

**Fox Center**  
**Works-in-Progress Discussions**  
**January 27, 2021**

**Breakout Room Discussion Descriptions**

**Subha Xavier**

**Transcultural fantasies between China and France: Politics, Culture, Translation, Aesthetics**

A scholar of migration studies as it inflects literature and film, Subha Xavier will present her work on the history of literary and cultural relations between France and China over the last century to unveil how a politics of suspicion and fascination has defined their transnational exchange in cultural products. Examining literary, cinematic and visual art by French and Chinese creative minds as well as their transmission and reception through various translational forms, discussion will weave in different philosophical and aesthetic traditions that color interpretation, often leading to misinterpretation and racial discrimination.

**Susan Ashmore**

**The Consequences of Liminal Citizenship: Patients in Alabama's State Hospitals 1900-1930**

A historian of the twentieth-century South, Susan Ashmore is interested in citizenship—who gets to express their citizenship fully and what happens to those who cannot—using the history of Alabama's State Hospitals over the course of the twentieth century as her focus. Inspired by other southern states, in 1901, a constitutional convention convened in Alabama to re-write the state's organic law to be more in line with white supremacy by denying African American and poor white men the right to vote. Section 182\* of the new constitution specified who would be disqualified from registering and from voting. The long list **began** with "all idiots and insane persons" and included a variety of criminals, vagrants, and tramps, essentially creating liminal citizens (waiting at the threshold)—through the fourteenth amendment of the U. S. Constitution their birth in the country qualified them as citizens, yet the 1901 Constitution denied them their voting rights, a fundamental right in a democracy. Thus, it mattered how a person got diagnosed as an idiot or insane, and what remedies were devised to control these liminal citizens and their inherent threat to white supremacy. We will discuss two journal articles written by James T. Searcy, M.D., and William D. Partlow, M.D., Superintendents of Alabama's Insane Hospitals and supporters of eugenics to reduce the state's undesirable population. I am hoping the discussion will help me clarify how to define the position of committed patients within the citizenry of Alabama's democracy. I am using "liminal" here, but I hope the discussion will either clarify the liminality or help me to find a better description.

\*Section 182: "All idiots and insane persons; those who shall by reason of conviction of crime be disqualified from voting at the time of the ratification of this Constitution; those who shall be convicted of treason, murder, arson, embezzlement, malfeasance in office, larceny, receiving stolen property, obtaining property or money under false pretenses, perjury, subornation of perjury, robbery, assault with intent to rob, burglary, forgery, bribery, assault and battery on the wife, bigamy, living in adultery, sodomy, incest, rape, miscegenation, crime against nature, or any crime punishable by imprisonment in the penitentiary, or of any infamous crime or crime involving moral turpitude; also, any person who shall be convicted as a vagrant or tramp, or of selling or offering to sell his vote or the vote of another, or of buying or offering to buy the vote of another, or of making or offering to make a false return in any election by the people or in any primary election to procure the nomination or election of any person to any office, or of suborning any witness or registrar to secure the registration of any person as an elector." 1901 Alabama Constitution.

**Abby Scribner**

**Silas Wegg and His Leg: Parts, Wholes, and the Subject of Liberalism**

A scholar of the Victorian novel, liberalism, and subjectivity, Abby Scribner will discuss a short passage from Charles Dickens's 1864-5 novel *Our Mutual Friend*. The passage's humor stems from a central confusion around a pronoun: when the character Silas Wegg attempts to buy back his leg, sold to an "Articulator of human bones" following its amputation, does he refer to the leg as "me" or "it"? Through tracing Dickens's wordplay in this scene, we will consider such questions as: where in the person does "the subject" inhere? How is a leg related to a body, and how is an individual related to a society? What can Dickens's last completed novel tell us about subjectivity and politics today?

