Post-Tenure Review Reflection for Dr. Kevin Andrew Spicer, Spring 2023

Table of Contents

Dr. Kevin Andrew Spicer's Post-Tenure Review Reflection

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0. Introductory Matters

0.1 Versions of this Document

For those that would would prefer to engage this work in a form(at) that isn't in HTML, I have provided a .pdf version here. I consider the HTML version here to be the "preferred" way to read this reflection largely because I have been greatly influenced, more and more as of late, by the work of Jonathan Reeve, who argues in his nice little blog post, "The Case Against PDFs", that we academics should really "stop pretending that we're all using paper." Of course, one of the things about the PDF format that I am sure most writers love is its ability ("a feature and not a bug," lovers of this file type will quickly say!) to imitate the printed form. But, as Reeve seems so right to note, to my mind, we do so little these days on paper. As Reeve puts it:

> At least, speaking for myself and my academic work, email is much more common than paper mail, ebooks are rapidly growing in popularity, and journals are mostly accessed electronically. The global pandemic has driven us even further in digitization. More and more, we sign contracts, pay our electrical bills, and even get our drivers'

> licenses renewed, electronically, over the Internet. So then why do we insist on using electronic file formats that mimic the constraints of physical paper, which we no longer use?

My sense is that one could double-down on this quite strongly: if someone is composing something they want other people to read (or, sheesh, simply just be "easy to find" in some way), then one of the worst places to put that something (one of the worst "forms" in which to have it live) is in a .pdf. There's little doubt—as we all know—that probably everything in the world today lives in some HTML format. I will spare my readers the incredibly long list of affordances that HTML offers over that of the PDF. I will just say here that for those that still love this old format that strives so mightily to simulate the printed page, it's available to them: the linked .pdf copy above was converted from the document originally written in HTML (well, I should say, written in Markdown first, then converted to .html, tweaked with the "Tufte CSS"—created by Dave Liepmann and based on the groundbreaking work of Edward TufteHere of course we mean his fantastic book, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, 2nd Ed. (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2001).—and then, ultimately, outputted to .pdf). There are some spots later in this reflection—readers will be able to see them when they come to them—where I do some interactive graph plotting that will not be available in the static .pdf format—the HTML version, however, does have that interactivity available to readers who would like to stay here on this page. Of course, good rhetoric teaches us rhetoricians to be aware of far more than one way to persuade an audience—in other words, we should give readers all kinds of options and choices for how they would like to engage our work. I would like to think I tried to do just that here in providing this alternate version of my Reflection.

For those interested in the workflow that went into creating and styling this HTML document, please feel free to head over here.

0.2 Initial Caveats

I am well-aware that the guidelines for the "Post-Tenure Review" process in the *Policy Manual* explicitly note (2.9.5) that this document should present "a reflective narrative on the progress toward achieving the goals set at the last review and updated goals for the next five years of practice including how they fulfill the University's defined mission." *USF Policy Manual*, p. 144. That section continues on to say:

> The reflective narrative should include:
> 1. A personal evaluation of performance quality and effectiveness in areas of teaching, scholarship, and service since the previous developmental review.
> 2. A description of professional development efforts and activities undertaken, particularly if such efforts have been in response to feedback from prior evaluations or related to recently revised professional

goals.

3. A description of professional goals and plans for continued professional development in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service for the ensuing five years.

As will come as no surprise to anyone who knows me, I would like to rather not slavishly follow these guidelines; instead, I would like to spin them in my own direction, to my own purposes—hoping, of course, that the "spirit" of these guidelines are addressed, even if it is often the case that the "letter of the policy" is, perhaps, all-too-thoroughly missed. My plan here is to, largely, select out only a chunk of the last five years of my time here at USF as an Associate Professor. I hope that the major story (or stor*ies*) I tell here will make it glaringly clear precisely why I have decided to select out this much shorter time frame; it is also my intention to make very legible why the major thing that happened within this frame cinched together all the different arenas of my work at USF: teaching, scholarship, and service have all been threaded and interwoven together because I was fortunate in the Fall of 2020 to meet someone exceedingly special, a student by the name of MaKenzie Hope Munson. Actually, I was lucky to meet two incredibly exceptional students, but MaKenzie is the one I will spotlight so extensively and heavily here. In addition to her story, I will attempt to narrate a good deal (although far from all) of the work done with my other absolutely brilliant (and also one-of-a-kind) student, William D. Mastin, whom I encountered shortly after meeting MaKenzie; I will try to address the impacts he has made on me and on all three aspects of my job as well.

Although I feel perfectly justified—again, the argument for this will follow below—in this selection process, I will attempt, in some of the later sections, to speak to some of the larger contexts outside of MaKenzie and William; it's true—I have had so many more students than just these two over the last five years, but in my mind they are exorbitantly special to me and both are mind-bogglingly unique and singular and each are so in their own absolutely singular and unique ways. It is hard to put into words how profoundly they have managed to change things for me. We all know a little (I think) something about how human desire and enjoyment work: is it possible for one to eat a dinner that is so good one doesn't ever want to eat anything else ever again? Many will say, "No, of course not, that's just silly nonsense," and others will say, "Well, why would you even want to close off your desire in that way? What if there's another better meal down the road you never anticipated?" A similar question could be posed about our most favorite students: "Can one have a student so special, so significant, so impactful, that they don't ever want any more students?" On its face, one should say "No"—but the past two years have really got me wondering about whether or not such answers are sufficient for those students who are so insanely transformative for us that hyperbole is the only real way to do them justice. How else is one to try to make clear how infinitely proud we are to be able to call these students "our students"; how else is one to try to make explicit and obvious how much more proud we are to be able to

say we were "the teacher" of these two students?

I was fortunate enough to cross paths with my one mentor in graduate school. He loved to say—when we would reminisce about the time when we encountered one another and one another's thinking—that it was "love at first sight." From the very first time we met, there was an instantaneous rapport—we instantly both felt as if we had known each other in a previous lifetime or had always somehow always already met one another countless times over in the past. He was always hopeful that such a thing would not be a one-off for me—that I too would some day meet a student with whom this same "instant rapport" and "love at first sight" would be perfectly on display for all to see; countless times after I graduated, when we would meet to talk of Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida, and all our old "kindred spirit philosophers," we renewed and relived this immediate rapport with one another. I will never forget the day when I told him that I finally really understood all of the things he said he felt upon meeting me for the first time: joy that was hard to express, a feeling of genuine intellectual camaraderie that had never really happened before with another else, and so much more. I told him her name was MaKenzie and that she struck me as being my exact intellectual double or twin—he said there wasn't anything more I needed to say: he understood it all so well without me needing to say much else. The smile on his face at my good luck: I'll never, ever forget it.

I am aware that this "review" is supposed to be a review *of me and my work*—but such a thing is far from easy and it's next to impossible to do it without talking about MaKenzie. I will speak of my work, but the use of that word "my" needs to be opened-up to include so much more than just me. First and foremost it needs to be opened-up so as to include MaKenzie. Trying to muster as much humility as I possibly can—which, I think, although I could be grossly wrong, is my typical *modus operandi*—I should say that I would like to say that I have actually achieved quite a bit since my being granted tenure back in 2018. I chaired the English and Foreign Languages Department for four years; I worked on creating from the ground up the Digital Humanities major (along with the wonderful work and shared energy from my departmental colleague, Dr. Anna Ioanes); I helped spearhead and build an entire slate of graduate-level courses for the REAL Academy for high school teachers wishing to become credentialed as Dual-Credit English teachers; I have published scholarly, peer-reviewed essays, along with a nice short review on a contemporary poet (prior to this contemporary poetry would not have been in my somewhat long list of wheelhouses); much more is in the CV now in comparison with the version presented for tenure.That version is still available via my online portfolio for tenure here. One could say that I have legitimately achieved a good deal over the past few years, but none of it (absolutely *none* of it) compares at all to MaKenzie and all the work that she and I have done together—and I feel exceedingly confident that there will never come a day when that is no longer true.

Thus, without further ado, I would like to try to starting diving into all of the wonderful work she and I have done together over the past two years.

1. Teaching

1.1 Working with My Greatest and Most Favorite Student in My Entire Career as a Teacher/Scholar: MaKenzie Hope Munson ('23)

It is quite hard to know exactly know where to begin the stories about ourselves that are so central to the people we are now. Most will say it's a perfectly good bet to just "start at the beginning." Back in the Fall of 2020, I received an e-mail from Dr. Elizabeth McDermott (English faculty member at the time and now current interim Dean of CAS) that the "Freshmen Orientation Day" that semester found her meeting a student who was hoping to become an English major. I e-mailed her back very quickly, telling her I already thought I knew who this was, one MaKenzie Hope Munson. In between that visit day and Dr. McDermott's e-mail, MaKenzie herself had already e-mailed me—saying something that makes her crinkle her face just a little bit each and every time I razz her with it—saying that she wished to introduce herself and "make [herself] known," as she put it in that e-mail.MaKenzie Munson, personal communication, October 26, 2022. I kid her about this incessantly now, but I don't think there was any better way she could have introduced herself—even an e-mail with even a smidgen less boldness than this very first one is something I cannot ever even imagine her doing, ever. I should say, too, that I had a very clear picture of the kind of student I was dealing with here in this first e-mail exchange. Even before we ever crossed paths, she was on my radar—and this was simply because of the structures our department has working to help us—over each summer semester—place students into College Writing sections. MaKenzie came to college, came my way, with an incredibly impressive number of college credits already under her belt from a combination of Dual- and AP credit earned in high school. Students that come to college with that many credits almost never, never, never, never, never come around—and I myself had never, ever seen anything quite like it. Given that, it was clear to me long before we ever encountered each other that she was no doubt on the lookout for someone to push her, to push her thinking, her growth, her knowledge, her writing, everything. MaKenzie, even from the very first moment we ever met, possessed an intellectual intensity and fierceness that is exceedingly rare—again, I've never, ever seen it before in any other student I've had the privilege to teach over my eighteen-year teaching career and especially not in someone so young. What she had achieved before even coming to college was exceedingly rare for an eighteen-year old.

As I have mentioned to Dean McDermott and a few others, our meeting was a really big-E "Event" for me.Here I am relying very strongly on Alain Badiou's conception of big-E "Events" in his most well-known philosophical text, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2007). For a slightly more "layperson's" treatment of this text and this key idea of Badiou's, the *Why Theory* podcast episode by Todd McGowan and Ryan Engley devoted to this work is not at all a bad start. Meeting MaKenzie did really thoroughly cut my

academic and professional life (and, to be frank, just "my life" in general) into a time that was "*before* MaKenzie" and then another altogether different time (and altogether different me, too, I should confess) that was "*after* MaKenzie." I really do not think it took any time at all for the two of us to instantly trust one another in a very, very, very deep way—she says that she was extremely excited that I became her advisor (she's taken to preferring the "mentor" term now as she feels this moniker does not have any kind of "expiration date" of sorts in the way that words like "advisor" or "teacher" so often do) and took her under my wing, so to speak. MaKenzie crossed my path as an absolute one-of-kind—and she needed someone to see that the trajectory that would be best for her was perhaps not one that could be easily found in any course catalog or curriculum list. As a way to fulfill part of the "Senior Capstone" requirement for the English, MaKenzie composed a lengthy reflective essay ("Reflection on My Time as an Undergraduate at the University of St. Francis") that narrated her experiences with me as an undergraduate. I will be citing this text constantly—and my very first recourse to it comes here now. In that essay, she wrote very poignantly about what it was she wanted from her undergraduate education:

> My time at the University of St. Francis began in a way that one might think is similar to most other college students; with being part of the graduating class of 2020 and all the lackluster experiences that Covid allowed, I was excited to dive into all of this headfirst. What I realized quickly was that the boredom I had felt in too many high school classes was not just a symptom of going to a public high school, but more an indication that I wanted something different than most educational institutions are willing to offer.MaKenzie Munson, "Reflection on My Time as an Undergraduate at the University of St. Francis," p. 1. A copy of this work is available here.

I knew from the start—even from "before the start"—how special she was and never missed a moment to prioritize her and her learning and her work in the hopes that I could actually manage to give her the challenge that I felt she was so deeply craving. MaKenzie herself notes when things started to really ratchet up for us—and that was in the Fall of 2021:

> That next semester, I took my first English course and while I fell in love with that program, my overall desire to be at USF faded. Over the span of 2021, I had thoughts of transferring, thoughts of leaving, thoughts of taking a break from school; USF was taking more from me than I could scrounge up in all my classes, jobs, and experiences. At the end of 2021, I was desperate and confided to Dr. Spicer my feelings, thinking that I had already lost all capacity for loving learning and reading. In true Spicer fashion, though, he listened and devoted himself to helping me in any way possible; thus arose the possibility of my graduating early. He told me that I could be done by this time next year, that it wouldn't be easy, but that we would do it together. This togetherness was unfamiliar to me in

> an academic setting, as I had always been taught and encouraged to work alone. I would like to say that I was wary for a brief moment about this proposition, but that would be untruthful; I was super excited to jump into my last year with the support of someone I had grown to admire and look up to so much at USF.Ibid.

As I say, I've never really had such rapport solidify as quickly as it did between MaKenzie and me—my relationship with my own mentor is the only other parallel. This motif of "togetherness" that she mentions here is of the deepest importance—all of the work that we did we did together in a way that is what I think true pedagogy should be at the end of the day. So what did we do, exactly?

From the very first time we conversed, I spoke to her of wanting her to be strong, autonomous, confident in herself and her abilities and capacities, and never afraid to tackle everything with a passionate intensity that can often be off-putting (especially when that intensity is found within people of the female gender). Over the course of three semesters her education gave her a crash course (equivalent, in so many ways, I would say, to what students would get at the graduate school level) in Continental Philosophy broadly construed—from Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel to Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler—and even a good deal of work by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. There was a huge focus put on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and a great deal of the psychoanalytic tradition, with a sizable quantity of emphasis placed on the primary source materials of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The combination of Nietzsche's conceptualizations of language (especially with regards to his treatment of figurative language within philosophy and conceptual thinking in general) with the theoretical advancements put forward by Freud and the larger psychoanalytic school on the nature of the unconscious, language, and desire within the "speaking being" of the human, all quite literally rekindled the embers of her love of learning, reading, and thinking. These thinkers—through the almost daily conversations we held together in my office—opened up a brand new world and an incredibly rich new terrain for her to roam in and through. In this last Fall 2022 semester as an undergraduate, she and I completed a full slate of courses together (all of which we designed solely in response to her own desire and drive to learn more about certain topics and texts), doing an incredibly deep dive into the *Hebrew Bible* and the works of Homer and Vergil, a course on 20th and 21st Century theories of gender and sexuality, and an entire directed study devoted to the reading of First Amendment Supreme Court cases.

How did we come upon such a unique and singular curriculum here for MaKenzie? The pedagogical principle was very simple—and the inspiration came to us (or, rather, the substantiation/justification came after we were already engaging in this eclectic study) from something that many would like to locate in the work of—surprise, surprise—Freud. In a chapter from Adam Phillips's *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Appetites*, entitled "The Inter-

ested Party," the well-known psychoanalytic essayist focuses on Freud's early work on the "sexual researches of children." This chapter very cogently puts forth a very key psychoanalytic idea, namely, that our interests and curiosities can so easily be squashed and killed by the so-called "ideals of education," as Freud puts it (this is something that MaKenzie herself was very presciently aware of in her own educational history even before coming my way, as her remarks quoted above make very bright and clear). There is one spot in particular where Phillips talks about how we all have certain "official" and "unofficial" interests. The former are the ones that we get given to us by our "culture" or our "schooling system" while, in contrast, the "unofficial" interests are the ones that we pursue ourselves without caring at all that these obsessions might be seen as sub-optimal (or, even worse, purely otiose) from the (admittedly paltry) perspective of all the "official" ones that all of our systems think one *should* have. Putting things very bluntly—par for Phillips's course, I should note—:

> Why read Henry James rather than watch pornography—both, of course, sublimations? This is clearly a moral question about the roots and the consequences of our most impassioned interests. And interests, as Freud shows, are never innocent but always morally ambiguous. What Freudian descriptions of a life formulate in a specific way are the senses in which we have official and unofficial interests, and that we are often unaware of the difference (when I'm reading Henry James, I may be reading pornography). As a crude Freudian—a not uninteresting thing to try to be these days—one could say that patients are suffering from not having made good enough sublimations. That they have got further and further away from those things that—for whatever reason—matter most to them. That their official interests—what Freud called "civilized morality"—the "ideals of education"—are spellbinding, their unofficial interests hidden. Their official education has extinguished their unofficial education. It is not always enlivening to be well informed.Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Appetites* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

The pedagogical goal, for me, was always to keep MaKenzie's fundamental "unofficial interests" in mind: she came one day saying she wanted to actually read the Jewish texts of the Torah (okay, awesome, I said to her, let's *read the texts together* and not settle for mere commentaries or paraphrases of them); she came on another day wanting to know what psychoanalysis thought about the differences between masculinity and femininity vis-à-vis their respective relationships to language (fantastic, let's read some Freud and Lacan to hammer that out); she wanted to know what some of the really rigorous and powerful critiques of Freud and psychoanalysis were—being very unhappy with the standard pop culture treatments of this tradition that she had gotten spoon-fed to her by previous teachers (excellent, let's read the *very best* critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis: e.g. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*); she often spoke of wanting to read more theory devoted to feminism and theories of gender and

sexuality (splendid, let's read a ton of the biggies in that field—Michel Foucault especiallyEarly on we had a read—again, together—of his infamously canonical *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980). This text became a kind of lightning rod for MaKenzie's intellectual work and growth as Foucault's rather poor treatment of psychoanalysis became a constant refrain and leitmotiv for us. As is usual for good intellectual work, though, this text oriented all kinds of connections between these other areas of interest for MaKenzie: language, gender and sexuality, and so much more. We toyed with the idea of reading the other two volumes of this work by Foucault (which many, I think, never manage to slog their way through), but it didn't quite align with our larger goals, so we tabled them for a later date.—and use them to, perhaps, ultimately, return to a text that she and I read and reread together one summer and absolutely adored, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986).); she has *always* wanted to go to law school as her main vocation/career goal (wonderful, let's read as many SCOTUS cases as we possibly can); and the list goes on and on and on of things MaKenzie "just wanted to learn more about" and that I designed reading lists to try to feed that voracious appetite of hers.

I should just confess here that one need not simply take my word for how well this went—MaKenzie herself can—and did—speak to this much more strongly and properly than I ever could. Concerning how much she learned by taking this rather unorthodox, "unofficial," "sped-up/slightly compressed" educational plan, she has written: "While some may think of this unconventional graduation and course track as somehow less full, I have experienced the exact opposite; these past two semesters have fulfilled me more than the total sum of my education before 2022. I hope that I have properly conveyed that throughout the bulk of this reflection."This is, once again, from her reflection, p. 8. MaKenzie's intellect is an incredibly tough nut to crack—her standards for intellectual engagement and rigor are incredibly high—and this is thus extremely high praise; she was already a frighteningly hungry thinker and reader coming out of high school. To say, as she does here, that the time spent studying with me gave her "*more than* the total sum of [her] education before 2022" (my emphasis) is an enormously big thing for her to say—given her standards, this is probably downright shocking—and not at all to be taken lightly. Again, trying to say this with as much humility as I can, I think I know exactly what she means and I wouldn't even think of claiming it wasn't absolutely true.

MaKenzie possesses this incredibly beautiful quality of never being willing to have anything slow her down—and there is much more that I would like to say about this key facet of her overall personality and intellectual predisposition. Often when I think about MaKenzie and how her mind works, metaphors having to do with speed and quickness always come first to mind. Difficult or complex arguments that it would take other students a great deal of time to parse and think through are understood and grasped by her with the velocity of a lightning flash. I literally could not count the number of times we read a dense

text together by Deleuze or Foucault or Lacan—or an incredibly complicated or perhaps even abstruse Supreme Court opinion—and her mind would immediately grab hold of all the major knots, contentions, and problems within the texture of the argument. I've never, ever seen anything quite like it in a student before. Her intellectual agility and maturity are truly from another planet. All too often her mind would just simply cut directly to the heart of the matter of a problem or issue at hand for that particular day. Most other students need time to work through difficult texts and arguments and ideas in order to find the real true core. MaKenzie never, ever seemed to need all that much time. Her analytical rigor is unmatched—unmatched not only in its cogency and persuasiveness, but also in terms of an unbelievable degree of quickness and speed. It is quite frankly a joy to be able to say I saw it in action every single day we sat and read and thought and learned and wrote together over the past two years.

Perhaps the easiest way to flesh out and further substantiate all of this would be to point to the rather extensive notes she and I kept as a log of all of our work over the Fall 2022 semester, where—as already mentioned—we did a number of independent study courses together. The length of that document suggests I spare the committee members that full treatment (it came in, upon my last check, to roughly one-hundred and seventy-pages single-spaced, covering all of the courses we did that semester). However, out of a plethora of examples one could easily mention from that document, I would like to extract, as illustrative examples, just a few moments and texts and readings and conversations that not only display perfectly MaKenzie's acumen and perspicacity as a thinker and reader—all of which I got to literally see grow stronger and stronger each and every day we spent conversing together in the office—but also to give my readers some sense of her increased intellectual intensity over time, which seemed to multiply almost exponentially each and every time we spoke. I also want these examples to serve as exemplary of her capacities to handle an incredibly diverse and wide range of different kinds of work—and I would love to try to pull out a story from each of the five courses we did together in her last semester here at USF.

1.1.1 ENGL335: Ancient Literature

My first test case here came from one of her independent studies devoted to "Ancient Literature," where we read together some really key, canonical texts from the Western literary tradition—one of the most significant being a couple of texts from the Torah. It's necessary for me to keep in readers' minds that in between every session we had together in this past Fall semester, MaKenzie managed to grow in her incisiveness each and every day. This is something that I have never, ever encountered in any other student I've ever had. Hopefully this example will make clear the truth of such a sentiment. I also hope to try to show some of the various threads that we are able to weave with the other courses we were doing here in this same semester.

