

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE
AND CULTURE STUDIES

SENIOR
THESES
2025

Trinity College
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CHINESE
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The Green Future Isn't So Green: Exploitation of People and the Environment in Lithium Mining

Pedro Mateo

Advisor: Diana Aldrete
Major: Hispanic Studies & Chinese

The Lithium Triangle involves Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile that is the grounds for the collection of lithium. Now more than ever, the push for green vehicles and sustainability goals has encouraged countries such as China and America to drive up demand for lithium. This analysis examines the impact of Chinese mining companies such as Tianqi Lithium and Ganfeng Lithium on local communities and the environment in the Lithium Triangle (Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile) through an ecocritical lens, using institutional research and literature to display how global green energy ambitions rely on unsustainable methods that disproportionately harm marginalized communities. By examining communities in the Atacama Salt Flats and Salar de Hombre Muerto, I will highlight the environmental degradation and water scarcity caused by mining operations. China plays a dominant role in the lithium supply chain where Chinese company Tianqi Lithium is a major stakeholder in Chilean mining company SQM (Sociedad Quimica y Minera de Chile). While corporate narratives push for a more green future, I aim to use literary sources such as Robert's Macfarlane's *Underland*, *A Deep Time Journey*, Ernest Scheyder's *The War Below: Lithium, Copper and the Global Battle to Power Our Lives*, and Samanta Schweblin's *Distancia de rescate* to put forth how environmental and human costs have been outsourced to distant countries while wealthier nations benefits from mining exploitation. Furthermore, I present the narrative that the new gold rush is occurring with Lithium in voiceless communities and while lithium is vital to our energy future, the lives and well-being of those living in the Lithium Triangle are even more crucial to building a truly sustainable world.

FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

Lessons from a Refugee: How Solidarity and Struggle Foster Resilience in Réfugié by Emmanuel Mbolela

Sarah Culling

Advisor: Elisabeth H. Buzay

Major: Francophone Studies

There are tens of millions of refugees in the world today, and that number is on the rise. As the population grows, so too do conversations about refugees. In these discussions, refugee voices must be prioritized. One such voice is that of Emmanuel Mbolela, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who fled inhumane imprisonment conditions, to which he was subjected for his political opinion, in 2002. Mbolela tells his story in his memoir *Réfugié*, in which he details his journey from the D.R.C., through Central and North Africa, and finally to the Netherlands in 2008. This paper argues that Mbolela subverts the traditional narrative around refugees—in which they are depicted as helpless victims—and, instead, focuses on refugees' collective strength. Mbolela does this through two mechanisms: *la solidarité* (solidarity with other community members) and *la lutte* (struggle). This paper breaks down the implications of both these terms, as seen both in academia and real-life applications in *Réfugié*. A continual emphasis on these concepts permits refugees to develop competencies in collective resistance, which ultimately provide lessons for how to construct successful grassroots advocacy movements. Mbolela details this personally through his own knowledge and experience in forming an NGO, Arcom. In highlighting an intentional shift in the narrative around refugee stories, this paper underscores the importance of both refugee stories and, moreover, literature written by refugees themselves.

A la Mode: Exploring the Roles French Couturiers Played in French New Wave Cinema

Kalea Akenti George-Phillips

Advisor: Elisabeth H. Buzay

Major: Francophone Studies

French New Wave cinema, which emerged in the late 1950s and 60s, transformed filmmaking with its radical approach to narrative, aesthetics, and production. These films' visual identities were often in collaboration with French couturiers, who played a pivotal role in shaping the movement's distinctive style. This paper examines how leading designers such as Yves Saint Laurent contributed to the New Wave's cinematic language by crafting costumes that reflected the era's modernity, rebellion, and shifting gender dynamics. Through an analysis of key films, including *Belle de Jour* and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), this study explores how couture functioned not merely as fashion but as a narrative device, reinforcing character psychology, class distinctions, and cinematic realism. By situating New Wave costume design within the broader cultural and socio-political landscape of postwar France, this paper underscores the interplay between high fashion and avant-garde filmmaking, revealing how French couturiers helped to define an aesthetic that remains influential in both cinema and fashion today.

