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ARABIC STUDIES

Music as a Tool for Socio-Political Expression: A Comparison between Lebanon's *Mashrou' Leila* and Morocco's *ElGrandeToto*

Hannah Neo Khambule

Advisor: Kifah Hanna
Major: Arabic

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, home to approximately 590 million people, is often perceived as ideologically and socio-politically monolithic, despite the internal diversity of its cultures and histories. As a region with one of the highest youth populations on the globe, the means by which youth navigate and, at times, subvert hegemonic power structures is an apt litmus test for the values that are shaping the region's future: particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring (2010-2012). Despite a recent history of overt protest, the Arts in the MENA region represent a sustained, latent engagement with political realities. This Arabic Language thesis examines music as a tool for socio-political expression by comparing Lebanon's *Mashrou' Leila* with Morocco's *ElGrandeToto*. The paper is underpinned by fieldwork conducted during a semester at the *Amideast* Language and Culture centre in Rabat, Morocco, contrasting Morocco's more stringent control on free speech with Lebanon's comparatively more permissive political landscape. To do this, I select *Mashrou' Leila*, a Lebanese band that openly championed LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East, as a point of comparison for *ElGrandeToto*, a Moroccan rapper embedding implicit political lyricism of cultural liberalisation in his music. Though rooted in their home countries, *Mashrou' Leila* and *ElGrandeToto* are transnational emblems of the upheaval of contemporary socio-political order in the MENA region, providing a glimpse into the youth undercurrents that give rise to open action protest.

FRANCOPHONE STUDIES

Dante in France: Etienne Gilson and Paul Claudel's Humanist Readings of *The Divine Comedy*

Kwaku Agyapong

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

Considered as one of the most influential writers of all time, Dante Alighieri's legacy was cemented by his final work, *The Divine Comedy*. Composed and circulated over the final years of his life during his exile from Florence, the work concluded shortly before his death in 1321. Though unconventional, Dante's choice to use the vernacular, Italian, instead of the standard Latin ended up being beneficial in the spread of his work. Soon after its release, the work quickly gained traction in the aristocracy of neighboring France as writers such as Christine de Pisan and Marguerite de Navarre adopted Dante's theological and philosophical views. Over time these ideas made their way into the more recent works of Etienne Gilson as shown in his *Dante et la Philosophie (1939)* and Paul Claudel's collection of poems *Cinq Grandes Odes (1910)*. In this paper, I argue that these writers revived the *Divine Comedy*'s philosophical and theological concerns to grapple with modern and contemporary French issues. Through close reading and literary analysis, I will highlight the core humanist principles they drew from Dante's work: the belief that mankind possesses the capacity for moral redemption within earthly life, independent of divine judgement. By emphasizing this capacity, Claudel and Gilson restore the moral agency in individuals calling for a more active responsibility and determination in the pursuit of self-betterment. Their insistence that human beings can, and must, make themselves worthy of essentially themselves remains a compelling and relevant philosophical concern today.

From the Margins to the Center: The Reception of Françoise d'Eaubonne's Ecofeminism in France

Lucy Bailey

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

French feminism is often categorized into three "waves," with Second Wave taking place roughly from the 1960s to 1980s, led by well-known figures such as Simone de Beauvoir, Christine Delphy, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig. While the First Wave focused on women's suffrage, the Second Wave looked to incorporate women into the concept of French universalism, demanding reforms such as equal pay or increasing the number of women elected to office. During this same period, lesser-known feminist thinker Françoise d'Eaubonne (1920-2005), coined the term ecofeminism, a concept which examines the interconnected systems of domination that uphold both gendered oppression and environmental exploitation. Two of her works, *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1974) and *Écologie/Féminisme : Révolution ou mutation ?* (1978), serve as the theoretical foundation and are key touchstones to examine both the formulation of ecofeminist thought and its early reception.

Although the term was coined in France by a French author, ecofeminism failed to take root within French feminist theory and activism. However, the movement expanded elsewhere in the world, such as in India and the US. Today, d'Eaubonne's works see a renewed interest in France, with scholars reexamining her texts and placing them in the context of contemporary climate catastrophe. Through a close reading of d'Eaubonne's work, archival analysis, and engagement with contemporary ecofeminist theory, I argue that d'Eaubonne's initial rejection was due to an incompatibility with French philosophical and cultural theory and a misunderstanding of ecofeminism as essentialism. Further, I view her recent resurgence in France as a consequence of the transnational expansion of ecofeminism, as well as a climate crisis calling for an interdisciplinary approach to systems of oppression.

