

Honors Creative Work Prospectus

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Title: Redeem Your Empty Bottles Here

Statement of Intent: I plan to present a collection of creative works, both poetry and short stories, centering on a group of characters all connected through one man. While many different themes or issues may appear within the collection, my primary focus and idea of exploration is that of personal redemption. Specifically, I want to explore the connection between an individual's search for redemption, as well as how redemption is influenced or determined by outside sources and perspectives. Redemption is a topic much discussed, whether in Faulkner's works, such as *A Fable*, wherein war is the primary backdrop, and Christ himself as a dead soldier appears (Gold 146). Even the dark Edgar Allan Poe confronts the idea of figurative redemption through action and knowledge, as well as literal redemption from the dead in his *Ligeia*. Across fiction, whether epic fantasy or movies like *Les Misérables*, redemption is often portrayed as possible and desirable. Yet, between the sphere of mainstream news and other media, ideas of redemption appear to contradict each other and the end result is a pessimistic view. Within fiction films and books we often see someone bad change and become better (though recent films have tried to spin the supposed bad guys as good in their unredeemed state, and yet even this is a type of redemption as they are elevated from villains to heroic villains). Conversely, news stations, and even our justice system, often focus on the errors and wrongs of a person, even if that person may no longer subscribe to a belief or action. We get a sense that our imaginations long for redemption, accept redemption. That's why we go see *Les Misérables*, the thief repenting and becoming a hero. And yet in reality, we penalize men and women with

criminal records, never giving them jobs, further estranging them from society, never viewing them as changed. We want redemption, but our actions say that others can't or don't ever receive it. I want to explore why that is.

The stories and poems all center on or connect with a principle character: Harrison. He makes an appearance in each story, though not always the protagonist of each. Harrison is a man plagued by his military past (having been discharged for attacking his sergeant) and his faulty relationships with his wife and family. Now advanced in age, he is confronting the consequences of his failures, while simultaneously viewed by others as a hero for saving the life of his commanding officer while in battle. The first short story is from the perspective of that commanding officer who is trying to exonerate and help Harrison, feeling that the army and others betrayed a man who is a hero. The officer is willing to do just about anything to try and redeem Harrison. In this officer's memories we see Harrison as a hero, as a man wronged, undeserving of his fate.

The second story is from the perspective of Natalie, Harrison's adult daughter, a plain-clothes police officer. The running action involves her trying to arrest a man who has broken parole and demonstrates an apparently sardonic attitude towards others, while we simultaneously glimpse her past and her quasi-vulnerability. In a poignant flash back, we see Harrison comforting her, but get a sense that he does so for self-fulfilling reasons, not necessarily heroic ones. In this instance, the ideas of perception and heroism become a central question, and present themselves as fluid and situation-dependent. Natalie brings questions of familial relationships to the table as well, in addition to their effects on memory and redemption, as we see her estranged yet awe-filled perspective of Harrison, the man she hates and loves.

The final story, currently entitled "Trigger Fingers," shows us Harrison's perspective. From his own memories of saving his CO, combined with memories of his wife being stolen from him by the sergeant he savagely beat, we gain a conflicting view of Harrison's heroism. To an extent he seems a victim, and yet we cannot deny his explosive, angry nature. This is further exemplified in the running action of the story itself, as he is frustrated beyond his patience level to the point that he lashes out at a stranger. This episode highlights the faults of Harrison, while simultaneously demonstrating his personal loathing and frustration with his apparent inability to change. At every step, he seems to prove correct the harsh judgments of his ex-wife and daughter.

