

The English Aggie



Professors & Publications

Dr. Harris, Dr. Bhattacharya, & Dr. Johansen on their recent publications

Dr. Jason Harris, Dr. Nandini Bhattacharya, and Dr. Emily Johansen have been hard at work. In the past year, these three faculty members have all published books. Dr. Harris published *Master of Rods and Strings*, a horror novella about occult puppetry. Dr. Bhattacharya's novel, *Love's Garden*, is a historical novel set in both modern India and British-ruled India. Lastly, *Beyond Safety* by Emily Johansen is a scholarly nonfiction discussing risk and safety in everyday life.



Dr. Harris teaches creative writing and folklore as a Creative Writing Coordinator for the English department. He grew up in California, but he has lived in many other states, including Florida, Ohio, and now Texas. He's enjoyed writing from a young age—from stories of talking slugs using spelling test words to junior high writing conferences—

and studied prose and poetry each quarter as a student at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In 2001, he graduated with a PhD in English Literature. After a brief stop in screenwriting, Dr. Harris pursued an MFA in Fiction Writing at Bowling Green State University as a return to prose. He's grateful for that decision because it has led to creative works (such as his recent novella) and teaching at Texas A&M!

“I will not deny that I have always been fascinated with puppets.”

Dr. Harris knew he wanted to write about puppets and their “uncanny potential as doppelgängers of humans,” but he

says that *Master of Rods and Strings* really started with his main character Elias and his voice. Once he thought of the first line, “I will not deny that I have always been fascinated with puppets,” the novel drew from Elias's voice. “I listened to him, and he listened to the puppets,” Harris said. He wrote the first drafts in the MFA program at Bowling Green State University around Fall 2013.

Master of Rods and Strings was published in July 2021. Elias begins a journey to discover the truth of occult puppetry after his sister Sonja is taken to a school by their Uncle Pavan to advance her skill. He is both jealous of her abilities and horrified by visions of her torture at the school. “Their sibling relationship is a rather gothic one, fraught with psychological ambivalence, painful anxieties, and a dark burden in the past which puts into question the nature of what their family really is as well as the dehumanizing consequences of pursuing vengeance.” Throughout the novel, Elias discovers facets of supernatural puppetry as well as “disturbing truths about traditional connections between puppets and identity.”



Dr. Bhattacharya specializes in South Asia Studies and Indian Cinema, Postcolonial Studies and Colonial Discourse Analysis, Gender Theory, Film Studies, and Creative Writing. She is a professor of English at Texas A&M University and an affiliate of the Women's and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, and Film Studies programs. She has taught and published on film, world liter-

ature, feminism and visual culture, colonial and postcolonial discourse analyses of literature from the eighteenth century onwards, gender in South Asia, and travel writing. She enjoys reading Amitav Ghosh's historical fiction on South Asia, the family sagas of Amy Tan, the delightful diaspora lyrical realism of Jhumpa Lahiri, and Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie's historical sweep, among so many others.

“The writer I want to become now is an archaeologist of the human condition.”

Her own novel, *Love’s Garden*, was published in October 2020, though she began writing the story nearly fifteen years ago. During this time, Dr. Bhattacharya went through what she calls an ‘Archaeology of Myself,’ which led her through her own family history and stories. Her novel began as a way to “invoke those powerful voices and figures into [her] felt reality, almost as soothsayers and shamans—a kind of ancestor worship, even atavism.” As she continued writing, she discovered a love for deeper and wider histories and epics, especially those in which “the individual is like the point in impressionist painting: critical but minute.” As seen in the fifty year time frame of *Love’s Garden*, Dr. Bhattacharya examines the layers of human history. She says that “the writer [she] want[s] to become now is an archaeologist of the human condition.” Dr. Bhattacharya did not, however, always plan to write fiction. She has written in the academic sphere for years, including three scholarly books. She believes that she has become “motivated to write fiction out of a quest for the impossible.” Her academic research has prepared her to write historical fiction well. Her study of empires and cultural contact zones has given her the necessary knowledge to discuss the colonization and decolonization of India, and her women’s studies background “informs the message of women’s historic resilience, courage, friendships, and matrilineal traditions.”

