



CMLL SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Mary Gilbert

Interview by Carly Bahler

Mary Gilbert came to the Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures in fall 2023 as an assistant professor of classics.

How did you become interested in classics, and what led you to Mississippi State University?

I arrived at the University of Georgia with enough credits to complete an undergraduate English degree in two years, but I decided to stay the whole four years to continue working on ancient Greek and to pick up some Latin and ancient history. A scholar of the ancient world, luckily, does not have to choose between literature, history, science and philosophy; you are encouraged to study all of these topics—just from a historical perspective! The more I learned, the more I realized how much I wanted to also investigate art, architecture, anthropology and contemporary theoretical approaches. Next, I did a master's in classics to continue working on the languages; I was not a student to whom these came easily! I then moved to Bordeaux, France, for a couple of years to teach English at a primary school and take French literature classes at the university there. In 2010, after about a year of travel and reflection, I began a doctoral program at the University of Virginia where I spent seven delightful years, including a year in Athens, Greece, at the American School of Classical Studies. My first academic position was a teaching position at a small liberal arts college in Birmingham, Alabama. However, when I learned of the position at Mississippi State that supported both research and teaching, I was eager to apply. I've really enjoyed the extra time to devote to writing at MSU. It's been a great first couple of years!



At the Archaeological Museum in Athens, Greece

Talk about your research, what you have accomplished since arriving at MSU and what's to come.

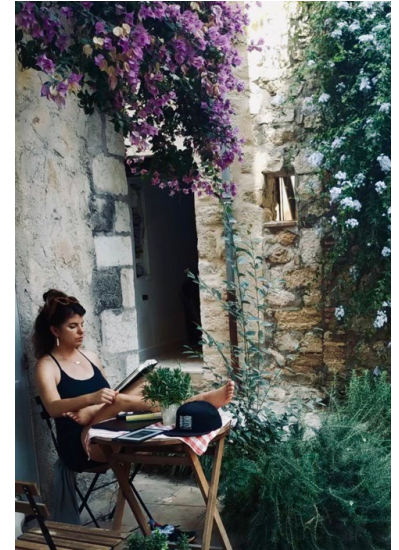
The first year I arrived at MSU, I published my first book, "Believing Ancient Women: Feminist Epistemologies of Greece and Rome" (2023), a co-edited volume that interrogates the relationship between gender and knowledge authority in Greece and Rome. This past year, I was awarded a fellowship to work on a second book at Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies. This project will be the first book-length study of Hecuba, the mythical Trojan queen who is both a protective mother and a fierce, politically engaged leader of an ancient city.

I've also recently written an article on women and anger in Roman tragedy and a chapter about Sappho and Anyte of Tegea's queer ecological accounts of the natural world. I want to get started on a sourcebook that collects all the ancient writing by and about women philosophers and knowledge seekers.

What does it mean to teach classics in 2025? What do you hope to impart to your students?

Most students want to learn ancient Greek and Latin so they can read ancient books: the philosophy of Plato, the poetry of Sappho, the histories of Herodotus, the Christian Bible, and so on—not so that they can order a glass of wine at a Pompeian bar. So, even in my entry-level language classes, I encourage students to explore further the writing that survives from antiquity. In addition to the more celebrated texts, there are many lesser-known but similarly influential writers. Students are often surprised and excited to find out that the Roman writer Lucretius wrote a philosophical poem theorizing the existence of atoms and black holes in the first century B.C.E.! I also teach classes in ancient literature in English translation, such as Greek mythology.

These classes are really fun because we get to go through the material at a quicker pace and get a broad sense for ancient religious and literary writing. Next year I am excited to pilot a new class on ancient witchcraft. If you are interested in learning about the magicians, spells and talismans of Greece and Rome, please consider signing up!



Mary Gilbert at a café in Antibes, formerly a Greek colony of Antipolis in the 4th century B.C.E., in southeastern France.

CMLL LANGUAGE EMISSARIES: Building Community and Representing CMLL

By Magda Hernandez

The Emissaries have been actively organizing events that foster a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere for students and faculty alike in the Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures. They hosted the annual fall department picnic, giving faculty and students an opportunity to get to know one another outside of a classroom setting. Following this, they hosted a table event on the Drill Field, reaching out to the campus community to increase awareness of and generate interest in CMLL.