Running between the stories we read a series of poems. Some are connected directly to each other, while others have their own different subjects. In a note at the very beginning of the piece, we read that all of the poems come from a Sergeant in the same division of the military as Harrison. This is the same sergeant who married Harrison's wife, took away his daughter, and that Harrison attacked. The note mentions that this sergeant was required to write down his thoughts and feelings in his journal, and that he had obsessive compulsive and sadistic tendencies. All of the poems have an underlying tone of aggression and frustration. The "Territorial" series simultaneously can cause bitter laughter as well as demonstrate a level of violent competitiveness that is disconcerting. Through these poems, we gain insight into the psyche of the apparent antagonist of the whole compilation. We gain a view of the man who tormented Harrison, stole and abused his wife, and yet seemed to get away with it all. The poems bring the Sergeant into a comparison with Harrison, whom we feel more sympathy for, and yet we cannot condone or side with either one of them. Both of them failed in the sphere of parental and marital heroism that is the most important.

This collection thus involves several different perspectives about the interactions between one family, specifically one man and his relationships. The question of redemption goes largely unanswered in order to create introspection and reflection. I hope that by reading this collection, a person will come away with questions of their own and seek to explore them.

Background and Significance: Mixed genre works, while certainly not the most common of contemporary projects, do have significant precedence, from Menippean writers like Lucian in the 3rd century B.C. to the more recent Robert Lowell in *Life Studies* (Dronke 1, Lowell).

Possible reasons for the mixed form vary, but some important ones include being able to quickly or abruptly change the tone of a narrative, while perhaps more compelling is the medieval perspective that mixing poetry and prose made the project as a whole one giant *poetic* work, rather than a mixture of the two (Dronke 2). That is to say, they saw mixing poetry and prose as an extension of poetic composition. Boethius is noted as using mixed forms to create allegory in his work (38). Another idea follows that the “prose evokes the empirical situation” while the poetry serves to grant access to the poetic (broadly representational) “I” of the story (86-90). Perhaps a most critical idea is that switching between prose and poetry allows complex and unpredictable voice shifts which facilitate “self-discovery,” and here Dronke specifically references *Nuova Vita* by Dante as a (perhaps) unrivaled example of well-utilized mixed form (114). Others see the mixture of prose and poetry as a combined effort that utilizes different forms of imagery and argument (Lerer 9). With Robert Lowell, prose was perhaps a way “back to psychological...health,” a method that allowed to think and explore in ways that poetry did not, and in fact, many of his poems in *Life Studies* were first written in prose, then changed into poems, suggesting the compact and narrative possibilities of poetry (Witek 40). Witek also sees

prose working as poetry in Lowell's work, further demonstrating a connection between the two (68). Overall, mixed genre works were more common in medieval and ancient times than they currently are, though Robert Lowell is an example of an effective example of such a project.

My project similarly uses a mixed genre form of poetry and prose. While similar to Boethius in the physical set up of placing poetry between the prose, my prose does not follow one story line as Boethius' work does, nor is it as long and expansive as Robert Lowell's compilation. I will attempt to connect three different stories of prose through the poetry. I feel as Dronke does, that the poetry and prose together make one big poem. I want my prose to "rhyme" and have rhythm, as well as dissonance. Each poem and each story may be read as a stanza to the greater work. In this way, I refute certain claims that a poem is determined by "the length of the line" (especially considering prose-poetry, which is on the rise) (Minot 5). Having said that, I recognize that by using different genres and forms I can express different ideas in different ways. Within the poetry, I can hone in on specific ideas, feelings, or problems, and give compact insight into the characters. Using prose, I can explore scenes and actions of characters, all the while creating unforeseen nuances between the overt narrative and the characters within.

I wrote a version of "Trigger Fingers" in my second year of college. At the time I meant it to be a stand-alone story. However, as I considered Harrison and his past and experiences, I became intrigued by the possibilities he presented. I realized that I had given him a story that I could explore more, and that I wanted to explore. Many people can relate to someone like Harrison in that they embody different qualities depending on who is telling the story. Furthermore, Harrison, and his sergeant, presented unique opportunities to discuss redemption. I also wanted to create unique yet realistically compelling stories, stories that could be real, with characters of depth and intricacy. This project is an attempt to do so.