One day while making our way through Genesis, MaKenzie fixated and focused in on a curious little thing in Chapter 24 of that had to do with the intriguing way in which the servant of Abraham interacts with the woman who will become Isaac's wife, Rebecca. In the Charles Kahane translation from 1963—wonderfully provided by Sefaria hereThis website served as an absolute gold mine for us, especially as it includes seemingly every tiny piece of Jewish commentary on the Torah, the Talmud, and so much more. It's an unparalleled resource for any- and everyone wishing to deeply engage with these Jewish texts. (And this is not even to mention that the original Hebrew is there side by side with hyperlinked lexicon entries for each original Hebrew word—as I say, an absolute gold mine is this website.)—we get the following exchange between "the senior servant" (24:2) and Rebecca:

> After giving her the gifts, he said: "Whose daughter are you? Tell me please, is there room for us in your father's house, where we may lodge? She answered each question in the proper order:"I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." And she continued: "We have ample quantity of both straw and fodder, as well as room for lodging. (24:23-25)

MaKenzie was terribly intrigued by this mention of Rebecca's "answer[ing] each question in the proper order." Why is this here and what is it doing, she asked. Before diving in any further, I just want to make clear how fantastic it is that she managed to zero-in on this in the first place. One can see how genuinely impressive this is when one goes to consult Rashi's own commentary,Again, his full commentaries are available on Sefaria here. which is an absolute *sine qua non* within this tradition of Jewish Biblical commentary. Rashi's interpretation does actually mention this thing that MaKenzie noticed all on her own and without any prompting—as far as I can recall—from me. Rashi parses this key verse thusly: "DAUGHTER OF BETHUEL — She answered his first question and his last last." One can easily see here that what looks like "commentary" or "interpretation" simply repeats the original text. Why does Rashi himself bother to redouble this little detail here with his "commentary"? After letting her know how impressed I was that she instantly latched on to something that Rashi himself mentions too, MaKenzie was endlessly fascinated by all of this still: what is the detail doing in the story and what is Rashi's redoubling of it doing? How is it working? How is it functioning? Indeed—fantastic questions, and even more fantastic as she is still so early on in her academic career and growth. (This kind of "natural talent"—I'm not quite sure what else to call it—is an absolute staple of MaKenzie's intellectual structure. She possesses a profound natural aptitude for something that it usually takes other students a great deal of graduate-level work to actually be able to do and perform. She is preternaturally gifted in this arena, thus necessitating our taking a path for her academic journey that didn't at all resemble similar paths for other students not quite like her—which, to be honest, is every single other student I have ever taught.)

I gave a response, at the time, that I was somewhat happy with, but now I'm not so sure. I do think that there is a significance to the ordering of the questions and responses—MaKenzie's intuition here is still spot-on—because the servant is trying to "track the prophecy," as I put it on that day. Abraham has already told his servant how he will know who is to be the wife of his son, Isaac. My sense is that the text is not satisfied with simply saying that the servant will know they have found the right woman because she manages to do all of the things that Abraham said she would—i.e. Abraham says Isaac's future wife will offer the jar of water to the servant and then will proceed to offer, again, water to his camels. Indeed, this is exactly what happens in the Genesis text, but Rashi's sly little (redoubling) comment makes one wonder if this is sufficient. Is it also necessary that these actions be carried out *in the proper order*? My sense is "Yes," and that this ordering is what Rashi's comment is really up to at the end of the day. Still, my point here seems easy enough to state simply: what kinds of students—again, young students, students yet to turn twenty—ask questions like this? As I say, I've never ever had anybody do it before MaKenzie and I've no doubt known beginning graduate students who would miss all this. There's no hyperbole here: it's very impressive. Furthermore, she was able to link this up with yet another spot in the text where she saw this same issue of order and ordering popping up.

The second time this ordering concern (within Rashi's own text) shows up is with one of Isaac's sons, Jacob—the context here again concerns marriage (which, once more, MaKenzie was the first to highlight), specifically the relationship between Jacob and Rachel—whom he has been pursuing while working for her father for many years. Jacob has left one night with his wife and children and Laban catches up to him, asking him a series of questions:

> And Laban said to Jacob, "What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre. You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! It was a foolish thing for you to do. I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father's [house] said to me last night, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.' Very well, you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?" (31:26-30)

In the very next verse we are told of Jacob's response: "Jacob answered Laban, saying 'I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kin, point out what I have of yours and take it" (31:31-32). Once again, Rashi notes the ordering relation in a somewhat opaque way (as is par for the course for him): "BECAUSE I FEARED — He answered his first question first, for he has asked him (*Genesis* 31:26)"[what has thou done …] that thou has carried away my daughters, etc." (this being the first of all Laban's

questions)." Once more—we get just a couple cryptic lines from Rashi where we see him highlighting of the ordering of the answers, but Rashi does not flesh out this ordering or what it's doing or its function, etc. which—broken record here, to be sure—shows the perspicacity of MaKenzie's initial question about this spotlighting of the "ordering of answers" issue.

At the time, after extracting out this key matter, we spoke together of all kinds of different ways one could parse this topic of answering questions in the proper (i.e. "original"?) order: it could easily be done out of courtesy, out of a proper sense of conversational decorum; MaKenzie even wondered if one could just call it "good common sense" to answer questions in the order in which they're posed. I still haven't managed to carve out enough time to canvas and dig through all the commentary on this passage—who has?!—nor have I had the opportunity to dive deep into the Midrash treatments about these passages—but I do find it absolutely wonderful (and told MaKenzie the next time we met that week) that the one who gets described as following this pattern is Jacob, the beloved son of … who? Well, Rebecca, obviously—who, as we know from the parts of the story chronicling the adventures of those twin boys (Jacob and Esau, prefers him over all others (Esau in particular, of course).

This excavation work was seemingly always only preliminary to something much more significant—and that was the way in which MaKenzie and I fell immediately into a pattern where we would use a particular text (along with the extracted kernel of an idea that came through her so often brilliant close and intense reading of that text/kernel) only as a jumping off point for us. Day after day after day each week, the assigned reading served as impetus for what someone might consider to be "tangential concerns": these tangents were also spots where we "leapt away from a text," following what Deleuze and Guattari love to call a "line of flight"See their wonderful *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Volume 2*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) for their initial use of this term. There's also a really nice little definition of this term by Tamsin Lorraine in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Paar (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005) pp. 144-46. in another direction entirely. The line of flight we followed and pursued from the "ordering" concern had a great deal to do with some of the uncanny (uncanny? not sure that's the best word here, but it's the one that keeps coming foremost to mind) resonances between parents and children throughout these stories in the Tanakh. If the text weaves together all of these subtle, subterranean, ways in which the two twin boys—Jacob and Esau—mirror their parents, we wanted to try to track something that would be quite characteristic not of Jacob but of Esau.

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg really fantastically highlights a very deep and dark sentiment that shows up in the character of Esau, which she herself links back to the *Akedah* that Isaac himself suffered as a child.See her masterful book, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009). Zornberg argues that Esau—so like his father—has this incredibly melancholic streak to him, a streak that she says makes sense given the fact that

he is Isaac's favorite (in contrast, of course, to his twin brother, Jacob, who, as already noted, is his mother's favorite). This difference seems to manage to greatly orient and constellate these storylines: When Jacob asks Esau to sell him his birthright (in *Genesis* 25:33), Esau responds: "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?" It may be my own personal melancholic streak, but I so vibe with this response, I can't even begin to say how much. This is the response of one who has so deeply intuited and understood his *being-toward-death*.Here we are of course thinking of Heidegger's treatment of the *Sein-zum-Tode* in his *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY UP, 1996). The "Cliff Notes" version is available here courtesy of Wikipedia. No substitute for an actual reading of Heidegger's masterpiece, the Wikipedia entry is not terrible. (Rashi's commentary is intriguing, but was not quite à propos for our purposes in this context). "I could be dead tomorrow," Esau seems to say, of what use is a birthright to someone who knows right down deep in their bones that she is always on the verge and doorstep of death? Indeed, what a fantastic question. Is there a better one for one to pose? Zornberg argues that Esau has somehow come to some awareness (either directly or indirectly, it seems to matter very little) of his own father's brush with death as a young child. Is this sentiment simply to be linked to the life of the hunter; the life of the one who risks life and limb every day in the hunt; is this not the sentiment and deep feeling of the one who (unlike Jacob, who, we are also told, spends so much of his time at home, in his parents' "tents") risks everything? Certainly, no doubt! But is this explanation sufficient? I am not sure—personally, both MaKenzie and I did really prefer to slide toward Zornberg's reading, who says that some of the *Akedah* experience has obviously rubbed off on the favorite son of Isaac. I dig it. "… of what use is my birthright to me? Of what use to me is the future?" Every mortal being poses this question. I greatly enjoy how the text does not at all shy away from such a trial and experience. The first son is so like the father; the second son is favored by, and is so similar to, the mother. And the text refuses to do anything but affirm these disunities; I cannot speak more highly of such texts and such refusals. Additionally, I cannot even speak more highly of the fact that all of this was generated by MaKenzie and I together—all "leaping off and away from," to some degree, the text in question for that day/week.

1.1.2 ENGL372: Shakespeare—A Tiny Aside

As one last example coming off of the previous section—and it's possible this here doesn't really need its own section heading—, I would like to speak briefly about how all of this got marshaled to talk about a work we read for an entirely different course—viz. the course devoted to Shakespeare. This same week we had the story of Jacob, et. al., on the docket, we also read (again, really nice synchronicity here!) *The Merchant of Venice*. As all good readers of that play know, the infamous trials of Jacob as shepherd for Laban's flock plays an incredibly significant role in that story—and Shakespeare masterfully masterfully mobilize this storyline in *Merchant of Venice* to talk about the role of wealth,

money, capital, and so much more, plays in this story of Shylock. Shylock's reading of the entire Jacob story is endlessly fascinating and intriguing—and MaKenzie also found this to be true for her as well—as Shylock zeroes-in on Jacob's amassing of wealth vis-à-vis Laban as a perfect analogue for his role as moneylender and financier. It thus makes sense that he would gravitate to one of the twins over the other. There is something really significant about Esau's lack of interest (pun intended here, for sure) in stockpiling (of what use is stockpiling for one who does not at all take the next day as a given?), in amassing and accumulating for the future, etc. (This is not, of course, the only allusion or resonance one could highlight between these different texts. All good Shakespeare readers know how the bard will link this lack of a future to the question of homosexual desire *re* Antonio's melancholy [which, again, as everyone knows, literally opens the play: "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad: / It wearies me; you say it wearies you; / But how I caught it, found it, or came by it, / What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born, / I am to learn / And such a want-wit sadness makes of me / That I have much ado to know myself" (I, i, 1-7). Indeed, all throughout the play Shakespeare will continually fashion the homosocial/-sexual connections between Antonio and his dear "bosom lover" (III, iv, 17), as Portia puts it, i.e. Bassanio]. There is thus a similar emotional valence, a similar emotional tonality and resonance, an uncannily similar affect, between the melancholy of Antonio and that of Esau, the one who has intuited the profound terror, horror, and despair that was the *Akedah*. Jacob is the one who stockpiles—the one who banks on the future; Esau is the one who says that all we really have is now—tomorrow is mere fancy.Of course, potential readers who work in the same field as I do will immediately draw fruitful parallels with the incredibly pathbreaking work on the intimate link between queerness and the future laid out most clearly and strongly by Lee Edelman in his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University P, 2004).—that struck both of us as so interesting.I'm not quite sure how else to fit this in, so this footnote also seems as good a place as any—but the next week after this when we covered Joseph's story, MaKenzie was incredibly excited to tell me that she was not all surprised to see that Joseph—another character (or perhaps *the* character) who *really* knows how to stockpile for the future (it is this idea that he utilizes in order to save Pharaoh and Egypt and himself from the impending famine indicated by Pharaoh's infamous prophetic dream of the lean and fat calves)—is … guess who's favorite? Yes, you're right: Joseph is Jacob's favorite.

I would like to now rehearse the *Merchant*/Jacob conjunction. How did MaKenzie and I try to read this conjoining? We started with the key exchanges between Shylock and Antonio in I.iii.67-93—apologies to my readers here in advance for the overly long quotation—:

> ANTONIO
> Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow
> By taking nor by giving of excess,
> Yet, to supply the ripe wants of my friend,

I'll break a custom. [To Bassanio.] Is he yet possessed
How much you would?
SHYLOCK Ay, ay, three thousand
ducats.
ANTONIO
And for three months.
SHYLOCK
I had forgot–three months. [To Bassanio.]
You told me so.–
Well then, your bond. And let me see–
but hear
you: Methoughts you said you neither lend nor borrow
Upon advantage.
ANTONIO
I do never use it.
SHYLOCK
When Jacob grazed his Uncle Laban's sheep–
This Jacob from our holy Abram was
(As his wise mother wrought in his behalf)
The third possessor; ay, he was the third–
ANTONIO
And what of him? Did he take interest?
SHYLOCK
No, not take interest, not, as you would say,
Directly "interest." Mark what Jacob did.
When Laban and himself were compromised
That all the eanlings which were streaked and pied
Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes being rank
In end of autumn turned to the rams,
And when the work of generation was
Between these woolly breeders in the act,
The skillful shepherd pilled me certain wands,
And in the doing of the deed of kind
He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
Who then conceiving did in eaning time
Fall parti-colored lambs, and those were Jacob's.
This was a way to thrive, and he was blest;
And thrift is blessing if men steal it not.
ANTONIO
This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for,
A thing not in his power to bring to pass,
But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven.
Was this inserted to make interest good?
Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?
SHYLOCK
I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast.

But note me, signior–
ANTONIO, [aside to Bassanio]
Mark you this, Bassanio,
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose!
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!This passage is taken from *The Folger Shakespeare*'s edition of the play in plain text (.txt) available here.

The key section here is obviously Shylock's explicit and direct invocation of the story of Jacob's production of all the "parti-colored lambs" (I.iii.79) from Laban's flock; we read this entire conversation as saying something quite profound about Jewish vs. Christian ways of reading the holy texts (this was, again, one of the major "unofficial interests" that MaKenzie sent my way: she wanted to know what was really going on between these two major traditions—and she wanted [in this wonderful way that is so unique to her] to figure this out by *going back to the original texts* themselves): Shylock reads Jacob as showing profound ingenuity, as generative, productive, inventive, entrepreneurial even, whereas Antonio and Bassanio (our stand-in Christian characters) read Jacob as usurping an explicitly divine ability (namely, this very capacity to be generative/creative/etc.). As I say, not a bad way to tackle the real difference between the Jewish and Christian "ways of reading."

Indeed, MaKenzie said to me that this recourse through Shylock's mention of the Jacob narrative was exceedingly helpful in parsing out another scene that occurs in *Merchant* that might be next to impossible to grasp without the context provided by the Hebrew Bible. In II.ii, we get an absolutely bizarre retelling of the Jacob/Esau/Isaac birthright scenario vis-à-vis Lancelot the clown and his blind old father. MaKenzie said she was puzzled by this scene, wondering what on earth was going here, what function it was serving, what it was doing in the play, and so forth. To be honest—prior to reading these Hebrew texts with MaKenzie, I was myself always unclear about what to do with this whole thing. The two of us together had been trying to keep track of the thread—interwoven all throughout the play—where characters often seem to be simply "playing out the wishes" of their fathers. Portia, of course, "plays out the wishes" of her own, *dead*, father; this "following the desires of daddy" obviously provides the entire rationale and impetus for the whole "three caskets" romantic/love plotline, so famous and so famously treated even by Freud himselfIn Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913)*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, 1958), pp. 291-301.. It's a horrifyingly callous question to ask—especially given the psychoanalytical dictum about the impossibility of this—but one cannot help but wonder why one can't just mourn the father and let all of his desires go? The scene with Lancelot the clown and his father—combined with the element of acting and impersonation—easily led us to thinking about other places where the

Shakespearean signature suggests that if power and authority can be simulated, can be impersonated—especially when that authority and power are located squarely within the paternal figure, as the work of Jacques Lacan so brilliantly showedThe *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)* entry on Lacan is also not a horrible resource for laypeople.—then its very authority and power and sway can be destabilized and undermined; this is itself a thread that fully links back up to Shakespeare's early play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, which is perhaps an even better place to see this undermining of the Lacanian "paternal function" at work even more clearly.There is now the rather infamous little remark in one of Lacan's early essays—"Presentation on Psychical Causality," in his *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002)—where he writes: "… —it should be noted that if a man who thinks he is a king is mad, a king who thinks he is a king is no less so [*il convient de remarquer que si un homme qui se croit un roi est fou, un roi qui se croit un roi ne l'est pas moins.*]" (p. 139). Likewise for a father: if the father thinks he is *really* a father and nothing more, there is a hint of madness to such a thing akin to that of the beggar who thinks he is himself really a king.

Earlier I said that one way to talk about the intellectual work MaKenzie and I did during her (very short) time here at USF was by invoking, somewhat metaphorically, the "line of flight" of Deleuze and Guattari, where one uses the text only to "leap away from it" in the pursuit of all kinds of other ideas, texts, concepts, theories, etc. But perhaps one should stick with this word "text," which we know comes, ultimately, from a Proto-Indo-European "root, *teks-* 'to weave, to fabricate, to make; make wicker or wattle framework'."See the Online Etymology Dictionary's entry for this word here. Perhaps we were "leaping away from" the main text only in the hopes of weaving more threads together—more strands, more connections, more generativity arising from all those increased connections between all of these things. I think that the next example here might further flesh this out.

1.1.3 ENGL495: Directed Study: Gender & Sexuality Theory

Towards the end of October, for her independent study of "Theories of Gender and Sexuality" course, we had Zora Neale Hurston's wonderful novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God.Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel* (New York: Perennial, 1990). In the months before October, MaKenzie and I had been reading *a ton* of mostly "philosophical" or "theoretical" works. MaKenzie started us off on this day that she wasn't quite sure how to navigate this text, by which she meant how to navigate through a "fictional" text as opposed to one that was more philosophical/theoretical. There was perhaps something to this as a good deal of our time was working through philosophy and theory. (This is of course not to say that we hadn't read any literature together. In the Spring 2022 semester MaKenzie took our ENGL400: Critical Theory course with Dr. Ioanes—the combination of Dr. Ioanes' reading list and our paired work together really lit a fire for MaKenzie. This was especially true for a work

of fiction on that reading list: Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*, a text that MaKenzie will confess she really changed all kinds of things for her. I like to think that only part of that was due to James' text and—perhaps—had much more to do with the fact that she and I read and thought about this novella a lot together. As I am looking back here now, this is curious to me as one could say that our reading together of that work really cemented the two of us as a pair. We were already extremely close—but it's somehow possible that that work brought us even closer.) I jokingly said at the time that I couldn't really believe her at all when she said she didn't really know how to go at this novel of Hurston's—and that sentiment was verified simply by the fact that we spent the next couple of hours (all afternoon, really) having the most wonderful conversation about this novel. But I'm jumping ahead of myself slightly here. I said she could feel free to start somewhat broadly: "What do you think about this novel as a whole? Don't worry about pointing to anything super-specific here at the outset, we'll get to that in good time." "It's a sad book," she said. "Why?" "Janie." "Yes! … Is it a beautiful book?" I asked. "Yes," she replied. Good—agreed!

After admitting that this text was assigned to her in high school (and that she actually read only a few chapters), she said she was happy to have "saved this text" for us. It's true, MaKenzie frequently and often lamented the rather poor and really sub-par educational experiences she had in high school prior to the two of us crossing paths (not challenging enough, failed to really push her and her thinking, the list of sins here is seemingly endless). She did recall a spot in the text where she wrote about Hurston's "free indirect discourse" methodology in high school and this gave us a nice little opportunity to talk about this (she said she didn't recall her teacher ever really defining this term—I worry that this was really par for the course for MaKenzie's academic history, too often she could easily and endlessly produces examples of situations where her earlier teachers would mention something and then not proceed to flesh it out) and where it comes from (for most of us working with the Anglophone literary tradition, the laurels and rewards for brilliant use of this technique go to Austen,See here for a nice slate of examples of Austen's utilization of this quintessentially novelistic procedure. of course, although one could easily mention Goethe's heavy use of it too). After we did that, we zeroed in on the rather infamous image of the pear tree and the bee, which orients and constellates so much of the novel, so much so that we could not help but have recourse to calling it Janie's "fundamental fantasy" à la LacanThe best place to go for this is his *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. The entry for this on *No Subject* is also not bad as it includes the use Slavoj Žižek (perhaps one of the most well-known of Lacan's commentators) makes of this Lacanian concept. given how Janie seems to return to this childhood experience again and again and again over the course of the novel.

The main thread MaKenzie wanted us to pull on here was clearly the thematic of trees and branches and roots that travel with the reader all throughout Janie's narrative.Just a side note here, but I wonder to myself now if anyone has ever

done any work trying to produce a Deleuzoguattarian reading of this novel through their concept of the "rhizome" (presented in the first chapter of their previously cited *A Thousand Plateaus: Volume 2, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. This Hurston arena slides smoothly into Dr. Ioanes' scholarly wheelhouse—so this is definitely I should chat with her about more fully. She started us off by immediately moving to Nanny's early use of this metaphor: "'You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come around in queer ways'."Hurston, p. 15. We continued tracing all the references to trees, nature, roots, branches, etc. It was very expertly done on MaKenzie's part. All while keeping track of this, we spent a great deal of time talking about Janie's first and second husbands, Logan Killicks and Joe (Jody) Starks, respectively, and their quite different modes of behavior towards Janie, towards work, towards women and femininity in general, and so forth. Most of our conversation focused in and around these first two figures and their relations and impacts upon Janie. The key thread here, at least for me, was one that centered on Janie's reactions to the patriarchal structures that are so visible all throughout this book (there are ways in which these structures often get propped up by the question of race as well—these strike me as quite skillfully and subtly done on Hurston's part, too, I should add). I know I mentioned already MaKenzie's (totally unjustified, from my perspective!) worry about dealing with a fictional text here—but we ended up reading the text through philosophical and theoretical lenses that were incredibly generative for both of us.