**Julie Miller****American Pasts, American Futures**

Julie Miller is a historian of the United States interested in political and intellectual history to Reconstruction and the long history of slavery. Present-day novelist Ali Smith writes that “nothing lasts, and nothing's lost, and nothing ever perishes.” She's right about that, and her wisdom is both a solace and a warning. Born in revolution and remade by a civil war, the government of the United States was designed in 1787 to owe a debt to the sovereign people, its author, from whom all political power derived. Turning human politics on its ear, governors in the United States would be the servants and “the people their superiors & sovereigns” as Benjamin Franklin once explained. President Abraham Lincoln sounded a similar note in his first inaugural address on March 4, 1861. “This country,” he said, “belongs to the people who inhabit it.” Time has tested those ideas, and our wide-reaching discussion will look to the American past to think about the complicated relationship between sovereign power, personal liberty, and moral authority.

**Lynne Huffer****The Anthropocene in Fragments**

This project in the environmental humanities situates the “I” of self-writing within the “I”-dissolving frame of the Anthropocene and geological time. The Anthropocene marks the present as both human and geological, bringing together human and more-than-human temporal scales. Written in a poetic-philosophical mode, the book-length project is composed of fragments. Fragmentation signals the Anthropocene as a time measured by hole-ridden archives, including earth archives such as the fossil record and CO2 in ice cores, as well as human archives that are incomplete. At the heart of the project and the table talk lies an aesthetic question with ethical, ontological, and epistemological implications: what is a fragment? How does the fragment help us to think the Anthropocene?

**Nick Sturm****Archival Reimagining: How Emory's Raymond Danowski Poetry Library Changes Literary History**

A literary scholar of post-1945 American poetry, Nick Sturm will discuss how his ongoing archival research in the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library at Emory's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library has shaped his approach to writing literary history. Assembled by collector Raymond Danowski over 30 years, the collection contains over 75,000 books, 50,000 periodicals, thousands of broadsides, and other primary sources. It is thought to have been the largest library in private hands until its arrival at Emory in 2004. I will provide an example of my recent scholarship emerging from research in the Danowski as a way into discussing the enormous value of the library for scholars, teachers, students, and community members.

**Irene Browne****Between Privilege and Precarity: What Can Authorized Middle Class Latino Immigrants Tell Us about Race and Immigration?**

Prof. Browne's project focuses on the complex intersecting dynamics of race, class privilege, and immigration. As a window into these dynamics, she investigates how authorized middle-class Dominican and Mexican immigrants navigate Atlanta's rapidly changing economic and political environment. Authorized middle-class Latinx immigrants are being pulled between two opposing forces. On one pole, this group is experiencing growing economic opportunities. On the other, Latinx immigrants face political and social conditions that are creating a “climate of hostility” towards Latinx immigrants. Using interviews, census data, and media analysis, Prof. Browne asks: What is the role of race, class, and nationality in shaping the experiences of authorized middle-class Dominican and Mexican immigrants in Atlanta? What is the climate of immigrant reception they encounter from whites and middle-class Blacks? What strategies do authorized middle-class Dominican and Mexican immigrants employ to protect and maintain their middle-class status within this climate? What can these strategies tell us about race, class, and immigration more broadly?

**Mike Lehman****Post-National Narratives: Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains***

Mike Lehman's research explores alternative conceptions of affiliation and human rights by exploring contemporary literature that focuses on the border. He argues that reading the border involves not only the thematic but also the formal and aesthetic troping of movement as integral to an implicit argument about rendering an imagining of the border as generative and creative. To illuminate these issues, Mike will discuss the Iranian-Kurdish asylum seeker Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains: Writings from Manus Prison* to consider the ways in which Boochani depicts a mode of writing that side-steps the claims of the nation on the literature of the migrant/refugee in favor of transoceanic connections created from the experience of survival while drifting at sea. In his depiction of the migrant and refugee, Boochani's text problematizes long standing concepts of the nation-state through the mobile figure to offer an alternative understanding of global mobility and humanitarian citizenship.