In October, the Emissaries organized a pumpkin carving event, encouraging fellowship among students across the various languages offered by our department. They also supported the Spanish section's Hispanic Heritage Month poetry reading, adding depth and warmth to our celebration of Hispanic culture. Additionally, they assisted in setting up a *Día de los Muertos* ("Day of the Dead") altar at the Mitchell Memorial Library, providing a space for students and faculty to honor this meaningful tradition.

With these initiatives, the Emissaries have done a wonderful job representing the department and building connections within our community. We are also excited to welcome eight new Emissaries to the team in spring 2025, and we look forward to more impactful events to come!

Pumpkin carving contest hosted by the CMLL Emissaries

FACULTY AWARD:

Dr. Sol Peláez

By Aerynn Dighton


The Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures announces that Sol Peláez, associate professor and Spanish section head, has won the Mississippi Humanities Council Teacher of the Year award for 2025. She gave the College of Arts & Sciences Humanities Lecture, "The Paradox of Narrating Violence," March 4 in the Mitchell Memorial Library.

Southern Pecan Pie


By Julia Chancellor

Nothing says Southern hospitality more than a pecan pie fresh from the oven. If you have never tasted this delectable, sweet and crunchy dessert, you have missed an incredible culinary experience. Growing up in the South for my entire life, I can remember sampling pecan pie (pronounced in my household as *puh-KAHN*) from as early as I can recall. Whether it was a potluck dinner at church or Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or just a Sunday lunch, my mom's or grandmothers' (both of my grandmothers plus my great-grandmother) pecan pie always made an appearance. I can taste and smell the warm and gooey goodness combined with the nutty flavor of the pecans, along with that buttery, flaky crust.

Of course, I think my mom's pecan pie is the best because she combined my two grandmothers' recipes and crafted her very own, but that's the beauty of Southern recipes. They often come from years of trial and error and remind us of special occasions spent with family. My mom decided that the mixture of both dark and light corn syrup creates the perfect sweet consistency. The real stars are the pecans, of course, and ours were always hand-picked from the farm, which ensured that they were always fresh and delicious. My great-grandmother's recipe calls for a pinch of cornmeal stirred into the mixture at the end. She claimed it gave the pie the perfect crisp on the top, so my mom and I still include it. Pecan pie is best enjoyed fresh from the oven surrounded by family and friends. This recipe is not just a list of ingredients--it's the memories I have savoring a bite in my mom's kitchen during the holidays when I can hear all the laughter and chaos.

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MISSISSIPPI HUMANITIES COUNCIL
**2025 TEACHER
OF THE YEAR**



JOIN US FOR THE COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES HUMANITIES LECTURE,
"THE PARADOX OF NARRATING VIOLENCE," GIVEN BY 2025 WINNER

Dr. Sol Peláez
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & SPANISH SECTION HEAD
MSU DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL & MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

MARCH 4 / 3 P.M.
THE JOHN GRISHAM ROOM / MITCHELL MEMORIAL LIBRARY
SHORT RECEPTION FOLLOWING LECTURE

Crust:

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup vegetable shortening
12 tablespoons cold butter cut in small pieces
1/4 cup cold water

Mix the flour and salt, then cut in shortening and butter with a pastry cutter until the consistency of coarse crumbs. Slowly add water and mix until combined. Form into a disc and divide in half. Refrigerate for 30 min and then roll half onto floured surface into a 10-11 in. circle. Save the other half for your next pie.

Filling:

3 eggs
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup dark Karo syrup
1/2 cup light Karo syrup
1/2 stick melted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
1-2 tablespoons cornmeal
1 cup pecans

Combine filling ingredients and pour into pie crust.
Bake at 350 degrees for one hour, or until not too jiggly.



Hispanic Heritage Month

**Celebrando con la Comunidad:
A Poetry Reading**

Monday, Sept 30, 5:30 - 6:45 p.m.
McCool 232

Join our students and faculty as we celebrate Latinx and Hispanic cultural heritage by reading poetry and literature.

This is a multilingual and multicultural celebration.
Everyone is welcome! ¡Todos son bienvenidos!

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ENGAGING STUDENTS IN CULTURE

By Julia Chancellor

Spanish instructors and professors spent the fall working to bring more cultural awareness to our students. To celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, Sol Peláez used her creative skills to collaborate both on the university level and throughout the community to host a poetry reading, where colleagues and graduate students shared poems that represented their own personal culture. Students, faculty and members of the community attended and had the pleasure of gaining a greater appreciation for Hispanic culture and literature.

