Faculty Favorites

FILMS

Jordan B. Jones (Brazilian Literature)
—Doutor Gama
A biographical drama that chronicles the life of one of the most notable abolitionists in Brazilian history.

Brazilian film *Doutor Gama* (*Doctor Gama*) dramatizes the life and work of Luiz Gama (1830–1882), an amazing 19th-century abolitionist who was born free but illegally sold into slavery by his father at age 10. During his eight-year enslavement, Gama learned to read and studied the Brazilian legal system, and he eventually obtained proof of his free birth and the illegality of his enslavement. After escaping from slavery, he continued to study the law and represent enslaved people in court. During his lifetime, Gama helped over 500 illegally enslaved people secure their freedom in the courts.

This film is a powerful portrayal of the violent legacy of slavery, and it also addresses the anti-Black racism that persists in Brazil to this day. It highlights the contributions of one of Brazil's great abolitionists and points to the diligent efforts of countless other Afro-Brazilians and allies in resisting slavery and working toward abolition over the course of centuries. Finally, it shows how Luiz Gama used his mastery of languages—Portuguese, Latin, French, and the language of law—to bring about positive change for himself and those around him.

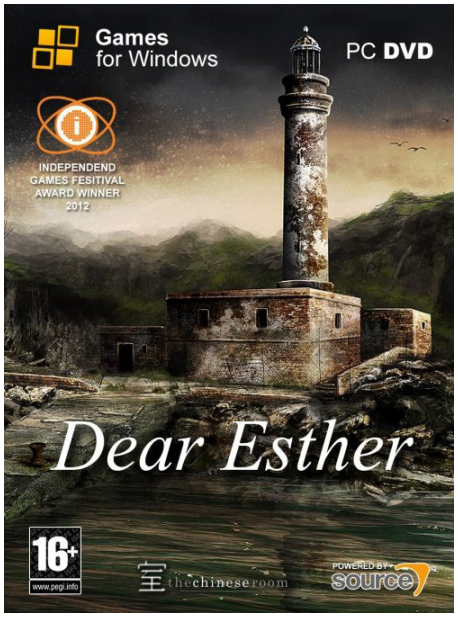
Carl Sederholm (Horror, Popular Culture, Literature, and Film)—*Now, Voyager*
A classic Hollywood romance film set in 1942 in which a young woman finds her independence from the pressures of society.

Now, Voyager (1942), starring Bette Davis, still resonates with audiences today. The film tells the story of a shy and repressed woman who discovers herself during a cruise. She also falls in love, but her story does not necessarily turn out the way audiences might expect. I have sometimes shown this film in American studies or interdisciplinary humanities classes, and my students love discussing its themes while also connecting them to their favorite contemporary romantic dramas.

VIDEOGAMES

Michael Call (17th-Century French Art and Literature)—*Dear Esther*
An untraditional, first-person exploration virtual experience.

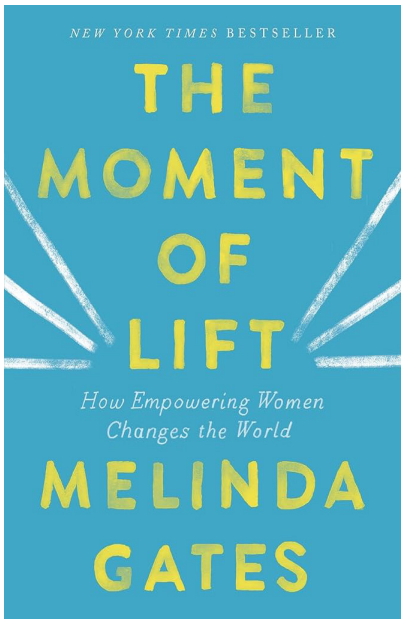
A pioneering and award-winning example of the walking simulator subgenre, *Dear Esther* places you on a gorgeously rendered Hebridean island and then presents you with fragments of dialogue. As you wend your way through the mysterious island, these narrative fragments weave together threads from the island's history and the narrator's recent personal tragedy. The twist that you do not realize until subsequent playthroughs is that the bits of narrative that you receive are randomly selected from a much larger bank of possibilities, meaning that the particular version of the story you encounter in your journey is based upon chance, which raises the specter that it might just be meaningless. And there is the rub: *Dear Esther*'s narrative conceit makes human meaning-making the game's real focus as both you and the narrator struggle to decide if the story components of human life and death can make sense in a world where things happen by accident.



BOOKS

Bobbe May (Humanities Center Program Administrator)—*The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World* by Melinda Gates
A memoir on Melinda Gates' experiences in her efforts to empower women.

