

THE KELLY WRITERS HOUSE



Penn Creative Writing Program

Present the 2022

HONORS THESIS READING

Wednesday, April 27, 5:00 PM ET (in person!)

Kelly Writers House | 3805 Locust Walk | Arts Café

YouTube Livestream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVt35oxzKiQ>

A number of our graduating seniors have been working hard to complete their Creative Writing thesis projects — long-form literary works in poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, screenwriting, and mixed genres that serve as the capstones to their time at Penn as writers.

We celebrate their diligent efforts with this live and livestreamed reading of thesis excerpts.

A reception will follow the event. Masks are required inside Kelly Writers House.

Readers

Jamie Albrecht, “What Have You” (advisor: Julia Bloch)

“What Have You” is a manuscript of poetry, found material, and, for better or worse, prose. Through unyielding citations, I seek to investigate the question of value, of what constitutes a life worth living. Through footnotes, through appropriation, and above all through sampling and remixing I ask how to take pause in an unrelenting digital era. “What Have You” revels in being multiple. It writes not just about but *as* a love-hate relationship. It tackles theoretical questions of axiology, linguistic indeterminacy, and commodification without using the language of academics. It fucks around and finds out. It uses Ke\$ha to tackle desire and solipsisms moved through by Robertson in acrobatic, distant form. Ultimately, “What Have You” seeks to make a mess of things.

Mehek Boparai, “The Drag” (advisor: Paul Saint-Amour)

“The Drag” is a novella that narrates the path a student takes in her final year of university to change the life she is sick of living. The protagonist Zora navigates her Indian-American identity alongside the constant burden of being perceived by others and herself, and she attempts to reckon with the journey towards halting her loneliness through a newly acquired pretentious friend group. As she entangles herself in the romantic affair of a picturesque, novelistic couple, she allows the worst parts of herself to resurface in a dreamlike manner. The project is told through seasons, allowing the first-person narration to reflect on the drag that she is pulling against.



Alexander Sully Burns, “Invisible Mending” (advisor: Weike Wang)

“Invisible Mending” is a story about heartbreak and recovery. Partially composed of poetic descriptions, the narrative follows a Philadelphia parking enforcement officer, as he wanders through the city streets, trying to move on from a destructive relationship. Narrated in the first person, the story moves between scenes from the past, in which his breakup takes place, to the present, in which he describes his days on the job. The anonymous wanderings of the narrator, described in sections of poetic observation, become his as well as the reader’s only escape from his constant search to picture her face. The scenes of Philadelphia are heavily inspired by the situationist movement and writings from the mid-20th century, while the internal narration seeks to mimic the borderline-existential monologue seen in the writing of Clarice Lispector, in order to convey the raw emotions of the protagonist’s emotional turmoil.

Saranya Das Sharma, “Everywhere, Nowhere and Other Stories” (advisor: Anthony DeCurtis)

This collection consists of four stories which bring into focus the universal search for belonging in the world and the pursuit of a sense of home. Whether in Delhi, Milan, Lahore, Thimphu or Ann Arbor, in the modern day or in 1970, whether they are college students or civil servants, the characters of each story navigate the difficulty of finding how they belong. The stories center around belonging in many different facets: social, cultural, economic, religious, even finding reasons for belonging in the world. The collection also examines various themes such as the conflict between modernity and tradition, the importance of borders, finding a purpose, cultural capital and the concept of home.

Quinn Gruber, “Margherita Guidacci’s *The Sand and the Angel*” (advisor: Taije Silverman)

Margherita Guidacci, a Florentine poet, teacher, and translator, published her first book, *La sabbia e l'angelo* (*The Sand and the Angel*) in 1946. In it, she examines the balance between life in death within the greater cosmic cycles that govern our world. With strikingly clear language, Guidacci illuminates how our lives fit into and contribute to these cycles through our relationships with natural beings, like sand, wind, stone, grass, and trees. Annotated with reflections on The Sand and the Angel’s relationship with John Donne and Emily Dickinson, whom Guidacci translated in 1946 and 1947, my translation of *The Sand and the Angel* seeks to rethink how translation itself informs our understanding of literature, life, and death.

Lulu Lipman, “Scoring Bice and Other Tragedies” (advisor: Max Apple)

Scoring Bice and Other Tragedies is an unfinished young-adult novel that details the trials and tribulations of Ella Garrison as she navigates the complicated world of Thornwall Academy, a prestigious boarding school in Vermont. The story is told retrospectively from Ella’s point of view, as she reflects on her time at the school. The book is divided chronologically into three chapters, one for each year that Ella spent at Thornwall. Within each chapter, Ella tells the reader about some of the crucial events that shaped her boarding school experience. Scoring Bice and Other Tragedies tackles a variety of subjects, including hook-up culture, first love, substance abuse, and the desire to fit in - all from Ella’s witty narrative voice.



Anna Naggar, "Anything but Now" (advisor: Jay Kirk)

"Anything but Now" is a collection of two comedic non-fiction essays chronicling my experiences infiltrating a local middle school and, more recently, attempting to superficially experience pregnancy and motherhood at Penn. Both pieces explore issues of performance, coming-of-age, anxiety and imposter syndrome, and use a unique and experimental method of observation and "essayistic" narrative.

Laiqa Shariff, "The Jagged Edge" (advisor: Ahmad Almallah)

"The Jagged Edge" is a collection of five short stories that explore the return of Zahra, a college student in America, to her home in India, where she confronts an increasingly hostile political and social climate spurred by the rise of Hindu Nationalism. The stories elucidate the multifaceted nature of the Indian Muslim experience, and the feelings of alienation, anxiety, and anger that often color it. The first two stories are set in Bangalore, the bustling city where she grew up, and the last three in Kerala, the southern state her family originally comes from. "The Portrait" is a still life assessment of Zahra's position in a society that curtails the way a woman can represent herself. "The Miniature" depicts the complexities of maneuvering social life through an argument unraveling at a dinner party. "The Biennale" considers the role of art as means of protest and expressing trauma. "The Island" depicts the crushing power of the government to control minority groups, and "The Wood Doyen" explores the role of communal violence on the fabric of communities.

Max Strickberger, "Generation Pandemic" (advisor: Sam Apple)

"Generation Pandemic" begins with a personal, nonfiction essay that is followed by a half-dozen oral histories that have been edited, condensed, and reshaped. Each piece seeks to address one overarching question: How did the pandemic alter the lives of young people? For six weeks in 2021, my roommate and I drove 7,300 miles, crisscrossing 23 states and interviewing 80 young people suspended between adolescence and adulthood. Some returned to the homes they spent their childhood hoping to escape. Others moved across the country when their jobs became remote. Each reshaped parts of themselves. This thesis chronicles my experience and thought process ahead of the journey and tells the stories of the people I met along the way.
