be broken through the dissolution of the carceral system itself.

Jonathan Park

"Oscar Wilde Deserves to Be in Prison":
A Homophobic Maiden, Masculine Idolatry, and the Drowning Queer Revolution

The queer existence is the most radical form of resistance against contemporary norms of patriarchy, marriage, and sexuality. But instead of taking advantage of this potential for revolution, American media and politics is shifting toward assimilating queer people into these same norms. The Supreme Court's decision to legalize gay marriage in Obergefell v. Hodges is regarded as one of the greatest victories of the gay rights movement. Films like *Brokeback Mountain* and *Love, Simon* popularized the whitewashed queer: masculine, inoffensive, normal. Whitewashing is also bleeding into Western scholarship: efforts to highlight queer historical figures have only imposed upon them contemporary standards of sexuality. While it is comforting to hear that Alan Turing was gay, for example, he did not operate under the same assumptions we now connect to the term. Homosexuality and marriage were separate to Turing; his oppression was in being denied the opportunity to exercise that separation to the fullest. My argument is twofold: first, that historical figures viewed their sexuality as separate from heterosexual patriarchal constructs; and second, that adopting this framework in a modern context makes clear the end goal of the queer revolution—to eliminate patriarchy from the human practice of love.

Labor Pains

Moderated by Sarah Nolan
Department of English

Thursday, April 21
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Carnegie

Talia Benducci

Lackluster Life:
A Critique of Work Life Balance Through Murata's Keiko

Work life balance is an increasingly popular life goal for people across the globe. While its meaning is unique to each individual, Peter Bloom, a senior lecturer and researcher at the Open University in Great Britain, generally defines work life balance as "effectively balanc[ing] her or his professional commitments with their non-work personal desires." Sayaka Murata's depiction of Keiko, the protagonist in *Convenience Store Woman*, exemplifies this idea. Keiko is a 36-year-old woman who has worked at the same convenience store for the past 18 years. This essay will contest that Keiko has achieved work life balance in regards to her gender, career, and geographical locations. The novel is set in Tokyo, thus it is imperative to analyze Keiko with Western ideals and Asian principles of work life balance, as explained by V. Chandra, a professor at the International Management Institute in New Delhi, India. Keiko was pushed to assimilate into society from a young age out of concern for her robotic mannerisms. However, her life is rather lackluster: she eats bland boiled vegetables, goes to bed at the same time, and follows the same schedule every week. Consequently, this essay will simultaneously critique work life balance's idolization.

Victor Falcon

Herman Melville's "Bartleby"
and the Enigma of Passive Resistance in Industrial Society

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance.
—The Narrator, "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street"

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" is a short story set in 1850s New York City detailing the misadventures of the lawyer narrator consumed by the thought of his employee: Bartleby. While a productive scrivener at first, without rhyme or reason, Bartleby ceases to complete the work assigned to him, repeating the phrase "I would prefer not to." This becomes the focal point of tension for the narrator and the reader alike, as they grow increasingly puzzled by the enigmatic "passive resistance" Bartleby provides. Fittingly, at the time of publication, New York City was ripe with tremendous working-class resistance, which would not have been unfamiliar to Melville. In place of conforming to the standards set by industrial society, Bartleby attempts to chart his own path in passively resisting the commodification of society detailed by Marx. Therefore, unlike how he is viewed by others in the story, Bartleby is not a figure that lacks an intended purpose. Instead, Bartleby is a passive character whose enigmatic resistance illustrates someone's rejection of the commodification of labor present in the workplace.

Emily Hurtado

Let's Talk About Sex:
The "Male Gaze" and the Sexualization of Tess in *Working Girl*

Females can only succeed if they are sexy. Most would disagree with this statement, but Mike Nichols's *Working Girl*, upon closer inspection, seems to promote this notion. The movie follows secretary Tess McGill, who struggles to realize her dreams of climbing up the social ladder come true. Throughout the movie, Tess battles against multiple instances of sexual harassment where she is constantly objectified by men. Once Tess becomes successful at the end of the film, her success is therefore portrayed as a triumph over sexualization. But is it really? Using the initial interaction between Tess and Jack Trainer, an important business contact that helps Tess succeed, I will argue that Jack demonstrates the "male gaze" when he sees Tess as a sex object. Additionally, the sexualization of Tess does not just occur on screen between characters, but also off screen with the audience. While scholars and the popular press believe *Working Girl* promotes female empowerment, I will argue, using the "male gaze," that through the sexualization of Tess in the film, the film promotes the idea that women need to use their bodies to move up in the workplace.