At the end of October, and for the second year in a row, there was a *Día de Los Muertos* (“Day of the Dead”) altar exhibit in the entrance of Mitchell Memorial Library, both physical and virtual. The project was spearheaded by Sol Peláez, with Rosa Vozzo, Julia Chancellor and Pilar Martínez collaborating. A presentation on Nov. 1 explained the elements and celebration in more detail, and attendees sampled authentic *pan de muerto* (“bread of the dead”) provided by the project committee.

Mr. MSU: Robby Skelton

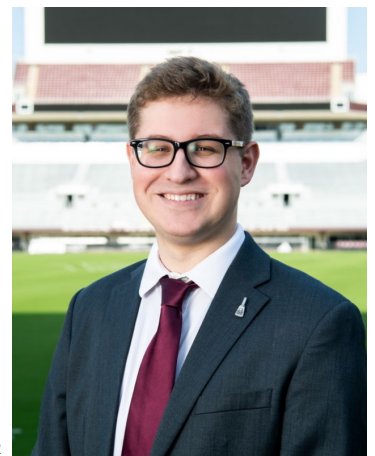
Interview by Magda Hernandez

Originally from Collierville, Tennessee, I plan to graduate in May 2025 from the International Business program, majoring in business economics and Spanish, with hopes of pursuing graduate studies in economics and ultimately becoming a professor. Since I started at Mississippi State University during the pandemic, I took most classes online, including Spanish III. Despite the challenges, my professors’ support and virtual conversation sessions strengthened my Spanish skills, and connecting with peers over the years has made my university journey rewarding.

My experience with the Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures has included cultural events like the *Día de Los Muertos* (“Day of the Dead”) altar and the International Fiesta, which celebrate a wide range of backgrounds. Studying abroad in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, helped me form lifelong friendships and step out of my comfort zone—a skill that has enriched my role with the alumni delegates.

Learning Spanish taught me the importance of adapting my communication to different audiences, a valuable skill in any field. I wish I had given more time to learning Russian, a reminder of the dedication language learning requires. My advice: practice your language daily, whether by speaking, reading or connecting with faculty—it’s a commitment that pays off.

My role as Mr. MSU is more than a title—it’s a commitment to making MSU a place where everyone can thrive. Working with the alumni delegates has connected me with inspiring alumni dedicated to our university. I hope to carry this legacy forward by giving my time and energy to our community. My time at MSU has been one of growth, connection and dedication, and I look forward to bringing this spirit into all my future endeavors.



Robby Skelton

JAPANESE CULTURE CLUB

By Nicholas Mickovski ('25, Computer Science)

The Japanese Club at Mississippi State connects its members to the world of Japanese culture. Every week we have engaging events that celebrate several aspects of Japanese culture, such as calligraphy nights, origami workshops, workshops making *onigiri* (rice balls), and much more! We always participate in campus-wide events such as Global Night and International Fiesta, where we make authentic, delicious food from Japanese cuisine. If you are interested in Japanese food, you will frequently see us selling food on the Drill Field as a club fundraiser! Every year we make a big trip to Atlanta Japan Fest, where our members can interact with Japanese culture and practice their Japanese with native speakers. If any of these activities interest you, please visit us at Old Main 3050 on Wednesdays from 5:30-7 pm!

クラブで会いましょう！

The Japanese Club Executive Board

Calligraphy demonstration of the kanji for "dream" by a local Columbus man



2025 CMLL LANGUAGE EXPO

By Aerynn Dighton

The Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures hosted its fifth CMLL Language Expo Feb. 27 in the Colvard Student Union. About 150 students from six high schools throughout the state came to experience activities and presentations of the languages represented in our department.



Events included the World Language Experience, in which students engaged in a whirlwind of five-minute activities and games, presentations by students who have recently studied abroad, and a Table Fair featuring our many language and cultural clubs along with sponsoring departments and programs—and Bully visited, too! The attendees also gave their own poster presentations on this year's theme of Myths and Folktales, with prizes to be won and fun to be had.

Above left: Bully at the Table Fair

Left: Japanese students Landyn Sullivan and Jenna Launey wearing happi (coats) while talking to high-school students



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To make a donation, please go to
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DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL & MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

The Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures (CMLL) at Mississippi State University consists of faculty members in Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian and Spanish. We offer Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in Foreign Languages, with concentrations in Asian Studies, Classics, French, German and Spanish.

East meets west, and classical languages converge with the modern: our students experience a variety of world cultures while maintaining a solid sense of their own historical identity.



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