

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVE THESIS

BALM OF GILEAD

by

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BALM OF GILEAD is a collection of poetry that explores the speaker's rediscovery of love and spiritual meaning in the years after his recovery from addiction and the loss of a parent. The poems are a lyric document of the speaker's need to anchor himself in the liturgical praxis of "High Church" Christianity in response to bewilderment, the emotional result of a renewed encounter with his own life in the world.

The often-confessional poems in BALM OF GILEAD borrow from the free verse, urban landscapes, and emotional urgency of Denis Johnson; the "broken" sonnets of Molly Peacock; the near-blank verse and terse formality of Joshua Mehigan; and the devotional rhetorical posture of Maurice Manning. Moreover, the volume appropriates the liturgical and theological language of traditional Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic Christianity as found in the Roman Missal and the Book of Common Prayer, a strategy found in the work of contemporary poets Malachi Black, R.S. Thomas, and Bruce Beasley, as well as in the post-conversion poems of modernist T.S. Elliot. BALM OF GILEAD fits within a long poetic tradition of fastening ineffable sacred experience into more personal lyric modes, an inheritance dating not only to the works of John Donne, George Herbert, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, but to the Psalms of David and the sayings of the Desert Fathers.

BALM OF GILEAD eschews the narrative arc found in most accounts of addiction recovery and grief memoirs, which typically tell the story of “rock-bottom” to “faith” in a predictable linear fashion. Instead, BALM OF GILEAD orders the poems through imagistic associations, themes, and tropes to more truthfully document the complex, convoluted means through which the speaker experiences his conversion away from the certainty of addiction and grief and into the unsure but redemptive footing found in love and faith.