

Preliminary Thesis Proposal – English Department

~~MAKYLIA MICHELE~~
Print Name of Student

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March 31 / 10
Date

April 7, 2010
Date

In the space provided please give a (typed) draft of your thesis topic (approx. 250 words)

For my thesis project I am writing a novella or short novel tentatively titled *Figment*. The story will chronicle one young woman's growing obsession with a stranger, and her creation of the fiction that fuels this obsession. The reader will observe the protagonist as she imagines the history of another, bringing him into existence for herself. As the narrative progresses, her fixation will take on an increasingly important role in her life, ultimately jeopardizing preexisting relationships and taking the form of self-objectifying fantasies. I hope to convey an evolution of my protagonist's mentality, which will occur through the interplay between fantasy and the external world. Through my depiction I will explore the role fiction can play in the relationship between the self and the Other.

I plan to shape my novella under the combined influence of Vladimir Nabokov's *Mary* and Marguerite Duras' *The Lover*, both of which are first person narratives that depict revived memories of unconventional infatuations. Other useful materials may include Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Simone de' Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, as these texts discuss the concept of the Other. More recent, relevant feminist scholarship may also aid me in writing *Figment*.

Preliminary Thesis Proposal – English Department

Print Name of Student

Signature of Student

13 April 2010
Date

Josip Novakovitch
Print Name of Supervisor

Signature of Supervisor

15. APRIL 2010
Date

In the space provided please give a (typed) draft of your thesis topic (approx. 250 words)

As part of the Masters of English (Creative Writing Option) within the Department of English at Concordia University, my thesis will consist of a novel length manuscript. The novel will tell the story of a simple soldier in World War II, specifically, a German draftee sent to the Eastern front during the final year of the war. The principal idea is to explore this well-known conflict from the other side. Many war dramas have explored (and exploited) the central themes of this conflict from the perspective of the victor. However, with more than 60 years since the end of this conflict behind us, there appears to be a small but growing appetite for a view from the perspective of the defeated, rather than from the victor. The principal basis of my novel will be personal material in the form of an autobiography written by my father, a German draftee in the war. Using this material as the main story arc, the novel will be supplemented with secondary research of the period, plus primary research consisting of first-person accounts of the period from other German soldiers.

Preliminary Thesis Proposal – English Department

~~Jeremy Valentine~~

Josip Novakovich

Print Name of Student

Print Name of Supervisor

~~Signature of Student~~

Signature of Supervisor

April 15, 2010

April 15, 2010

Date

Date

In the space provided please give a (typed) draft of your thesis topic (approx. 250 words)

Preliminary Thesis Title: *Yves Antichrist* Genre: Novel

The object of the proposed work is a dramatic, emotional, and phantasmagoric Novel that tells the story of one day in the life of a homeless eighteen-year-old living on the streets of Kansas City. *Yves Antichrist* will be a dream-like fantasia that engages with Yves' gender confusion, drug addiction, megalomania, and fashion-obsession as Yves undergoes a torturous journey through the various underworlds of Kansas City, including through his difficult past and through intensely visceral encounters with many local hustlers, drug addicts, and other dispossessed or fugitive persons.

Yves, the primary narrator and megalomaniacal star of the proposed novel, is reminiscent of a 21st Century, postmodern Holden Caulfield, James Dean, or Huckleberry Finn, and the novel will be staged around one particular day (his birthday and America's birthday as well), July 4th 2000, as he encounters a variety of figures from his life growing-up and from Kansas City's downtrodden street world. Ultimately, Yves' convoluted millennial tour of Kansas City becomes a pilgrimage through a hallucinatory dreamscape of satanic heavens and paradisaic hells and through the Mid-American Religious, Sexual, and Historical Unconscious as Yves must discover something of the nature of love, of family, of friendship, and of the nature of the self, if he is to survive on the strangely holy and terrifying streets of Kansas City.

The work in this novel will draw from such works as: Gunter Grass' satiric novels, Petronius' *Satyricon*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*, Genet's *The Thief's Journal*, Harold Brodkey's *Profane Friendship*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and incorporating magic--realist elements similar to those of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*.

Thesis Proposal - Draft

Student Name: _____ Supervisor: Kate Sterns

In the space provided please give a (typed) draft of your thesis topic:

Title: The Doormaker

My thesis takes the form of a young adult novel that follows twelve-year-old Agnes Atwater and her siblings Dean and Merri as they discover hidden truths about their family and struggle to redefine their place in the adult reality of shifting truths and morals. At the beginning of the story, Agnes's life is changed by a pink envelope that arrives early one Saturday morning. The letter is from her grandmother—a person Agnes and her siblings didn't know existed. The ramifications of this deception spiral outward as Agnes and her siblings struggle to understand the reasons why their parents might have lied to them. In an attempt to heal the break, the family drives north to visit this strange, reclusive grandmother who lives in a remote area based loosely on the coast around the Bay of Fundy.