Karina Parikh

Acculturation in the Workplace in "Grey Bull":
An Analysis of How Cultural Divide and Lack of Assimilation Impacts Martin's Happiness

Institutionalized racism is often overlooked in society, however Eddy Bell's short film, "Grey Bull," highlights the difficulties that a South Sudanese immigrant, Martin, faces when he moves to Australia and tries to integrate pieces of his old culture with his new job, but is shut down. Hoping to hold onto his values, he challenges his employers, and rather than being successful, is emotionally pained. In this presentation, I will explore a few different lenses through which I am able to view Martin's situation and further understand his actions and how they correspond to his happiness. Looking at Sara Ahmed's books, *The Promise of Happiness* and *On Being Included:*

Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life provides a deeper understanding of Martin's treatment for the audience. Ultimately, this presentation looks deep into how Martin's actions and decision to hold onto his values affect his treatment and his relationship with his employers, which is a key aspect of the film as Martin's happiness is compromised.

Jacob Rose

Wolf-Gods, Demons, and Supreme Leaders:
***Princess Mononoke* and Its Environmental Call to Action**

Anime and climate change: words typically not associated with each other, and yet, the film *Princess Mononoke*'s message of environmental sustainability could not be more relevant. But while its importance cannot be denied, the film's message of human integration with the natural world, or as Lady Eboshi puts it, to "build a better town," is not quite as easy in practice as we may want it to be. For if the past twenty years of climate agreements and Conference of the Parties summits have revealed anything, it is that it is really difficult to save the world. So how feasible is director Hayao Miyazaki's call to action? How does Lady Eboshi's status as a dictator influence Irontown's views of nature? Are human development and a green world mutually exclusive? And perhaps more importantly, should countries even care? These are some of the questions this paper aims to answer. Unfortunately, it does not solve climate change. But by delving deeper into how humans address troubling circumstances, reflecting on a small town in 19th Century Massachusetts, and analyzing how style of government influences sustainability, Miyazaki's seemingly daunting task becomes a bit more manageable.

Stephanie Yu

Othering of the Working Class:
Creation of Monsters in *Parasite*

It is widely known that Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite* is a film addressing social class and the issues present within our capitalistic society. However, at its core, *Parasite* is a movie about monstrosity. The monsters in *Parasite* are not out of a horror film, they do not make you jump out of your seat or cover your eyes in fear, but rather they make you feel uncomfortable and unnerved. Most of all the monsters are found within characters that the audience are able to understand and relate to, and it is the possibility that monsters reside within ourselves that makes it all the more chilling. I will explore how the working class in *Parasite* are transformed from humans into monsters, and how this transformation is not brought on by poverty but more specifically from the interaction with the upper class.

Power Struggle

Moderated by Professor Anthony Kemp
Department of English

Thursday, April 21
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Laurentian/Sumerian

Jace Clowdus

Power in *Princess Mononoke*:
How It Motivates, Inspires, and Kills Us

Most academic conversations around *Princess Mononoke* center on the relationship between humans and nature in the film. But that is not the only idea the film has to offer. By looking at Irontown as a metaphor for the United States working class as defined by Dahrendorf, we find an accessible version of complicated real-world power relations. Using the definitions of power set out in "The Bases of Social Power," the ways that Lord Asano and the emperor influence Irontown line up almost one-to-one with the ways employers and threats of eviction or death work to coerce the working class in the U.S.. The result is Lady Eboshi killing the Deer God, the working class being forced into less desirable jobs, and an ideal emerging in both the movie and the real world of ambition over all else. Looking at *Princess Mononoke* in this way shows us some of the methods used to effectively abstract complicated concepts into understandable stories.

