Employing Cherrie Moraga’s play *Heroes and Saints* (1992) as a departure point, this talk investigates how contemporary narratives of laboring bodies and stories about places that should be heralded as signs of “progress” actually work to undermine rather than underwrite such sites of corporate advancement. Althanassakis argues that Moraga makes tangible and visible the ills of a system gone awry and how “progress” translates into environmental degradation. Moraga pushes the boundaries of human/machine/animal divides through the lens of environmental justice and race relations. Set in the San Joaquin Valley, her work dramatizes the human and environmental cost of agribusiness. Moraga’s attempt to map California’s Central Valley back into the popular imaginary as a space of invisible labor and ecological violence is an artistic one—a larger concern of this talk is why fiction and aesthetic representations of “real” events are necessary and/or crucial to our understanding of the place of the human in the world.

Yanoula Athanassakis is an American Council of Learned Societies New Faculty Fellow in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers. Yanoula received her Ph.D. in English (American Literature), with a Global Studies emphasis, from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Her interests include the politics of environmental justice, representations of immigration and the body in contemporary U.S. multi-ethnic literatures, global and transnational approaches to “American” texts, and theories of corporeality. Her book project dovetails with the transnational turn in American Studies and with emerging concerns of environmental justice.