Thinking Freely: Montaigne's Skepticism and the Pursuit of Intellectual Independence

Paul Kates III

Advisor: Elisabeth H. Buzay

Major: Francophone Studies

This explores Michel de Montaigne's use of skepticism as a powerful method for encouraging independent thought, intellectual humility, and personal self-exploration. It focuses specifically on two pivotal essays from Montaigne's *Essais*: "Apologie de Raymond Sebond" (Essais, II, 12) and "De l'expérience" (Essais, III, 13). Montaigne critiques philosophical dogmatism and human arrogance, emphasizing the limitations inherent in human reason and advocating doubt as an essential tool for genuine understanding and freedom of thought. While the "Apologie" challenges established philosophical certainties and emphasizes intellectual humility through questioning ("Que sais?"), "De l'expérience" highlights the necessity of personal experience and individual judgment as an important means of comprehending oneself and reality. Also drawing on scholarly analyses, this thesis demonstrates how Montaigne's writings actively inspire readers to question inherited truths, reflect critically, and ultimately cultivate their own intellectual independence and self-awareness.

**Modern French Femininity: Multi-Faceted Depictions of La Marianne
through Writings of Maurice Agulhon and Marianne
by Valentina Canavesio**

Mae O'Neill

Advisor: Elisabeth H. Buzay

Major: Francophone Studies

Since the French Revolution, the French Republic has defined its values through the use of their slogan - liberty (liberté), equality (égalité), and fraternity (fraternité). In French culture, symbols have been used in order to represent these ideals, with “La Marianne”, or simply Marianne, as one of the most identifiable. Typically depicted wearing the “bonnet phrygien” of the French Revolution, Marianne has served as a personification of French independence. The reliance on this figure is particularly explored through the lens of historian Maurice Agulhon, an expert and author who details Marianne’s rise to fame. In all French town halls, the bust of Marianne is placed as a reminder of the critical French value of liberty. However, it must be questioned to what extent Marianne has served as an accurate and total representation of French, and specifically female, citizenship. With an ongoing pursuit of the Fifth Republic’s views toward “laïcité” (secularism) as a tenant of maintaining French ideals, the place for religion in society continues to be a point of discussion, as well. Muslim women in particular have been targeted due to their wearing of a veil, which, according to the administrators of the French government, can “conflict” with French ideals. However, French Muslim women have contested this narrative. By comparing the historical analysis of Maurice Agulhon’s Marianne, *Les visages de la République* with Valentina Canavesio’s 2023 film, *Marianne*, the perception of who is accurately and inclusively represented in today’s French society can be further considered through a multi-faceted understanding of the symbol of La Marianne.

« Le Cas Messiaen »: Understanding Olivier Messiaen's Cultural Significance through the Lens of Language via Writings of Music Lovers, Critics, Scholars, and Christians

Madison H. Thompson

Advisor: Elisabeth H. Buzay

Major: Francophone Studies

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was one of the most formidable and influential composers of sacred music during the 20th century, and his legacy today is undisputed. As an organist, improviser, composer, and devoted Christian, Messiaen's output largely concerned Christian topics, and a majority of them were written for the organ. The reason for his legacy being so honored today is because his compositions went beyond conventional forms, harmonies, and rhythms that were typical in Western classical music, which places him as part of the Avant-Garde movement of composers. This thesis aims to better understand the evolution of Messiaen's cultural significance through textual analyses of articles written by Messiaen, scholars, music critics, and fans of his music (religious and non-religious) with a focus initially on reactions to his work *La Nativité du Seigneur*, a composition for organ released early in his career in 1936. Then, analyzing texts written about his work as a whole later on in his life (1940s, 1950s, today) to understand the progression of his role culturally. The title of this thesis references articles which aimed to understand the "cas" (case) of Messiaen's music--was it thoroughly structured with very specific musical functions, or are his works overall more aesthetic and theological? This thesis will show that opinions regarding this are primarily in favor of Messiaen's works musically speaking as those of a composer of unmatched genius. However, the arguments vary when discussing Messiaen's own writings in which he explains his musical process, and when determining if the mystical, theological, and/or Christian idea or person that he aims to portray is well understood by listeners. Despite varying opinions, the question remains as to his influence as a composer in modern-day organ music, which is examined in the final part of this thesis. In brief, this thesis will demonstrate that the road that Messiaen opened is still well trodden today by organists and composers alike, and that his ability to combine a new musical language with traditional Christian imagery marks him as one of a kind in his field.