Much of the action of the novel centers on the children's discovery of the natural world. The medicinal properties of plants and the river's ability to carve extensive underground caverns, serve as natural anchors to the more fantastical elements of the novel such as the whirligig beetles, which change color like fireflies and have antenna like helicopter blades, and the sentinel trees, larger than giant sequoias and dying of disease. One of the things I hope to do in the novel is to recreate the sense of wonder that comes from encountering nature in its element for the first time. It made sense to do this in the mode of a children's book because, just as childhood is a time of blurring between fantasy and reality, this book will use certain fantastical elements as a way of navigating the often fine line between childhood and adulthood, as well as to explore the morality of actions taken in the name of preserving humanity at the expense of nature and conservation.

In addition to the children's grandmother, another important character in the novel is Peat, the child of two botanists who settled in the area to study the sentinel trees and why they are dying. With Peat in tow, the Atwater children explore and eventually learn that there is more to their world than they have ever imagined—that passages between different worlds exist and that actions taken in one can have ramifications that spread across the universe. They learn of a group manipulating these passages to strip other worlds of their natural resources, heedless of the destruction this causes in the physical form of poisonous, foul-smelling puddles that begin to appear in the woods. The group is doing this not only for personal gain, but in an attempt to close some of the passages according to which worlds they deem morally acceptable. They claim to be making a "safer" world, but at what cost? Ultimately, this is not a story of good versus evil, but of the fact that these concepts can appear more subjective than the black and white labels suggest.

While on the surface this is a novel of discovery and adventure with elements of fantasy, I believe that in order for the story to work, it must be firmly rooted in reality. It can't be a world of magic wands that fix problems and heal wounds. Instead, Agnes's world is one where reality is a concept that is constantly shifting under her feet because things—family, morality, childhood, the bounds of real experience—are themselves not always what they seem. But I believe that the best way to address these complicated issues for children is with a story that is fast paced enough to be compelling and characters that are realistic enough to be relatable.

Over the course of developing the elements that will make up this story, I have been influenced by the work of writers across different genres. I am attracted to Aimee Bender and Gabriel Garcia Marquez for their seamless blending of fantasy and reality until the result is a story that does a better job of exploring the real than many realist novels. I have also been influenced by the ideas in Tim O'Brien's writing, especially *The Things They Carried*. Within this work he explores the space that exists between the stories we tell and the things that have happened, "story truth" and "happening truth", until he comes to the conclusion that sometimes the stories get at the truth of what has happened better than a simple retelling of the events would do. I strive to reach this kind of "story truth" within the context of my novel. Finally, I am a voracious reader of children's books and among them, my greatest influences are the work of Philip Pullman, the poet Ted Hughes, Lois Lowry and Madeleine L'Engle for their ability to use imaginative works as metaphors to discuss larger societal issues such the role of ideology, religion, and morality while never losing sight of the fact that a novel should be a story, not a polemic. I look forward to the challenge of following in their footsteps.

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Signature of Student

Date

Thesis Proposal – Long Form

MARY DI MICHELE

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I think the most important characteristic of so-called New York School Poetry is its stylistic variety, which it borrows from Eliot and Pound; however, while Eliot and Pound used this variety for cultural and historical meaning, New York School Poetry uses it for its own sake, for the fun of it but also in the belief that there is no one style that is the main way in which one has to write. For example, if the language of the Renaissance is in one's head, or the French language, or the language of the 19th century, why not have it all on the same page? Similarly, if one is interested in phrases, rhymes, blurts, philosophies, recipes, and dreams, there's no reason why a poem can't take them in all at once. Part of the challenge in using such disparate materials is that it creates situations in which transitions are vital and, if the poem is to have a semblance of continuity and connectedness (also characteristic of the New York School), must work with the kind of unquestionable grace of a wave transitioning between its crash and withdraw. Another part of the challenge is, as always, staying fresh—especially important when using, for example, archaic diction and syntax. Consider Ron Padgett's use here: "Brain, shake out thy water, dog-like."

Writing with this New York School sensibility, and in its tradition, embracing the challenges, each of my poems takes the form of a single, unbroken stanza. The effect is like a long take in a film—that is, an uninterrupted shot, the unchanging perspective of a single camera capturing a moment. As Michael Klein writes in a review of Mary Ruefle's *Selected Poems*, the single-stanza poem "gives the important impression that everything in the poem is happening at the same time and could be held that way in the psyche." For everything to happen at the same time while ensuring that everything in the poem—including the diction, tone, and imagery—is as varied as possible (à la New York School) makes for a technically challenging combination, one that insists an idea is carried to its associative limits at rapid-fire speed. Besides this loose formal unity, no one poem in my collection will necessarily be predicated on or obligated to another in logical ways. My process is most often a combination of automatic writing, collage, and other Surrealist techniques. My intention is mainly lyrical, not satiric, although there are comic elements. The combination of the lyrical and the comic, although it exists certainly in Aristophanes and Byron and Wallace Stevens, is sometimes hard for people to perceive and enjoy because very often lyric poetry is associated with seriousness unmixed with laughter—but really this is more like a seriousness that is in fact solemn. As Charles Simic writes: "If it's funny, obviously, it can't be serious, people will tell you. I disagree. Comedy says as much about the world as does tragedy. In fact, if you seek true seriousness, you must make room for both comic and tragic vision."