We talked a great deal about the territory, about the floor plans, about the blueprint, that Janie's grandmother, Nanny, lays out for Janie and her life. Nanny wants "protection" for Janie—and that "protection" means marriage as the final end, no concerns at all about the means necessary to achieve that end. The novel clearly invites us to do all kinds of comparing when it comes to Logan and Joe as husbands: the first clearly falls into that economic conceptualization given to us by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*:*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002). everyone needs to work (seemingly as much as possible) and the rewards of that work are in the work itself. Here MaKenzie and I immediately thought of the way in which Logan says he needs another mule so that Janie can also work the fields; Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, clearly espouses a slightly different form of capitalist ideology, something that associates money and capital with political power (and which also seems to require Janie to be put up on a pedestal, no working, just an object of male gazes, although Hurston's narrative voice is careful to note that the real gaze here is Joe's and Joe's alone: "That night he ordered [key word choice, here, for both of us] to tie up her hair around the store. That was all. She was there in the store for *him* to look at, not those others."Hurston, p. 52. Nothing of Logan's "Protestant Work Ethic" is present here with Joe.

We also discussed at great length Janie's ultimate dismantling of Joe's patriarchal position within the town of Eatonville —this was no doubt spurred on by

the work she and I did on Lacan's well-known "formulas of sexuation" where he lays out the differences between "masculine" and "feminine" ways of relating to signifiers, to language.The main primary source here is Lacan's *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998). Levi Bryant—another well-known philosopher who travels in identical circles to the ones I do—has some wonderful blog posts about these infamously cryptic "formulae" here, here, here, and here. Very assiduous readers may want to read his even fuller treatment in *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities P, 2011)—a full .pdf copy can be accessed here. MaKenzie seems to have found the the Lacanian treatment of "masculine and feminine" structures of sexuation to be very helpful to her in thinking about what it is that Janie tries to dismantle of said patriarchal structure. We took a great deal of time focusing in on a couple of really powerful pages that come in Chapter 6 of the novel. After telling Janie that he has to tell her what to do because women don't think ("Aw naw they don't [think]. They just think they's thinkin'. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one" [p. 68], Jody says), we get the following long paragraph:

> Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them.Hurston, pp. 67-68.

Before I get into reading this passage, I just want to lavish even more praise on MaKenzie for highlighting this passage. Even after all the time that has elapsed in between that day and now, I know this still shouldn't surprise me too much; she spent so much time here at USF thinking and reading with me, it only makes sense that she would learn how to seemingly instantaneously cut right to the very heart of a text in a way that is identical to the way I myself like to think I do it (over the course of our time together a million times out of a million she would pick out the places requiring more thought that were the exact same ones I myself would want to highlight), so, before I put forward my own take here, I want to give MaKenzie all the credit here—one should always give credit where credit is due.

Now, I just absolutely love the fact that the passage here in question refers to a split within Janie (here is, perhaps, the very birth of her subjectivity): "She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them." Ah, perfect. I asked MaKenzie: can one be a real, actual agent without this split between inside and outside? "No," she said. Good—agreed. This break, this split, is perhaps fully foreshadowed on the previous page, coming immediately after Jody's saying that women don't think: "Times and scenes like that put Janie to thinking about *the inside* state of their marriage. Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good. It just made Joe do more. *He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it.*"Ibid., p. 67, emphasis mine. This split, this separation, between outside and inside, does it not set the stage for Janie's thorough castration of Jody in Chapter 7: "Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n you kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life'" (p. 75).This phrasing, "the change of life," I'm not sure it needs glossing, but it refers to menopause (see the OED entry here)—and thus lends credence to a reading focused on sex and sexuality, in addition to gender too, of course. Everyone sees what's going on here:

> Then Joe Starks realized all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him [again, key word choice, the masculine structure here obviously would want to read this removal of what Lacan calls "the phallus"Once again, see Lacan's "The Signification of the Phallus", in *Écrits*, *op. cit.* to be a kind of theft] of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing. When he paraded his possessions hereafter, they would not consider the two together. They'd look with envy at the things and pity the man that owned them. When he sat in judgment it would be the same. Good-for-nothing's like Dave and Lum and Jim wouldn't change place with him. For what can excuse a man in the eyes of other men for lack of strength? Raggedy-behind squirts of sixteen and seventeen would be giving him their merciless pity out of their eyes while their mouths said something humble. There was nothing to do in life anymore. Ambition was useless. And the cruel deceit of Janie! Making all that show of humbleness and scorning him all the time! Laughing at him, and now putting the town up to do the same. Joe Starks didn't know the words for all this, but he knew the feeling. So he struck Janie with all his might and drove her from the store.Hurston, pp. 75-76.

(Now, MaKenzie and I didn't talk on this day about Janie's invocation of the

story of David and "Saul's daughter," whose name is Michal, but it is one of my most favorite stories in the Old Testament—it is in II Samuel, Chapter 6]—and it's also a story that Dante picks up on and uses incredibly strongly and powerfully in Canto X of his *Purgatorio*.Of course, I deeply adore W. S. Merwin's absolutely gorgeous translation of this text, *Purgatorio: A New Verse Translation*, trans. W. S. Merwin (New York: Knopf, 2000). This allusion is heavily, heavily, heavily overdetermined here, it seems to me. It's not immediately clear to me how one should take it, given that the original story is complex, alluringly so, I would say [and this is not even to mention that the history of interpretations of this story are legion]. Once more: here's another quarry to chase within the secondary literature on Hurston's work.)

It's very evident that Janie castrates Joe here (thoroughly feminizes him by suggesting he looks like a woman who is in menopause)—and he knows it, or, at the very least, he "feels" it, somehow. Indeed, as the free indirect discourse (again, MaKenzie was the first of us to bring this out in our conversation) hints at here: "For what can excuse a man in the eyes of other men for lack of strength?" At the time, I wanted to try to read Janie here as having a ton of agency in this moment of castration; MaKenzie was slightly more cautious here, asking if that was true or if Janie is perhaps somewhat more passive in that she does, admittedly, "wait for Joe to die" a bit later in the book (unlike the way she simply leaves Logan for Joe) before taking up with Tea Cake. I don't mind that cautious reading too much—but I like the idea of seeing the split in Janie as the thing that grants her a degree of autonomy and agency. Although, I confess, that might be too strong.

The rest of our time on this novel was spent discussing this concern about Janie's agency (or lack thereof). We managed to keep off for quite a while the question of how best to read Tea Cake. Does he—as so many readers and critics have strenuously and vociferously arguedJust one example here, see Leila Hajjari, Hossein Aliakbari Harehdasht and Parvin Ghasemi's "The Legacy of Romanticism: the Pear Tree and Janie Crawford in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God," *Journal of African American Studies*, Vol. 20., No. 1 (March 2016), pp. 35-52.—not "free" Janie in some sense from the shackles of patriarchally-imposed (socioeconomic) power structures? Is this novel not to be read as a journey, a fundamentally heroic journey, where Janie moves from having seemingly no voice whatsoever to one that is more "her own"? How does Tea Cake fit into this dialectic, this journey? Many, many readers and scholars have focused a great deal on the role of *play* when it comes to Janie and Tea Cake's relationship—they *play* checkers together (which Jody never let her do), he teaches her how to shoot a shotgun—and teaches her so well that becomes a better shot than him: "She got to the place she could shoot a hawk out of a pine tree and not tear him up. Shoot his head off. She got to be a better shot than Tea Cake" (125).See ibid. for a reading that itself focuses on this "play" aspect. This seems to grant Janie a modicum of autonomy that she never had with Logan or Joe. We also talked about all of the numerous ways in which Tea Cake gets linked back up to this theme of nature—his name is

Vergible Woods, after all. I gave MaKenzie a quick rundown on a number of the "affirmative" readings of this bookAgain, see ibid. for a nice survey of many of these "affirmative" readings.—she found the bar for men to be incredibly low in many of these readings. Agreed—I am myself not all that sympathetic to the reading that interprets Tea Cake as a kind of salvific figure for Janie—sure, he is, in some senses, better to her than Logan and Joe, but I'm not sure he is without his own flaws.Todd McGowan's reading—in his "Liberation and Domination: Their Eyes Were Watching God and the Evolution of Capitalism," *MELUS*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 109-128—is highly consistent with my own position. Towards the end I wanted to know what MaKenzie thought of the whole rabies storyline at the end of the novel. Did she read Tea Cake's descent into a rather terrifying human being as simply the result of the rabies? Or, alternatively, did she like the idea that the rapid dog's bite brings something to the surface that had been simmering under this very same surface. I quite like that reading. She agreed—and proceeded to have us take a very close look at the entirety of Chapter 15, which we did as she said she wanted to read it to me in its entirety. After doing so, she quipped, "I think that's all I need to say about the affirmative readings of Tea Cake." Not bad—and well-put as far as I'm concerned.

As I mentioned at the start of this section, I think we had an absolutely stellar discussion about this book. There were seemingly an infinite number of other things we discussed that haven't found their way into this write-up. I know we talked *ad nauseam* about patriarchal power in this book—especially about the ways in which the patriarchy appears to be such an incredibly fragile thing: just the right words chosen (and spoken) by Janie manage to cut Jody right to the quick. Yet, simultaneously, one wouldn't want to go so far as to say the patriarchy was so flimsy that it still couldn't hit someone and hit them hard, cause a scar, make them bleed. How is one to think this fundamental paradox of patriarchal power, best, I asked MaKenzie. So fragile and yet it hits—and hits *hard*. Indeed—such a situation continues to necessitate the task of trying to generate more and more thoroughgoing critiques of the patriarchy.

1.1.4 ENGL300: Free Speech

I would bet that it's probably no doubt already clear how MaKenzie seemed to always be "in her element" when we were in the office working together. I think that was especially true for this course, the one that I really hoped would be *very formative* for her and her ultimate goal of pursuing a law degree. For this course, I'd like to rehearse the work we did on one of the rather famous "Freedom of Speech" cases we looked at together in this tutorial, *Hustler v. Falwell*.

MaKenzie started us off with what the main opinion considered to be the key question here: "This case presents us with a novel question involving First Amendment limitations upon a State's authority to protect its citizens from the intentional infliction of emotional distress. We must decide whether a public figure may recover damages for emotional harm caused by the publication of an

ad parody offensive to him, and doubtless gross and repugnant in the eyes of most." After confessing that, right at the start (upon reading the description of it on the very first page of the opinion [p. 46 of the previously linked .pdf version]), she went to find the ad in question (I'll link to one here), she then proceeded to say she absolutely loved the first footnote in this case, which reads: "While the case was pending, the ad parody was published in Hustler Magazine a second time" (49). Already, there was something just a tad-bit comical to us here—but, all levity aside, the real questioning—in a very quite-serious and non-jokey way—from MaKenzie came after she spotlighted a passage on page 46 where Chief Justice Rehnquist mentions the *Abrams v. United States* case,250 US 616 (1919)—the opinion can be read in full here. argued back in 1919 and one that she and I had already read together earlier in the year:

> We have therefore been particularly vigilant to ensure that individual expressions of ideas remain free from governmentally imposed sanctions. The First Amendment recognizes no such thing as a "false" idea. *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U. S. 323, 339 (1974). As Justice Holmes wrote, "when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas-that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market . . . ." *Abrams v. United States*, 250 U. S. 616, 630 (1919) (dissenting opinion).

I put a smiley face in the margins here of my copy—MaKenzie did too, surprise-surprise. I wondered aloud to her: "What's the problem here, buddy?" "I just want somebody to flesh this out a little bit more—and I'd like somebody to read a little bit more Nietzsche." Fair enough, I replied—indeed, here we see the significant role Nietzsche's thought has played for MaKenzie surfacing very clearly and evidently here.See MaKenzie's "Reflection," pp. 1-2 for more on this influence of Nietzsche on her thinking and her work more broadly. "I would love to know how we're really cashing-out this difference between an 'idea' and a 'fact,'" she said. I wanted us to jump onto this (what for us by this point in the semester had become something of an "old bugaboo" after reading so many of these SCOTUS opinions)—i.e. metaphor of the "marketplace of ideas" and its relation to truth. She said not to get too hasty, "We'll get to that here in a second," she replied. Following my line of thinking really well, she had us jump over to page 52, where we get the following invocation of "facts" as they relate to ideas and their possible falsity: "False statements of fact are particularly valueless; they interfere with the truth-seeking function of the marketplace of ideas, and they cause damage to an individual's reputation that cannot easily be repaired by counterspeech, however persuasive or effective." Here again she wanted some kind of precision with regards to the difference between facts and ideas. She really leaned heavily on this assertion that "False statements of fact are particularly valueless …" MaKenzie said—quite correctly, I should add—that we're back to Plato here; we tried to elaborate this a bit more: is the

"marketplace of ideas" rhetoric/metaphor really a Platonic one, I asked her? I was a little hesitant to sign on to this at first—if only because it seems to me that there is something about this good ol' Socratic idea that if "one knows the Truth," there's just no question whatsoever that they'll chase that Truth, they'll pursue it doggedly that needs a lot of unpacking. That said, there is no doubt an element of the Socratic dialectic that does require something that looks quite similar to this "marketplace of ideas" ideology—viz. the testing of claims to Truth, which Socrates never stops doing in the Platonic dialogues, as we no doubt all know. As I type up this account here now, I like how slippery this all is—especially vis-à-vis this connection to Plato. However, I think that over time I started to feel less and less certain that I need to be hesitant about this connection MaKenzie unearthed about the fundamentally Platonic nature of this whole "marketplace of ideas" rhetoric.

Furthermore, MaKenzie used the text to try to ameliorate this potential problem of a way-too-implicit and way-too-heavy use of Platonic thinking by jumping down to another sentence on page 52:

> "But even though falsehoods have little value in and of themselves, they are"nevertheless inevitable in free debate," id., at 340, and a rule that would impose strict liability on a publisher for false factual assertions would have an undoubted "chilling" effect on speech relating to public figures that does have constitutional value. "Freedoms of expression require 'breathing space.'" *Philadelphia Newspapers, Inc. v. Hepps*, 475 U. S. 767, 772 (1986) (quoting *New York Times*, *supra*, at 272)."

I get her line of reasoning here, perfectly—is this fact/idea distinction as clean as the opinion suggests it is, she wanted to know. What assumptions are being made here about facts and about the implied assertion that one cannot really have a "false idea," but one can have (presumably) all kinds of "false facts"? If the "best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market," what then do "facts" have to do with this? Of course, as MaKenzie herself noted, there are all kinds of questions one could pose to this marketplace metaphor: who gets to participate in this market, what structures of power and authority influence this market, who really gets to decide the winners and losers in this competition? If "false statements are particularly valueless," how does that work in relation to the marketplace? Is the main opinion relying on a really strong (and implicit) injunction that everyone should be able to know which statements are false and therefore not to be utilized in any market calculations? Who gets to calculate, who (or what) does the calculating here? I loved each and every one of these questions. I, for my part, wanted to really take up this idea that "false statements are particularly valueless." I told MaKenzie that I didn't at all think this was true. I took up a perhaps very Žižekian position here—she said we should go to Nietzsche instead, which we could and did too, I should note—and said that I think there are all kinds of falsities that are incredibly powerful and that people invest with

a lot of value—to call them valueless is profoundly begging the question, at least for me.One could easily think here of Deleuze and Guattari's attempt—in *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Mark Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983)—to provide an answer to William Reich's infamous question regarding fascism in Hitler's Germany before World War II. Eugene W. Holland, in his Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: *Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1999), is very clear on this. "Can you give me an example of something false that still has profound power and value," MaKenzie asked. Absolutely—I wanted to say that most ideological positions would fall into this category, but I offered a more specific example by going back to what we talked about in a previous week with Hurston's novel—viz. the patriarchy. Certainly there are tons of people who think that the patriarchal structure is anything but false—but there might be a ton more who fall into the position of the fetishist, into the position of one who says, as Octave Mannoni infamously put it, '*Je sais bien, mais quand même* ...,' ('I know well, but all the same ...')There's a direct link to Manoni's rather famous essay here. If that link is dead for any reason, the larger text it comes out of is *Perversion and the Social Relation*, eds. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), pp. 68-92.

I think that the major bone of contention here for us—if I try to combine my reservations about the whole "marketplace of ideas" thing with MaKenzie's concerns about facts and ideas, truth and falseness—is how one goes about deciding if something (an ad, a spoken utterance, a caricature of a public figure, whatever) is at all interested in playing this game of the "marketplace of ideas." What if some ad or idea or statement isn't at all interested in having someone immediately place it within the "marketplace of ideas"? MaKenzie was herself onto this quite well, I think, as she knows how her Nietzschean way of thinking asks one to be really careful about when and how we parse something in terms of its being a part of this "search for Truth," which is what the main opinion says the marketplace helps to facilitate and nurture. I said to her it's fine if someone wants to say that everything can be fit under this rubric of the market, but I do think that this can be seen as analogous to someone who wears a size ten shoe, but all the shoes on offer are size six. Sure, you can cram your foot into that thing, but you're obviously gonna have to break some toes and other parts of your foot to get it in that shoe. It's absolutely true, the legal system here has a distinctly different conception of language, truth, propositions, and much more than what MaKenzie has gotten all this Nietzsche and theory in general together—and that's not even to mention all the psychoanalysis.

Continuing on with the case's opinion, we also spent quite a bit of time talking about some of the examples that the main opinion uses on pages 54 and 55. The sentence that piqued MaKenzie's interest ("piqued" was her word) is the very last one in the following:

> Despite their sometimes caustic nature, from the early cartoon portraying George Washington as an ass down to the present day,

> graphic depictions and satirical cartoons have played a prominent role in public and political debate.Nast's castigation of the Tweed Ring, Walt McDougall's characterization of Presidential candidate James G. Blaine's banquet with the millionaires at Delmonico's as "The Royal Feast of Belshazzar," and numerous other efforts have undoubtedly had an effect on the course and outcome of contemporaneous debate. Lincoln's tall, gangling posture, Teddy Roosevelt's glasses and teeth, and Franklin D. Roosevelt's jutting jaw and cigarette holder have been memorialized by political cartoons with an effect that could not have been obtained by the photographer or the portrait artist. From the viewpoint of history it is clear that our political discourse would have been considerably poorer without them.

MaKenzie really wanted to zero-in on this claim that closes the quotation above—is it true these caricatures actually contributed at all to this (admittedly rather vague) idea of "political discourse"? The opinion states (in quite clear economic language that no doubt keeps it consistent with the whole rhetoric of the "marketplace" we've highlighted already) that "our political discourse would have been considerably *poorer* without them" (italics mine). She was curious about the examples from the historical record used to substantiate this remark—she said the Boss Tweed one seemed easy enough to understand without even having seen it before—; she was a little unsure about the invocation of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, etc. I think there's no doubt that the main opinion assumes a great deal of familiarity with these images—so much familiarity that one need not even mention anything specifically or with any particularity at all about them. MaKenzie wanted to wonder if the Tweed example could have been sufficient. I get it—my only addition to this was to say that it seems to me that one would really want the opinion to talk about all of the ways that, say, for example, the image of a thin and gangly Lincoln was mobilized by the Confederacy to suggest a profound degree of weakness (and lack of masculine weight and heft on Lincoln's part), but there is no real discussion of the actual effects of these images on "political discourse." I also offered to MaKenzie that it's possible the justices aren't interested in getting too bogged down in the examples, the only function of these examples is to provide enough of them so that the Falwell ad can be shown to be not all that "outrageous."

I know it's totally bizarre to suggest this, but I can't help but think that the major issue here is, again, the claim that all of these ads are fundamentally "truth-seeking." I just don't think that this method of Procrustean smashing of everything under the banner of "Truth" really continues to do anything but fatally beg the question for me. I would suggest that if we think about all language only from within the space of statements that are truth-oriented (or that are all "under" the category of "Truth"), then I think we operate with a profoundly poor and paltry conceptualization of language. MaKenzie agreed and concurred with this claim. One can—obviously, which MaKenzie did, in fact—take up a critique and deconstruction of this by going to Nietzsche. This

is no undoubtedly MaKenzie's bread-and-butter and I think it's an absolutely fantastic way to go.

However, another angle came to me as I was listening to a music album, *Get to Heaven*, by the British band, *Everything Everything*. MaKenzie texted this my way after our session, saying that she had recently "rediscovered" it and that it was quite impactful on her during her "early high school years." I gave it a listen and there is a song on this album, "The Wheel (Is Turning Now)", that has a first line that caught my attention (probably no doubt simply because I was thinking about all these Nietzschean arguments that we turned over and over again): "He held my hand when I died." I couldn't help but think what an interpretation of this line would be like if one had to claim that the proposition was truth-oriented. Surely, such statements are silly: do such sentences even have a truth value? You could say sentences like this are always going to need to be parsed as false. (One can't help but think of all the similar kinds of sentences that Jacques Derrida loved to trot out again and again when talking about language that has to get corralled into the regime of truth; the most memorable one is probably that line from Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" where the eponymous character says, "I am dead" … indeed, how to understand such a sentiment in terms of its truth-functionality?) Of course, language would seem to be rife and absolutely overflowing with locutions like this. I, once more, feel impelled to go to some sentences in George Steiner's fantastic text, *After Babel*, where he speaks of language as the greatest tool we have to call bullsh*t (please forgive my vulgarity here) on this whole ideology that language should always be assessable in terms of its truth or falsity:

> My conviction is that we shall not get much further in understanding the evolution of language and the relations between speech and human performance so long as we see 'falsity' as primarily negative, so long as we consider counter-factuality, contradiction, and the many nuances of conditionality as specialized, often logically bastard modes. *Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is.* Without that refusal, without the unceasing generation by the mind of "counter-worlds"—a generation which cannot be divorced from the grammar of counter-factual and optative forms—we would turn forever on the treadmill of the present. Reality would be (to use Wittgenstein's phrase in an illicit sense), "all that is the case" and nothing more. Ours is the ability, the need, to gainsay or "un-say" the world, to image and speak it otherwise.George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), pp. 217-18.

