Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Senior Presentations
May 28th, 2020
7-8:15pm
via Zoom
Program

7:00 Welcome

7:10 Taylor McClain

7:25 Antonia Aguilar Cole

7:40 Cassandra Silva

7:55 Arpita Joyce

8:10 Toast & Celebration!
MMUF Mentors: Jennifer Harford Vargas and Mecca J. Sullivan
Project: Writing the Hard Truth: Post-9/11 fiction

Abstract:

“If they are going to fall, hari-kari, they will fall on themselves”  
Giannina Braschi

What is the meaning of Empire, and when does it fall? On September 11, 2001, the world stopped to watch two-hijacked planes be flown, one after the other, into the sides of the previously untouchable US imaginary. This catastrophic moment was swiftly followed by a violent shift in US foreign policy and the launch of the “War on Terror,” a neo-imperialist global campaign to combat domestic and international terrorism, which has long been written as a moment of shock and grief for the US people. Much of the fiction that is traditionally been termed post-9/11 literature has been written by white men relies heavily on the apocalyptic nature of the attacks, but it falls into narcissistic guilt and despair. However, Giannina Braschi’s The United States of Banana, a cross-genre Latinx novel of philosophical fiction intentionally confronts the ultra-patriotic, self-possessed aftermath of September 11th turning a critical eye on patriotism and performing an autopsy on the nation’s remains. I argue that Braschi’s novel in both content and form provides readers with a more comprehensive understanding of crime and violence endorsed by the state and the ever-troubling question of defining the terrorist and the liberator.
Arpita Joyce

**MMUF Mentors:** Ignacio Gallup-Diaz and James Padilioni

**Project:** *Annai Velannkani* and the Cultural Politics of Tamil Devotional Film

**Abstract:** The project aims to broaden our understanding of the relationship between devotional films and Tamil cultural nationalism as produced and disseminated by the local cinema industry. I am primarily interested in the 1971 film *Annai Velankanni* as representative of two major streams of historiography that are central to the constant (re)shaping and (re)molding of Tamil Catholic identity: the history of Marian encounters in Tamil Nadu and the history of Tamil cultural nationalism as presented via the film industry. Earlier work on Tamil film has established the industry as worthy of study and as a deeply socio-cultural endeavor that continues to shape the political terrains of southern India. By focusing on marginalized people and Catholic syncretisms within film analysis, this paper speaks to the emerging field by understanding Tamil Catholic devotional film as steeped within gendered Tamil ideological theater. This paper asserts that *Annai Velankanni* itself is an archival transmission that marks a place of historiographical coalescence by speaking to histories of colonial Catholic encounters, post-colonial political identity formations, and the affective, devotional realities that emerge for Tamil womxn through engagement with this film.
Taylor McClain

**MMUF Mentors:** Joel Schlosser & Steven Salkever

**Project:** The Practice of Farming and Responsibility for Oneself: What we Can Learn from Vergil about Our Modern Agrarian Problem

**Abstract:** In the United States there has been a steady decrease in the number of people who live on small farms. This is a problem because something is being lost as we continuously move away from small farms. It is hard to convey exactly what it is that is being lost, but this decline shows that we need a new way for thinking about farming. When we view farming as a practice and a way to become responsible for the self, we find a new enthusiasm for the farm. By turning to the work of agrarian thinkers we are able to see that the way that these thinkers think about work is in line with how MacIntyre thinks about practice and Foucault the responsibility for the self. However, it is when we turn to Vergil’s Georgics and Eclogues that we get a clear picture of what is at stake within the modern farm decline. Through Vergil we are able to see the full impact of the practice of farming and articulate what is being lost today as we move away from having a direct relationship to the land.
Cassandra Silva

**MMUF Mentors:** Piper Sledge, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Steven Salkever

**Project:** Coming to our Census: Examining Colonial Censuses as Technologies of Power and Resistance

**Abstract:** Censuses, the process of counting the number of people belonging to a particular group, are conducted by governments for political and administrative purposes. They have been widely used across the globe and have been referenced in the Bible, important tools in imperial Rome, and continue to be regularly conducted in the majority of nations in the modern era. Censuses are often assumed to be politically neutral tools used for the purpose of collecting data in order to create and monitor policies. However, this project will problematize this assumption and show that censuses are informed by motivations of the state and are not just politically neutral fact-finding tools. There is a history of bias in the way that censuses have been conducted and utilized that has the potential to disenfranchise entire groups of people. Since censuses have, and continue to be, tools that nations depend upon it is essential to critically analyze population statistics and the purposes they serve. The way that population statistics are conducted, and their purposes have the potential to be used to create and maintain structures of power and domination. Censuses are a tool used to collect data and inform policy by the government, however they also require the participation of the individuals being counted. As such, there is a potential for the people to engage in forms of resistance.
Bryn Mawr College
MMUF Coordinators

Vanessa Christman, Assistant Dean of the College for Access and Community Development

Jennifer Harford Vargas, Associate Professor of English, Co-Director of LAILS

Archana Kaku '14, PhD Candidate, University of Pennsylvania

Appreciation

Thanks to President Kim Cassidy, Provost Mary Osirim, Dean Jennifer Walters, Kathryn Melvin, Vanessa Davies, Bryn Thompson and Mary Ellen Gardner for their support of Bryn Mawr’s MMUF program

Many thanks to the MMUF Faculty Mentors!

Art credit: Alma Sterling ‘21