The Forgotten Liberators: The Strategic Marginalization of La Nueve and its Delayed Memorialization

Nicole Balbuena Gutierrez

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

On the evening of August 24, 1944, the first military vehicles to reach the Hôtel de Ville during the Liberation of Paris were greeted not in French, but with cries of "¡Hola!" and "¡Viva la Libertad!". This visual archive reveals that among the vanguard of liberation was La Nueve, the 9th Company of the 2nd Armored Division, composed almost entirely of Spanish Republicans and anarchists. Despite their military indispensability, these soldiers were systematically erased from the official French narrative for over fifty years. This thesis explores the mechanisms of erasure through a close reading of Captain Raymond Dronne's war diaries *Carnets de route d'un croisé de la France Libre* (1984) and Alberto Marquardt's documentary *La Nueve: les oubliés de la victoire* (2010), as well as financial analysis of post-war diplomatic archives, including the Blum-Byrnes Agreements (1946) and Marshall Plan negotiations (1948).

I argue that the marginalization of La Nueve was not merely a byproduct of French national pride, but a calculated economic transaction. In the wake of World War II, France was a bankrupt nation standing on the precipice of the Cold War. To secure vital financial credit from the United States, the provisional government of Charles de Gaulle had to market a front of "National Unity" and political stability. By analyzing the Gaullist Myth through a financial and ideological lens, this research examines an identity transaction where the pressures of the American Red Scare and the racialized "whitening" of the Allied forces compelled France to silence its most radical transnational elements to appease its allies.

The historical silencing eventually gives way to a 21st-century revaluation of memory. Drawing on Pierre Nora's theory of Lieux de mémoire (1984), I will analyze the 2015 inauguration of the Jardin des Combattants de la Nueve in Paris by Mayor Anne Hidalgo and investigate why the political capital of La Nueve has increased in recent years. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that the history of La Nueve was liquidated as a political liability in 1944, only to be recapitalized today as France finally seeks to balance its historical ledger.

A Struggling Class: Cultural Representations of French Middle Class by Anthony Cordier and Margurite Duras

Meckenzie Boylan

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

Since the early days of the French Revolution, the French middle class has been explored in history books and novels, as well as portrayed in film and television. Over time, members of this class have continued to influence French culture and society. Today, the middle class makes up approximately fifty to sixty percent of the population. Despite its significant presence, however, it is often overlooked in policy and legislation, as attention tends to focus on supporting the lower class and glorifying the upper class. In French cultural productions, the middle class is frequently depicted as conventional and banal. Through a close reading of Anthony Cordier's film *Classe Moyenne* (2025) and Marguerite Duras's novel *La Ville Tranquille* (1944), this essay will demonstrate that, despite their seemingly monotonous lives, members of the middle class face numerous struggles and insecurities beneath the surface.

A People Forgotten, The Cagots

Liam Goodman

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

This thesis contributes to the scholarly recovery of the Cagots, a historically marginalized people whose presence across the Pyrenean regions of southwestern France and northern Spain remains one of the least documented episodes of sustained social exclusion in the francophone world. Through a structured two-part examination, it argues that the Cagots were constituted as a lower caste through three mutually reinforcing and largely unsubstantiated discourses, medical stigmatization, religious imputation, and genealogical myth, and that the French Revolution, far from producing a recoverable archive of emancipation, served as the pivotal moment at which Cagot communities, as observed by Michel, exploited the upheaval of 1789 to destroy the registers and legal documents that had long identified and subjugated them, rendering their erasure from the historical record as deliberate as it was comprehensive. Both chapters draw substantially on Francisque Michel's *Histoire des races maudites de la France et de l'Espagne* (1847), engaged here as both a secondary historical synthesis and a primary document in its own right, utilizing his first-hand field observations and translations of traditional Gascon oral poetry to reconstruct the mechanisms of caste formation and the conditions that rendered the erasure of Cagot history not merely possible but, for those concerned, necessary.