Hannah Anderson Contreras

Exotic Porn and Panda Express:
How "To the Man Who Shouted 'I Like Pork Fried Rice'..." Uses Cannibalism to Fight Against White Society

I'll eat you whole
Pull out your teeth and take your soul
Stir some blood into the punch bowl
—Chloe Moriondo, "I Eat Boys"

What do you do when a man on the street says he wants to eat you? In Franny Choi's evocative and terrifying poem "To the Man Who Shouted 'I Like Pork Fried Rice' at Me on the Street," Choi transforms a catcalling experience she had into a radical work of art that represents a new way of looking at the figure of the cannibal. While the figure of the cannibal has long used by white people to portray ethnic minorities as "savage" and inferior, Choi turns this trope on its head and reclaims it for her own use by juxtaposing the violence of that figure with ideas about the bounds of the body and sexuality. In my paper, I use literary analysis, historical perspectives, and anthropological commentary to show how Choi subverts the image of the cannibal to reveal the violent fantasies of exoticism and how the metaphor of cannibalism can be weaponized against white society.

Regan Simmons

Rooted Redemption:
The Twisted Tale of the "American Dream" Seen in Misha Green's *Lovecraft Country*

"Is the American Dream at the Expense of the American Negro?" This question was asked in the 1965 debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley. Incorporated seamlessly into the scenes of Misha Green's hit cinematic television show, *Lovecraft Country*, the debate poses as the thesis of the production. Thereby exposing not only the gaps of social change within American society, both past and present, but also revealing the "white gaze" in which we have viewed science fiction throughout the years. *Lovecraft Country*, set in Jim Crow America, follows the life of protagonist Atticus Freeman and his close loved ones as they travel through journeys that help them realize their true fate. The show heavily examines the horror that besets the African American community and utilizes various references to further emphasize this horror. My analysis of *Lovecraft Country* focuses on the healing and racism seen within the show as being duplicative of the environments that surround Black individuals. Additionally, I argue that science fiction follows the idyllic nature of the "American Dream" and has been heavily influenced by H.P. Lovecraft; thereby being devoid of Black humanity. The only question that remains is, where do we go from here?

Meiyi Song

Women Cannot Have It All:
Male Narratorial Control in Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*

Debate surrounding appropriate sexual expression, gender behavior, manhood, and womanhood was central to the 1910s. This period featured phenomena such as the white slavery tract and anxiety over women's autonomy and bodies. Drawing on the work of historians, gender and sexuality scholars, and literature scholars, and focusing specifically on Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and Bess Earne's character, this paper explores how narratives about women and representations of their sexuality are informed by men and their narratorial control—in the larger landscape, how they alter the image of sex work and women in society and legislation. Bess's portrayal demonstrates that male narratorial control offers men control over how women's narratives are told—freedom to manipulate

the release of information and to sexualize then revirginize women as they please. Her narrative parallels the male, patriarchal perspective of sex work, causing her to resemble young girls featured in white slavery tracts and a "sex worker," or victim.

Lyra Steiner

Kick Off Your Sunday Shoes:
Religion, Dance, and Danger in *Footloose*

Footloose is the definition of a trashy teen film: melodramatic, loud, and filled with frivolity. But is not youthhood the same? That is what makes the film just so revealing about its premise (dance being banned in a small town for religious reasons) and its connection to adolescence in real life. *Footloose* puts dance on a pedestal, portraying it as an all-important act that is worth all the frustration and fighting the teens of Bomont go through in order to lift the ban. Taking a step back, we ask ourselves why, exactly, dance is so necessary—but the film reveals this as well. So many of the most iconic scenes, including street racing, boys playing "chicken" with tractors, and Ariel standing on train tracks depict the teens moving their bodies in rebellious yet incredibly dangerous ways. However, by doing so, they are expressing bodily autonomy, pushing back internally against a strict religious culture that aims to police bodies. Dance is then presented as an antidote to these behaviors, redirecting this impulse towards danger by allowing for unique expression of bodily autonomy.

Annabel Street

Reading Molina:
The Minimization of Feminine Power in Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

What happens when complete opposites are forced to share the same prison cell? In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, they learn to accept their differences and care for each other. Valentín Arregui Paz is a Marxist revolutionary who is a serious man and unshakable figure of masculinity; Luis Alberto Molina is a frivolous, sentimental character who has been imprisoned for the corruption of a minor. These two characters—quintessential figures of masculinity and femininity—represent two distinct political groups in Argentina at the time: Marxist men and queer activists. Outside of their prison cell, these two groups scarcely interacted because politics was a deeply masculine field that dismissed femininity as unviable. I argue that Molina proves the political viability of feminine traits in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* because her femininity provides the framework for her friendship with Valentín—a friendship that aligns with political theorist Hannah Arendt's philosophy on the political significance of friendship. I then address the unbalanced effects of their friendship on each other, arguing that Molina's death at the conclusion of the novel represents the exploitation and disposability of feminine traits in society, as well as the danger that minimizing feminine traits poses for people who possess them.