GERMAN STUDIES

From the Wilhelmine to the Weimar Republic: the Transformation of German Women

Hailey Sussman

Advisor: Jason Doerre
Major: German Studies

While World War I is often remembered for restructuring Germany's land, labor, and legacy, a lesser-known aspect is its impact on the discourse surrounding and role of womanhood. This thesis argues that the mobilization of German women during World War I rapidly deconstructed traditional gender roles, surpassing the impact of pre-war feminist movements. By examining both male perspectives and female experiences, this thesis utilizes a two-pronged approach: first, analyzing patriarchal depictions of women in literature and the arts to understand how German gender roles were socially constructed and reinforced; second, exploring women's employment to highlight their agency, or lack thereof, within the patriarchal society.

The first chapter establishes pre-war expectations for German women through mainstream media and then analyzes how industrialization in the 19th century systematically constrained both working-class and bourgeois women's employment opportunities. The second chapter investigates how World War I enabled women to assume roles in sectors that were previously reserved for men, shifting their social and economic status at an unprecedented scale. By 1918, women had undergone a social, economic, physiological, and political metamorphosis that conservatives referred to as the "masculinization" of women. The final chapter argues that the Weimar Republic was a fleeting post-war era of female emancipation, where German women earned access to education, professional careers, and political representation because of their vital contributions to World War I. Although these advances were squandered by increasing anti-feminist discourse and the rise of National Socialism, the Weimar Republic was a pivotal moment for gender equality in Germany and must not be forgotten to the vestiges of history.

HISPANIC STUDIES

Disposable Lives: Waste, Ecological Decay, and Social Stratification in El Hoyo

Franco García

Advisor: Diana Aldrete

Major: Hispanic Studies

This thesis examines the film *El Hoyo* (*The Platform*) directed by Galder Urrutia and argues that the film uses waste as a central metaphor for ecological and social degradation, further criticizing the capitalist structures that deem both resources and human lives disposable. I discuss the issue of capitalist consumption and its impact on the environment and society from an ecocritical perspective. The film's principal *mise-en-scène* focuses on the compelling image of a vertical prison structure with a platform that ascends and descends between levels. We can compare this to the traditional style of incarceration, designed on a horizontal plane under the perpetual oversight of a central authority. Yet in *The Platform*, there is no central authority figure, just a system dependent on a vertical hierarchy and scarcity, reminiscent of Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest. In this context, all individuals are criminals, confined to "the platform," where there is always someone above who benefits, while another below endures suffers twice as hard. The platform itself carries leftovers from those at the top, prompting the question: do people in positions of power only take what is necessary and assume resources are equitably distributed within such a system? My thesis seeks to investigate these inquiries by analyzing how the film critiques capitalist consumption, exposing the imbalance and the dehumanization that occur when people are treated as waste. Ultimately, it exposes a troubling cycle in which profit is valued over sustainability, resulting in social, ecological, and economic collapse.

Extractivism and Resistance: An Ecocritical Analysis of Extractivist Practices and their Impact on Latin American Indigenous Communities.