Love’s Garden begins in early twentieth-century India and focuses on two girls of vastly different economic statuses. They fail to remain close and true to one another as each marries within her own economic status. Marriage and motherhood divide them, and their descendants continue to feud. As time passes, India fights fascism and as women gain more freedom, it is discovered that both women were the pawns of men. “When that story can be told, the new generations choose forgiveness and unite to build a new future and country,” Dr. Bhattacharya explains. Essentially, “*Love’s Garden* asks why some women embrace motherhood and others refuse it. In that sense, it is, a sort of story of resistance.”



Dr. Johansen is originally from Canada and moved to Texas and Texas A&M just over twelve years ago. She misses the cooler weather, but she enjoys the availability of enchiladas verdes. Lately, she’s been reading *Luster* by Raven Leilani and *Future Feeling* by Joss Lake. Her favorite genre is romance, but she happily reads all genres of fiction and creative nonfiction. Dr. Johansen writes in order to en-

gage with interesting ideas—from herself, authors, scholars, students—and to think more clearly about the subject. She is especially interested in the way literature and culture work and connect to social issues and values. Writing allows her to “crystallize [her] thinking about the topics that matter most.”

Dr. Johansen’s first book, *Cosmopolitanism and Place*, is actually what inspired her latest book, *Beyond Safety*. Her first book discussed cosmopolitanism and “how a deliberately or self-consciously globally-oriented view of our solidarities shapes our understanding of the physical places we inhabit.” During her research, she discovered that cosmopolitanism envisions a “safer” world that is not available to the global population; thus, Dr. Johansen wondered “what it would mean to consider the experience of being at risk as being, in fact, the more cosmopolitan experience.”

“We’re asked consistently to take risks—to think creatively, to invest in new ventures—but, paradoxically, also to always protect ourselves from risks and prioritize personal safety.”

Beyond Safety was published in October 2021. The book examines risk, safety, and how human beings see themselves in relation to global existence. Dr. Johansen states that “we’re asked consistently to take risks—to think creatively, to invest in new ventures—but, paradoxically, also to always protect ourselves from risks and prioritize personal safety—from, say, violence and infection, as we’ve all been particularly aware of over the last eighteen months. Yet at the same time, so many of the things that make us safe are dependent upon other people, both far away and nearby, being made substantially less safe in a whole variety of ways. How we understand risk and safety, then, has implications for how understand ourselves as global citizens.”

Many English Aggies are aspiring writers, and these successful professionals have plenty of advice. The first and most important piece of advice from all these is simple—read!

To read the full article, including advice from each professor, visit [The English Aggie blog](#).

You can purchase *Master of Rods and Strings* on [Amazon](#).

You can purchase *Love’s Garden* on [Amazon](#).

You can purchase *Beyond Safety* at [Barnes and Noble](#).

Grendel- the Hero

Poem by Renée Tyler, Class of 2021

Hark the hurt | which hardens hearts.
Growing from within, | it wipes out wealth
Of health- | of joy and healing mirth.
A myriad of misery | the monster brings.
Must we feel mercy | for the life which dismantles
The joy of the innocent?
Is it supposed to disappear
Without the coaxing of the spear?
Salvation is not seen | by those who stay
And save sympathy | for the sinful.

Has everyone forgotten | the danger of the fen-walker?
Do we forsake the families | with iron hearts forged in
Hellfire?
Where was their mercy?
Did the monster spare their family's bone-fortresses?
He takes and torments | and twists the natural order and
terminates
Children while their mother and father | fall victim to the
falling of soil
Of the cool grave
Which grips them
Firmly under marigold stems.

