

Capstone Proposal (Reformation – A Novel)

1. Topic
  - a. With the recent growth of YA fiction in the literary world, my young adult dystopian novel will address whether humans are economically, socially, and spiritually better off as a more objective species with a dulled capacity for emotion. This idea is inspired by pharmaceutical drugs, specifically the over-prescription and abuse of Attention Deficit Disorder medication, such as Adderall and Vyvanse. Legal drugs like these are great for productivity and efficiency, but many users have reported downsides to this state with symptoms like lower social connectivity and a numbing of emotion response. With the unmatched standards already placed on teenagers and adults alike in today's modern world, this will be a very relatable concept. My hypothesis is that an unstable society with the capacity for emotion is more worthwhile than a stable society absent of emotion.
  - b. In my fictional world, the unhealthy specimens are the emotional, and the superiors are the rational. Some inspiration consists of documentaries like "Homo Sapien 1900," and books such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Plato's *The Republic*. Unlike other novels, however, mine focuses on the fundamental importance of emotion itself, how it influences almost every aspect of human decision, and how it often supersedes critical thinking. Because the teen audience is more open to influence than perhaps any other age group, a message about the power of emotion and the importance of balance between it and critical thinking skills is very important to articulate through story.

- c. Another difference between my novel and others is that the vast majority of dystopian literature begins with a dystopia already in place, and the reasons that dystopia exists are typically not revealed until the end of the story. My novel will be a unique addition to the genre because it depicts the political and social events as they happen, and show how smaller decisions can slowly but eventually lead up to a dystopia. This will be an especially important aspect of the narrative for my teen audience, who often feel their decisions don't matter and aren't impactful. I hope to demonstrate that while politics does have an effect on its citizens (*1984*, *Brave New World*), citizens have just as much effect on their politics. For instance, my antagonist introduces a new medicinal drug named "Vera" (A Russian word meaning "faith.") to every pharmacy in the country. Vera is an inexpensive pill advertised to make people energized and focused, while dulling the hindering effects of emotion. Taking the pills is a voluntary choice, but more and more people start to use them to improve their skills in the competitive job market. Eventually, non-users are the minority seen as dead weight and emotional baggage slowing down progress, and so new laws are passed in landslide votes requiring all citizens to take Vera.
2. Setting
    - a. Despite some of their technological advances, resources like water, power and clean air are dangerously depleted due to overpopulation. Politicians must follow through on promises for more resources if they are to win

elections, and at the time the story begins my antagonist is quickly gaining support to supersede the standing Prime Minister.

- b. Around a half-century into the future, America is reduced to less than a third of its current size, decimated by bankruptcy, war, and poverty. Only the east remains, and in a large capital called Ankora, Destica, the lives of my hero and heroine are portrayed. Rough concrete buildings and apartments from construction of previous decades are prominent in poor districts as a result of crime and lack of upkeep. Richer districts are aluminum buildings with solar power in widespread use, heating homes and charging automobiles while subways and elevated trains are crumbling from outdated technology and blackouts are common. Education is dramatically underfunded at the start of the novel, and causes a lack of motivation for those native to the country like my hero. My heroine—being a poor, illegal immigrant from the lost American territory west of the Mississippi River—has no formal education and must make her living on starvation wages by cleaning wealthy homes or working in dangerously unregulated plastics factories. However, the education that is provided is limited to property owners and shelter members. Most books have been burned in recent years for heat during the cold winters, where blackouts are the most severe.
3. Importance
  - a. Because emotion is the central theme of my story, and teenagers are generally the most responsive to emotional experiences, young adult fiction is the most effective genre. With YA fiction being such an expanding genre as

well, my novel fits in nicely because of its mature themes and timeless questions for everyone, including adults. For instance, because emotions are a major cause of human conflict, eliminating emotions would also eliminate conflict *in theory*. However, *in practice*, emotionless actions strip away empathy towards the individual and leave human decisions in favor of the majority, regardless of individual suffering. Knowing this, my novel asks teenagers and adults alike the age-old question: Is there ever a way to erase human suffering completely? I will not simplify the exploration of this question, because the search for an answer is not simple in reality either, and I want the story to reflect reality as closely as possible. My teenage heroes will embody intelligence and emotional savvy, since teens are generally much smarter than mainstream culture gives them credit for. Using complicated situations and choices, I will show readers that emotions are overall a positive entity to be cherished rather than fought or struggled with as a negative force.