L'identité francophone libanaise: le phénicianisme dans les écrits de Charles Corm

Alex Paxhia

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

This thesis dives into the emergence of Phoenicianism in Lebanon during the early twentieth century, a powerful narrative articulated by a network of intellectuals concerned with the survival of the nation. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire there was trauma left in Lebanon due to the Great Famine during World War I.

The Lebanese inteligentsia turned towards the prestigious history of maritime trade and expressed multireligious worldviews informed by a French influence. Phoenicianism was a way to claim their ancient ancestry. Due to those traits and the francophone influence, these thinkers were instrumental in the creation of the independent nation of Greater Lebanon.

Through a literary analysis of the poems of Charles Corm (1894-1963) this thesis illustrates how Phoenicianism laid the roots for a hybrid, humanistic, and culturally sound Lebanese identity.

Painting Resistance: Memory, Culture, and Identity in Postcolonial Algeria through the Works of Issiakhem and Khadda

Zarina Stone

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies

The Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and its aftermath marked an era of profound trauma, political division, and instability as the country sought to rebuild its identity after 136 years of French colonization. In the time leading up to and following liberation, Algerian artists explored the legacy of colonial violence through the redefining of national identity. Among the most significant of these artists were M'hamed Issiakhem (1928-1985) and Mohammed Khadda (1930-1991), whose works helped shape modern Algerian painting. Through close analysis of Issiakhem's later works, such as *Femme et mur* and *Femme sur poème*, created in collaboration with poet Kateb Yacine, this paper will first study how Issiakhem's portrayal of female figures challenges post-independence narratives that minimize women's contributions to resistance. His somber, muted paintings reframe resistance as the endurance of memory, contrasting traditional heroic representations and illustrating that women's bodies serve as carriers of colonial trauma, vessels of historical memory.

Mohammed Khadda adopts a more abstract artistic style that draws on his interest in Arabic and Amazigh calligraphy. This paper will examine *Les Casbahs ne s'assiègent pas* and *Pièges*, which incorporate layered textures, signs, and symbols rooted in Algerian cultural identity, directly contrasting traditional, colonial art. Khadda's writings on art and decolonization will guide our interpretation of his works. I argue that although their styles differ, both Issiakhem and Khadda apply calligraphy or cultural texts to transform painting into a space of postcolonial resistance that explores themes of grief, memory, and trauma, reframing history and Algerian identity to resist colonial frameworks.

FRANCOPHONE STUDIES & GERMAN STUDIES

"Gevatter Faucheuse": Alsatian Identity in the Interwar Era through *Die Leibwache* and *Les Oberlés*

Jacob Kammerzell

Advisor: Walid Bouchakour
Major: Francophone Studies & German Studies

Alsace-Lorraine is a region of current-day France along the northeast border next to Germany. The region has a long and complicated history with both nations, having been part of both on multiple occasions. Its position as an "in-between" space of France and Germany has given the territory a unique blend of both cultures and even its own language: Alsatian. However, in the current day and age, the culture has become heavily dominated by French influence, as the population of Alsatian speakers is quickly dwindling while the German presence is declining.

In this paper, I argue that the series of wars which took place in the Interwar Era heavily damaged the Alsatian identity, creating a loss of autonomy through a rapid switching of nationalities, which has ultimately led to the cultural loss we're experiencing now in 2026. This argument is made first through a translation and close reading of Alsatian literature from the early 20th century, examining René Bazin's French novel Les Oberlés and René Schickele's German poems 1815 and Chronik from the collection Die Leibwache. A multilingual comparative reading of these works illuminates the impact of the wars of that period on Alsatian culture and identity.

GERMAN STUDIES

Guilt, Material Continuity, and the Myth of *Stunde Null*

Helena Likus

Advisor: Julia Assaiante
Major: German Studies

This thesis interrogates the concept of *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour) in post-war Germany, commonly understood as a moment of radical rupture from the Nazi past. Challenging this narrative, it argues that *Stunde Null* functioned less as a genuine break than as a mythic construction that masked cultural amd philosophical continuities. Instead of examining the historical outcomes of this supposed rupture, this project focuses on the concept itself, tracing how elements of German cultural and intellectual thought persist within it. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno, the thesis situates National Socialism as emerging from culture not outside of it. It then engages Friedrich Nietzsche to show how narratives of rebirth naturalize history, and Sigmund Freud to argue that the declaration of a new beginning represses rather than resolves guilt. Through theoretical analysis and readings of post-war German literature, the thesis demonstrates that *Stunde Null* did not constitute a genuine break, but rather enabled the continuation of cultural myths under the guise of rupture. Using Nietzsche's language, *Stunde Null* masked monumental history as critical history.