Major Yang

Can Equality Really Exist in Our Society?:
Keiko's Unfortunate Fate in *Convenience Store Woman* Says No

Modern psychological theory states that our personality is primarily influenced by two aspects of our lives: our biological aspects (our genetic makeup and the way we are born) as well as our environmental aspects (the experiences we have and the societies we are raised in). But the question I have for you is whether or not these two aspects are equal in strength? Based on Sayata Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*, I argue that our environment has a much larger impact on our overall personality than our genetic makeup. This is best explained by Keiko Furukara's unfortunate fate, wherein her personality and behavior clearly misalign with societal expectations. Keiko is born with a very rich and vibrant personality, but due to the environmental impact of her oppressive society, she grows up to become unambitious and robbed of her identity. Make no mistake, Keiko is a victim of her exploitative and manipulative society. In this paper, we will look into how Keiko's personality does not align with the expectations of her society and how this influences her to become attached to and dependent on her local convenience store by the end of the film. We will explain how and why Keiko is not actually satisfied with her life (despite her claims that she is), analyze how society can deceive and manipulate innocent people like Keiko without them even being aware of it, and understand just how powerful of an impact these societal pressures can have on people like Keiko.

Seeing Is Believing

Moderated by Professor Hector Reyes
Department of Art History

Thursday, April 21
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Gutenberg

Tate Frederick

"That, too, is a tale worth telling":
Looking beyond Medusa's Physical Transformation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

From Freud to the *Percy Jackson* series to modern feminist poetry, it is obvious that something about Greek mythological figure Medusa resonates with us. Too frequently, though, we halt the exploration of Medusa's character just as it gets interesting. Of course, her Ovidian physical transformation from a beautiful human girl to a serpentine-haired monstrous hybrid is quite the literary turning point. However, by focusing too heavily on this physical transformation, and by consistently attempting to place Medusa in a box of either "ugly" or "beautiful," we are subjecting her to the modern day beauty standards that plague our society. Instead, I argue, with support from Monica Miller's book *Being Ugly*, that we should focus on a slightly more nuanced transformation that occurs simultaneously with her physical one: the transformation from a woman who has power because of beauty standards to a woman who has power despite them. This transformation of power is much more significant because from an aesthetic perspective, Medusa's physical transformation is not that drastic. Further, I explain how all women have the power that Medusa exemplifies after her change, and how that power poses a threat to our modern patriarchal institutions.

Azariah Kebede

To Drink from the Artistic Well of Cultures:
Learning from Gerald's Cultural Balance

We redefine what is proper and improper as our society continuously evolves, but what calls for this evolution? The answer lies within the arts of course. The saying "life imitates art" has some truth to it as society tends to follow what the arts dictate. Throughout history, the arts have led to changes in the public perspective on varying matters, whether it is more serious issues like the Civil Rights Movement or more trivial topics like pineapple on pizza. Then you ask, where does art's prevalence come from? To find the answer to this question, you have to look at the perspectives of different cultures that feed into singular artistic ideas. This can only occur when cultures mesh together, with the central lifestyle not being overridden by any other cultural influences. Karen Tei Yamashita's "1971: Aiiieeeee! Hotel" personifies this ideology through its character Gerald K. Li, a Chinese-American who heavily indulges in African-American jazz. Through these influences, Gerald proves to be a better person all around, musically and mentally, making the argument that once you open yourself up artistically, your outlook on life can become more well-rounded as you allow different voices to formulate it.

Aaron G. Kirk

The Visible/Invisible Native American:
Can More Than One Culture Be Accepted Into the New West?

Zane Grey, one of the most legendary authors of the Western genre, created epic tales of adventures and gunfights in the untamed West. His stories are filled with cowboys and outlaws, Mormons and Christians, settlers and bison, but lack the prominent inhabitants of the American West: Native Americans. Native Americans face an invisible/visible portrayal in his book, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, where their presence is invisible, but their legacy is visible. The lack of representation brings up the question of acceptance into the New West. Drawing upon the work of historians, I address assimilation policies and the mindset of the American people in the late 19th and early 20th Century; with the help of literary scholars, I close read the reflection of these failed assimilation policies in literature. I argue that the literary way of keeping Native Americans in the US was by creating a hybrid culture of settlers appropriating Native American ways and making use of their tools and tactics to dominate the West, while at the same time Native Americans as a people were not allowed to be present in American society without being forced to sacrifice their entire identity and culture.