Emily Manzano

Advisor: Diana Aldrete

Major: Hispanic Studies

Throughout Latin America, the extraction of natural resources has historically operated at the intersection of economic development and environmental degradation, with indigenous communities often bearing the heaviest costs. This thesis examines the complex relationship between Mexico's petroleum industry and the Huastec/Téenek indigenous community through an ecocritical lens. I argue that the 1938 Mexican Oil Expropriation (under President Lázaro Cárdenas), was celebrated as a pivotal moment in national sovereignty, but simultaneously facilitated new forms of dispossession and environmental degradation for indigenous peoples. The research explores how extractivist practices (such as petroleum drilling, fracking, and silver mining) have impacted indigenous territories, disrupted cultural practices, and threatened biodiversity essential to Huastec/Téenek identity. Drawing on postcolonial and environmental justice frameworks, this thesis argues that contemporary conflicts over resource extraction represent continuities of colonial power dynamics, where indigenous environmental stewardship is systematically undermined by national development priorities and global market demands. Through an analysis of environmental and indigenous scholarly studies and legal frameworks, this paper documents both the historical legacy of extraction and indigenous resistance movements. References to similar indigenous struggles in Chile, Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia provide additional Latin American regional context for comparison. By examining Mexico's recent energy reforms through the lens of climate justice and indigenous rights, this thesis demonstrates how the increased value of natural resources in our global economy has intensified encroachment on indigenous lands and in turn accelerated environmental degradation, despite constitutional protections in place and international agreements on indigenous rights.

Colombia's Indigenous Journey for Peace: The Continual Protection and Reclamation of Indigenous Lands in Colombia Two Decades After Ceasefire.

Cali Minnehan Leonard

Advisor: Diana Aldrete

Major: Hispanic Studies

The indigenous Colombian community known as kiwes, living on the reservation of Tacueyó, have been battling ex-FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) members five years after their group signed the landmark peace deal with the Colombian government. These ex-members, who disagreed with the peace deal, have continued to perpetuate such violence on innocent people, particularly to the kiwe community, including significant damage to their indigenous ecosystem, in an attempt to control their reservation which has been federally recognized. This thesis looks to investigate the continual degradation and exploitation of indigenous lands by guerrilla groups who seek to control these constitutionally protected territories to expand drug trade. Even though the government of Colombia has published their official Hallazgos y Recomendaciones or "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in 2022, which sought to recognize the human rights violations committed and hold accountable the perpetrators responsible during the 55+ year violence known as the "Forever War." By utilizing sources such as Hallazgos y Recomendaciones, other federal documents, testimonies from indigenous Colombian communities directly impacted by guerrilla violence, and literature published by other indigenous scholars who have experienced similar violations in their respective countries and communities, I seek to answer the question of what are the lasting effects of the continuously violent Latin American drug trade, with a focus on Colombia, through a historiographic and ecocritical lens.

ITALIAN STUDIES

Schizophrenia in Italian Film Before and After the Basaglia Law (1978)

Lily Cummings-Danehy

Advisor: Joshua King

Major: Italian Studies

Franco Basaglia was an Italian psychiatrist who was a key player in the movement to reform mental healthcare in Italy during the 1960s. He began working in mental hospitals and was appalled at the conditions of the environment and treatment the patients were enduring. In 1978, under Basaglia's namesake, the Basaglia Law was enacted in Italy to ensure the closure of mental hospitals and to impose a new system of mental health services to take their place. This law helped protect patients' autonomy in deciding their care and respecting their human rights by protecting them from being involuntarily committed to mental hospitals. Lastly, this law encouraged community-based mental health services by integrating psychiatric care into general hospitals and outpatient facilities with the goal of reintegrating patients into greater society.

This shift in mental healthcare coincided with evolving perspectives on disorders like schizophrenia, a psychotic disorder that affects how a person thinks, behaves, and feels. Typically diagnosed between ages of 16 and 30, schizophrenia often manifests after an initial episode of psychosis - a state in which a person loses touch with reality and has difficulty recognizing what is and is not real. As societal attitudes toward mental illness transformed, so too did the mediums reflecting these changes, with film standing out as a powerful lens into public perception.