The Culinary Divergence: How Shifts in Migration, Economic Mobility, and Cultural Capital Shape Chinese Gastronomy in Germany

Jensen Tsao

Advisor: Jason Doerre
Major: German Studies

The profound division within the Chinese gastronomic landscape in Germany suggests that it can no longer be analyzed as a singular cultural practice. The sector has fractured into two distinct categories: the adapted, namely Westernized, and the authentic. Rather than treating these differences as mere culinary preferences, this study frames them as the material results of distinct migration waves interacting with shifting market constraints and traces how the demographic shifts of immigration produced fundamentally incompatible culinary realities within the same host society over the past six decades. To establish an empirical foundation, the study analyzes the culinary techniques and dish characteristics, evaluates the influence of the dining ambiance, and identifies the primary target clients. It demonstrates that precedent-adapted Chinese restaurants rely on standardization, predictability, and self-orientalization to create a mild exotic experience tailored to the mid-twentieth-century German palate. In contrast, modern authentic restaurants prioritize regional specificity, technical integrity, and simplification. To provide ground for such phenomena, a historical approach is taken to reflect a direct demographic shift within the migrant population. Early restaurateurs, arriving between the 1960s and 1980s, faced serious economic limitations, which made culinary adaptation a necessary strategy for financial survival and social assimilation. The newer wave, consisting of post-2000s migrants, international students, and professionals, is supported by globalized supply chains and a growing diaspora. This movement utilizes its cultural authenticity as a competitive advantage and deliberately eschews cultural translation in favor of a specialized commercial strategy. To provide a broader context, the findings are compared to the cuisines brought by the Gastarbeiter (guest workers) from Italy and Turkey. While Italian gastronomy successfully ascended from modified immigrant fare to prestigious regional authenticity alongside the diaspora's upward mobility, Turkish cuisine, despite the monumental commercial success of the Döner Kebab, has remained largely confined to the fast-food sector, suggesting persistent structural boundaries. This thesis concludes that the culinary divergence of Chinese food in Germany proves that the adaptation of migrant cuisine is not a permanent market necessity, but a historically situated action. The ability to serve authentic food is a privilege inseparably linked to cultural and financial capital, making gastronomic output a reliable representation for measuring migrant economic mobility and power dynamics within the host society.

HISPANIC STUDIES

Between News and Silence: Testimony and Repression in García Márquez's *Relato de un náufrago* and *La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile*

Gabriela Geraldine Flores

Advisor: Priscilla Meléndez
Major: Hispanic Studies

This thesis examines two works of nonfiction by Gabriel García Márquez—Relato de un náufrago (1970) and La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile (1986)—that have been frequently identified as of nonfiction because of its journalistic roots. However, I argue that such a classification is limited, as both works transform testimonial accounts into literary narratives that expose censorship, political repression, and institutional power in Latin America. More importantly, it asks why real events are reshaped through literary form if the goal is denunciation. This project contends that it is precisely through this transformation that the texts acquire their critical force. Situating these works within the tradition of Latin American testimonial literature (which underscored their liminality), this project explores how García Márquez employs narrative strategies of the crónica and testimonio to reconstruct real historical events while simultaneously questioning the notion of objective truth. Rather than treating these texts as purely journalistic, this study emphasizes their hybrid nature, showing how they operate in a space where narration inevitably involves mediation, selection, and construction. In Relato de un náufrago, the first-person account of the Colombian sailor Luis Alejandro Velasco—originally published in El Espectador—reveals how an individual survival story becomes an implicit denunciation of military corruption and state-controlled information. Although the narrative appears to present a direct, unmediated voice, García Márquez deliberately grants Velasco narrative authority, creating the illusion that the journalist disappears. This strategy, characteristic of testimonial discourse, highlights how the testimony is shaped and structured rather than simply recorded. Similarly, La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile reconstructs the clandestine return of filmmaker Miguel Littín during Chilean military dictatorship, using interviews and narrative framing to document experiences that could not circulate publicly under authoritarian rule. Here, the mediation is even more visible, as the narrative is built from reorganized interviews, reinforcing that testimony is a constructed representation shaped by memory and narrative design. In both cases, testimony becomes a vehicle through which silenced histories are narrated and preserved. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of testimonio, particularly the work of John Beverley, as well as studies on narrative journalism, this thesis analyzes how voice, authority, and narrative structure (such as perspective, time, subjectivity, language, symbolism, among others) shape the representation of truth. The project pays particular attention to how García Márquez constructs narrative credibility while blurring the boundaries between factual reporting and literary storytelling. This tension reveals the extent to which "truth" in these texts is not merely recorded but actively produced through narrative form. By placing these works in their historical contexts, this study demonstrates how testimonial narrative functions as symbolic resistance. Ultimately, it argues that literature is not subordinate to factual truth; rather, it actively structures and shapes how reality is understood.