I cannot even begin to say how much I love this thought: "*Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is.*" Boy howdy—I, perhaps, somehow, love even more this "ability" of ours to "gainsay or 'un-say' the world, to image and speak it otherwise.") Absolutely—I couldn't agree with these ideas more. I think MaKenzie would be fine with these comments by

Steiner and that they would be very consistent with her usual Nietzscheanism … this is an image of language as not some thing that merely reflects or mirrors something out there in reality (indeed, what would a sentence like "He held my hand when I died" actually reflect "out in the world," whatever the heck that means?). Instead, we get language as *productive*, incredibly so.I've already mentioned Eugene W. Holland's *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to schizoanalysis* text, but there is another spot I read recently that made me instantly think of MaKenzie and her profound love of Nietzsche. The passage reads as follows (Holland is talking about Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire as fundamentally *productive* in the way I'm trying to talk about language here—and Holland has recourse to an analogy, an analogy that is fundamentally legal in nature, which is perhaps another reason why it put me in mind of MaKenzie): "A better sense of the active force of productive desire may be gleaned from forensic usage; desire produces reality in the same sense that lawyers 'produce' evidence in a court of law: they cannot 'wish' it into existence; they don't make it up, but they do make it count as real. Here, too, however, any distinction between what counts as fact, evidence, and reality inside the courtroom and what counts outside it is moot: desire in the schizoanalytic sense produces reality in and of itself, before any such inside–outside distinctions can be drawn. Given this Nietzschean transvaluation of desire as active force, the connection forged by the concept of desiring-machines between desire and labor should appear less perplexing. Through the investment of energy in psychic as well as physical form, desiring-machines produce reality, both in the cognitive sense of psychic drives shaping the phenomenal world and in the economic sense of labor-power shaping the material world." (pp. 22-23) (In the very next week I would reread Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, and would come across the chapter about Aunt Lupe, the first one to listen to Esperanza's poems: 'That's nice. That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You must remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn't know what she meant.' *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 61. Yes, this is the power of language, the power of writing—'it will keep us free.') Anyways, I probably don't really need to belabor the point here anymore, I'm sure.

However, given all that, I still can't help but wonder if I should not play devil's advocate just a little bit with my own reading here. Is the "marketplace" metaphor perhaps much more amenable to this "productive" conception of truth than I am willing to allow? Maybe—but one still gets the feeling from the way the justices utilize this analogy that the "truth" that the marketplace helps to win out is somehow known ahead of time. I'm not quite sure what makes me say that—but the game still seems rigged to me in some way that I can't quite fully describe or flesh out or put my finger on precisely. It strikes me as very significant that the Nietzschean/Deleuzoguattarian conception of truth *not* preexist the field in which that truth ultimately comes to be produced. Otherwise, things do start to sound eerily Platonic in exactly the way that MaKenzie argued they do—and Truth becomes the thing that is—possibly—produced within the field

of the market, but in a way that, again, somehow, the justices somehow already know the outcome of before we even get started.

All right, maybe just one more thing here now (and I'll try to keep it as concise as I can): in all of the time MaKenzie and I spent together working, I was always trying to find ways to give her as many tools as possible with which to "take something apart," so to speak. The Nietzsche angle on all this is absolutely warranted, perfect even. But, I would be remiss if I didn't evoke the name of one of the other philosophers who became quite a touchstone for us, especially given how pronounced this "marketplace" rhetoric is here—of course, I'm thinking here of Marx. (MaKenzie didn't mention him by name, but when she voiced her question about who exactly gets to participate in this "market," one could imagine that she had Marx in mind.) I have a trio of texts that I read over this past summer—largely in preparation for all the courses MaKenzie and I were scheduled to do that next Fall—that I would want to invoke here. In terms of the order I came across them, they are Thomas Nail's *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism*,Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020). Eric MacGilvray's *The Invention of Market Freedom*,Eric MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011). and William Clare Roberts's *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital*.William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2018). All citations to this work will appear parenthetically in text. These texts are copious in their length, so I'll try to grossly oversimplify things here by going right to the very heart of the matter as it pertains to the marketplace metaphor within this legal sphere MaKenzie and I found ourselves working on week after week after week for this ENGL300 course.

Nail's text is largely concerned with Marx's thoughts on value under capitalism. As a nice little *précis*, we could look at page 78:

> For Marx, the conditions of value do not resemble what they condition: value itself. If they did, we would have explained nothing. We would have a mere tautology, found in many "labor theories of value." In other words, the conditions for the capitalist mode of production are not and cannot resemble capitalism itself or even the merely social relations between humans. This is why there is no rational or formulaic proportion between labor (which has no value) and value.

Elaborating further, Nail notes—correctly, to my mind—:

> This is also why Marx's historical mode of inquiry begins with colonialism and primitive accumulation in the first place—something value theorists often leave out. Capitalism emerges from the historical conditions of the noncapitalist process of direct appropriation, murder, theft, colonialism, demineralization, and so on: "Capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and

> dirt" (*C*, 926). Capitalist value is dripping with the blood of all the indigenous people it killed and with all the minerals it stole from their land.

The reason I cite these passages is just to make clear that this invocation of the market is not without consequences and quite serious complications. Nail's text allows one to say something like the following: "There's no simple or self-evident way for one to move from the use-values of a thing within the market to the thing's price—these two things are not at all smooth or glaringly self-obvious or clear." Indeed, MacGilvray's text doubles down on this idea even more strongly than Nail's does—and Roberts's text really illustrates the full power and potential of this "invention" of the marketplace's becoming synonymous with "freedom" (a sphere free of coercion—this sphere, as MaKenzie has always liked to note, *is not free from coercion*, of course).

> The measure of value, according to Marx, is the labor time socially necessary to produce the valuable commodities given the current means of production. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, it is a basic element of Marx's theory of value that value, while it is determined by labor time, only ever appears as exchange value, as "the social relation between commodity and commodity." There is no direct, empirical measure of labor time, since there is no way to know whether any given instance of labor actually performed—and hence empirically measurable—counts as an equivalent amount of socially necessary labor. Moreover, the fact that commodities sell on the market does not guarantee that they sell at their value. (122)

Furthermore, the degree of uncertainty here—will my labor be valuable *at all*?—is a distinct existential terror (one could say) that is baked-in to capitalism as a system of what Roberts's calls "impersonal domination":

> Marx finds two wrongs inherent in capitalism considered as a commercial society. First, because value is determined by abstract, socially necessary labor time, no producer can know until after the fact whether or not their labor was productive at the socially necessary level. This exposes every producer's judgment to a form of uncertainty and compulsion that makes him or her act incontinently. *Second, this exposure to the market renders each producer a slave to the decisions of others, made without consultation or debate. The preferences of others impose themselves on each producer without any need to justify themselves, and without any possibility of being contested.* There is no way to ask whether the activities that set the terms of sale are themselves worthwhile. (101, emphasis mine)

Roberts's argument here is that it's quite silly to say that the marketplace is a space and place of freedom; moreover, his argument completely and totally gives the lie to the way the majority opinion utilizes this metaphor:

> The problem is not that individuals cannot do exactly what they

> each want to do [when playing the market game], but that they cannot get together and talk about what sorts of things that should and should not be done, and what sorts of reasons should and should not count as good reasons. Having to take the beliefs and desires of others into account is, in itself, no threat to one's freedom; the question is whether one can challenge those beliefs and desires before having to take them into account. … Hence, although although people continue to make decisions based on their beliefs and desires, these beliefs and desires are not especially salient as explanatory factors, because the macroregularities of market societies—all of the tendencies or laws of economic development—will hold regardless of which individuals play which parts. The great irony of modern market societies is that they give rise to the cult of the individual at the same time that, through their institutional order, they render the specificity of any individual irrelevant to social scientific explanation. What matters for the predictable dynamics of modern economy is that there are individuals. *Who* those individuals are does not matter at all. (96-97)

There is so much here in Roberts's book that is so germane to me here:

> Marx's attention is not on the identifiable person with whom I am transacting business, but on all of the unknown buyers and sellers whose choices have established the parameters of this transaction. By focusing narrowly on the personal interaction, the defenders of the market have missed the drama of the situation entirely. The defenders worry about the possibility that a *monopolist* might threaten the freedom of market agents; hence, the freedom of the market is only threatened by a force alien to—and, supposedly, ameliorated by—market competition. Marx's worry is about the threat to freedom posed by a market agent's competitors and customers, and hence about a threat to freedom proper to the market as such, and which would be more of a threat the more perfect the market became. (99)

Forgive me here, but the following paragraph is where I want to ultimately get:

> Buyers and sellers on the market are not asked to justify their preferences for money or goods. I think it is safe to say that we would all find it very strange if the cashier at a store asked us to supply reasons for our purchases: "Why do you want that? Do you really think it is the best thing for you?" *If anything, we expect our counterparts in exchange to justify our desire for us, to give us a litany of reasons for wanting what they have to offer. To a large extent, we offer money and commodities in exchange precisely as an alternative to offering reasons for wanting what we want.* (emphasis mine)

And then—all right, last citation, I promise—we get this wonderfully nice little

footnote: "Much commentary on this passage [from Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, bk. 1.I.ii] focuses on the way in which the market offer is a sort of reason-giving. What is occluded here is the difference between offering an *incentive* to do what I want (market offers) and offering you *grounds* for doing what I want (offering reasons)" (100). I find this critique incredibly convincing and devastating, in so many ways—how cute it is to think that the market is a space where people *offer reasons* for things. I have so much more to say here, I'm sure—but think I'll cut the thread here now.I might also submit to the record here that the very next week we read the *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 US 397 (1989), where we returned once more to this marketplace metaphor yet again; it was insanely fascinating to both of us to see the dissenting opinion quite explicitly say that there are some things, ideas, symbols, that *do not play within the marketplace game*.

What's the main idea here with all of this? My only point is not simply to illustrate the content—what we studied together—but *how* we studied together. MaKenzie mentioned one day towards the end of the semester she had been thinking some more about that thing Joe/Jody says to Janie about women and thinking: "Aw naw they don't [think]. They just think they's thinkin'. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one." She said she thought one of the great things that the two of us did when we worked and thought together was something very much like what Jody says women don't ever really do—namely, we read all these dense or wonderful texts, and then we find all of these spots we want to talk about and, ultimately, we try to link all of those different spots to one key idea or thread or point or whatever. I agree—so wholeheartedly. It is indeed a really beautiful and wonderful thing that didn't take us all that long to learn how to do. It made me so pleased and proud to know that she saw this whole process in a very similar, if not identical, way to the way I looked at it.

That said, I did offer to her that I think we also managed to do the other thing that Jody talks about: we start with this one text or court opinion or play or whatever and proceed to show how we understand not just one thing using this text, but so many things that it gets difficult to count and enumerate them all when the day is done. We can thus look at one thing and see ten. When she brought up this passage, she initially said that Joe's self-description here is very consistent with his capitalist leanings: always wanting to take the one thing and then produce ten from it. I myself ventured to say that it would seem important for us to draw a distinction here: we do ourselves engage in this generative multiplication—of readings, of interpretations—but not really for any hope of profit, but just because difference is so important to the way we think. We are always connecting, always multiplying perspectives, in good Nietzschean fashion—so I didn't want Jody's capitalist ideology to get any kind of monopoly on this multiplicative phenomenon. Of course, I'd also like us to be able to do—and I think this was incredibly easy with MaKenzie as a thinking/conversation partner—the thing he says Janie—and women in general—can't do: see ten things and push to something that runs through all those things. I would hope

that this "reflection" here is a wonderful testament to MaKenzie's ability to move in both directions. Ten times out of ten I rather felt as if she was carrying me with her on this journey, so I'm hesitant to give myself much credit for it.

1.1.5 ENGL497: Senior Thesis

Before transitioning fully here, I want to carve out a moment here to "take stock" of things so far. I think that what has really become incredibly clear to me after working very closely with MaKenzie is that it's not quite enough for one to just "learn the content," as one says. I think that it is a profoundly different thing—a profoundly different experience—to learn how to "think *with* another person." I know we all like to think that when we come together in the classroom, or we come together in the conference rooms around this university, that we are actually thinking *with* other people. I should say—and I am trying mightily to not make this sound as if I'm cruelly just "throwing shade" here—but ten times out of ten I feel as if we are just thinking *with* others "who are in close spatial proximity to us." But this is not actually *thinking with* another at all. Even in conversations with deeply cherished colleagues, I could still detect the traces of us not necessarily thinking *with* but merely thinking *alongside* or thinking *near* the other. No doubt this can be attributed to my own idiosyncratic personality, but two years' worth of thinking with MaKenzie really got me wondering if I had ever really—outside of my relationship with my own mentor, I should say, who is the only other person with which I managed to forge this kind of connection, and, somehow, MaKenzie managed to do it even better than he did—learning to *think in rhythm* with another person. (Of course, in the sections below that deal with William D. Mastin's work, I should add his name to this very short list of people who have managed to learn how to "think *with* me.")

I am well-aware that many people need a good deal of time to even begin to figure out to "think *near* another" let alone fully *with* another. Indeed, many people really never find someone or learn how to "think with" that other person. Somehow, MaKenzie and I just didn't ever seem to need much time to learn that at all. This is something that, I noticed too, MaKenzie herself was aware of and thought similarly about—this is her, again, from her "Senior Thesis Capstone Reflection," talking about how even before our flurry of work in the Fall semester, we had already built a rapport and trust that was absolutely unique and singular for both of us:

> The two of us had already set quite a foundation for working and thinking together before I even thought about finishing early and taking an expedited path. I would often leave my classes and head straight for his office, where we would talk about whatever I had been tasked to read; he would often help me unlock parts of texts that I never would have been able to access alone, which is something I had never found in a conversation partner before. When it came time to work on our various independent and directed studies together, it was an easy adjustment. Talking about things in such a deeply

> analytical way has always come so naturally to us, even from our first meeting where I told him that Polonius was my favorite Shakespeare character. Right from the very beginning of our first independent study, entitled "Style", I felt that my love for learning had been reignited; rather, the wick had been totally replaced: this was not a type of learning I had ever experienced but it was so much more fun and enriching than the learning I had come to take as the only option.Munson, "Reflection," p. 1.

MaKenzie says that she found a "conversation partner" in me that she had never quite encountered before in her academic travels; I would be more than willing to say that the exact same thing was true for me. There was nothing that we could not figure out how to use this to ultimately do. Once one learns the kinds of rhythms by which another person's thinking moves and makes its way through the world, there is never a time when that can't be leveraged for profound intellectual work. I cannot help but think here of that wonderful little aphorism of Nietzsche's about thinking and its connection to *movement*, poking fun at Flaubert: "*On ne peut penser et écrire qu'assis* [one can't think and write unless one is seated] (Gustave Flaubert).—Now I've got you, you nihilist! Assiduity [*Sitzfleisch*] is the *sin* against the Holy Spirit. Only thoughts that come by *walking* have any value."Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 10, fragment #34. So many thinkers—Nietzsche says Socrates is the consummate exemplar of this tendency—like to envision thinking as a process where one does do some walking and traveling—but the goal is always to get somewhere safe and sound and secure, somewhere the thinker can come to then just sit. MaKenzie's thinking—long before meeting me, I would bet—seems to have imbibed and deeply internalized this Nietzschean preference for movement—for very intense movement—, for picturing thinking as a kind of dance, where the goal is never to get to some place so that one can then just sit there. Always in movement, always becoming something different, never static, always *dynamic* and always *in process*—this is MaKenzie's way of thinking, to my mind. I think it's the only real way to be and, again, I've never, ever seen a student do it so well as her. Obviously, it's not enough to just sit there and watch the dancer dance—instead, one must feel the need to get into the rhythms of the other's thinking: how does it move, what are its moment of pause and rest like, where does its intensity and velocity speed up and slow down, how does it ultimately want *to work*? This is what MaKenzie and I managed to do … and managed to learn how to do—always—*together*.

1.1.5.1 Composing the First Draft

Transitioning here just slightly, I would like to move on to what all of this wonderful work ultimately culminated in for the two of us together. Such a thing is easy to do—and it comes in the form of our co-authored piece (the first of many, many articles I know she and I are planning to write together now that her graduation day this past December has come and gone) on Lydia Millet's

recent novel, *A Children's Bible* (which also served as one of the artifacts for her "Senior Thesis Capstone" for the English major.The final, second, draft of this essay, "'Holmes, that's some Santa Claus shit': Reading Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible* as an Ecological Crime Fiction Hybrid," is available here. This piece has been accepted for publication and inclusion within *The Routledge Handbook of Crime Fiction and Ecology*, which will be published in April of this year. By this point in time, it might be already all too clear—however, I would like to voice it here once more—but MaKenzie is by far the only student that I would have ever considered coauthoring an essay together with—and I know for a fact that a published essay in a collection from a publisher that is no slouch—especially when it comes to the field of literature, philosophy, etc.—will look incredibly good on her CV/Resume when it comes time for her to apply to law school or wherever else her future might take her. This is not even to mention that the number of twenty-year olds who can boast such a thing are frighteningly few and far between. The essay has already been through the first round of editorial review; we have already finished (as of this writing) the second full draft incorporating the editor's suggestions/edits; Dr. Ashman, the editor of this work, continues to be incredibly excited about the opportunity of including the work in his collection. Few students ever really get such a "trial by fire" crash course in academic writing at the undergraduate level. Even fewer is the number of twenty-year old students who can handle such a thing with the skill and rather staggering degree of sheer brilliance that MaKenzie showed every single step of the way throughout this entire project.The fullest treatment of this entire project can be found here in my "Reflections on MaKenzie Munson and Dr. Spicer's Co-Authored Essay on Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible*—Supporting Materials for MaKenzie's Senior Thesis Capstone Requirement for the English Degree." Now seems as good a moment as any to note that this "Reflection" on our shared project crystallizes perfectly the changes in my pedagogical philosophy and ethos over the years since receiving tenure; furthermore, MaKenzie (once again) was the impetus and force that pushed this crystallization. I also hope to not mechanically and laboriously repeat myself here in this reflection—I could have easily imagined a "Tenure Review Portfolio" that simply said: "See this other essay for everything curious readers are inquisitive about in terms of my pedagogy and ethos of teaching." I will hope that here—in this slightly different context—I can manage to say some things that I don't exactly say in that other piece. As I say, such things are so exceedingly rare—it is very difficult to describe how rare. That said, there's no doubt whatsoever in my mind that MaKenzie is one in a bazillion.

I hope that it is already clear that MaKenzie has an incredibly sharp capacity for reading and interpretation; of course, at the same time, her facility with the written word is equally unmatched when I think back on all the students I've taught in my (now rather long) teaching career. MaKenzie produced–as a *very young* undergraduate student—scholarly writing (under my mentorship and guidance) that will meet (is already meeting) some incredibly rigorous and exacting standards. All teachers dream of getting students' writing capacities

to one day be up to such standards: we almost never achieve it before they leave us at the undergraduate level. MaKenzie more than accomplished such a thing even before she received her BA. No doubt this was all helped by the profound degree of rapport and trust fashioned between MaKenzie and myself that I have already tried to highlight here in this "review." I have never encountered anyone who thought quite as similarly to me as her; I have also never encountered someone whose writing style is such a perfect fit with my own. While reflecting on the entire process that led to this soon-to-be-published article, MaKenzie noted something this past December that I would be remiss if I did not share it with the committee members here in full:

> Something I find so interesting when reading the paper again, as a finished draft (awaiting edits from Dr. Ashman [who is the editor of the collection]), is how seamlessly our two styles fit together. It feels impossible to me to point out distinct moments that one of us individually wrote – both because of our shared thought-work on all aspects of the project and also because our writing seems to flow together so well. Style is something that I think is so singular and unique but I find myself second-guessing that definition while reading this paper. I don't find this to be a bad thing at all; on the contrary, this fact even further solidifies my confidence in this paper and my hope that we can continue writing together even after my time as a student here comes to an end. I truly think that we have a special way of working and writing together and that we have some incredibly important things to say.Munson, "Reflection," p. 7.

I could not have said it better myself—I do think that she and I "have a special way of working and writing together." This has, by far, been the highlight and pinnacle of my career as a teacher and an educator. And there is no question whatsoever that this absolutely singular experience was all due to MaKenzie's strengths as a thinker, reader, and writer. She will say that so much of this was due to me—and she has been tirelessly working to get me to accept this and to never shortchange my own contributions and impacts on her. I am not so sure of that. I think that she came my way with a mind that was already *so* sharp—by far the sharpest mind I have ever encountered in all my years of teaching—and I think that if I have done anything at all for her, it was simply to help make this mind even sharper.

Trying to actually avoid the "mechanical and laborious repetition" of all I wrote in my reflection for her Senior Thesis Capstone, I would like to cite a long passage, again, from her own "Reflection" where she acknowledges something that was exceedingly important to this entire endeavor, but it was not a facet that I myself spoke too much about in my own "Reflection." The context here has MaKenzie transitioning a bit between all of the work we did in our courses and how it all related to the task of co-authoring the paper together:

> While all of the previous sections may seem superfluous or not pertinent to the task of reflecting on my senior thesis, I find it so impor-

> tant to look at the full process of writing this paper; it just so happens that this process was a lot more involved than others may see at surface level. Beyond the largely unconscious work that occurred within my class readings, Spicer and I started tackling the discussion of this book really early on. I think there were a lot of things that were super obvious to us upon initial readings of this book [Millet's *A Children's Bible*]; for example, the myriad analogies and connections to religious texts, the importance of the guessing game, and the message this novel sends about the climate crisis. What was (and still is!) always so wonderful about our conversations is that I never feel like Spicer is talking down to me; and the moments where I taught him something or pointed out something he hadn't seen are incredibly genuine. It was rarely even that one person had something specific to teach or show the other – our conversations were almost always the most generative part of the thinking and writing process. There was always something so rewarding about the moments where we made connections or decoded something together; that shared triumph is something I feel can be so lacking in the humanities, where a relative seclusion is more often the case for scholars.Ibid., "Reflection," p. 6.