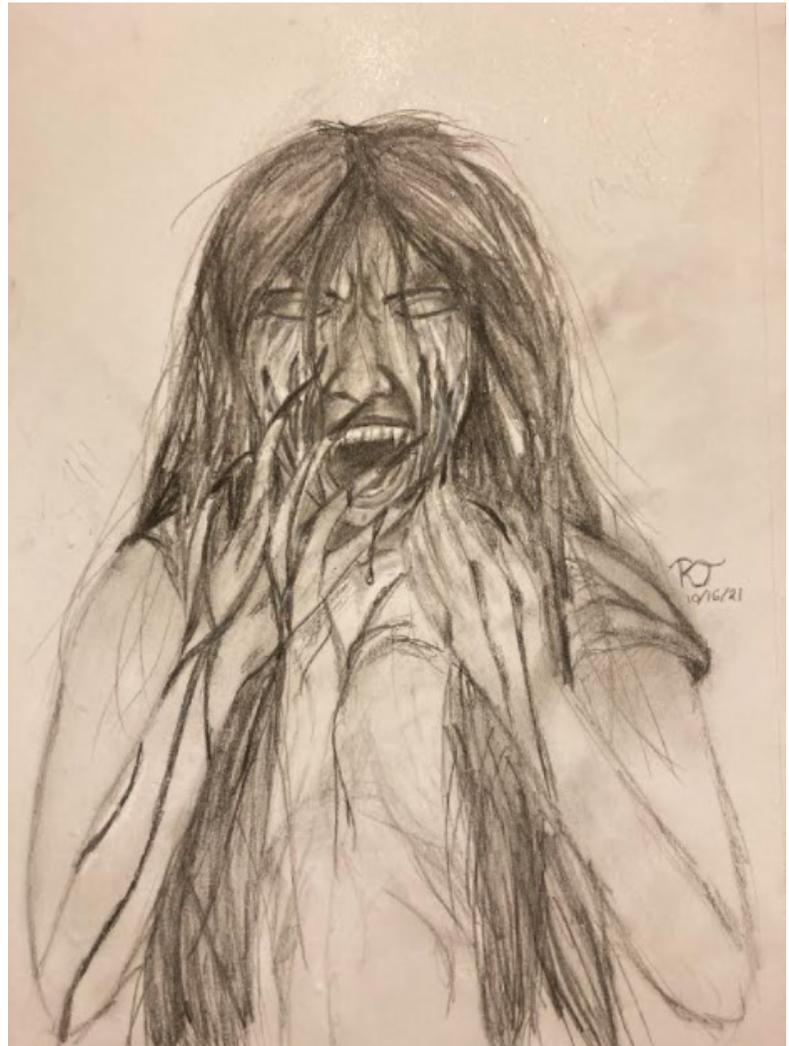
Why must I | internalize
The message of sympathy | with how it slithers into souls
And forget | the consequences of a beast's freedom?
Is it wrong to feel | that some are victims
Who are innocently fed | in droves to villains?
Will we no longer question
The actions of the "forsaken"
Who does not care for the lives they've taken?

Spare the savior speech | that says nature will see
That all is well | while life wanes.
Will you say it to the widow? | Will share condolences with
Those left behind learning | how to carry on the light?
How will the parents hear | that *heartfelt* message?
Should children cheer | the earth-shattering change?
They are mere-mortals
Made now to mourn.
Nothing is the same- nothing can return.
No flower or fellowship | can replace the fire lost
While we wait | and watch for a miracle.

Maybe there will be a man | made of mountains
Immovable in his conviction

To blast away heartbreak | with a beam of light...
But this is Life.
This is Imperfection.
Here there are no halls | no heroes who conquer
Fear and doubt | dashing heads against doors
Ripping the fight | out of fiends
Here there is no one made | who can command miracles.

The sun will rise
And then fall,
And the afflicted live
While the blessed rest.



Roots

Poem by Kinley Foster, Class of 2025

There once was a young sapling
In a lush forest by a bubbling stream
Where trees, whose leaves of such resplendent green,
Like water reflected the sun's beams.

And for his home, a small patch of earth
Neighboring that of a wise old oak,
One who'd never boast of height nor girth
For trees like these are simple folk.

Now, this little sapling was the most content you'd ever
find

Until this one particular day...
When a sudden whim came into his little tree mind,
Sparked by some young boys' play.

The more he thought about it, the more it made him mad.
"It isn't fair", he muttered. "My roots, they keep me
downed."

A soft laugh echoed through the woods (for heard, the oak
tree had),

"Why, what's so wrong with being a tree and anchored in
the ground?"

"I'm trapped", the sapling protested, "from doing as I
please.

Not free to run or play as children do -
They haven't any roots pinned to their knees
Or to their toes within their shoes.

Then with a gentle smile at the ignorance of youth,
The wise oak said, "Roots, my young friend, the very thing
that keeps you down

You'll be surprised to learn, in truth,
Stand you up from tip to crown."