Abandonment and Solitude: The Destruction of Political and Social Institutions in *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* and "La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada"

Beckett Hennessey

Advisor: Priscilla Meléndez
Major: Hispanic Studies

In the illustrious career of the Colombian journalist, writer, and Nobel Prize winner in literature Gabriel García Márquez's (1927-2014), the theme of governmental abandonment is especially prevalent throughout his works. What follows as a result of this abandonment for the characters living within this societal and political structure is isolation and the dismantling of family units. The short novel El coronel no tiene quien le escriba (1961), and the short story "La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada" (1972) emphasize these themes and the severe consequences of governmental abandonment in the lives of individuals and communities. Containing both realistic and magical approaches to critiquing the realities of Colombian society in the 20th century, these two texts represent a common fate and pattern that occurs under an oppressive system, such as the tragic realities of of the Civil Wars during the early part of the twentieth century, and later in the tumultuous period of "La Violencia", the decade long conflict (of 1948 to 1958) in which at least 200,000 people are known to have been killed due to political violence. It is clear through these texts that García Márquez argues that the failure of large, oppressive institutions results in the failure of local and personal ones.

Power Over the Vulnerable: Social and Religious Hierarchy in the Work of Gabriel García Márquez

Annie Kathryn Scovill

Advisor: Priscilla Meléndez
Major: Hispanic Studies

Vulnerability in the works of Gabriel García Márquez is not a direct result of individual weakness, but rather external forces that include religion, social norms, and the power that institutions hold. Through the texts Cien años de soledad (1967), Crónica de una muerte anunciada (1981), and "El rastro de tu sangre en la nieve" which is part of the anthology of short stories, Doce cuentos peregrinos (1992) García Márquez displays vulnerability through different strategies. In Cien años de soledad, vulnerability is portrayed through the role of spiritual forces, especially those that appear through the enigmatic character Melquíades. As the emblem of writing, Melquíades and his story move from the global to the specific, and vice versa, creating an image of repetition and circularity that anticipates the destruction of Macondo. Similarly, the theme of incest and cyclical time recur throughout the novel ultimately causing destruction and ironically instilling both fear and audacity within the characters. In Crónica de una muerte anunciada, there are religious expectations associated with women and their purity, and when these expectations are not fulfilled, there is a murder within the community. The community and religious figures are complicit in this murder as there is no action taken to protect Santiago, the character accused of taking Ángela's virginity. In "El rastro de tu sangre en la nieve", the characters are vulnerable due to being displaced in Paris, on their honeymoon without speaking the language. When Nena gets injured, her husband has difficulty navigating the confusing and powerful hospital resulting in her death. In these texts Gabriel García Márquez emphasizes how spiritual forces, religion, community norms, and powerful institutions limit the individual's control over causing destruction in the stories. This essay proposes that GM's stories create the impression that most of its characters have limited control over their own existence, underscoring that determination and free will are subject to forces that are beyond their control. Nevertheless, the persistent use of elements associated with magical realism allows the characters to portray vulnerability, not as a flaw or weakness, but as one of its strengths in the midst of destruction.

