Kristin Bloomer “Possessed by the Virgin” Book Forum

Earlier this month, the department hosted a forum celebrating the recent publication of Prof. Kristin Bloomer’s new book, *Possessed by the Virgin: Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, and Marian Possession in South India* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Based on over a decade of ethnographic research in South India, the book narrates the poignant, at times startling, stories of three Tamil women repeatedly possessed by the Virgin Mary. The event gave the opportunity to hear Prof. Bloomer’s behind-the-scenes reflections on writing the book, which included everything from sticky visa restrictions to updates on the characters to candid reflections on the most vexing challenges. The forum’s consensus lay in commending the book’s outstanding scholarly contributions in its theoretical insights and its elegant prose.

The Library’s Athenaeum filled up with an audience from across the college and the broader community who gathered to hear the author discuss the book alongside reflections from three panelists: Prof. Anantanand Rambachan (St. Olaf), Prof. James Laine (Macalester College), and Prof. Mara Block (Carleton College). Prof. Noah Salomon kicked off the event by reading the book’s beautiful “Interlude.” Remarks from the panelists addressed the book’s broad ranging contributions. Drawing on their own research from India to Trinidad, the panelists noted the book’s attention to porous boundaries around the categories of “religion” and religious “traditions.” They also discussed the theoretical contributions in the book’s reworking of agency, power, and gender. Finally, each of the panelists addressed the book’s graceful writing and remarkable storytelling. The book reads like a gripping novel. A student puts it best in his reflections on the book and the event: “It truly seems as if Professor Bloomer immersed herself in the lives of the book’s subjects. And for that, a sense of indebtedness to those subjects renders the narrative so much more genuine and all the more human.”

Religion Alumni: Do you have career stories about how you use religion-major skills in your job? We want to hear from you! Email our department at ssaari@carleton.edu
In Appreciation of Sandy Saari

Sandy Saari is retiring after nineteen years of working at Carleton. She began in the Admissions Office in 1999 in the temporary pool, hand addressing envelopes to alumni and ending in 2009 with managing the Alumni Admissions Program where she developed an affinity for working with alumni. Sandy joined the Religion and Philosophy Department in 2009 as their Administrative Assistant. Sandy has been a constant source of positivity and wisdom over the course of her time at the College. Her planning, coordinating, and organizing skills have been indispensable in enabling the numerous events she has worked on to come to fruition.

She has been impressed by the wide range and global nature of courses offered by the Religion Department and has treasured the close relationships she has built with the faculty over the years and thinks of them as her extended family. Sandy’s compassion and enthusiasm will be sorely missed, but we are happy to know that she will be enjoying her retirement spending time at her cabin in Bovey, Minnesota with her husband Matt and their two sons and families. She looks forward to enjoying nature and seeing the numerous deer, otter, eagles, and foxes that are part of the natural habitat up north. Sandy also hopes to do more golfing, traveling, and restoring furniture in her spare time.

A personal note from Sandy: It has been wonderful getting to know Carleton alumni and students and to form many close friendships along the way. The faculty and staff hold a very special place in my heart. I have received so much more in return than I could ever imagine at a place called “work.” Thanks so much and God bless.

The Theology and Politics of Prince

In his talk entitled, “Like it’s 1999: The Theology and Politics of Prince,” Professor Elliot Ratzman (Lawrence University) discussed how Prince incorporated various religious symbols to address the issues of gender, faith, and politics. According to Professor Ratzman, Prince’s few references to politics revolve around explicit—and cryptic—references to Communism and the Cold War in his lyrics (“1999”, “America,” etc.). In Prince’s body of work, dualisms of politics and theology are related, but fail to adequately resolve themselves.
After a very long winter, Wednesday May 23rd turned out to be out to be a beautiful day for the Religion department picnic for faculty and majors. Department chair, Asuka Sango welcomed the 14 new sophomore majors (to make a total of 40 majors!) and then honored the graduating seniors with kind words collected from the faculty members. She also presented each senior with an origami box containing their affirmations as a wonderful reminder of our time here at Carleton, our academic growth, and the department’s constant support. After a dinner of Hogan Brother’s subs, we all headed outside to enjoy an evening of conversation and a highly competitive game of wiffle ball. Although members of Carleton Baseball and Softball teams may have thought that they have had an advantage in this game, they were blown away by Asuka’s bat-wielding skills.

The Humanities Center collaborated with MPR medical news analyst and UMN physician Jon Hallberg to bring the award-winning Hippocrates Café to perform at Carleton.

Professors and students from the following 3 classes watched a show featuring professional Twin Cities actors and musicians in a live performance that explored issues of social justice in medicine, access to health care, and serving patients with HIV:

Biology 370: Selected Topics in Virology (Debby Walser-Kuntz)
History 262: Public Health: History, Policy, Practice (Amna Khalid)
Religion 224: Religion, Science, and Modern Imagination (Mara Block)
Senior Comps Titles 2018

➤ Taylor Barnhill. Sallekhanā, Suicide, and Selfhood: Constituting Religious Freedom in a Secular Indian Nation-State
Teagan Felknor-Edwards. Ahmed Deedat: Using Da‘wa to Defend and Define a Muslim Identity in South Africa
Haley Griese. (In)sanity as Fiction: Exploring Alterity in A Question of Power
■ Anna McGinn. William James, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Religious Freedom: The Twelve Steps as an American Religious Movement
Leah Meltzer. On the Far Right Side of History: Reconciliation and Redemption in White Evangelical Depictions of Race
➤ Tyrone Moore-Perez. Anime, Manga, and “Religion” in Modern Japan
■ Olivia Nyberg. Women in Pain: How Narratives of Pain and Sacrifice Complicate the Debate over the Catholic Provision of Obstetrical Care
■ Abby Polk. The Divine Feminine on Earth: A Comparison of Two Contemporary Avatāras of the Goddess
Gina Ray. Thai-American Thervada Buddhism: Making Merit Across the Pacific
Max Smith. Tragic Myth and the Blues
Rebecca Stover. The Process of Soteriological Ontology Through the Hermeneutics of Nāgārjuna’s Mulamadhyamakakārikā
■ Sara White. Confronting Black Suffering, Resisting Systemic Violence: An Anabaptist Theology of Racial Justice
Ari Zuaro. Saints Alive: Devotion and Destruction Through Kinetic Sculpture

■= Distinction in comps      ➤= Bardwell Smith Prize for Excellence in the Study of Religion