**Martha Groppo****Dirt Poor and Filthy Rich: Rural Healthcare and Elite Philanthropy**

A historian of medicine, Martha Groppo will discuss the rise and fall of a network of healthcare associations that connected seemingly “isolated” rural places across the British Empire and United States in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. These associations, founded by a densely interconnected group of elite women, shared a common goal of bringing trained nurses and midwives to the homes of the rural poor. She will give an overview of her current book project, which asks questions about what forces interested privileged outsiders—the wives and daughters of British aristocrats, Gilded Age plutocrats, and colonial administrators—in rural welfare, and why their efforts to address emerging rural medical disparities so often proved unsuccessful. Speaking to histories of empire, gender, class, and reform, her work draws from archival records of more than 20 little-known healthcare associations to tell a story that stretches from the Yukon to the Outback and from the Indian Hill Stations to the Appalachian Mountains.

**Don Tuten****¿De dónde es usted?: Address and Anxiety in early modern Spanish**

Whereas modern English has only one singular address pronoun (you), other languages have two or more. In such languages, pronouns of address (e.g., pre-modern English thou/ye, German du/Sie, modern French tu/vous, Spanish tú/usted) are used to negotiate social goals, statuses, and identities in interactive discourse. They are among the most frequently employed forms of language and also the most socially salient, for one cannot employ them without situating both oneself and one’s interlocutor(s) in a culturally-framed (and potentially contested) social space. Inventories of forms and conventional social meanings of address pronouns may remain stable for long periods of time. Yet social, cultural, and political changes can lead to changes in language that in turn may contribute to sociocultural change (we can see a related though different phenomenon in the case of current debates regarding gendered personal pronouns).

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the Spanish system(s) of address changed radically, maintaining medieval use of tu and vos (as does modern French), but also incorporating many new forms of address, among them vuestra merced ‘your grace’ and eventually usted. This presentation and discussion (in English!) will begin with two key questions about this phenomenon. First, how and why did this change take place when and where it did, and second, what role did this change in language play in early modern culture. In response to the first question, I will suggest that the changes in address arose as a result of compensatory behavior occasioned by extreme status anxiety, which itself was a manifestation of the widespread tension between a dominant state ideology of static hierarchy, on the one hand, and a reality of great geographical and social mobility, on the other. In response to the second, I will suggest that apparently trivial but complex and pervasive patterns of address played an important role in shaping everyday discourse and social relations of early modern Spain (and its colonies) and with them the broader culture of the Spanish Baroque. Discussion may open up to comparison with similar phenomena in other languages, current issues of language and sociopolitical change in the US and elsewhere, and more general questions regarding the relations among language, culture, and politics.

**Byrd McDaniel****The Performance of Listening in Digital Cultures**

A scholar of popular music, Byrd’s work considers the way digital cultures turn listening into an expressive practice, enabling people to treat listening as a performance that they share with others. He analyzes a series of online performance genres, including popular music reaction videos on YouTube, lip-syncing apps such as musical.ly and TikTok, music-related podcasts as audible listening, and air guitar competitions that visually represent remixed guitar solos. All of these practices stage taboo forms of private listening for public audiences, allowing people to present themselves as spectacular consumers. By focusing on norms of ability and disabled performers in particular, Byrd’s work considers the stakes for these practices, which challenge some of the ableism implicit in more conventional listening contexts and yet also reproduce their own normative ideas about powerful listening.

**Joy MacDougall****The Gendered Bondage of the Eye: A Feminist Re-imagining of Sexism and Sin-Talk Today**

A scholar of contemporary Christian theology, Joy MacDougall will present her work on reconstructing a feminist theology of sin and grace in order to provide a “social diagnostic” of sexism, its pernicious fallout for women and men today, and a path towards its remedy. Her project challenges the individualistic paradigm of human sin in terms of the self-arrogating ego and its will to power (domination and subjugation) that perdures in much of Christian theology today. Drawing resources from both classical and contemporary Christian theology—in particular, the work of white feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and Global South feminist theologians—MacDougall offers a different theological analysis of sexism in terms of “closed eyes” toward and “blocked vision” of the beneficence and call to friendship with God, one’s self, and one’s fellow human beings—a state of sin that she terms the “gendered bondage of the Eye.” After an overview of the book project’s design, discussion will focus on how her re-imagining of Christian sin-talk can address the structural and social sins of sexism that ensnare women and men today, and how a theology of transforming grace might “clear our vision” and empower both an individual’s vocation and communities of faith’s charge to liberate our collective captivity to sexism today.