ITALIAN STUDIES

Deterritorializing the Mother Tongue: The Work of Massimiliano Chiamenti Through Deleuze & Guattari

Pen Baxter

Advisor: Joshua King
Major: Italian Studies

The poetry of Massimiliano Chiamenti deterritorializes standard Italian through grammatical instability, syntactic fragmentation, and lexical experimentation, in line with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of minor literature. For Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature arises not from a minor language but from a minor use of a major one, as it is marked by the politicization of language, the disruption of dominant linguistic structures from within, and collective perspective of its subject matter.

Chiamenti's work exemplifies the idea of reshaping the Italian language by exposing the ideological assumptions embedded in its normative forms. His poetry unsettles the coherence typically associated with standard Italian. Through fractured syntax, shifting registers, and disrupted grammar, Chiamenti resists the idea of language as a transparent vehicle of meaning. These strategies loosen the link between language and the social norms it encodes, revealing how linguistic conventions reproduce heteronormative assumptions about gender, sexuality, and identity. In this way, Chiamenti queers Italian from within. By bending and breaking its rules, he transforms the "major" language into a flexible, unstable system capable of expressing non-normative identities by enacting what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the capacity of minor literature to make language "stutter," or in other words, opening it to new forms of meaning and expression. This linguistic experimentation is inherently political. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, everything in minor literature is political, and so accordingly, Chiamenti's poetry turns personal expression into a form of structural critique.

His deviations from linguistic convention expose the limits of normative language while imagining alternative modes of relation and expression beyond heteronormative frameworks, and they demonstrate how even a "major" language can be metamorphosized from within into a site of new poetic possibility.

Manufacturing The Italian Identity: The Impacts of Colonization and Fascism on Contemporary Migration Discourse

Grace Bomberger

Advisor: Joshua King
Major: Italian Studies

Since antiquity, the Italian peninsula has been a space of racial, cultural, and linguistic mixing, characterized by millennia of cross-Mediterranean migrations and social intermixing. Despite this history of heterogeneity, Italy's transformation since the late twentieth century changed from a historical nation of mass emigration into a primary destination for global migration, which has exposed deeply entrenched crises of national identity. This thesis argues that contemporary Italian political and cultural responses to immigration are fundamentally shaped by the unexamined legacies of fascist, and colonial racial ideologies, which established and preserved an exclusionary, "white" definition of Italianness. By tracing the genealogy of Italian racial identity, this study examines how the state forged its whiteness through the subjugation of internal Others, specifically Southern Italians, and external colonized subjects in Africa. This racial hierarchy was ultimately organized by the Fascist regime through strict colonial apartheid and the 1938 Racial Laws. Following World War II, Italy bypassed a comprehensive national reckoning and actively suppressed memories of imperial atrocities by cultivating the self-exculpatory myth of the *italiani brava gente* (good Italians). This colonial amnesia enabled a "foreclosure of race," where the language of race became taboo while structural racial hierarchies remained intact. Consequently, this study connects this historical evasion to modern exclusionary mechanisms, most notably the citizenship law based on *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), which legally marginalizes Italy-born children of immigrants. Additionally, I analyze how contemporary right-wing political discourse weaponizes these dormant racial anxieties by framing migrants as existential threats to an imagined homogeneous European civilization.

JAPANESE STUDIES

How Shinkai Makoto's Natural Disaster Anime Film Trilogy *Suzume* (2023), *Weathering with You* (2019), and *Your Name* (2016) Subvert the Sekai-kei Genre

Ashton L. Rivera

Advisor: Katsuya Izumi
Major: Japanese Studies

This essay focuses on Shinkai Makoto's anime film "Disaster Trilogy" and how it subverts the typical traits of the sekai-kei, or the "world-type," a genre in Japanese popular cultural media such as manga, anime, and videogames. Especially, I will explain how Shinkai's "Disaster Trilogy" (*Your Name, Weathering with You,* and *Suzume*) tackles the understanding of sekai-kei which Motoko Tanaka, a well-known critic of Japanese popular culture, explicates in her book chapter titled "Apocalyptic Science Fiction after 1995—Sekaikei Works". Through the lens of gender ambiguity and the concept of the "middle-ground", this essay compares each of Shinkai's films in the "Disaster Trilogy" and how each challenges the sekai-kei definitions explained by Tanaka. Tanaka defines gender ambiguity into three sections: the heroine's sacrifice for the male protagonist, the "invincible heroine" trope, or the powerful female character, and the infant-mother relationship as described in Tanaka's book chapter. Tanaka defines the middle ground as the presence of societal interference or the role of communities in such stories, which is typically absent in sekai-kei. This essay seeks to explain how these natural disaster-related films challenge each of the points Tanaka makes, which are atypical of common sekai-kei narratives. This subversion may communicate a larger message to society about the relationship between humanity and natural disasters.