The sentence I want to focus on here is the one that reads: "What was (and still is!) always so wonderful about our conversations is that I never feel like Spicer is talking down to me; and the moments where I taught him something or pointed out something he hadn't seen are incredibly genuine." I spoke earlier of the way in which the two of us happened to "instantly trust one another in a very deep way." I can easily imagine that one could really make an argument that when it comes to teachers and their students, there are all kinds of imbalances and asymmetries between each of the people in the pair. Can a teacher really put themselves on the exact same level as their student? Can a student with far less experience and expertise actually manage to rise to the exact same level as a seasoned scholar? I can easily envision saying that such things really cannot happen, no matter how often the teacher or student might want to say that they worked together as *fully* equal partners on a collaborative project. I think that it is more than possible that if I had worked on this project with any other student but MaKenzie, I would find these arguments to be ones that would deserve a hearing. However, in her case, there is no way whatsoever that such lines of argumentation could hold any water—at all. There are so many things that I am exceedingly proud of MaKenzie for over her time with me here at USF (and, I know for a fact that as she moves further and further into her own future, this number is only going to increase each and every day). One of the most significant things that make me so proud of her is how she worked with me on this project. There was never, ever, a moment where a potential imbalance or inequality between the two of us meant that I had to, in some sense, "carry her" along with me through the journey. When she writes that "[i]t was rarely even that one person had something specific to teach or show

the other—our conversations were almost always the most generative part of the thinking and writing process. There was always something so rewarding about the moments where we made connections or decoded something together …"—she is absolutely right and tells the truth absolutely perfectly. I never, ever had to carry her—I never, ever had to do things that MaKenzie couldn't do solely on her own—the load was completely and totally equal. To be honest, it might be much more truthful to say that there were countless moments where she carried me—although this metaphor of "carrying" is probably not the best one: goodness knows I hit so many roadblocks in my own thinking trying to wrestle with all of the texts and ideas and theories that we marshaled in the composition of this article. I know I cited one of MaKenzie's remarks earlier about how I "would often help [her] unlock parts of texts that [she] never would have been able to access alone, which is something [she] had never found in a conversation partner before." Ten times out of ten MaKenzie helped me "unlock parts of [these] texts that *I* never would have been able to access alone"—and, there's no doubt whatsoever that this too was "something *I myself* had never found in a conversation partner before" either. I learned *so much* by and through working with MaKenzie—it would be impossible to really explain fully just how much I learned. There's little doubt in my mind, that something special was always occurring here between the two of us—she learned how to do all kinds of things on her own that, perhaps, did ultimately come from me, but that didn't install any of these imbalances/inequalities between us as a pair. We worked in a space *in between* the two of us—always incredibly mutually and reciprocally.I tried heartily and mightily to explain this "working in *the space of the between*" in my already frequently cited "Reflection" on this article/project—pages 12-14 are especially of note here on this concern.

1.1.5.2 Revising the First Draft, Composing the Second Draft At the time that my reflection on the project was composed, we had only recently sent it along to the editor (Dr. Nathan Ashman), who was a huge fan of it and a great supporter of the work MaKenzie and I did to create the essay. Over the months since that finals week in December, MaKenzie and I have spent a good deal of time working on Dr. Ashman's suggested revisions. Since those weren't yet completed at the time of my earlier reflection, I would like to speak to this part of the scholarly writing process here now. Dr. Ashman's editorial comments were not only incredibly good, but became really generative for both MaKenzie and myself as we tackled the task of revision. As MaKenzie will no doubt be willing to admit—again, something that I find she one-hundred percent shares with me—the "revision" part of writing is one that has always left her with a somewhat lackluster feeling. Given the fact that both of us can't help but feel a little curmudgeonly when it comes to this part of the process, one could easily guess that this part of the journey would be a tad bit difficult and challenging for us as a pair. I think I should give a huge shout-out here to Dr. Ashman, as his commentary really helped us out immensely.

There were three essential points of clarification that Dr. Ashman suggested we

try to attend to as we moved from our first to second draft. These points were as follows:

> 1 – [T]he first section of the essay focuses on what you term the "oedipal detective game" and I think this would benefit from a little more development. It wasn't entirely clear to me what this game actually entails (within the logic of the novel) and why you land on this psychoanalytic designation. It's a provocative idea, but perhaps feels a little undertheorised as it stands. So perhaps you could spend an additional short paragraph unpacking the specifics of this game and why it is being termed an 'oedipal detective game'.
> 2 – I think you could also spend a little more time unpacking Deleuze's discussion of crime fiction, particularly what he means by the 'classic' detective novel. What is he referring to specifically, here? The nineteenth century detective novel? The golden age novel?
> 3- When discussing the resolution of the novel and what this means in relation to questions of truth/justice, it might be useful to bring in some secondary criticism that discusses these ideas in the context of crime fiction studies. Sam Walton's intro to the 'Crime and Ecology' issue of *Green Letters* might be useful here.Nathan Ashman, personal communication, December 22, 2022.

This here is really generous editorial commentary. Not only that, but Dr. Ashman very willingly gave us a bunch more words with which to figure out how we wanted to address these three items. The original word count for the essays in the CFP was 7500 words—after some nice back and forth between Dr. Ashman and myself (where I openly confessed that MaKenzie and I both felt like we didn't just have one essay here that we easily could have composed, but had, rather, maybe something like three or even four)—he increased our word limit, which is something I have found most editors will do only begrudgingly or with, at least, quite a bit of hemming and hawing. I should also grant that MaKenzie and I both found Dr. Ashman's comments to be incredibly perceptive, very perspicacious: these three spots were indeed areas where we felt the weight of the word count working on us; these were indeed things that we had talked about already. It's always nice to get something from another reader—a third-party observer, so to speak—that feels confirmatory in this way—as no doubt all of us scholars fully know. As MaKenzie and I spoke about together so often, neither of us were quite sure, when we started this whole thing, whether or not any of it would actually work out in the end—everything here about this was frighteningly speculative, I think, if I'm totally honest.I should probably try to be as fair and forthright here as possible. I am pretty sure that MaKenzie might have been far more confident—and found this whole thing to be far less speculative and uncertain—about all of this than I was at the outset. I tried to speak to this uncertainty on my part in my "Reflection," *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18 in particular. I know I have already cited MaKenzie's reflection comment that after we decided we would have her take an "expedited path" towards graduation, she confessed:

"I would like to say that I was wary for a brief moment about this proposition, but that would be untruthful; I was super excited to jump into my last year with the support of someone I had grown to admire and look up to so much at USF" (p. 1). I would bet that she felt very similarly about embarking on this whole Millet paper project. It would seem that I was far more uncertain about this than MaKenzie—which is no doubt yet another indicator of her own strength of character, that's for sure. I should say that I also noted in my "Reflection" that if the project was successful, I was going to take it as a precedent etched in stone for our continuing to work and write together long into the future. At the time of this writing, this is indeed still my position.

1.1.5.2.1 "Shoring-Up" the "Oedipal Detective Game" In the previous section, I spoke of the way in which MaKenzie always helped me enormously think through things. This was fully on display here as—again, well after her graduation day in December had come and gone—we leapt into deep waters in order to address Dr. Ashman's suggestions for revision. Now, it is true that the final section of the essay, "3. Weaving Together Inconsistent Threads," where we try to get the first two sections of the paper to gel and jive with one another, a good bulk of that was "written by me" (keeping in mind, once more, that there's no possibility of really saying that "I alone" wrote X, Y, or Z—everything was written by us, together, in some way, shape, or form), thus, it made some degree of sense that I would be the one to tackle Dr. Ashman's point 3. (That said, this third section has always been a little knotty for us—it often gave us some trouble, if I'm being totally candid.) Now, in fact, it could have been really easy to say points 1 and 2 were MaKenzie's territory—as she was "the one that wrote-up" [again, massive caveats are needed for that phrasing]) the sections focusing on the "oedipal detective game" and also was the one to heavily (and very brilliantly, I should say) utilize Deleuze's "Philosophy of Crime Novels" essay there.This essay can be found in his collection of essays, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 81-85. I think there might have been about thirty seconds in total, where I know I thought to myself: "Okay, easy breezy—I'll just (finally) figure out how to handle that third section problem and then let MaKenzie handle the revisions to beef- and bulk-up the whole 'oedipal detective game' and Deleuze crime fiction things." I say that I probably only spent thirty seconds thinking about this solely because—again, full disclosure—I wasn't entirely certain how to think about all of this.This was actually something that came up in conversation with Drs. Ioanes and Popp, and Dean McDermott, when all five of us were able to spend some time together having MaKenzie and I present our work to the English faculty this past December. Dr. Ioanes herself was onto this gap in our paper (I was about to say "weakness," but I'm not sure—given certain constraints that we had at the time—that word is quite applicable; I suppose it is a "weakness," but certainly an understandable one, I would say, given all the other parameters of this project). As I say, neither of us did anything in the whole time this project took to complete that looked like just one of us tackling a particular thing. We

always did it together, as a pair, and thus I quickly figured that it would be odd to change tactics and techniques here at this point—the way we had done it so far was working incredibly well.

We took one long afternoon in January to talk through Dr. Ashman's three concerns, tossing back and forth together in dialogue how we wanted to proceed forward. As was so par for the course, we talked through each of the parts and pitched some ideas. That conversation produced an outline of ideas that looked roughly like the following (I'll separate out the three major critiques into their own sections below).

1.1.5.2.1.1 Further Theorizing the "Oedipal Detective Game" With regards to point 1., as I already admitted, our creation—and use of—this "Oedipal detective game" concept could definitely have benefited from some strengthening. I told MaKenzie that I thought the work of well-known ecological/environmental philosopher Timothy Morton could be really helpful for us on this front. However, I made the case that we would definitely have to be very careful in the way that we utilized his work here to flesh out the "Oedipal" side of this detective game. I have found Morton's ecocritical work to be very fruitful—but this work is not something that we could easily just use in any kind of simple way. This is due, at least for me, to some of the many problematic positions that Morton has taken up in his work vis-à-vis psychoanalysis in general.I should disclose here that I myself am already "on the record" here in terms of criticisms of Morton's understanding of Lacan in particular. See my own "*L'extermination de tout symbolisme des cieux*: Reading the Lacanian Letter as Inhuman 'Apparatus' and its Implications for Ecological Thinking," in *Lacan and the Nonhuman*, eds. Jonathan Dickstein and Gautam Basu Thakur (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 101-120 for a (short, admittedly) treatment of Morton and his take on Lacanian psychoanalysis. MaKenzie was game for giving the Morton a shot, but was a bit hesitant, I think, largely because I have a rather passionate take on the whole psychoanalysis angle. I have never thought that part of my job of training MaKenzie was to get her to just—either too simply or too dogmatically—take up my positions wholesale. She never took up positions or sides of an argument simply because they were mine—and although we are very close in so many ways, she was never one to show any interest whatsoever in simply mechanically imitating me and my own philosophical/theoretical loyalties. I have always put her own intellectual autonomy first and—her knowing that very fact—, she was eager to read some of Morton's texts on her own. As per usual, MaKenzie totally had the right idea here and she took a little bit of time to have a look at Morton's *Dark Ecology: Towards a Logic of Future Coexistence*Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: Towards a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia UP, 2016. and also his earlier essay (which is explicitly concerned with Oedipus), "The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness."*Environmental Humanities*, Volume 1 (November 2012), pp. 7-21. That said, our procedure here was just slightly different—we did decide to divvy up the work: MaKenzie taking the first two points and me the

third.

After taking some time to read "The Oedipal Logic" essay—we had already talked through *Dark Ecology*'s use of Oedipus—MaKenzie came back somewhat tepid in response to that piece: she found it to have a bit too much theoretical name-dropping and the treatment of Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes seemed to her to be quite off as well. She joked a little bit: "Can we really greatly dislike an article and yet still use it?" A fantastic question that no doubt all scholars—and even budding scholars—ask themselves constantly. It's true, the sources that we leaned on really heavily to write up the first draft were ones that both of us were really positive about—MaKenzie greatly leveraged the Deleuze on "Crime Novels" to wonderful effect; she also generated a really fantastic reading of Jerome Jeffrey Cohen's short little talk to discuss the ethical ramifications of not only the Oedipal detective game, but also the way in which the storm in the novel recalls very Noah-esque parallels; in "my" section of the article, I found very little to disagree with in our secondary literature researches (my use of Russell Ford's "Deleuze's Dick" might be a slightly outlier here—but that is due more to the fact that Ford's own prey in that essay is far more philosophical/metaphysical/ontological than the purposes to which I ultimately put it"Deleuze's Dick," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2005), pp. 41-71.). Morton's essay was in quite a different category here—and MaKenzie sensed it right from the very start (of course, she did say that there were quite a few spots in the essay that had some "pullable quotes" for us and our purposes).MaKenzie's notes have been made available here.

I told her once more that we were going to have to try to be really careful here with the Morton. There is no doubt—as MaKenzie also told me—that there are some really nice nuggets in Morton's early essay, but we were clearly going to have to step very gingerly around Morton's too simple reading of psychoanalysis.I do not want to sound wholly negative here on Morton—I have myself used his work in a very positive manner, see my co-authored paper with now interim Dean Beth McDermott, "Poeticizing Ecology/Ecologizing Poetry: Reading Emily Bishop's 'Poem' Ecologically," *Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2017): 48-67. This time around, since we (once again) both felt similarly about Morton's early essay—and we both were somewhat on the "negative" side of the fence, too—we decided to each try our hand at writing up a couple of paragraphs using Morton's essay to handle Dr. Ashman's feeling that the first section of the essay was still a bit "undertheorized." The goal was that we would both try to incorporate the Morton and whichever of the two of us managed to do so without throwing the most shade in Morton's direction, that was the version we would go with in the next draft. I really liked the way this worked, to be honest—as it was a slightly different way of writing together that was moderately different than what we had done for the first draft of the essay.

MaKenzie's first stab was really good—as I've mentioned an infinite number of times already, she has this incredibly sharp parsimoniousness in her writing.

She has no problem cutting right to the core of a thing—and often does so in a way where she would only need five sentences to do what I might want to do in ten or fifteen. Here was her initial take:

> The concept of the Oedipal detective game is one that was theorized from a close reading of several contemporary thinkers. Timothy Morton, in his essay entitled "The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness," provides a great starting point for understanding this game that plays out in the novel. Morton describes the Oedipal logic as being deeply embedded within agricultural society and allowing for these sort of contradictory experiences within such a society. Millet propels this same theory in engaging the children within this detective game: as they work so hard to conceal their identities and relations, they are only further revealed; and in the words of Morton, "every being is hobbled like Oedipus, since every being is marked by the traces of other beings" (18). The children are caught in this Oedipal contradiction where they act as both the detectives and the criminals; the detective game acts as their coping mechanism and distraction from realizing their very real roles in the climate crisis – roles that may even match the ones their parents play.Ibid.

I think that MaKenzie here was quite strongly working with the extra words Dr. Ashman passed our way: he gave us an extra five-hundred words to work with to shore things up. I myself wasn't really trying at all to stay within the word constraintsIndeed, my first try was definitely—no surprise—a bit more long-winded—a copy is available here.—I felt that the essay would be infinitely strengthened by however many extra words we had to put in there.At the time of this writing, we are expecting to hear back from Dr. Ashman any moment here—if he suggests the additions need to be trimmed either further, MaKenzie and I will have to rethink things a bit. My prediction is that our additions will indeed need to be cut back once again—I would bet that the trimming will probably be somewhat slight, maybe by a couple hundred words or so. I thought that MaKenzie's initial foray was quite good, but could still benefit from just a little bit more. She had a chance to look at my first stab; we talked through what I was hoping our additions would actually end up doing in terms of remedying the "undertheorization" critique; she showed herself (for the billionth time) to be such a wonderful writing partner here, saying that I should feel free to take a shot at building off her initial foundation and that she trusted me to synthesize together the best parts of both of our work. Indeed, this is the way the project went right from its inception, so, again, why bother to "fix something that ain't broken?" I gave it a try, producing a couple more versions that built entirely off of MaKenzie's first try.For curious readers, the first version is here and the second version is here. I think these finalized additions are really quite good—I was—broken record here—quite proud of MaKenzie's diving directly into the Morton and getting the ball rolling for us. As should no doubt be crystal-clear here by now, although the technique here between us was slightly different from our composing technique in the first draft, our collaborative focus and intention

to constantly work in the space *in between each of us* worked wonders for us yet again.

As I say, I was happy with the way we "shored up" the Oedipal detective game in section 1: the work of Morton does that quite competently, to my mind. Moreover, I think we managed to quite dexterously utilize the "Oedipal Logic" essay without getting caught in Morton's treatment and use of the psychoanalytic tradition. What made this a real tightrope-walk kind of situation is no doubt due to a confluence of different threads that our essay puts forth, but does not fully trace out as fully as we could if we had had more space. As previously mentioned, MaKenzie and I didn't have just one essay here as the text of the article potentially contains maybe three or four. One of the major "ghostly" or "spectral"When I say "ghostly" and "spectral" here I am riffing on Sarah Ruhl's wonderful little book, *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children, and Theater* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015)—in our case here we *did* write the essay, but the final product carried along with it a number of "paths not taken" that we very easily *could have taken*. essays in here that doesn't show up at all in the actual body of the article is a reading of the novel that is what one might call "strictly psychoanalytic" in nature. Now, it is absolutely true that we veer infinitely close to marshalling the psychoanalytic tradition to read this novel—we call the first half of the book one that is focused on an "*Oedipal* detective game," MaKenzie's work explicitly cites and uses the work of Deleuze (certainly not a philosopher how is somehow foreign to psychoanalytic thinking), and my section leans incredibly heavily on what one might call a "psychoanalytic deconstruction" of forms of thinking that owe their existence to Plato and Platonic thought more generally. I think that one would be more than correct to wonder why precisely we don't lean into this incredibly rich vein of philosophical thinking that comes from the story of Oedipus as itself a foundational text for Freud and every other psychoanalytic thinker that came after him.

However, given this admittedly legitimate and fully understandable surprise on the part of my imagined readers here, I think the line we took was a perfectly fine one. Morton's early essay links them explicitly—it contains treatments not only of *Oedipus* as one of the very first "crime novels," one could say (Morton is right to say this, as both MaKenzie and I—and Deleuze as well, for that matter—agree). Still, it was important for us to toe this line very, very, very carefully. I think my (I should say "our" here, of course) worry and concern that if we didn't treat Morton very gingerly with our additions, we would quite directly open up this entire "psychoanalytic can of worms." Additionally, given the scope of Dr. Ashman's collection—it is about, after all, *crime fiction and ecology*—it seemed prudent of us to pick off and utilize just the Oedipus-ecology strand in Morton's essay. This also seemed fine to me too as MaKenzie's brilliant use of Deleuze's essay would give us as much of the whole crime novel/metaphysics of truth conjunction that we wanted to bring out so strongly. Indeed, I think that our essay does manage to not only walk this line carefully, it also opens up a

number of different territories that we think may result in fertile grounds for future scholars of crime fiction and also of Millet's novel, too. Deleuze's essay, it seems to me, has not been fully utilized—it certainly hasn't been strongly used within the secondary literature on Deleuze, Ford's essay here is the only one that comes immediately to mind here. Thus, we both think that we have opened up realms not only for crime fiction scholars, but also regions that Deleuzians might want to play within also. I do also think that if MaKenzie and I wanted to go back to this well once again in another article, we could easily do that—so many things would already be in place and such a writing project would be incredibly smooth for us, without a doubt.

1.1.5.2.1.2 Laying Out Some More Context for the "Oedipal Detective Game" Itself Handling this second criticism was actually quite simple and straightforward. MaKenzie jumped at the chance to take this all herself. I—as has been so often the case for me throughout all the time working one-on-one and side-by-side with her—affirmed this feeling and told her to go full throttle. She had—long before this point in time—shown herself to be so competent in all of this, I had no reservations whatsoever. That turned out to be the perfect way to go: MaKenzie's additions greatly fleshed-out some of the parameters of the game that not only greatly clarified the game itself, but also (again!) gave me some ammunition when it came to thinking about how to tackle the third and final concern Dr. Ashman had for our initial draft.

1.1.5.2.1.3 Tying Up Some Loose Ends in the "Resolution" Section of the Essay This third area for revision asked us to think just a bit more about the whole "detection" side of the "detective novel" or "crime fiction" genre within which we are intervening here. Dr. Ashman suggested an introductory essay from *Green Letters*Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton, "Introduction to *Green Letters: Crime Fiction and Ecology*." *Green Letters* 22:1 (2018), pp. 2-6. might be something to have a look at. It turns out that this journal issue was one that I had already had a read of way back in the summer before as MaKenzie and I were just doing some general background reading (we went in its direction largely because Dr. Ashman had an article of his own in that issueNathan Ashman, "Hard-boiled Ecologies: Ross Macdonald's Environmental Crime Fiction," *Green Letters* 22:1 (2018), pp. 43-54. More information on this work is available and indexed here.). At the time I read it, I wasn't quite sure at all if it was germane for our purposes—Dr. Ashman's article was helpful, however—we didn't use it, but it did give us a really good "lay of the land," so to speak. Back in the summer, the Waltons' essay didn't strike me as all that helpful. However, after returning to the Morton work, it came into focus much more clearly how this short introduction might become more functional for us. Morton's *Dark Ecology* makes the case that there is indeed a connection between the tale of Oedipus, the ever-worsening climate crisis, and the genre of crime fiction. Morton writes there:

> I am a responsible member of this species [humanity] for the An-

> thropocene. Of course I am formally responsible to the extent that I understand global warming. That's all you need to be responsible for something. You understand that this truck is going to hit that man? You are responsible for that man. Yet in this case formal responsibility is strongly reinforced by causal responsibility. I am the criminal. And I discover this via scientific forensics. Just like in noir fiction: I'm the detective and the criminal! I'm a person. I'm also part of an entity that is now a *geophysical force on a planetary scale*.Morton, *Dark Ecology*, pp. 8-9.