Cinema has long mirrored and shaped societal views, particularly on mental illness, where portrayals can either reinforce stereotypes or challenge them. The goal of this thesis is to explore how the representation of schizophrenia in Italian cinema has evolved over time, particularly in relation to the landmark Basaglia Law. As a part of my research I analyzed four films, "Prima della rivoluzione" (1964), "Diario di una schizofrenica" (1968), "La pazza gioia" (2016), and "Mio fratello, mia sorella" (2021), which all depict characters suffering from schizophrenia or symptoms of psychosis. Overall, my purpose in looking at these films was to examine changes in the depiction of mental institutions, treatment methods, and the individual's experience of schizophrenia. The research highlights the overarching narrative of transformation, as shown in shifting from institutionalized and often stigmatized portrayals to more nuanced and humanized representations of mental illness in contemporary Italian film.

18th-Century Architectural Aesthetic Ideals in Stone and Garden: The evolution of Villa del Balbianello towards harmony and the architecture of experience on Lake Como

Christopher Alexander Del Cristo

Advisor: Joshua King

Major: Italian Studies

This thesis explores Villa del Balbianello as a physical and experiential palimpsest that embodies the aesthetic and philosophical aspirations of architecture and landscape of the 18th-century, cultivating a deliberate sense of harmony. Situated on the promontory of Lavedo along the western shore of Lake Como, the villa, procured in 1793 by Cardinal Angelo Maria Durini from the Franciscan Monastery of the Minor Conventual Fathers, serves as a paradigmatic site through which to examine the materialization of various architectural ideals in the built environment. Merging architectural history with landscape theory and intellectual history, this study positions the villa not merely as a residence but as a choreographed spatial experience, wherein constructed form and cultivated nature converge to articulate a vision of cultivated harmony, sensibility, and introspection.

Through a critical engagement with period archival correspondences, site analysis, and contemporaneous aesthetic theory, this project elucidates how the villa's formal elements—its axial perspectives, terraced gardens, loggia, and strategic topographical engagement—reflect and refract the intellectual currents of the time. Special attention is given to the ways in which successive owners, particularly Durini and Guido Monzino, mobilized the villa as a scenographic apparatus for the performance of elite identity, philosophical retreat, and aesthetic contemplation. In foregrounding the experiential dimension of the site, this thesis advances a theory of 'architecture of experience,' wherein affect, landscape, and design coalesce into an intentional phenomenological encounter. The study considers how the villa's design articulates a philosophy of lived beauty. It positions the villa not simply as a site of architectural interest but as a curated space of experience, intentionally shaped by its owners to align with evolving ideas of leisure, erudition, and refined taste.

Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines architectural history, landscape studies, and cultural theory, the thesis examines how successive owners have projected their intellectual and aesthetic ideals onto the villa's form and function. These ideals included the pursuit of arcadian harmony, the alignment of man-made forms with the picturesque, and the transformation of private space into a stage for personal identity and philosophical retreat. Research on the topic of villa culture informs this analysis, shedding light on the villa's unique role in embodying a transitional moment in European architectural thought. Villa del Balbianello is interpreted as a spatialized expression of 18th-century epistemologies—an architectural manifestation of an age striving to reconcile reason and emotion, nature and artifice, solitude and spectacle. It stands as both a historical artifact and a theoretical exemplar of how architecture and landscape were harnessed to construct and aestheticize the self within a broader cultural and ideological framework.