"Over time, you see, they grow deeper and stronger still -
A tangled subway system that gives us life,
Offering the foundation to branch out as only we uniquely
will

And holding us steady through winds of strife."

They both were silent. Then: "You know, children are a lot
like us trees.

Perhaps not on the surface, no,
But it would appear to me
That they have roots of their own, even so."



Write, Write, Write!

Writing Resources and Contests for Students

Happy National Writing Month, English Aggies! There are so many resources for English majors, minors, and all writers at Texas A&M. There are many different ways to get involved on campus as a writer, from joining clubs, to submitting works to contests and journals, to seeking help and advice. Below are seven organizations or awards that can improve or showcase student writing.

The Creative Writers of Aggieland is a group of writers who gather to critique members' work and discuss writing techniques. They meet each Thursday in LAAH 463 from 7-9 pm, and students are welcome to join any meeting. Samantha Chapman, B.S. of Nutrition, Class of 2021, says that "being in CWoA gave me the writing community I never knew I needed. They encouraged me to write more and better stories, to expand my mind to try new ideas, and to know that I was, in fact, a writer. It is through their encouragement that I am now over 50K words into my first novel. Of course, the real treasure was the friends I made along the way. Now that I've graduated, CWoA is one of the things I miss most about A&M."

“Being in CWoA gave me the writing community I never knew I needed.”

For more information, students can email cwa.tamu@gmail.com.

The Eckleburg Project is Texas A&M's official literary journal. Submissions are open to all undergraduate students. Students are welcome to submit up to three poems and three short stories, each not exceeding three pages. The Eckleburg Project also accepts artwork. There are no thematic guidelines for submissions. To submit your creative works or to view past issues of the Eckleburg Project, visit <http://www.theeckleburgproject.com>.

The University Writing Center is a valuable resource for all Texas A&M undergraduate and graduate students. Consultants are trained and certified to help students with any written or spoken assignment. Students are able to meet with University Writing Center consultants in-person in Evans Library or Business Library, through email, or on a Zoom meeting. To make an appointment, visit <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

The 2022 Dr. Stanley L. Archer Memorial Award will be accepting undergraduate submissions of a high-quality paper written in response to an Early Modern, Renaissance, or Shakespeare class (ENGL 314, 315, 317, 412, or 415). Submissions will be accepted from January 18, 2022 to February 15, 2022. For more information, visit <https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/english/undergraduate/opportunities/awards-and-contests/>.

The Rhetoric and Discourse Studies Essay Contest will be accepting submissions related to rhetoric, linguistics, or discourse studies from February 1, 2022 to March 1, 2022. For more information, visit <https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/english/undergraduate/opportunities/awards-and-contests/>.

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Creative Writing Contest is presented and funded by the Texas A&M College of Liberal Arts and the Texas A&M Libraries. All forms of speculative fiction (science fiction, fantasy, etc.) is accepted. A flyer with more information is located on Page 7.

The English Aggie welcomes undergraduate short story and poetry submissions. Stories must not exceed 1400 words, and poems must not exceed two pages. Please send all submissions to englishaggiestories@gmail.com.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Creative Writing Contest

Attention:

Submit your speculative fiction piece for a chance to perform your piece at a public reading and win cash prizes!
All pieces of speculative fiction are accepted.

You must be a currently enrolled Texas A&M undergraduate student to submit.
Submission word limit is 3000 words.

Submission Link:
<https://bit.ly/SciFiContest22>

Submission Deadline:
February 14, 2022

Presented and Funded by



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

College of Liberal Arts and



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Libraries

Share Your Story!

Tag us in your post
[@theenglishaggie](#)

Use our hashtag
[#theenglishaggie](#)

Want to share your work?
Email EnglishAggieStories@gmail.com

Follow us!

 englishaggie.blogspot.com

 facebook.com/TheEnglishAggie

 [@theenglishaggie](https://www.instagram.com/theenglishaggie)

 [@theenglishaggie](https://twitter.com/theenglishaggie)

 EnglishAggieStories@gmail.com



This publication is brought to you by:
Texas A&M Department of English

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
Department of
English

Editor: Hayley Fleener '24

