

**WSCA 2007  
Kick-Off Program**

**Title:** Miss Scarlett and Her Imaginary Friends

**Abstract:**

Miss Scarlett, as literary and cinematic characterization, is an embarrassing relic of Jim Crow America. At the same time, she is persistently iconic in contemporary American culture -- the romantic idealization of a troubled past. Mitchell's novel and Selznick's film have much in common with D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). All three stories romanticize the plantation system of slavery and valorize white supremacy. All three stories justify Jim Crow laws and extra-legal violence against black citizens who pressed for property rights, better wages, and voting rights. It is appropriate to wonder why *GWTW* in general, and Miss Scarlett in particular, remain popular American icons, though they are icons of profound human rights violations.

Performed as postmodern parody, "Miss Scarlett"© acquires a self-mocking political consciousness. Miss Scarlett and Her Imaginary Friends own up to the consequences of race slavery and white supremacy -- twin bedrocks of American capitalism and democracy. The inspiration for a postmodern Scarlett and Friends flows from intersections among critical theory and practice: Kenneth Burke's comic frame, Mikhail Bakhtin's "carnival," queer theory, critical race theory and feminist critique.

Burke reminds us that whereas humor deals with the *symptoms* of a malady, comedy must deal with the *causes* of that malady. Whereas humor can be a diversion, comedy must focus squarely on the root(s) of the problem. Whereas humor frequently over-simplifies a problem, comedy must get at the complexities of human societies. Whereas humor often mocks the audience, the comic frame is humane. Comedy produces dramatic irony, and therefore requires that we adopt a perspective from incongruity. Finally, Burke says, the comic frame requires foolishness and a fool. Hence, Miss Scarlett and Friends.

**Participants and Affiliations:**

A. Susan Owen, University of Puget Sound  
Oscar Giner, Arizona State University  
Grace Livingston, University of Puget Sound  
Dexter Gordon, University of Puget Sound  
Peter C. Ehrenhaus, Pacific Lutheran University  
Sarah R. Stein, North Carolina State University  
Wenshu Lee, San Jose State University  
Heather Hundley, CSU San Bernardino  
Dustin Goltz, Arizona State University  
Jac Royce, University of Puget Sound

**Equipment:** One standing mic; one podium mic; sound system assistance, if possible