The Emergence of a New Cinematic Movement in Italy: Slow-EcoCinema

Jay Pickering

Advisor: Joshua King

Major: Italian Studies

Emerging in the late 1990s, slow-cinema is characterized by its deliberate pacing, minimalistic storytelling, and long takes that emphasize the nuances of everyday life. Deeply rooted in Italian tradition, slow-cinema developed out of Italy's most notable contribution to the film industry: Neorealism. Arising after the devastation of World War II and a period of Fascism, Neorealism embraced a raw and authentic portrayal of reality, seeking to capture the struggles of ordinary people in a cost-effective manner. Key characteristics of Neorealism, such as extended takes, ambient sound, on-location shooting, and natural lighting, were driven by budget constraints and have since been adopted by slow-cinema filmmakers, in part to make film production more financially accessible. Pushing back against long-standing traditions of fast-paced, overproduced Hollywood-style films, this movement focuses more on the intersection between art and reality. It attempts to provide a more personal, realistic experience for viewers while encouraging critical engagement with the subtleties of sound and image and emphasizing the intentionality behind each aspect of the film. In this way, slow-cinema is a perfect medium for ecocriticism, or the discussion of the environment and ecology in literature and film which has evolved in response to growing environmental awareness. There is an intersection developing between slow-cinema and ecocinema, especially in Italy with directors like Michelangelo Frammartino, Mauro Delpero, and Salvatore Mereu continuing the rich legacy of earlier Italian filmmakers. This thesis critically examines the history of slow-cinema and ecocinema, their roots in earlier Italian movements, and how this emerging movement explores the interconnection between humans and our physical landscapes.

RUSSIAN

**Pride and Punishment:
The poison of arrogance and the downfall of the "Exceptional Man"**

Hamdan Almansoori

Advisor: Katherin Lahti
Major: Russian

This thesis explores how the pride and arrogance of Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, and Luzhin in *Crime and Punishment* lead to their downfall, reflecting Dostoevsky's critique of the "extraordinary man" ideology that was rampant in 19th century Russia. Through story analysis and historical context, it reveals how moral exceptionalism, and arrogance corrodes both individual conscience and social bonds. Each character's collapse illustrates the novel's central warning about unchecked ego and the rejection of compassion. Ultimately, Dostoevsky posits humility as the antidote to spiritual isolation and societal harm.

Russian Plays Adapted by Non-Russian Directors

Nathan Sykes

Advisor: Katherine Lahti

Major: Russian

Classic Russian plays are intense, character-driven works that deeply explore existential struggles, societal decay, and tensions between traditional and modern values. Writers like Chekhov, Gogol, and Ostrovsky crafted pieces that, in their time, emphasized realism and emotional authenticity. Early performances tended toward theatricality and declamation, but under Stanislavski's influence at the Moscow Art Theatre, productions shifted toward subtle, psychologically nuanced acting, naturalistic set design, and ensemble-driven performances rather than star-focused showcases. This thesis examines five adaptations of classic Russian plays directed by non-Russian directors, aiming to identify what common values, if any, these directors—without a cultural or genealogical connection to the material—bring to their interpretations.

***WORLD
LITERATURE
& CULTURE
STUDIES***

Indigenous People in the Eyes of Explorers: Objects or Human Beings?

Lujan Palacios Benitez

Advisor: Rosario Hubert

Major: World Literature and Culture Studies

This research examines how Indigenous communities in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were perceived during European and Hispanic explorations, analyzing whether they were seen as human beings or objects of study. By focusing on Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and Francisco Pascasio Moreno's *Viaje a la Patagonia Austral* (1879), this study explores the ways in which these explorers engaged with Indigenous people and contributed to colonial narratives.

Darwin, as a naturalist, framed Indigenous communities through an evolutionary perspective, describing them as "primitive" and reinforcing 19th century racial hierarchies. His interactions with the Fuegians, particularly with Jemmy Button, reflected his belief in Indigenous inferiority and the need for European intervention. Meanwhile, Moreno as an explorer and nationalist, treated Indigenous people as specimens of scientific study, collecting artifacts and even human remains to support Argentina's territorial expansion. His relationship with Sam Slick, whose remains he later excavated for study, exemplifies this objectification.

By critically analyzing these narratives through colonial discourse and scientific racism, this research argues that both Darwin and Moreno dehumanized Indigenous people and shaped lasting policies of displacement and marginalization.