



THE KELLY WRITERS HOUSE



The Creative Writing Program

PRESENT THE 2023

HONORS THESIS READING

Wednesday, April 26, 5:00 PM ET

Kelly Writers House | 3805 Locust Walk | Arts Café

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.

READERS

Erin Brennan, “Dark as Ash” (advisor: Nova Ren Suma)

Eboni Ankari is a walking contradiction. In a world where precious few humans are born with magical abilities and required by law to identify themselves, Eboni longs to prove herself as part of an elite squad which enforces the Emperor’s Magic User Registry. The one complication: Eboni is harboring her own volatile secret, a power with the potential to tear her life apart. Desperate to rise in the ranks so that she can avenge her brother’s death at the hands of rebel magic users, Eboni’s mission will be thrown off its rails when a new discovery causes her to reveal her powers and forces her to flee the imperial city.

Margaret Dunn, “Babies” (advisor: Weike Wang)

Babies is a collection of six short stories all rooted in the idea of inexperience. They are linked thematically by victimization and misperception, apathy and the loss of innocence. “West Coast Ghosts” tells the story of a wannabe actor being exploited against the sedative-like landscape of Los Angeles. “Dogfish” sees a young girl struggle with gender identity and romantic relationships, specifically when the two become incompatible. In “The Sow,” a wife and her husband detail their different takes on her mental unraveling. “Diet Cola Babies” features several Floridian girls navigating the nuances of female friendship while “Lecce” follows a man’s re-knowing of his father after his death. In “Kounna Kitten,” a college senior who believes she has the world figured out realizes that maybe she doesn’t. I hope that these stories speak to the ‘inexperience’ that comes with youth as well as that which can still be found in adulthood.

Sophie Nadel, “The Phantom Rental Agency” (advisor: Kathy DeMarco Van Cleve)

This thesis is a study in revision, tracking multiple drafts of a screenplay over four years of work. *The Phantom Rental Agency* is a buddy-style family-friendly movie that follows twelve-year-old developing psychic Casey and the thirty-years-dead motorcycle gang member who has latched onto her. Struggling with anxiety and depression from her parents’ divorce, Casey develops psychic abilities and accidentally summons a rambunctious spirit, Luther. Together, they run away to Reno, where Luther has unfinished Earthly business. On their journey, Casey works to gain mastery over her untamed abilities and Luther seeks the son he left behind. Through research and multiple rounds of feedback, I have honed the screenplay to a crisp, comprehensive story with themes of found family, life and death, and mental wellness.

Raja Promige, “The Limestone Steps” (advisor: Max Apple)

My thesis is a collection of two short stories, titled *Oldest*, *Youngest* and *The Limestone Steps*. The collection is titled after the second story. The stories revolve around the family, friends, and adolescence of a Bengali-American boy living in Queens, New York who goes to a private boarding school in California.



Sophie Quaglia, “A Temporary Residence” (advisor: Weike Wang)

“A Temporary Residence” is a collection of short stories that share a variety of lived experiences within Seville, Spain. They all reflect the perspectives of women who take up a form of pseudo-residence within the city for an impermanent period of time, and thus reflect on the experiences of being an outsider in a city that will never truly be theirs, but which they consider home for a time. The stories experiment with genre and levels of realism. They all hopefully reflect true experiences and ideas present within the experience of an American abroad. The collection consists of three stories: An Ode to Winter Oranges, Corporeal Affair, and Table for Two.

Lee Schwartz, “Teenagehood: A Conversation Between Selves” (advisor: Anthony DeCurtis)

“Teenagehood” is a cross-genre project compiling carefully selected, lightly edited journal entries that I wrote from age thirteen to twenty to embark on a search for self and identity. What began as innocent adolescent journaling became an almost decade-long journey of becoming unstuck in time. I developed a fear of the passage of time, and my fixation materialized throughout eight hundred journal entries—my teenage girlhood years that I was obsessed with preserving. In many of those entries, I address my future self. I converse through time with versions of myself, a coping mechanism for my fear. The conversation across time that I began as a child is finally complete in this project as I breach the gap between my younger and older selves, trying to move forward in time and let go of my fear of forgetting. From analyzing my past self, truths of my present and future become clear. The “Teenagehood” I spent so long trying to “do right” lay right in front of me, and happiness was always there if I chose it. “Teenagehood” creates a view of what anxiety and depression look like in young people. More than that, it is an inside exploration into the mystery of what it is like to be a girl.

Peyton Toups, “Poetry as Pop Song” (advisor: Julia Bloch)

A project that has been gestating for the past three years, *Poetry as Pop Song* is a multi-layered work of complex and personal meaning. Wishing to interrogate my own relationship to Pop culture and the Internet through my life-long love of Pop music, I explore the links between some of my personal Pop idols, favorite horror movies, video game characters, and more in an attempt to create a web of aesthetic correlations—a personal totem of the cultural products of various media, found through years spent online, that make up much of my identity as a young gay man today. Additionally, there is an angle of critique of hyper-online life and the lasting effects of 2020s isolating quarantine.

Abigail Walker, “My Uncle Has a Lot of Guns in His Basement” (advisor: Paul Hendrickson)

My Uncle Has a Lot of Guns in His Basement is a long-form nonfiction essay centered around my family’s relationship with guns. It was written in an attempt to tell my uncle’s story – he was in the Las Vegas mass shooting in 2017 with his wife but somehow did not adjust his beliefs on gun control in the slightest. The thesis features family stories spanning generations and is structured around a series of interviews. *My Uncle Has a Lot of Guns in His Basement* is also a portrait of Vermont, the second least populated state in the country but an indispensable character in this essay.



Helen Wu, “Tell Me What Happened in Copenhagen” (advisor: Weike Wang)

Tell Me What Happened in Copenhagen is a novella about a Chinese family traveling in Copenhagen. Unfolding in five parts through the different perspectives of each family member, the story centers around an atypical vacation filled with absurd dramas and tensions. Despite their unified Chinese identity, the family of five is forced to reckon with their generational gaps, different value systems, and collective history, which they navigate in close proximity to each other while exploring a new environment. In the idyllic Danish capital, old secrets bubble to the surface, new secrets are formed, some mouths stay shut while others open...

Ashna Yakoob, “Fleeting Moments of Discontent” (advisor: J †Johnson)

This project centers around the discontent we feel in the everyday moments that we have no control over. These are disparate, fleeting moments, but they are significant in that they are representative of the greater economic system that we live in. We live in a unique moment of neoliberalism, a term that dates back to the 1930s to describe the economic model of privatization and the prioritization of free-market capitalism. However, neoliberalism has come to encompass the ways in which human activity is organized, far beyond its economic principles, now permeating society in social, cultural, creative, and personal spheres. Using the research from my Critical Honors Thesis, I hope to take these particular moments, those that would typically have no meaning, moments we don't think much of, seconds that are repressed due to their mundane nature, and bring meaning to them, or rather to reassess them as part of a larger cultural phenomenon.

Chuqi Zheng, “Form Fitting” (advisor: J †Johnson)

Form Fitting explores established usages of the word “form,” as well as how we define it and how we fit into those definitions. Through poetry and prose in varying levels of structure, from more relaxed freeform styles to fixed formats adapted from other writers to stricter forms like a non-disclosure agreement and finally back to a formless state after disassembling the form, the collection serves as an investigation into the ways in which a form can define or limit us or serve as an extension of a particular aspect of us in both intrapersonal and interpersonal areas.
