



**The University of Pennsylvania
2024 Creative Writing Program Honors Thesis Abstracts**

Brandon Anaya, “Grandmother Asked Me”

(YA fiction; advisor: Annie Seaton)

Grandmother Asked Me is a curation of the work I have done this semester. They are stories about a girl fed up with the pressures of school. A girl who must feed her family when no one else can. Two boys who must make their families proud by going to college. And a boy who must protect his grandmother. These are stories that take place along the borderlands of each character’s life, connected by the stark contrast of the urban and pastoral environments. This thesis asks not how to create positive representation, but how to create both inhabitable and uninhabitable representations.

Rachel Collison, “Almost West” (Thesis Prize Winner)

(thriller/magical realism; advisor: Piyali Bhattacharya)

It’s 1974, and the narrator is on the run through the American West. At a highway truck stop in the middle of the night, she witnesses an act of violence between two strangers. When she rescues this woman from the man trying to do her harm, she gains an unexpected companion on her cross-country flight. Haunted by her past and unnerved by the mysterious task she has set out to complete, the narrator must determine how many of her secrets to divulge to her new passenger. As a reluctant allyship forms between the two women, the narrator begins to question the path she follows and what waits for her at the end of her journey.

Delaney Parks, “Beyond Union Girl Summer: When Striking for Your Ideals Costs Everything”

(long-form journalistic writing; advisor: Anthony DeCurtis)

This long-form journalistic thesis covers the events of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* strike, focusing specifically on the story of the NewsGuild journalists who have been on strike since October 18, 2022. It is divided into five sections, with the first one detailing the years of tension leading up to the strike, and the chaotic four days immediately preceding it. Next, it describes the strikers’ experience becoming accustomed to everyday life on strike, and a critical National Labor Relations Board ruling. The following two sections focus on the regional and national labor momentum building through the summer of 2023, and my summer internship with the *Pittsburgh Union Progress*, the “strike paper” run by the PG’s striking journalists. In the final chapter, which is structured around in-person interviews conducted over my recent visit to Pittsburgh, strikers reflect on the “long slog” they’re still experiencing, and the dueling feelings of exhaustion and continued hope.

Gabriella Raffetto, “Purgatory & Dantean Pursuits”

Advisor: David Wallace

Escaping Purgatory & Other Dantean Pursuits is a reflection on what it means to exist. A loosely threaded collection of poetry, prose, and experimental auto-fiction, *Escaping Purgatory* leads readers through the every-day treks of adolescence in elite Northeast circles, using a Dantean cosmology of Catholic purgatory. Though not as exciting as Hell, Purgatory offers a daunting yet hopeful landscape for late repent sinners. After climbing out of the pits of the hellish realities of COVID depression, the world of a privileged college student—full of promise but no direction—is fertile soil for a new purgatory to take root. Purgatory, like life, has its ups and downs; dry lecture halls, embarrassing attempts at love, and horrifying moments of existential despair. But at the end of it, we just might catch a glimpse of heaven.

Jonathan Song, “Turning Money to Eros Dust”

Advisor: Weike Wang

This thesis is the first part of a fictionalized autobiographical account of the creation of the Herzog Collective, which is an active student cooperative at UPenn. The story investigates the creator’s roots and dreams. The narration strikes a balance between the creator’s retrospective maturity and contemporary idealism. Class and religion are revealed as the two anchors for the creator’s formal utopian thinking. Part One concludes at the climax of the creator’s highest faith in his ability to transcend roots and distinction, which is simultaneously the highest moment of paradox and innocence. In Part One, the creator is already reckoning with his privilege. But Part One alludes to a further resolution in the unwritten Part Two, where the creator will accept the limitations of roots and distinctions and renounce his savior ego. The whole story aims to demonstrate that dreams of transcending distinctions create beauty and meaning.