- b. The other reason I am choosing YA fiction is that I think teenagers are particularly impressionable and insecure with themselves, especially with today's cultural subjectivity and self-destructive dangers of the term "perfection." Now more than ever, our culture places unmatched standards not just on teenagers, but on everybody. With advancements in science we ask certain questions; How can we improve ourselves? How can we increase the intellect and well-being of the individual in an efficient, large-scale manner? I wish to get to the core of this mindset in my novel, where genocide

is intellectually motivated. The genocidal society narrows the parameters of what is “valued.” I want to give a message of self-acceptance, a celebration of emotions, and the promotion of an open mind. Being open to difference and the powers of a variety of emotions and perspectives makes a society rich, and in my novel, teens are the one part of society that seems to realize the importance of this as well as display a willingness to fight for it. Critical thinking is a very important topic for me to address, and it’s just as relevant today as it was during the dawn of our species. In my opinion, the sooner people are introduced to new ideas, the better they are at forming their own opinions and thinking for themselves. The decisions we make as humans have repercussions, both big and small, and it’s those everyday choices that shape dystopias.

#### 4. Methodology

- a. Because the creative arts spark such profound emotional responses to humans, my methodology will be based on inspirations from music, art, and literature. The Naked and Famous (an indie electronic band) wrote an album called *In Rolling Waves*, a pivotal foundation to base my novel around in terms of tone, philosophical ideas, and narrative structure. The album’s disconnected tone reflects the population’s numbness in Ankora; the album raises ideas on argumentation and its power over human decisions on a fundamental level; and finally, the structure follows a back-and-forth narrative between two voices, male and female, that tell their sides of the story to each other and the audience. I also use songs like Gymopedie No. 1

from Erik Satie to inspire the atmosphere of a scene or character section. This song is calm and soothing, one that fits the novel's opening scene, the protagonist's memory of cold nights with her best friend in the west, which starkly contrasts the congested suffocation of the dilapidated subway car she rides to work on. Photography helped her envision buildings that might be in this city, and literature like *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas provides example of interwoven humor through adventures with human relationships.

- b. A part of my fiction novel will also be based on playwriting structure for several reasons. Political candidates in reality are also judged primarily on their actions and dialogue in speeches. Therefore, during scenes from the POV of the antagonist, I will primarily rely on action and dialogue to convey his feelings and intentions. This will allow my audience to draw their own conclusions by judging them as they would characters in real life. Each book in the trilogy will also follow a three-act structure (Act I, Act II, Act III), adopted from playwriting format. Each act will lead to a climatic event from the foundation set forth by the preceding act, each building upon the other. I intend to submit Act I for my thesis, a section roughly around forty pages.
- c. I will use a third person limited narration between various characters, including the main hero, the main heroine, and the antagonist. Using this point of view, I will explore the mindset of the "victims" as well as the "villains" during the events of social and political reform, thereby presenting multiple sides of the story that blur morality and philosophical questions.

Every one of my characters will symbolize a different positive emotion to fight for as well as a negative emotion to battle against. Because every character will have their different shades of ethics, the audience will be left free to decide if anyone can be considered altogether good or evil, and whether the rational or the emotional is more beneficial. In real life, every human has their own variation of morality that conflicts with another. This fluidity of ethics mixed with the self-persuasiveness of emotions is what leads to violence, war, poverty, starvation, and mental anguish. This will provide a strong argument against the need for human emotion. I will then counteract this view with what I feel is a stronger argument, that emotions are what keep us empathetic towards other people's suffering, and are also what make life worth living in the first place. This argument will be done through narrative demonstrations of love, friendship, happiness, and other feelings between the characters. It is my hope that this debate will spark thoughts and conversation in the minds of the audience.

- d. My characters are not only connected through circumstance, but through the underlying theme of emotion, which eventually becomes discriminated against during the reformation. Therefore, the characters must act rational in order to remain safe in society. Emotions are detected through dialogue and actions, such as yelling at someone with anger or showing public displays of affection with a lover. Each character being a symbol for a positive and negative emotion makes their acting difficult in diverse ways. For example, my heroine symbolizes righteousness because she has a strong moral

connection to humans and animals, but her profound care for others gets her into states of self-loathing when she fails to protect people. Vera may provide benefits in numbing self-hatred in face of failure, but without emotion my characters also lose their positive qualities that make them impactful individuals. Without emotions, humans are nothing more than robots in zombie-like shells.

## 5. Timeline

- a. In terms of time, the research/rough-draft portion will probably take the shortest amount, as writing the rough skeletons of scenes is my easiest challenge as a writer. I would say writing the rough draft is my weak suit, and should occupy the last 60% or so of my timeline.

## 6. Funding

- a. While my project does not require funding per say, it would definitely be beneficial to study somewhere like Atlanta or Washington D.C. Atlanta now has a Center for Civil and Human Rights Museum that would be great in studying historical tendencies of human conflict and the means that allow these movements to succeed or fail. Washington D.C. would give me a chance to visit the Holocaust Museum, a plethora of information and inspiration needed for my concept of societal cleansing. It would also give me a glimpse of what's it's like to be on a seat of power, a vital component of my villain. Both Atlanta and Washington D.C. would give me personal experience with a metropolitan city, the core layout of my setting.