Miyazaki Hayao's Perception of Imagination: From *My Neighbor Totoro* to *The Boy and the Heron* in the Age of Participatory *Isekai* Culture

Sudhish Bikram Thapa

Advisor: Katsuya Izumi
Major: Japanese Studies

This paper explores Hayao Miyazaki's evolving perception of imagination as reflected in two of his films: *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and *The Boy and the Heron* (2023). Miyazaki Hayao used to perceive imagination as a coping mechanism that brought joy, but shifted to viewing it as a force that leads to social isolation. In *My Neighbor Totoro*, imagination is portrayed as a coping mechanism for children that brings them joy. Conversely, *The Boy and the Heron* presents a more complex and critical stance, depicting imagination as a double-edged sword. While it brings joy to those who engage with it, it can also cause creators (artists, film directors etc.) who rely on imagination to be socially isolated. The two movies will be analyzed and compared in this paper through the lens of a portal-quest narrative, which is a type of story that involves characters getting transported to another world. This paper argues that the shift in Miyazaki Hayao's perception reflects the rise of participatory culture within the *isekai* (different world) genre of anime. This shift shows Miyazaki Hayao's changed and nuanced approach to imagination which he initially celebrated as a source of joy but later scrutinized and considered dangerous because it can isolate individuals.

LANUAGE & CULTURE STUDIES COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Self- History: Narrative Perspective in Xue Fucheng's *European Diary*

Marina K. Wheeler

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Major: Language & Culture Studies Comparative Literature

Xue Fucheng was a Chinese diplomat of the Qing Dynasty in the late 19th century. As a notable ambassador, thinker, and writer, *The European Diary of Xue Fucheng* documents his experiences during a diplomatic mission to Europe while reflecting on broader political and cultural observations. This thesis analyzes the diary as a narrative form that reveals how historical meaning is shaped through individual lived experience and interpretation.

Drawing on theories of narratology and narrative identity, particularly the idea that meaning is shaped by perspective, this project will demonstrate how Xue Fucheng's writing exemplifies the importance of personal narrative in historical understanding. His diary does not simply document his observations objectively, but is influenced by human motivation, cultural outlook, and personal interpretation. Through moments of reflection and evaluation, Xue Fucheng provides a window into a history that reflects an individual identity within the broader context in which he writes.

By placing the diary into the context of narratology and historical interpretation, this thesis demonstrates how personal narratives are essential to understanding the complexity of history. Personal narratives reveal how lived experiences, interpersonal relationships, and cultural dynamics shape the large-scale narratives of history. Ultimately, this thesis argues that utilizing personal narratives for historical analysis leads to a more accurate and human centric understanding of history.

RUSSIAN STUDIES

Psychological Punishment and the Limits of Moral Rationalism in Crime and Punishment: An Analysis of Raskolnikov

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This paper uses the question 'How does Dostoevsky portray crime as a psychological punishment rather than a legal one in Crime and Punishment, and what does this suggest about the limits of rationalist theories of morality?' to analyze psychological punishment rather than legal crime. I argue that Raskolnikov's suffering begins immediately after the murder, when he is driven by guilt, paranoia, and self-isolation. I examine this through his failed "extraordinary man" theory by demonstrating that humans like Raskolnikov cannot rely on logical reasoning to justify actions, but should instead use conscience, emotion, and morals through human connection. This paper draws on philosophical and psychoanalytical perspectives to show how Raskolnikov's self-inflicted suffering functions as an evasion of guilt, transforming into genuine awareness of morals only after confession, his internal suffering, psychological and physical decay, and his interpersonal relationship with Sonya. Ultimately, I argue that Dostoevsky portrays true punishment and redemption as internal processes that reveal that moral accountability comes from within and is not fully imposed by the legal system.