The introductory essay by the Waltons also takes up this Morton tack, quite explicitly:

> As climate science and escalating climate catastrophe reveal the complex material interrelatedness that cuts across familiar categories of the economic and environmental, cultural and natural, individual and collective, local and global, ecological detectives may be called upon to bear witness, diagnose, organise, protest, persuade, suffer, mourn, and act. The premise of separation and transcendence of the social field, on which the nineteenth century detective was partly based, may also prove incongruous. As Timothy Morton suggests, the perspective of the noir detective takes on new significance in an era in which ecological entanglement can no longer be ignored: 'The noir narrator begins investigating a supposedly external situation, from a supposedly neutral point of view, only to discover that she or he is implicated in it' (Morton 2010, pp. 16–17). Understanding our ecological enmeshment shifts emphasis to the detective as a situated and imperfectly knowledgeable agent who must act nevertheless.Walton and Walton, p. 3.

Having canvassed the Morton essay—and then returning to reread the Waltons' introduction—it struck us quite strongly that there may be a little too quick conflation of the tools of reason and rationality (the tools utilized by climatology and climate scientists) and the figure of the "noir detective." MaKenzie's leveraging of Deleuze's essay gave us a slightly tweaked angle of perspective on this. For Deleuze—as MaKenzie's section of our makes abundantly clear—it is important to separate a detective's utilization of these tools of reason and rationality—and either inductive or deductive logic—(which he says is a staple of the "classical detective genre")Once more, it's time to give credit where credit is due: my thinking on this whole issue was greatly enhanced by numerous conversations with my other most brilliant student ever, William D. Mastin, who talked through Deleuze's theoretical position on this genre with me more times than I could ever count. All the progression on this front in my thinking is due to him. and the noir detective's almost complete and total lack of these methodologies. As Deleuze formulates it:

> What the new literary use and exploitation of cops and criminals taught us is that police activity has nothing to do with a metaphys-

> ical or scientific search for the truth. Police work no more resembles scientific inquiry than a telephone call from an informant, inter-police relations, or mechanisms of torture resemble metaphysics. As a general rule, there are two distinct cases: 1) the professional murder, where the police know immediately more or less who is responsible; and 2) the sexual murder, where the guilty party could be anyone. *But in either case the problem is not framed in terms of truth. It is rather an astonishing compensation of error.* The suspect, known to the cops but never charged, is either nabbed in some other domain than his usual sphere of criminal activity (whence the American schema of the untouchable gangster, who is arrested and deported for tax fraud); or he is provoked, forced to show himself, as they lie in wait for him.Deleuze, "Philosophy of Crime Fiction," pp. 82-3, emphasis mine.

As I say, both MaKenzie and I zeroed-in—rather independently—on this too quick conflation: the noir detective, in Deleuze's eyes, *does not* have recourse to rationality in his search for the criminal. This is—perhaps, again—another spot in our revised second draft where we skirt a little too close to opening up yet another gigantic can of worms. There is no doubt that the overall thrust of Morton and the Waltons' argument strike us as *prima facie* correct, but Deleuze's split in the genre—between the "classical" and "noir detective" genre asks one to revise their thinking just slightly. The real connection here between the scientific detective who detects climate change and the "noir detective" has more to do with the detective's own culpability as an accessory in climate crimes than it does with the methodology by which said detective comes to her discoveries. Long story short, Dr. Ashman's suggestion that we have a look at this introduction to *Green Letters* was indeed helpful as it allowed us to sharpen our own intervention here even more: the secondary literature here argues that the qualities of Oedipus as detective is to be likened best to the noir detective (Morton's argument in a simple nutshell), whereas we are arguing that Deleuze's essay suggests scholar err on the side of caution here just a bit more.

I can imagine an argument that says our tiny edits to this third section do not really handle the third point of critique—the recourse to Morton and the Waltons does end up in section one (which is where it should go, of course)—and that the tiny little ligaments we added to the final section do not fully address the concern. That said, I think the way we handled it is quite sufficiently for our purposes. We had a goal of figuring out how to properly theorize the "Oedipal detective game" in section one and we both feel that, overall and in general, the additions greatly strengthen the essay as a whole. I think we managed to incorporate Morton's theorizations without falling into either the Scylla of Morton's treatment of psychoanalysis or the Charybdis of getting bogged down in too much (perhaps unnecessary) exploration of the massive secondary literature on crime fiction more broadly. Again, as I said, this was indeed an incredibly difficult tightrope to walk—but I think the final product does it quite competently. I should also say that, once again, MaKenzie and I learned how to do

something else together that we had yet to try out in the composition of the article, namely, how to think through and handle revisions of our work. I am incredibly proud of MaKenzie and how well she handled it. Again, given our shared baseline feelings about revision work in general, I think we both figured out how to do this quite, quite well.

1.1.5.3 Learning New Things and Incorporating the Old I think one of the other things about this whole project that was so wonderful and beautiful was how both of us had to learn so many things in order to write this essay. "Crime fiction" isn't in my area of expertise (far from it, in fact); the ecological/environmental philosophy angle is in my wheel house, so to speak; contemporary fiction is also nowhere close to my home base. But there's no doubt the two of us had to learn and read together in order to acquire all that we needed—I definitely did not somehow "have all the knowledge" ahead of time. I had to grow, add a bunch of new things to my repertoire. MaKenzie did too—and, again, we did it together, at the same time. Of course, it would hardly be true to say that I hadn't read more than MaKenzie. But she has spoken to me so passionately and strongly of how impactful my presence in her educational journey has been. I know I've mentioned it before, but when she writes that "[w]hat was (and still is!) always so wonderful about our conversations is that I never feel like Spicer is talking down to me; and the moments where I taught him something or pointed out something he hadn't seen are incredibly genuine"—this is not to be forgotten. I never "talked down to her" because that would have installed an imbalance between the two of us that I never could have stomached—first and foremost because it would greatly sabotage all the work we were trying to do together.

I think the best way to describe this is with something a little metaphorical. I am trying really hard not to toot my own horn here, but I think that what really separates good teachers from great teachers is not so much their willingness to "learn new things," although that is an absolute prerequisite for great teachers too. I think that what great teachers do is show a profound willingness to walk back over the ground they have traveled, walk back over that ground back to where their student currently stands—and to then re-travel and re-traverse that very same road, side-by-side with their student, every step of the way. Being able to retrace one's steps as if the path those steps tread upon was brand new (and it will be, if one travels alongside their student, as the teacher will be able to see and re-experience through the eyes of their student, places and paths that they thought they already knew but can see now in a new and different way). Bad teachers refuse to travel back towards their students—perhaps simply sitting ahead of them, always waiting for the latter to catch-up. Nothing good comes of such a pedagogy. We have to travel back to our student, no matter how many times we've already walked that path and no matter how much farther along it we've been able to move. The only kind of real learning that happens is when teacher and student walk the path *together*. Heidegger has some remarks in an essay on Nietzsche where he writes of something similar with regards to

philosophy and thinkers:

> Before sowing comes plowing. It is essential to reclaim the field that had to remain in obscurity while the land of metaphysics was inescapably dominant. It is essential first of all to sense, to intuit, this field; then to find it; and then to cultivate it. It is essential to go out to this field for the first time. Many are the paths still unknown. Yet each thinker is allotted only one way, his own, in the tracks of which he must go back and forth, time and again, in order at last to keep to it as his own, though it is never his, and say what he came to know on this one path.Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 158.

"[E]ach thinker is allotted only one way … though it is never his"—if we tweak this just slightly, we can say a good teacher is one who is willing to "go back and forth" along a path and to be willing to know that the path traveled "is never his."I can't help but think here of how a very similar idea appears in an absolute masterpiece by one of the greatest French novelists ever: "The book whose hieroglyphs are patterns not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us" (p. 914). The teacher does indeed travel a path they have "known," to some degree, in some sense, but the path is not his—and nothing shows him this more strongly than when that teacher retreads old paths to move back towards his student, all with the goal of returning back down that same path, right beside her.

I couldn't have learned all the new things—nor could I have seen so many of the old things in a brand new light—if I hadn't had MaKenzie alongside me, always giving me ample opportunities to see things through her eyes. An experience like this—yes, broken record—is so rare and the chance to do it is one I will never, ever take for granted.

1.1.5.4 Charting New Territory I think that one of the most impressive things—and there are so many impressive things that helped contribute to the success of this project—is that not only did MaKenzie and I both have to learn new things, but that we actually took these new things and used them to produce something that, to my mind, strikes out into brand-new territory. In the "Senior Capstone Presentation" that MaKenzie held with the other English faculty in Finals Week this last December, Dr. Ioanes mentioned this herself, asking MaKenzie what it was like to step into a space that had not been mapped out yet entirely, or at all; Dr. Ioanes was generous in her praise and found our work incredibly good precisely because it stepped to space yet to be fully investigated by all kinds of practicing scholars. During the presentation, MaKenzie was lavish with her praise of me for helping her not to be too terribly apprehensive about this. Moreover, in her reflection she writes: "With this being my first dive into the world of truly scholarly writing, I needed a lot of guidance throughout the entire process. Luckily, Spicer was there to shape my ideas and

goals for this paper into something that resembled a truly professional piece of writing."Munson, "Reflection," p. 6. I am not really sure how much guidance MaKenzie needed with all of this—to be perfectly honest—she entered this space like a fish to water.

No doubt what makes MaKenzie's work so frighteningly exceptional is the way she felt no fear jumping into new waters with this paper. There isn't a ton of work like this essay out there—and goodness knows that even the secondary literature on Millet's novel is hardly plentiful. This is not even to mention the fact that scholars working on such a peculiar intersection of interests as "crime fiction *and* ecology" are very few and very far between. It's not a huge community/field and the fact that we were able to plant our feet somewhere here still surprises me enormously when I look back on it. I also would like to say that MaKenzie's first dive matches up so nicely and effortlessly with the kind of person she is: one in a bazillion, as I've no doubt said already way too much.

1.1.6 Concluding Remarks on MaKenzie's Trajectory

It will no doubt be totally unnecessary, but I would like to say here how proud I am of MaKenzie—not just with regards to all the work we did writing together, but to all of the wonderful work she did in all of the courses she worked so hard on over the entire Fall 2022 semester. There isn't a shread of uncertainty in my voice when I say that she pushed herself quite a lot—*a ton*—this last Fall semester. It makes me cringe just slightly here now to think of how in previous semesters she had (I think) to struggle quite a bit to get motivated about so many things—and, as she knows, I have told her often how proud I was of her for doing that in those semesters; more often than not, it was really hard for her: it's true, she so often had to really work to get up for so much that I'm not quite sure she was really all that interested in chasing at the end of the day. I think the kind of pushing and hard work she put in during this final semester was so much more enjoyable and, hopefully, never something that she found to be just horrible drudgery. I'll bet she'd say too that she pushed hard this semester, but it was a good kind of pushing as we were chasing those "unofficial interests" of hers. As I've already mentioned, I rarely had a day when I didn't keep those "unofficial interests" in the very forefront of my mind.

Right from the very start—maybe even from before the two of us ever met—, I wanted her and her education to be the very best that I have ever helped to give a student—ever. This next part will no doubt sound incredibly pompous (and it does indeed bump up against my humility a lot). As I said in my "Reflection" on our work together, our closeness made it super-easy for me to know with pretty much absolute certainty that I could be the greatest teacher, mentor, advisor, writing partner, that she could ever have wanted. As she and I grew and grew ever closer with each passing day we spent thinking, talking, and reading together, I became more and more certain that I could very well be what I thought she needed from a mentor.See the "Concluding Remarks" section of

my "Reflection" pp. 18-22, especially, for more discussion on this front. I think that many will say there's little doubt whatsoever that that was true in her case and for her—and I am not at all skeptical about this anymore simply because MaKenzie herself has said that this was true. Before we ultimately decided that she should take a highly expedited path towards graduation, we would often joke about her perhaps sticking around long enough to win all of the (academic and nonacademic) awards that she no doubt would have won. She was always adamant that she never wanted any of those awards and accolades and that my pride in her was all she ever wanted. I can't even begin to fully communicate how much pride and joy I have in her and her work and her accomplishments. I cannot—and will not—hog any of the credit for that. None of the kudos for any of that goes to me—all of it goes to MaKenzie and her alone. I have been so fortunate to have watched her come *so far* and done so much in an insanely short amount of time. MaKenzie mentioned in her "Reflection" the way in which I always, *always*, saw things in her that she may not have fully seen in herself.Munson, "Reflection," p. 8—her "Final Words" section is incredibly germane in this context. I can't even say how true I think that is. If I've done anything at all to help MaKenzie and her growth and development—there are no other accomplishments and accolades I could ever want besides her own pride in me for doing so; there's nothing else anyone could ever want more.

Students like MaKenzie just don't ever come around—and I am so fortunate that we crossed paths. She has said numerous times, as she did in her "Reflection," that she has had an absolutely identical feeling: "As I've told him before, I am so lucky that I found someone at USF like him. I think my college experience would have been bland and monochromatic if not for the two of us connecting."Munson, "Reflection," p. 8. I have been teaching for what now feels to me to be a very, very long time—somewhat close to twenty years if you count my time in graduate school. I have never met anyone quite like MaKenzie before. To say she was an intellectual superstar that was one in a million is a horrifyingly gross understatement. I cannot even really begin to say how absolutely singular and unique MaKenzie is, when all is said and done—and every single day/session we had chatting was a complete and total joy. She has, again, herself written similar things (I hope readers will forgive me for length of this long citation—but it says so much of what I myself want to say about my pedagogy while also providing a bit more context for some remarks that I have already excised out—and, even better, MaKenzie says it in a way that is infinitely better than I ever could):

> I think it also goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway) that I am incredibly grateful for Dr. Spicer and all his wisdom, guidance, and support throughout my past 2.5 years as a student at USF. He sees so much in me that I fail to see in myself and pushes me to have confidence in myself and my capabilities. Working together has hardly ever felt like work at all and I think we share in the sentiment that we will miss our Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays spent in his office thinking through any number of things each time. Spicer has a

> skillful way of finding something in even my most off-topic tangents, even spinning philosophical revelations from TikToks videos I found interesting. None of our time together was ever wasted, in every sense of the word – we could always generate something from incredibly minute topics and we always had fun doing it. This level of entertainment and enjoyment in productivity seems so rare. What I am most grateful for from Spicer is that I always know that he is someone I can go to. He has helped me through countless personal difficulties and has given me advice ranging from how to quit an incredibly toxic and draining job to reaching for opportunities I would have never thought to be possible. As I've told him before, I am so lucky that I found someone at USF like him. I think my college experience would have been bland and monochromatic if not for the two of us connecting.Ibid.

I think it completely and totally true to affirm MaKenzie's comment here that "[w]orking together has hardly ever felt like work at all" and that "none of our time together was ever wasted." It is hard to describe how much fun, invigorating, and truly inspiring this entire "Millet project" endeavor was for both of us. Teachers pray desperately and often to come across a student like MaKenzie—and the odds of a teacher ever finding one like her has so often felt to me to be like close to zero. I would like to say that I knew from the very beginning—even from "before the beginning"—how lucky and fortunate I was to connect up with her and I tried to never have a day when I took that for granted. It has truly been a once in a lifetime experience for me as a teacher and a scholar—and I wouldn't be willing to trade it for anything else in the world. Back to Table of Contents

1.2 Mathematics, Literature, and Philosophy with William D. Mastin ('23)

Back in Section 0, I mentioned another student that I would meet very soon after crossing paths with MaKenzie, William D. Mastin. MaKenzie will always be incredibly special to me and she will always be without a peer in my book. That said, William comes a very, very close second to MaKenzie. It's silly to rank those we deeply love and care for—and the fact that William is only nanometers behind MaKenzie is no lack or deficiency on his part (more than anything it probably has more to do with the fact that I have known MaKenzie for a slightly longer period of time). Since I found myself living a profound charmed life in the Fall of 2021 (having, at that time, now met my two favorite students I've ever had the honor of being able to call "my students" and to call myself "their teacher"), it's shocking to me the luck of all this. I would like to talk here about the work done with William—and if it does not come to same length of material that MaKenzie gets in this reflection, I would still like to tell a bit of my story with William here now.William has himself written copiously and—again, similarly to MaKenzie—beautifully of our relationship. I

have included his cover letter, entitled "The Well-Located Man," for admission to graduation school here. I am going to try my best to cover some of the same ground that he does, but from my own perspective on the journey; he himself narrates the "student" side of this student/mentor relation wonderfully, while I'll cover the latter side myself here. All further citations from this essay will occur parenthetically in the main body of my reflection.

1.2.1 Early Days

I greatly hope that this exercise will make something else quite clear. In so many ways, one could say that all exceptionally bright students, all exorbitantly stellar and brilliant students—all these adjectives fit both of them to a T—are, at the end of the day, all pretty much quite the same. I think that there is some tiny iota of truth to this—no doubt readers will find me naming (probably both consciously and unconsciously) all kinds of uncanny similarities between the two of them—but I have found that these two (although they are maddeningly similar in so many different ways) are each radically and singular and unique in ways that are idiosyncratic to each of them. I hope that the narrative here is able to illustrate how I tried to speak very directly and very uniquely to each of these two, always putting them and their singularities first, and never, ever treating them as if they and their intellectual journeys were somehow easily substitutable for each other in some banal way. With MaKenzie this process was quite easy—she and I are, I think, temperamentally and intellectually identical to one another. William, although very similar intellectually, has an entirely different temperament, and good teaching on my part was going to need to be incredibly attentive to that difference.

Very similarly to how it went with MaKenzie, I recall the very first e-mail William ever sent my way (and I'll never, ever forget either of the first e-mails these two sent to me). He introduced himself to me saying that we had never met before, "but [he] had heard great things about [my] courses."William D. Mastin, personal communication, August 10, 2021. If MaKenzie absolutely exploded into my world with a beautifully reckless boldness (so typical of her), then William came my way in a somewhat more cautious, reserved, understated, and almost "quiet" way (which is also one of his most beautiful personality traits). He wrote in that initial e-mail: "In the last eighteen months, I've been drawn increasingly to literature and have begun to read the western literary canon; I have come across the idea that one of the many purposes of fiction, and perhaps of art in general, is to relate truths that nonfiction cannot reach – this has been a great motivation for my study of literature."Ibid. William thus came to me with a project, with a very specific goal in mind: "In my as yet limited readings, I've quickly found that the amount of study I am able to exercise on works of fiction is quite limited. Not entirely nonexistent, but certainly in need of radical development should I be able to succeed in my project: to uncover and understand the truths that I believe are present in and essential to great literature."Ibid. Again, in beautiful contrast with MaKenzie's fearless

adventurousness, William was more conservative (even though his project was so far from "conservative" it's not even funny):

> I wonder if you might be open to a correspondence discussing techniques of literary analysis, comprehension, and interpretation. I'm sure that you, being quite a popular professor at USF, have little time for extraneous activities, so I hope that what I ask will not seem arrogant or onerous; if this will be a tax on your time, I beg you not to feel obliged to participate. If, however, you are willing and able to participate, I'm sure that it would be a great help and service to me, and I would be greatly indebted to you.Ibid.

Looking back at this initial message, a couple of things jump out at me immediately. First—and, once again, I'm trying be humble here—, it would seem that my reputation preceded me here quite a bit when William describes me as a "popular professor." Second, it still surprises me (even after all these years) when students seem shocked (as I think William probably was when we first met) that I have anything better to do than to spend time with them; I am also myself quite amazed now upon rereading this very first e-mail message how William describes our potential collaboration as something that might be "extraneous" to me. The past two years reading and working with William has never felt extraneous—it was, in fact, the exact opposite as our work became more and more necessary for me each and every day we talked. (I honestly can't count the number of days where I was so happy to know that either he or MaKenzie were scheduled to come by—to be perfectly frank, I'm not sure how I would have been able to handle as much as I did without them. We all know how the years since the pandemic have been on all of us; I'm not sure I would have survived it without them.) That said, this starting e-mail is a good indicator of William and how he rolls: cautious yet terrifyingly rigorous. My readers won't be surprised, but, again, as I did with MaKenzie, I leapt at the chance this totally-unknown-student-to-me was offering here.

Very similarly to MaKenzie, William has written quite a lot about his time with me—and this fact has made documenting my own journey with them here incredibly easy. William's major narrative is recounted in a very lengthy cover letter he composed for admission to graduate school in philosophy—and, just as I did with MaKenzie's own "Reflection," I will citing William's essay copiously and often. As William tries to articulate in this cover letter, he came my way, sought me out, with questions, and an ever-increasing list of problems with all kinds of answers that he found insufficient, paltry—he crossed my path carrying a really profound degree of dissatisfaction; he found me in the hopes that I might help him somehow with all these incredibly sophisticated philosophical and ontological questions about aesthetics, the nature of truth, mathematics, fiction and literature, and so much more. William was hungry—it was often scary to me during our early days together how hungry he actually was—even after we had spent hours talking about philosophy, the rapacious appetite never struck me as sated. (This is no doubt one of the most glaringly evident similarities between

MaKenzie and William—both of them were so hungry, hungry for knowledge, hungry for an intellectual partner that could hold their own with them—this hunger is absolutely beautiful, but can no doubt be quite off-putting to many. The desires of others often shock us more than we would like to admit—always hoping that the other person has desires and hungers just like our own definitely makes us feel comfortable, but it's probably an illusory comfort.It might be jumping the gun just slightly here, but it's all right, I think, to place this tiny little aside here. I should say that these remarks here are wholly influenced by Lacan and his brand of psychoanalysis, which teaches that there is always something (potentially) unsettling about the desire of another person—and it probably goes without saying that this can also be true of the other person's profound gratitude—the way the other person talks about how important we have been to/for them can produce a great deal of turbulence for us. We never quite know—fully—exactly what we are to and for the other. The question posed to the other, "What am I to you?" can bring us up against a profound opaqueness and opacity. Of course, the other can always try to answer this question, but we can always wonder if that answer really and truly cuts to the heart of the matter. In the realm of pedagogy, this fundamental riddle of the other has arisen with both of the students I have talked about so much here. They have told me often and very directly how profoundly impactful I have been on them and their lives. (I've already recounted these kinds of sentiments countless times here.) However, one cannot help but wonder to themselves, "But c'mon—I can't really have been *that* influential, been *that* significant, been *that* life-changing and -altering …" Despite how often I have told them that it cannot be true that I was ever that effective in drastically changing their lives for the good, they have told me infinitely more times: "Hey buddy, you need to let that shit go"—as MaKenzie loves to respond when I say it to her—because neither of them will let me shortchange or lessen or diminish how much I changed them for the better. All of this didn't bother me in the slightest—I knew long before they probably did how we would use this fuel to do more and more and more: to grow closer as friends and conversational partners, to help me speed-up and intensify their intellectual growth, to make it so my mentorship of them could become something that I hoped they would never look back on with anything but a smile. Thinking about this now, I know this worked out perfectly for both of them, as they have each said as much to me more times than I could ever even count.)