As a devoted Christian and global health advocate, Melinda Gates writes about the issues women are facing through a lens that really resonates with me. She is driven by her faith in Christ to understand and address many of the most difficult issues that women and children (and by extension, all humanity) face worldwide. Her energy for this cause and



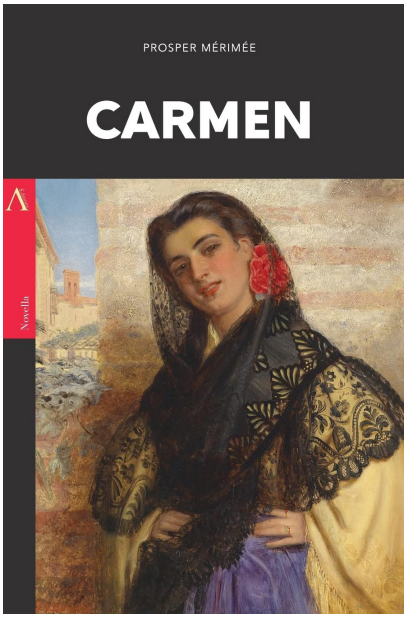
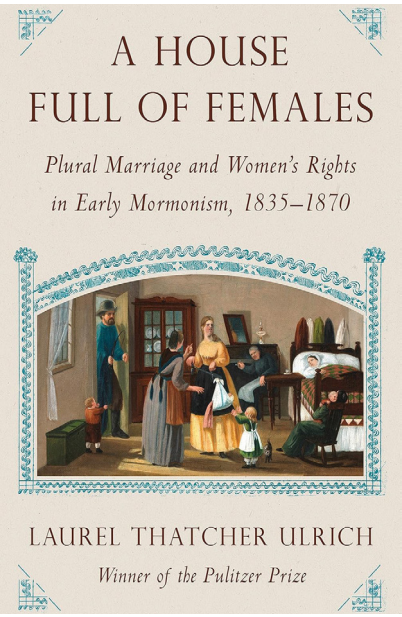
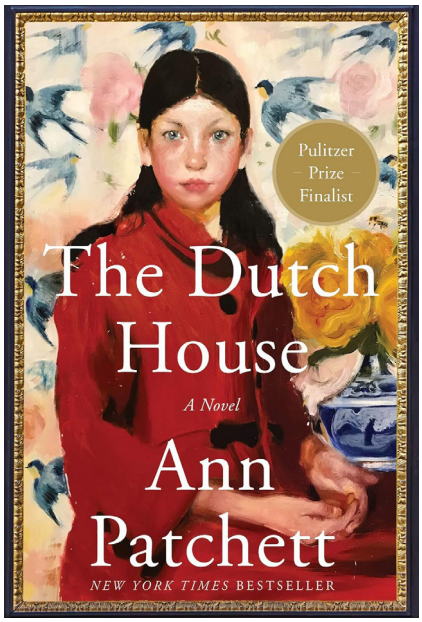
optimism for what we can accomplish in the future are contagious.

Corry Cropper (French)—*Carmen* by Prosper Mérimée
A 19th-century novella depicting the flirtatious, gypsy woman Carmen bewitching a Spanish soldier, Don José.

Mérimée's 1845 novella *Carmen* inspired Bizet's famous 1875 opera. But where the opera's characters are largely types, Mérimée's characters are more complicated: José is not simply an innocent soldier corrupted by passion; he has joined the army to flee preexisting legal problems in his home region. Carmen is not simply a dangerous femme fatale; she is a countercultural embodiment of freedom who resists José's attempts to control her. Mérimée's *Carmen* plays on the archaeological fervor of 19th-century Europe—the narrator has traveled to Spain to locate the site of Julius Caesar's Battle of Munda. But instead of solving this historical mystery, he is pulled into the story of José and Carmen and attempts—but seemingly fails—to understand their personal drama. Reading the original novella provides new insights into the opera but also offers a glimpse into the issues of history, nationalism, gender, and social class in 19th-century France.

Julie Damron (Korean Linguistics and Pedagogy)—*A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich
An account of the earliest Latter-day Saint women based on the memorabilia they left behind.

A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870, written by Harvard history professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, provides an insightful and much-needed look at Church history from women's perspectives. Ulrich interlaces excerpts from diaries, poems, and meeting minutes to illustrate the challenging lives of 19th-century Latter-day Saint women. It focuses on the utter chaos and the loss of status for women caused by early plural marriage. Overall, it is a powerful account of the strength, conviction, and unending devotion of early Latter-day Saint women.

Cheri Earl (Fiction Theory, The Latter-day Saint Novel)—*The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett
A historical fiction novel that combines Paradise Lost *and* Cinderella.

I have read *The Dutch House* four times in two years, and I will most likely read it again. And again. I even assign it to my Beginning Novel students and read along with them because the pain of this novel, for me, is so compelling I cannot leave it alone. The story orbits the Conroys—Cyril, Elna, and their two children, Maeve and Danny. The Conroys' fate is attached to an early 1920s mansion in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, that they call the Dutch House. In *The Dutch House*, Patchett attends to the peculiar wounds shared between mothers and their children, asking, "What sins are too grievous to forgive?" Frankly, I am still trying to answer that question for myself, which may be the reason I keep coming back to the novel. But if you need a better reason to pick up the book, Tom Hanks narrates the audio version. ■