Genevieve Marino

The Invention of Queer Reading:
Molina's Compensation for a Lack of Representation

One minute on Wattpad is enough to convince anyone that our generation has a knack for taking any character or fandom and turning it queer. But it was not always like that. This idea of queer reading that involves emphasizing themes and tropes associated with queer media began to develop around the time that queer theory was first finding its footing. Around that time, in Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman,* Molina, a queer, self-identified queen spends much of the novel passing the time by retelling stories and embellishing where they see fit. In their reimagining of these films, Molina reinterprets and refocuses the films from their perspective to have queer undertones through queer reading by introducing camp-based storytelling and highlighting themes that relate to their queer

experience. By doing so, Puig uses Molina's need to reimagine certain films in order to experience the escapism promised by them as a representation of a greater lack of representation for queer people in film.

Zachariah Steele

Ableism and Abhorrence:
The Treatment of Disabled Characters in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*

In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Franklin Hardesty is the final casualty of iconic antagonist Leatherface, torn asunder by the other's chainsaw. Despite Franklin's role as a protagonist and victim to the violence of Leatherface and company, critics such as Robin Wood see Franklin "as grotesque, and almost as psychotic, as his nemesis Leatherface." Indeed, Franklin and Leatherface share similar body types, passions for the slaughterhouse, and alienation by director Tobe Hooper. But Franklin and Leatherface share one trait of utmost importance to each of their characters: the two are brothers in disability—Franklin as explicitly physically disabled in his wheelchair and Leatherface as coded to be intellectually disabled with his bodily movements and lack of speech. The pair's kinship in their disabilities serves as a tool for director Tobe Hooper to dehumanize disabled people within *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, affecting the perception of disabled people in the real world.

Ricky Wang

Killing the Grey Bull:
No Humanity Allowed by Utility

We hate being seen as tools that merely generate profits and utilities. But sometimes, society does not allow us to be more. In the modern world, we witness how the powers of capitalistic structures reduce humans and animals to objects, excluding all different humane views. Eddy Bell's short film "Grey Bull" criticizes this phenomenon. The film, set in contemporary Australia, tells the fictitious story of Martin, a South Sudanese migrant torn between his cultural beliefs and his family's new life in the foreign country. Martin sees a grey bull in the local meat processing factory he works at as his totem animal, thus taking it home and renaming himself "Malou" after it. However, under pressure from the factory, Martin realizes that he cannot own the bull, and therefore kills it and gives up his name "Malou." In this presentation, I will explain why Martin's killing the grey bull is an attempt to relieve it from the cruel world it is in. I will also explain how "Grey Bull" criticizes the ways in which conventional capitalistic norms force people and animals to be constrained to merely objects for use, driving every inch of humanity out and forcing the different ones to either assimilate or die.

The Others

Thursday, April 21
7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Scriptorium

Moderated by Professor Lucas Herchenroeder
Department of Classics

Cat Broderick

Beyond a Dog Breed:
Blood Quantum, Anti-Blackness, and Familial Relation in *Reservation Dogs*

Amidst spirit warriors, blood quantum, and frybread, *Reservation Dogs* explores what it means to exist as Indigenous. Developed by Native creators Taika Waititi and Sterlin Harjo, the eight-part show follows a group of Indigenous teens navigating reservation life. In my presentation, I will examine the appearance of blood quantum, specifically when a woman describes herself as "part-Indian." Secondly, I will investigate how the Spirit Warrior character and subtle reinforcements of blood quantum interact with the Noble Savage Trope. Furthermore, I will examine how the colonial structure of blood quantum, Indigenous stereotypes, and exclusion of Black Natives throughout the show bolsters anti-Blackness. Finally, I will provide alternates to defining Indigenous identity through colonial structures. I will explore how *Reservation Dogs* expresses "chosen family," connecting these relationships to how tribal affiliation and Indigenous identity were defined before colonization. Ultimately, I will argue that the subtle reinforcements of blood quantum within the show bolster the stereotype of "the noble savage" that the piece attempts to undermine, creating a subtext of anti-Blackness and reinforcing colonial structures. The presentation of these structures creates a narrative of the "one way" to be "Indian," presenting our community as experientially and phenotypically monolithic.