So what was this mentoring relationship like early on in the Fall of 2021? If the rapport and understanding with MaKenzie was seemingly instantaneous, William and I had to do a little bit more work before coming to some kind of awareness and agreement about how we wanted to learn, read, talk, and think together. Because William came with already incredibly deep ontological, epistemological, and philosophical questions, the tactic one needed to engage him couldn't be the same one used with MaKenzie. MaKenzie's mind is—as I've already shown, I'm sure—too much like mine: hysterical in the best sense,Here we are using "hysterical" in its most powerful and positive formulation, given

within Lacanian psychoanalysis: see *Seminar XVII*, Chapter II in particular (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg [New York: W. W. Norton, 2007]). always leaping from one idea, one book, one philosophy, one thinker, one argument to another—always jumping and leaping away to other matters from the one on the agenda; William's mind does not quite work this way, his is more like a steel trap, as the old proverbial cliché goes. He will latch onto an idea and won't relinquish it for days, weeks, months even. As I say, although these two students are so similar to one another, there was no one size fits all solution for the pair of them. One would have to switch things up a bit. Still, it's certainly true that in both of their cases it was clear to me from the start what they wanted, what I thought they needed. With that in mind, different pedagogical solutions began to easily present themselves.

This wanting to treat each and every student according to their own singular uniqueness was not lost on William—no two students are the same and our relations to them, therefore, cannot be identical either. William narrates in his cover letter the very first time we ever met and ever chatted:

> It was a perfect August afternoon, and the campus was in full bloom. We sat on one of the benches lining the path that winds through the quad, connecting the old and new areas of the campus. We began to speak. I can remembering noticing immediately just how easily I could speak to this man, and what an odd experience that was! I hadn't spoken to anyone about any serious topic in over 18 months, and yet the words seemed to literally slide off my tongue and hover in front of me for the smallest moment, before Dr. Spicer would take hold of them, turn them in his hands, pull his own from his pocket, and toss the new thought back towards me. It was, quite literally, a divine experience. (4)

To be honest, I have no idea whatsoever why I so often seem to have this kind of effect on students—the ease with which they like to speak to me, I have no idea why this is so often the case (uncountable numbers of students have said this to me before in the past and both MaKenzie and William have relayed this sentiment to me way too many times to ever keep track of).The best explanation for what might be going on here comes from the Lacanian psychoanalytic camp. Kirsten Hyldgaard's "The Discourse of Education—the Discourse of the Slave," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2006), pp. 145-158 is absolutely brilliant and strikes me as the *sine qua non* in this arena—not only that, but I think this essay is completely and totally right in highlighting the importance of "transference" in pedagogy and teaching. I should confess, however, that perhaps it need not be so mysterious, as William goes on to highlight what it was that I gave to him on our very first conversation (again, my apologies for the length of these quotations):

> We spoke for three hours that day, from noon until three. Our conversation swam from personal history to literature to philosophy (nothing serious at first, I must mention), and back again at a gallop-

> ing pace, while I attempted, with a grin splitting my face, to hold on. Our conversation was so distinctly different from those I had observed in the political and "publicly intellectual" spaces, that I found myself quite at a loss for exactly what to say; I had no idea how to operate in this space. Even so, the words kept tumbling out, apparently not of my own accord. At the time, I would have thought this to be something akin to a moral sin which, after lurking for some time, would come up from the deep and snatch me back down out of my arrogance. So much more surprised was I, then, when Dr. Spicer did not sneer or scoff or simply get up and leave, but listened to my juvenile ramblings and considered them somewhat seriously! Such an experience I had never had, and such a man I had never met. His mind was absolutely immense. I have often said, when holding in my hands a book like Kant's first *Critique* or Heidegger's *Being and Time*, that it feels as if I hold a black hole in my hands. Sitting next to Kevin Spicer on that bench on that August afternoon, it was as if I sat next to Atlas himself. I hated to leave, but our conversation had exhausted my mind to the point of incoherence. We said goodbye, and I walked away, in shock of the man I had discovered by sheer luck and chance. (4)

I would beg my readers here to note very carefully and closely what William writes here: "So much more surprised was I, then, when Dr. Spicer did not sneer or scoff or simply get up and leave, but listened to my juvenile ramblings and considered them somewhat seriously! Such an experience I had never had, and such a man I had never met." I find William's quintessential cautiousness rearing its head here: "… and considered them somewhat seriously!" That "somewhat" there strikes me as wholly unnecessary—I didn't then (and never have since) ever "*somewhat* seriously" consider the things William has said to me in any of our philosophical conversations.

Before continuing on here, I would like to venture a tiny aside here: why are students so surprised, so shocked, when we listen to the things they say and consider them with a great deal of seriousness? I've already cited the paragraphs where MaKenzie wrote something almost identical: that I always took what she—and William—said to me with a great deal of seriousness and interest. At the point in time William is narrating here, he didn't know me at all; I would guess that if you asked him now, after two years of study together, if he could ever even imagine me "sneering" or "scoffing" at one of his thoughts, he would say such a thing would be absolutely impossible to imagine—and he would be right. It breaks my heart to think of these two brilliant students coming across teachers in their past who didn't listen to them … and I know they had teachers like this, as they've told me those stories so many times. Are the teachers who are "unwilling to travel back towards their student," as I talked about in Section 1.1.5.4 *supra*, ones that would scoff and sneer at a student's thoughts? I know what I think the answer to that question is, but, again, I note a very common similarity between MaKenzie and William when the latter mentions more than

once in his cover letter the way in which I tried to work with him as he studied things that I myself had already investigated in some way, shape, or form. Here he is on page 6 noting how we eventually made our way to psychoanalysis: "… I was more than happy to make a fine study of the area with my good friend guiding me all the way."See page 5 where, after telling the story of some of the first forays out of his Platonic/neo-Platonic worldview and into that of the sophists: "After hiding inside for so long, I found the wind pleasant on my face. Strong the new wind was, and violent, but I found a wonderful guide by my side, helping me to sway and dance in the gale." Here he is on the turn to Heidegger's work:

> Despite never having read many of the texts we spoke of, I was nevertheless able to speak about them without a problem, thanks to Dr. Spicer's inimitable ability to summarize a complex topic in a few sentences, with the kind of richness and depth that only comes from the most profound contemplation. This has been an invaluable gift; it has made extremely difficult texts incredibly understandable to me on a first reading. This has allowed our conversations to extend far beyond my measly repertoire. My exposure to Heidegger followed this model; in reading *On the Way to Language*, though still shocked and paralyzed by the profundity of the work, I found it to be intelligible and even understandable. All thanks to my dearest friend and mentor. (7)

Here he is canvassing our move towards Shakespeare:

> We had, throughout our friendship, danced around Shakespeare. Dr. Spicer is a fine Shakespearean, and so was quite anxious to introduce me to the bard ever since he noted the spark of potential in me. Under a mutual, though unspoken concurrence that it was, finally, the right time to study the plays and poems, we agreed to devote the summer and following fall term to Shakespeare. We began in June with *Julius Caesar*. It was certainly pastures new for me, and for my mentor as well, in an odd way. It was a different newness for each one of us, which allowed a wonderful and fascinating *pas de deux* of study. I would bring up quite a naive point (I'll still call them such, though Dr. Spicer insists they were not) and Dr. Spicer would turn it in such a way that made it seem more profound a question than I ever could have conjured on my own; this is the value of years of devoted study. This capacity of Spicer's, which continued all through our studies, even past the point where I ceased to ask naive questions, was absolutely invaluable. I can say with a fine degree of certainty that (it would be tedious of me to remind the reader to give every medal to my mentor, so I won't) I was able to make as complete and profound a study of Shakespeare as any undergraduate could hope to make. (8)

William knows me all too well—even today, long after his application for grad-

uate school has been submitted—, I never found his queries and points to be "naive," far from it. Again, I do not at all understand why students like William and MaKenzie had to have teachers who *didn't take* their ideas and try to make something of them, to make something *with* them (I love the multiplicity in this "with" here: not only make something with their ideas, but also to make something with them too). It boggles the mind and I have yet to be able to wrap my mind around it. Both of them have astronomically limitless intellectual potential; it's not clear to me at all why they seem to have had no one actually see it in them prior to their meeting me.

1.2.2 New Tools for Thinking

Is it really that simple, though—that the main pedagogical technique here was just to *listen to what William said* and to help him work his questions and queries into something a little sharper, perhaps a little bit more sophisticated, maybe even a tiny bit better formulated? He will say it was never quite that simple—but I think it actually might be. (These two students are profuse in their praise of me and my mentorship; I think it's all so simple it's not even funny: *I listened, deeply and sincerely, to every single thing they said, listened attentively to every single thought they shared with me.*)

As he notes in his narrative, he came my way with what he describes as a philosophical position that was "a strong Platonic or neo-Platonic view of things. I had the making of a fine religious scholar or pre-Kantian metaphysician, I'm sure," he writes (4). Was it good that William and I started, as we did, with the greatest opponents of Plato, namely, the Sophists? I think so. I quite fondly recall sending William a copy of the *Dissoi Logoi* and I equally well recall the next time we met—William had devoured that piece in the meantime—when this text literally split his mind open in this incredibly beautiful way. I am of the opinion that all he needed was this tiny little anonymous text that has such fantastic things to say about language, thinking, philosophy, etc. All the other thinkers William mentions in his cover letter—and he mentions so many different philosophers that one starts to reel a little bit—are so easily connectable to the Sophists' conception of these things. It's such an easy hop-skip-and-a-jump from the *Dissoi Logoi* to the likes of Nietzsche (whom it didn't take us long to get to, maybe a week, tops), Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, et. al. (Of course, as William correctly notes, once we had finished the *Dissoi Logoi* we went straight to Nietzsche.)

Everything I gave him to read—again, just exactly the same as MaKenzie here—he consumed with reckless abandon; honestly, it was shocking—and, as I've said before, scary. I always tried to keep in mind what brought him to me. Most simply put, he had a major question about hermeneutics, about interpretation. He says that before meeting me, the question on his mind when reading works of fiction and literature was always: "what does it *mean*" (3)? Indeed, a perfectly Platonic question—and no doubt this is perhaps the major reason why I immediately threw William towards the Sophists, who were far more interested in what I will admit I find to be a much more intriguing set of questions—not

"what does it mean," but "what is this doing," "how does it *work*," which are *the* questions par excellence of *rhetoric*. The question of "what does it mean," William suggests in his cover letter, was absolutely bankrupt for him before reaching out to me, useless, otiose even. That's perfectly understandable and, thus, one needed to give him new tools, new ways of thinking, to try out—maybe those would work better for him.

It is quite interesting to me that this process of "finding new ways" for William to think, read, learn, talk, etc. had everything to do with finagling and tweaking not only the language that he used, but language itself so often became an object of conversation and study purely in and of itself. When we started out, it was clear that he and I had quite drastically different pictures of language and conceptions of what we thought language was and did. William says his original idea of language was one that he describes as "a strongly representative or referential picture of language, grounded in [his] mathematical and Wittgensteinian commitments" (7). Moreover, he correctly comments that his picture was one "totally incommensurate with my friend's." I think that our early work together saw us just trying to test out this picture of language and whether or not it was one that would provide him with some kind of satisfactory answers to his deep philosophical questions about literature, truth, ethics, ontology, epistemology; William was harangued by concerns about the aesthetic relation to all of these areas: how did art work, what relation did literature and philosophy have with one another, could you talk about the truly powerful nature of the aesthetic if you had a perspective on language that saw it as only (merely?) a tool for communication?I cannot help but reference, yet again, those lines from Steiner, *op. cit.*: "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is."

1.2.3 The "Event" that was Shakespeare

I would say that after many months where we read so many dense philosophical texts together—and William was sliding towards a rather different picture of language that the one he originally came my way with—we needed to find some kind of space, some kind of playground, on which we could test out all of these theories (e.g. psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, and so many more); but not only did we simply want to "test" these theories, we wanted this "testing" to have an active component—we wanting this testing to be an *experimenting* in the original Latin sense of that word (*experimentalis*). For me, the real ground to best see and test out all of the intersections that William was forging between philosophy, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and literature, is, without a doubt, in the work of Shakespeare. I quite like to think of all philosophical work as merely preparatory for a reading of Shakespeare; I say that in a somewhat facetious way, but I do think that a healthy dose of 20th Century Continental Philosophy can be a fantastic foundation for reading the bard's work.

I am always endlessly fascinated by which authors, which *writers*, light a fire

in a student's mind that burns so strongly and ferociously that one can see the brightness light up their face. For MaKenzie, it was Nietzsche, without a doubt; for William, I think the key thinker was not a philosopher at all, but a poet, Shakespeare. After roughly a year of giving him a crash course in Continental Philosophy that would rival even the best course sequence offered at the graduate school level (again, this is another exact identical parallel with what MaKenzie got), we turned our attention to the greatest poet in the English language.William describes it thusly: "At last, after a study lasting little under a year, I had acquired something of the true philosophical attitude; again, with all credit and commendation given to Dr. Spicer. Such were his patience and generosity that, upon realizing my progress under him, I felt quite guilty at not having progressed quicker. And yet, I was all the more delighted, now that I was able, to keep pace with my mentor during this time" (8). In the Fall of 2022 William and I did sixteen weeks' worth of intense, careful, and close reading of Shakespeare's works; the reading list was largely designed by William with his own interests and areas of focus always at the forefront of my mind. We talked about and worked through so many things in this time period. Out of the plethora of ideas and arguments and theories we brought to bear on Shakespeare's works, I would like to highlight one thread in particular—and then I would like to show what larger philosophical conclusions about hermeneutics and literary interpretation we ultimately drew from all of the data points connected to this thread.

I am not quite exactly certain when this thread bubbled to the surface, but I do recall that it became very visible to the both of us a few weeks into the semester when we were scheduled to have a look at the *Henry IV* cycle of plays. After a few days talking about the play as a whole—along with a very deep dive into one of Shakespeare's greatest creations, John Falstaff—we got bogged down in all of these strange resonances between some of the characters in *King Henry IV: Part I*.I am using *The Arden Shakespeare* edition of this play edited by David Scott Kastan. William himself noted all of the uncanny ways in which young Prince Hal is mirrored by his equally young rival, Henry Percy, otherwise known by everyone in the play as "Hotspur."Of course, as all readers of this play know, the original (historical) Harry Percy was quite a bit older than Hal—but Shakespeare writes Hotspur as roughly the same age as Hal, thus making very clear this issue of doubling, uncanny similarity, etc. These two are exact images, doubles, of one another in seemingly every way. Of course, the mirrorings and doublings do not end there. I remember a really jam-packed week where we spent hours looking at the battle scenes at Shrewsbury field in Act V where a bunch of the rebels (Douglas, Hotspur, et. al.) slice through countless soldiers who are wearing colors and armor that are similar what the king is currently wearing. Hal's father, King Henry, has fashioned countless decoys, leading to Douglas's wonderful lines: "Now, by my sword, I will kill all his coats. / I'll murder all his wardrobe, piece by piece, / Until I meet the King" (V.iii.26-28). This too is a moment of doubling, simulation, etc. At the time, I was more than happy to spin this concern towards what I take to be the play's larger concerns about

King Henry's goals for legitimizing his political rule and authoritative power in England. Of course, this issue of simulation and doubling becomes fraught, tangled, and gnarly. If the king can be impersonated, if one can fashion a decoy of the King, how unassailable is his authority? It's so far from unassailable it's not even funny, the play seems to suggest.This should remind readers of the treatment of this very same idea that MaKenzie and I unearthed through different plays by Shakespeare: *Merchant of Venice* and *Taming of the Shrew*, see *supra*.

This issue of the "twins" (both Hal and Harry Percy) and of kingly doubles and decoys became something of a mantra for us as the reading continued each week. William came to find more and more spots where Shakespeare has recourse to this theme of twins: he saw it in *Twelfth Night* with Viola and her twin brother; he saw in the obsession with mirrors in *Richard II* and with rhetorical deception and dissimulation in *Richard III*; he very easily saw it in Hamlet and Fortinbras; he detected it brilliantly in the doubling ambiguity of the witches' riddles in *Macbeth*; he found it absolutely perfectly in the rivalry between Coriolanus and Aufidius; he pinpointed it very carefully and closely in all the shenanigans that occur towards the end of *Measure for Measure* (not to mention the bizarre "bed trick" that occurs between Angelo and Mariana in this play); he unearthed it beautifully in numerous spots in *Cymbeline*. He started to notice and see it absolutely everywhere. Having seen this repeated refrain/motif, the natural question was *what one wanted to do with* this Shakespearean obsession.

When thinking about doubles and twins, about repetitions (both conscious and unconscious) those of a psychoanalytic bent are apt to turn immediately and directly to Freud's famous essay, "The Uncanny."For William's stellar work on *Coriolanus*, see his essay on this play for his ENGL372: Shakespeare course, "*Coriolanus*: The Betrayal of the Uncanny" where he expertly reads this essay by Freud (a copy of William's essay is available here. All references to this paper will appear parenthetically in the main text. This is exactly what William did. At this time, we were also slowly making our way through what many consider to be Deleuze's masterpiece, *Difference and Repetition*.Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). This is an incredibly dense and difficult text—not for the faint of heart at all. I should say that we easily (beautifully, and wonderfully) got bogged down in the very "Introduction" to the text—and once again we spent many days wrestling with the first opening sections of this awesome text. The key passage in particular that got William's motor running was the second paragraph:

> Generality presents two major orders: the qualitative order of resemblances and the quantitative order of equivalences. Cycles and equalities are their respective symbols. But in any case, generality expresses a point of view according to which one term may be exchanged or substituted for another. The exchange or substitution of particulars defines our conduct in relation to generality. … By contrast, we can see that repetition is a necessary and justified conduct

> only in relation to that which cannot be replaced. *Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. Reflections, echoes, doubles and souls do not belong to the domain of resemblance or equivalence; and it is no more possible to exchange one's soul than it its to substitute two real twins for one another.*Ibid., p. 1, emphasis mine.

William latched on (again, in that "steel trap" way that is so unique and singular to him) to this assertion about an absolute difference between a reflection and a resemblance. What does this mean, he wondered aloud to me one day. What would it mean, exactly, to say that the image of myself in the mirror didn't really *resemble* me, but, instead, *repeated* me? Indeed, what a wonderful question. Deleuze says that resemblances within the qualitative order introduce us to generalities, categories shared in common by two different things where those categories could be substituted and exchanged for one another. Can my image in the mirror "replace" me in some way? Nope. Can I swap my reflection out and have it go into the office for me while I stay behind reading Hegel? Not at all. My image in the mirror doesn't at all *resemble* me; it *repeats* me as an absolutely singular singularity that is "non-exchangeable and"non-substitutable." One could say that a bunch of mandarin oranges in the grocery store "resemble" one another, but each does not "repeat" the others … As I say, a very interesting angle here on ideas that many might consider to be somewhat unimpeachable and hardly problematic at all.

William was so terribly fascinated by Deleuze's treatment of generality, repetition, resemblance, and the need to try to keep some of these things conceptually separate and distinct from one another. He was also—I'm sure this is probably pretty obvious from the drift of my narrative here so far—really curious to see what Deleuze's language might offer him when thinking about all of the doubling and twining that he was seeing in Shakespeare's plays. We spent many hours talking about Deleuze's mention of "reflections" as we had talked a ton about the function of mirrors in some of the early history plays, especially *Richard II*. But I think the usefulness really came about in William's marshaling of this Deleuzian language to talk about *Coriolanus*. But before jumping to that play—and to William's very masterful reading of it—, I need to say a little bit more about Freud and psychoanalysis here.

After wrestling and wrangling with the first couple chapters of *Difference and Repetition*—including the very key sections in Chapter 2 where Deleuze tries to demarcate his differences from Freud's conception and use of repetition—I told him (rather offhandedly, if I remember correctly) that it surprised me that Deleuze doesn't at all mention Freud's "Uncanny" essay (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the main text investigated here in *D&R*, which makes perfect sense, but still, odd that he doesn't mention it at all). As is so par for the course for William, he wanted the Freud essay, which I sent his way, along with a really fantastic book by Nicholas Royle.Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2003). Once again, William devoured these worksI might

also mention how I sent him Mladen Dolar's very nice little essay, "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," *October*, Vol. 58 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 5-23, which, again, he read in less than a day.—a day later he was back in the office to tell me about how fantastic Royle's book was—and how strange (dare we say "uncanny"?) it was that Deleuze doesn't mention this text of Freud that one could say is, somehow, even more concerned with repetition than *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. William quickly became convinced—I have no doubt here that Royle's just solidified an intuition that William had already had about Shakespeare's dramas—that Shakespeare was on to this idea of the "uncanny."Indeed, the index of Royle's book lists 38 references to texts within Shakespeare's corpus (p. 338). He was also thoroughly convinced that the best way to talk about all these doubles and twins and reflections was not through the language of resemblance, but, rather, it was Deleuze's conception of "repetition" that was key here. Has there ever been another Coriolanus? Absolutely not. Does Coriolanus uncannily *resemble* his arch-rival (at least in the first half of the play), Aufidius, when the former switches allegiances from Rome to the Volscians camped outside Rome's walls or does he not rather *repeat* him? William says it is *not a matter of resemblance*—in so many ways Aufidius looks nothing like Coriolanus and yet these two do engage in a dance of repetitions of one another.

