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 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 thematics 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.
A scholar of contemporary Christian theology, Joy McDougall 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—McDougall 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-imaging 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.