Abigail Rawlinson

Gone and Forgotten:
Analyzing Native Americans' Absence in the Western

Hold onto your horses… the Western is not the genre you think it is. This paper demonstrates how the prototypical boot-stomping cowboys, arid lands, and suspenseful shootouts are facades for violent history and cultural misrepresentation. Sadly, images of a traditional Western are a product of regional histories and literary works that disregard how Manifest Destiny, the US government, and white settlers greatly distorted Native American history and culture. In archives, history books, and Western literature, Native American history is not fully and properly portrayed. Attitudes, trends, and archetypes across classic Western works like *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey, and *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather corroborate this reality. However, present scholarship about Native American history and assimilation like *Violence Over the Land* by Ned Blackhawk hopes to demystify the complex interplay between literary works and historiography. Thus, this analysis of present scholarship and classic Westerns illustrates the facade of white sovereignty over Western lands and how absences in the historiographical archive have deleteriously affected literature.

Jason Sadayasu

A Complicated Resistance:
Analyzing Colonialism through the Display of Sexuality in *Rolling the R's*

Set in 1970s Hawaii, *Rolling the R's* by R. Zamora Linmark follows the lives of an outcast group of fifth-graders living in the impoverished neighborhood of Kalihi. Some of the kids are queer, most are Filipino, and they all bear an adult-like sexual awareness. The kids experience the effects of colonialism from the United States' illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the subsequent annexation of the islands. While they are only ten years old, the kids demonstrate that they are more than capable of resisting attempts to Americanize or assimilate them into colonial society. Many scholars identify the group's persistent usage of pidgin (broken English that incorporates elements of native culture) despite their teachers' instructions as to how they resist colonialism. However, I believe that Linmark's commentary on American colonialism goes beyond using pidgin—he hyper-sexualizes some of these kids to demonstrate their resistance to the suppression of their sexualities. The issue is that these sexually active ten-year-olds find themselves in relationships with adult men; I argue that Linmark uses the pedophilic relationships of the fifth-graders to show the complexities and complicities of colonialism and that resisting is not as straightforward as it seems.

Sydnee Yu

A True Tupinambá Lost in Translation:
Examining Subtitles in *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*

To what extent do "anti-colonial" films, in spite of their intention, reinforce harmful colonial ideas surrounding Indigenousness? Examination of Nelson Pereira dos Santos's Brazilian film, *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*, and its manipulation of the Indigenous Tupi language may aid in a deeper understanding of this conflict. The film follows a French Huguenot who is captured by the Tupinambá and undergoes assimilation into the culture of the tribe while awaiting his inevitable consumption in a ceremonial act of cannibalism. Though most often read as an anti-colonial film, dos Santos's narrative reinforces imperial power dynamics as

it subtitles the Indigenous Tupinambá characters into silence. Focusing specifically on the function of translation within the film, I argue that subtitles play into the broader appropriation of Tupi culture by disempowering and othering the Tupinambá characters. Furthermore, as the Tupi language undergoes translation, it is forced to conform to the linguistic frameworks of the audience. With *How Tasty* as my case study, I propose that even "anti-colonial" depictions of Indigenous identity are often othering and exploitative, necessitating a more critical analysis of the genre as a whole.

Victor Zhang

Identity Searching through Distorted Spatial and Temporal Errantry in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

From Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* to Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced*, refugee novels often present readers a combination of imageries such as panic crowds, arsenals, falling walls, blurred borders, and a clatter of suitcases filled with only the essentials. Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West* evades these archetypes of the genre: by teleporting everyone through magical doors around this fictional world, Hamid disrupts the characters' perception of time and space. I examine how this concocted disruption of time and space affects the protagonists' development of their individual and respective identities in the novel. I argue that the novel depicts migration as not only physical relocation but also psychological and cultural movements. Hamid employs these forms of migration empowered by the magical doors altogether to influence the characters' individual and relational identities, ultimately universalizing migrants' experiences in their sense of loss and struggle, yet recognizing the emotional nuances among different characters.

notes