Methodolgy/Procedures: I will write three to four short stories. After finishing the short stories, I will revise and review them, using peer feedback, working with professors and mentors, and then finalizing the drafts. I will ensure that the content stays within the parameters and is a cohesive part of the whole project. I will write several poems to be used between each short story. While each story will come from a different person's perspective, the poems will all come from the same person. Thus, the poems will maintain a certain voice throughout. Similarly to the stories, after writing the poems, I will use peer review to edit and revise the poems and improve them. I will also seek feedback about the order of the pieces, so that not only are they connected, but somehow progressive. I will adapt, edit, and revise as necessary.

Preliminary Outline or Prospectus of the Finished Thesis:

- A. General Introduction explaining the project (Non-fiction). After this, everything will be part of the entire work of fiction.
- B. Introduction of Poems – This will be from a third person perspective, explaining that the poems included are from the journal of character included in the stories.
- C. One or two poems
- D. First Short Story – “Unsung”
- E. Two or three more poems as an interlude
- F. Second short story – “Drop”
- G. Three or four more poems
- H. Possible final short story – “Trigger Fingers”
- I. One or two poems (if there is another short story)

J. Final short story – Untitled

Qualifications of the Investigator: I have already completed my Creative Writing minor, which included taking Eng 218 (Creative Writing), 319 (poetry workshop), 320 (creative writing for youth and adolescents), 401 (creative writing capstone), and 419 (creative writing projects). During these classes, I was able to develop and refine my craft in poetry and fiction, not only finding my own voice, but also learning effective revision skills and techniques, as well as receiving feedback for my work, some of which will be included in this collection. I have been published in the BYU magazine *Criterion*, and I have also presented my poetry during the BYU English Symposium.

Qualifications of Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Stephen Tuttle has a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Utah. He teaches several different Creative Writing courses. He specializes in short fiction, and thus can offer special insight into my short stories and their instruction and improvement. He also was my professor when I completed the English 419R course for creative writing projects, wherein a large portion of my work for my thesis was originally conceived. Thus, he is familiar with my work and this particular project. Dr. Tuttle is also familiar with constructing compilations of creative works, and so can offer additional insight into organization and effective interaction between the works.

Qualifications of Faculty Reader:

Dr. Emron Esplin has a PhD in U.S. literature and inter-American literary studies from Michigan State University. He specializes specifically in such authors as Edgar Allan Poe and Katherine Anne Porter, in addition to international poets like Luis Borges. My experience with Dr. Esplin began with his English 295 class dedicated to literary criticism. He mentored me during the class, and continued to do so, encouraging me to submit my paper for publication. He has a great deal of experience with critical analysis and will be able to help me better hone and evaluate the different parts of my project. His critical experience will also be beneficial when it comes to helping me fulfill the mission of my project, and recognizing the weaknesses and strengths.

Schedule:

December 2016: Draft any new poems necessary. Revise short stories 1-3. Possibly draft new story. Adjust the order.

January 2016: Final revisions to short stories. Pick/revise final poems. Determine final order. Create the final draft. Submit to advisor for final review.

February 6, 2017: Submit Thesis Draft.

End of February: Defend Thesis

March 2017: Make any necessary adjustments and upload final Thesis

Expense/Budget: I will not require outside funding for this project.

Sources:

Dronke, Peter. *Verse with Prose From Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994. Print.

Gold, Joseph. "Delusion and Redemption in Faulkner's 'A Fable.'" *Modern Fiction Studies*. 7.2.

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Lerer, Seth. *Boethius and Dialogue: Literary Method in The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Princeton: Princeton University, 1985. Print.

Minot, Stephen. *Three Genres: The Writing of Poetry, Fiction, and Drama*. 3rd ed. Englewood

Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1982. Print.

Witek, Terri. *Robert Lowell and Life Studies: Revising the Self*. Columbia: University of

Missouri, 1993. Print.