

Stephen Anderson  
Thesis Reflection

Creative work has two key dimensions: the personal—the idea born in your mind, poured onto the page, given life by your dedication and decisions; and the external—the personal given to others to read, judge, scrutinize and constructively criticize. For my thesis, I began with a clear idea of what I hoped to write by the summer before junior year. It gestated in my heart and mind for a while, and I even produced a version of the beginning of the novel I envisioned while in Ireland the summer of 2018. When I committed to this project about a young seminarian leading a group in the apocalypse at the beginning of senior year, it went through many transformations. My vision changed completely and I had to start over, but this was quite important for opening up the project to new avenues as I proceeded to work on it, share it with others in the colloquium, and internalize advice about how to make it sharper and more profound. And so, this project has a long history in the personal realm, which means much of myself is evident in the words now, and that is something I cherish.

In the context of a structured thesis, I found a solid community to help draw out the personal work into a realm of constructive feedback. The thesis colloquium class, composed of just five students and a professor, became a really productive space to share my work, hear genuine reactions (both praising and criticizing what I had produced in an important way), and then to ask questions of myself about how best to move forward. For me, the colloquium provided the structure I needed to produce more content, but also to think more critically about my own work, and to envision not just the characters on the page, but the context of my project as a piece of art in and of itself. My advisor, Professor Tomasula, became the continued presence of a critical and supportive reader as we transitioned into the second semester, and

this was instrumental in helping produce a whole work of art, taking the chapters I had written and shaping them into a beginning, middle and end for the thesis. The external component of creative writing was made possible for me in the support I received from the community collectively engaged in producing creative theses at Notre Dame.

It is important to note that much of the second semester work ended up being done remotely at home. Interestingly enough, my novel revolved around an apocalyptic plague, and so the contemporary events I faced while completing it were indirectly influential on the final tone of the piece, providing an eerily resonant backdrop with which to work as I finished the project. It has been sad to accept that the final stages of the thesis are not going to be as intimate and collaborative as I had hoped; the creative thesis writers were all looking forward to reading our finished work for one another and for a greater audience. It was a collective journey in many ways cut short and forced once more into a more personal realm. Still, I know that the work we produced will be available to read and that the community that has supported us (professors, the English department, etc.) will continue to do so and will share in the delight of our final projects. I am proud of the work I have produced, and I am even more proud of the work my friends in the thesis track have created. I will look back fondly on this time, no matter what the circumstances, for art is about personal creation turned outward to the world, and that is possible here and now. I cannot wait to see how each of us continues to turn loose our current projects, and new ones, to the world.