The thing about doubles and doubling that so fascinated William was why it seems to be the case that in so many literary stories and fictions, the text always has to end up with one of the two dead. In order to get at this issue, we again went to the infinitely rich well that is psychoanalysis—in particular, I passed William an early essay by Mladen Dolar where he speaks to this concern quite directly:

> The subject is confronted with his double, the very image of himself (that can go along with the disappearance, or trading off, of his mirror image or his shadow), and this crumbling of the subject's accustomed reality, this shattering of the bases of his world, produces a terrible anxiety. Usually only the subject can see his own double, who takes care to appear only in private, or for the subject alone. The double produces two seemingly contradictory effects: he arranges things so that they turn out badly for the subject, he turns up at the most inappropriate moments, he dooms him to failure; and he realizes the subject's hidden or repressed desires so that he does things he would never dare to do or that his conscience wouldn't let him do. In the end, the relation gets so unbearable that the subject, in a final showdown, kills his double, unaware that his only substance and his very being were concentrated in his double. So in killing him he kills himself. "You have conquered, and I yield," says Wilson's double in Poe's story. "Yet henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself." As a rule, all these sto-

> ries finish badly: the moment one encounters one's double, one is headed for disaster; there seems to be no way out. (In clinical cases of autoscopia—meeting or seeing one's double-the prognosis is also rather bad and the outcome is likely to be tragic.)Dolar, p. 11.

This is itself borne-out by the text of *Coriolanus*: the title character ends up dead, his double, Aufidius, surviving him. As William puts it so wonderfully in his essay's concluding paragraph:

> Here is the tragedy of Coriolanus. His transformation from Martius Coriolanus to Martius Aufidius to Martius has all been for naught. In uniting the common and the proper, he comes too near Aufidius, repeats him too well. In signing the treaty, Martius becomes both a Roman and a Volsce. This pricks too near Aufidius' heart, presents him with his mortality in too raw a fashion. Therefore does he murder Martius. He finally betrays his double. (13)

I think it goes without saying that William's essay is an absolutely stellar and fantastic example of "applied knowledge" at work. He consumed a bunch of theoretical, secondary materials and then brought them to bear very strongly on one of Shakespeare's plays. As I say, it is wonderfully and expertly done. I could not be more proud of him for this work.

Now, when a student does this kind of excellent application-work, it warms a teacher's heart, to be sure. But I should say that it didn't just give me a warm-and-fuzzy feeling. What it did was fuel my own thinking in incredibly profound ways that I would like to try to talk a little bit more about now here. All of this talk of doubles, twins, reflections, and repetitions couldn't help but get me thinking back to all kinds of concerns that also arose in MaKenzie's "Ancient Literature" course where we read about all kinds of twins: Jacob and Esau, of course, but also that wonderful pair of sisters, Leah and Rachel. If William and I hadn't been working our way through the Deleuze, I'm not quite sure the stars would have aligned in quite the way they did. Working as closely with both William and MaKenzie in the Fall of 2022 was such a perfect storm: it produced all these insanely profound feedback loops where discussions and readings with one of them would intensify and strengthen the texts and ideas I was working on with the other. This focus on twins, doubles, and repetitions definitely did a ton of work for me—and also made the work on the "theological allegory" in Millet's novel (and that shows up in the coauthored paper with MaKenzie) such a breeze to see and flesh out.Here I cannot help but think of that passage from Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 2011): "One should not conceal and corrupt the *fact* that our thoughts come to us in a fortuitous fashion. The profoundest and least exhausted books will probably also have something of the aphoristic and *unexpected* character of Pascal's *Pensées*. The driving forces and the evaluations lay below the surface a long time; what comes out is effect" (Section 424, p. 229). MaKenzie definitely helped these driving forces come to the surface.

The roots of the whole Rachel, Leah, Jacob, twins and doubling nexus goes all the way back to my earliest days with MaKenzie. One day we were talking about feminism and I asked her if she happened to have read Margaret Atwood's brilliant *The Handmaid's Tale*?Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986). As I hope my readers might know, this novel has an epigraph at the beginning that directly cites the story of Rachel and Leah (Genesis 30:1-3). MaKenzie and I read Atwood's book over the summer of 2021 and promised that we would link back up to it as we made our way through the Genesis text, to go "back to the original" story that served as Atwood's epigraph.I should say here that MaKenzie and I have a long-running list of article projects that we plan to tackle (again) together, an essay on Atwood is one of the most key ones—as MaKenzie has been profoundly itching to write about this novel after reading it that summer a couple of years ago.

I have always loved the story of Leah and Rachel—and Jacob. I have particularly adored—sigh, I'm not quite sure what this says about me, lots, I'm sure—the infamous "bed trick" that Laban pulls here in Genesis 29. After seven years of working for Laban in order to earn Rachel's hand, we get Jacob's request: "Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her'" (29:21). The text continues: "When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her" (29:23). So here one could say that we get a "substitution" of sorts: Leah for Rachel. The text is quite beautiful in its shock, surprise, and incredulity—feelings that no doubt Jacob himself shares and feels himself: "When the morning came," the narrator says, "there was Leah! So he said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?'" As is so often the case, Rashi's commentary is beautifully perspicacious (and alluringly, seductively, tantalizing) in its attentiveness to this "bed trick" moment:

> AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT IN THE MORNING, BEHOLD, IT WAS LEAH —But at night it was not Leah (i.e. he failed to recognise that it was Leah) because Jacob had given Rachel certain secret signs by which they could at all times recognise one another, and when Rachel saw that they were about to bring Leah to him for the marriage ceremony, she thought, "My sister may now be put to shame", and she therefore readily transmitted these signs to her (*Megillah 13b*).

The commentary here is so short, so cryptic, so bizarre (for many readers!). Rashi's marginalia here is only a single sentence in length—and yet it opens up so much! Where is this detail in the original text that Rashi extrapolates: namely, this little detail that one sister shares the secret signs with the other so that when Jacob and Leah meet in the night, it will *not* be a meeting of Jacob and Leah but of Jacob and Leah-as-Rachel? Nowhere that I can see. Of course, such creative ingenuity never stopped any of the Rabbinic commentators from "adding it to" the text (if that is indeed the way one would like to describe what is happening here with Rashi's hermeneutics). Are these signs given to

Leah by Rachel so that the former can merely "resemble" the latter—or are they not given so that one can (and here I mean this to be parsed incredibly *literally*) *become* (or "repeat," in Deleuze's register) the other sister?We should also mention here how the treatment of this same scene in *Bereishit Rabbah* 70:17 makes this "becoming" even more clear: "But I called you 'Rachel,'" the commentary has Jacob say, "and you answered me!" Leah *literally becomes* Rachel; she does not merely *resemble* her, she *repeats* her, *becomes her* in an absolutely singular way.

Although William and I did not really chase the "doubling" and "twinning" involved in the bed trick that shows up so frequently in Shakespeare's corpus (which, as already mentioned, is present in *Measure for Measure*, but is also there in *All's Well That Ends Well* and, arguably, even in the odd little nighttime-trick that Iachimo/Giacomo gets up to in *Cymbeline*), I can easily imagine some work where we continued to try to draw out these through-lines.I know for a fact that MaKenzie will want to pick up this thread in the Atwood project, as the spin given on the whole "bed trick" is incredibly odd and quite peculiar in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the Christian appropriation of this Hebrew story really runs off the rails, at least in my own personal reading. I suppose all I want to make clear here is how mutually supportive (and reinforcing) the work with William often became for the work MaKenzie and I were doing—and vice versa, too. I am not certain that I could have really grown my thinking about these ancient stories without William around; in fact, I'm certain such growth for me wouldn't have happened at all had it not been for him.

1.2.4 Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks

Before I transition here, I want to go back again to MaKenzie: "What was (and still is!) always so wonderful about our conversations is that I never feel like Spicer is talking down to me; and the moments where I taught him something or pointed out something he hadn't seen are incredibly genuine." As I tried to make really clear, this was never just posturing on my part. Working with MaKenzie and William has allowed me to learn so many new things—I couldn't list them all even if I had "world enough and time," as Andrew Marvell says. I would like to canvas, however, just a couple of slightly different things that I have learned from studying, reading, thinking, and talking with William over the past two years—and both of these things are brand-new and very recent.

I find that when talking with William, he has a plethora of different fields that he loves to use to flesh out difficult ideas in different realms: the biggest and most significant one seems to me to almost always come from the realm of music. He is himself an avid guitarist and piano player and loves talking to me about jazz (if one pokes their head in the office when he comes by—and the chances are good that if you still poke your head in even now, either MaKenzie or William will probably be in there—, they can tell just by looking at his face alone that he's drawing parallels and analogues to music). I have confessed to him on numerous occasions that despite the fact that I myself live with three

musicians (my wife is a guitarist, my son is a violinist, my youngest loves playing the piano and her ukulele), I don't understand a single darn thing about music. William likes to say that my areas of expertise are "immense" and very wide-ranging. Music is *not* one of the areas across which my knowledge ranges—far from it; I'm perfect illiterate when it comes to music. That said, I have found myself becoming more and more intrigued by the way in which William very brilliantly utilizes music in order to do philosophy. (I will never forget the week this past February when William downed the entirety of the 11th Plateau, "1837: Of the Refrain," in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*Deleuze and Guattari, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-423., with him immediately saying how right he thought this pair of thinkers was on tonality and atonality in music.) More often than not, I can track the analogies and analogues—although, without him I wouldn't have had a prayer in the world of doing such a thing, especially since I've always found that 11th Plateau to be totally opaque to me, no doubt due to the musical illiteracy I already mentioned)—and I have found his use of music and music theory to greatly enrich my own thoughts about aesthetics, aesthetic creativity, and so much more. As I have already noted, William's first forays (in my direction) were in search of ways to talk about aesthetic creation and artistic ingenuity and innovation. I must admit that I have—prior to meeting William—never really been all that interested in such things. However, William has pushed me to wonder if I can still get away with such a position; now I am not so sure I am able to really be able to do what I want in conversations with him without having some kind of recourse to a discussion of aesthetic creativity when talking about how a particular poem or play or novel or work of art really works on and does things out in the world. This is undoubtedly a part of my academic being that was added by William—no other source is possible. I think we want our students to be able to change us—and to really change us such that they can honestly, sincerely, and genuinely can say of us, as MaKenzie did, that *she taught her teacher*, *she taught her mentor* something that he didn't know before. I would guess that William might be somewhat hesitant to agree that he managed to do this for me, but his reserved nature and quiet caution are completely and totally unwarranted here. MaKenzie drastically changed me; William did too. If our students can't do this to us, one wonders what it is we're all up to here in this whole pedagogical enterprise in the first place, at the end of the day.

Here is perhaps the great example (humbly submitted into evidence/the record here)—that MaKenzie's sentiment that there was something "genuine" about how I was changed by them is not mere window-dressing and not mere polite rhetoric—occurred just a week or so ago when William and I spent multiple days in a row reading the work of one of William's most favorite and most beloved literary writers (and one of my most disliked), Ernest Hemingway. I would like to relay a little story about this now so that it is blindingly clear how much my students have changed me and some of my most long-held positions. I have never been big on Hemingway—I read his novels when I was around William's age, but gravitated to quite different modernist writers than he did. I loved the

work of Proust, Joyce, Pound, Woolf, Faulkner—Hemingway was never top of the list for me. William would so frequently talk to me of his great admiration of Hemingway (and Fitzgerald too, I should add); I guess it's possible that I got it when I was his age (although I'm not quite sure that I did even back then) and I really didn't get it either twenty years later. That is, until William and I spent a whole week looking at some of his most favorite Hemingway stories.

I'm not sure if he would describe it this way—but I sometimes think (with all the good-natured and -willed levity and friendly ribbing I can muster)—that trying to find things that he and I greatly disagreed about (long after we learned how to think, read, and talk with another)—could become something akin to some sort of parlor came William might play. Over the past couple of years we did sync up our thinking quite strongly—though not on the question of Hemingway. My position on his work was far from principled—it was silly, juvenile even, one might say. I just didn't really at all care for some of the typical "Hemingway-esque" techniques of narrative and imagistic description that William so clearly enjoyed. I told him I could definitely understand what Hemingway's "minimalistic" style wanted to achieve: a plethora of meaning in an incredibly short space, a profound parsimony of language that would open-up and unfurl in all kinds of different ways. Still, I just couldn't see it in the works—couldn't locate it; at the end of the day, I just didn't know what to do with these things. I have a feeling that William would (and I know MaKenzie would) say that everything one might want to know about me as a teacher, learner, and mentor was there to be seen one Thursday when I told him (after we had argued back and forth for hours about characterization in *The Sun Also Rises*): "Okay, my friend, it's been two decades since I read one of Hemingway's books; this weekend I'll go back and reread one." "You don't have to do that," he said, "you don't need to come to love Hemingway in the way that I do." Of course, I knew that, but I still felt as if I couldn't really spar with William on this terrain—my engine here was not well-oiled, it was no doubt rusty; I needed to open up the hood again.

I took the weekend to reread this novel. Nope, I still couldn't really stand it, any of it. Don't get me wrong, I understood the book—I understood the crippling ennui, the typical "ex-patriot" despondency, the despair, the emptiness, the profound nihilism—I have never been a stranger to such things (well, excepting the "ex-patriot" adjective, of course). All of this is so elementary, so par for the course, about a novel whose epigraph from Gertrude Stein reads, "You are all a lost generation." I spent all weekend trying to articulate some slightly more substantial criticisms of the text, but the vacuity, the vapidity, the emptiness, and the giant gaping void at the center of Hemingway's work irritated me (still) to no end. I rehearsed all kinds of possibilities. Why, exactly, should one prefer the hamstrung way Hemingway's style and technique worked—this question was, perhaps, quite particular to me, who loves the sublime long-windedness of, say, Dickens' narrative lines, or the profound use to which Austen utilizes the already mentioned "free indirect discourse" to get inside her characters' heads. I just couldn't understand; I just didn't know, still, *what to do with this thing*. All

the characters in Hemingway, dripping with alienation—from themselves, from each other, from their world, even from their pleasures. This alienation touches everything—even the very fact of talking has become so useless, characters constantly tell each other to "just stop talking."Utilizing, via synecdoche, one example to serve as exemplary of all the rest, here is an exchange between Brett and "the count" in Chapter VII: "The count reached down and twirled the bottles in the shiny bucket. 'It isn't cold, yet. You're always drinking, my dear. Why don't you just talk?' 'I've talked too ruddy much. I've talked myself all out to Jake.' 'I should like to hear you really talk, my dear. When you talk to me you never finish your sentences at all.' 'Leave 'em for you to finish. Let any one finish them as they like'" (58). Nothing upon this second read computed at all—who wants to bother reading a novel where the characters are so alienated from their own words, saying they don't need to finish any of their sentences because it's all the same to them how someone other than them would finish those very same sentences? As I say, I just couldn't make anything with this text, couldn't connect it up with anything else, just could not at all make any of it go … anywhere. Coming from the likes of Dickens and Austen and the Brontë sisters, I just couldn't stomach it at all.

This very same weekend—as I was trying, genuinely, authentically, sincerely—to come William's way *re* Hemingway, he himself started reading two of my most favorite novels by Dickens (again, as his way of trying to get a sense, via contrast, of my own position in order to come closer to me).These two novels are, of course, his masterpieces, *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. We spent a morning during the Hemingway week where we spent hours looking at the opening to *Bleak House*, cataloguing Dickens' brilliant use of participles to fashion the environment created by the all-consuming fog in this novel, which itself becomes one of the major leitmotivs that course and move all throughout the entirety of the book. I could see—as I've seen on his face innumerable times—the way this careful and close reading of Dickens narrative (and syntactical) technique showed William things in this passage that he'd never seen before, never thought about before. The complexity of these typically Dickensian techniques is shockingly brilliant and masterful. "Where can I see something similar to this happening in Hemingway," I jokingly goaded him. There is no doubt whatsoever that one can put these authors on frighteningly different sides of the spectrum when it comes to narrative technique and literary methodology. I asked William if he would be willing to play a little game here, do me a little favor: Could he take Friday and the weekend to pick out some of his most favorite Hemingway works and do something similar to what I did with the opening three paragraphs from Dickens? He said it would be hard to pick out his favorites, but promised to give it a shot. Later that day, he texted me a short list of his favorite short stories: "The Killers," "Cat in the Rain," "In Another Country," "Hills Like White Elephants," "Old Man at the Bridge," "Today is Friday."All these stories can be found in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigía Edition* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987). Pulling "a William," I immediately read these stories, incredibly excited and enthused by the idea

that William would be trying to show me what he saw in these things that I just saw absolutely nothing in, if I'm being at all honest.

William says in his cover letter that one of the things that became clearer and clearer under my mentorship was the importance and profound significance of one's be willing to never rest on their laurels, to always, *always*, question their own positions on things: "It is the ultimate failure of the intellectual, I've learned, to hold too tightly to one's ideas and commitments" (5). I was very honestly trying to do this, to continue putting this sentiment into practice—this time with Hemingway. The parameters of this exercise were, on the surface, something a little different from the way in which William and I usually worked. I put William in the role of authority and expert—which is hardly a fiction as he's a much better reader and scholar of Hemingway than I am, that's for sure!—so that he could teach me how to read this author's works. When it came time to dive in, William's standard cautiousness was on full display here; he said that he was prepared to take me step-by-step through the stories, but, that said, there were still little spots and details in the story that he himself confessed he "didn't quite know what to do with." Perfectly fine, I said—we'd give it a shot and see what would come out of it all.

We started with "In Another Country" and William took me through nearly every sentence, every word, showing me how he thought things were working, what they were doing, etc. (I should note here that the days when William would relentlessly worry over questions of "what does this mean?!" were long gone; here he was putting all his learning into practice: focusing with his rare doggedness on *what the text was doing*.William's transition was remarkable as it was a movement away from his Platonist/Wittgensteinian/deeply mathematical conception of language and meaning to thinking about texts and language as fundamentally *machinic*. As Deleuze and Guattari put it on the very first page of *Anti-Oedipus*: "Everywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones—machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections." Everything is in this switch to machinery, and Graham Harman put the consequences of this best in his *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2018) when he writes: "what a machine *does* is more important than what it *is*" (p. 228).) William deftly noticed all the spots that so often give Hemingway a distinctly "nihilistic" tint and tone: the alienation, the ennui, the despondency, the despair—all of these were present in the story. Moreover, I found William highlighting and extracting out certain key phrases, ideas, images, repetitions, on so on, that I myself noticed too. Slowly, I was starting to find some things here that I just could not find before. Why, though? Weren't those things there already to be found? Why is it that I was only starting to see them while in (and after) conversation with William? I think this is no doubt one of the absolutely magical—and still mysterious—things about learning to "think *with*, really *with* another person" and this all reminds me of something else William wrote (though in this context the movement was him getting in step with me while in this Hemingway case the situation was the reverse—me getting in step

with him):

> This pattern, quite reminiscent of what Deleuze wrote of his relationship with Guattari - something to the effect of "Felix would say things to me, and though I'd know exactly what he said, I wouldn't understand it until six months after" - would continue throughout my study of the bard. Spicer would say things to me that I knew were unbelievably insightful and profound, but wouldn't be able to understand them for weeks after. And once I did, I would drag him (willingly, I should say) back to that play or poem, and we'd play again the tune we'd both heard before, now tapping our feet in the same tempo. (9)

Something similar was happening here with me and Hemingway—all due to William, I have no doubt.

We spent all week literally picking these stories apart, tearing them up, jamming our tools inside them, opening them, figuring out how they worked, what they were doing, *how* they were doing what they were doing. Something opened up for me here too. I was especially able to get my own tools to work really quite nicely with Hemingway's "Today is Friday," where William and I got to rehearse the Deleuzian claims about "repetition" and their relation to Christ's crucifixion in this story. (This is a really wonderful little Hemingway text, for those that don't know it—and I recommend everyone take a gander at it.) Now, to be completely honest, despite how truly wonderful exercise was for me, I am not sure that, afterwards, I was really any more able to stomach all the despondency and despair in Hemingway. I was, however, able to get these texts to do something—and that's something that I wasn't able to do before William took me through these stories *in his own unique and completely singular way.* We did something similar for other stories that I was able to open up incredibly: "Hills Like White Elephants" in particular was one that we, again, spent hours looking at closely and carefully together. Have I come to "love" this author's work in the same exact way William does? No, I don't think so—but I do "get them" and I do have a much better sense of seeing why it is that William returns to them again and again in the same way I do with the novels of Dickens, the poetry of Shakespeare, or the riddling obscurities of the ancient Hebrew Bible texts. What a gift for a teacher and mentor to have been given by their student and mentee.

Good teaching—and good learning too, for that matter—must always be symmetrical, must always be intensely symmetrical. If students don't teach their teachers something, if they don't help their mentors see something new that they didn't see before, then there's no doubt that a wonderful opportunity has been missed—clearly missed, I should say.

1.2.5 Of Objects that are Virtual

Before trying to conclude this section devoted to William's education, I want to spend a little bit of time thinking through something that is, for many, still a profoundly "open question" when it comes to the ontology of aesthetic objects. For me, the jury is still out with regards to precisely how it is possible to do what I did with Hemingway when I claimed that through studying with William I was able to begin "to find some things here [in these Hemingway stories] that I just could not find before." When I asked, "Why, though?" this was far from being a purely rhetorical question. How is it that one can find "new things" within a text or aesthetic object that they have interacted with and known for a very long time?

I know all too well aware that the simplest—and perhaps most "empirical"—way to address this question is to say that nothing in the object changes (it's still the same words, arranged in the same way, etc.), but everything, perhaps, changes on the side of the subject or viewer or reader of the text/aesthetic object. Was I a completely and totally different person at twenty than I am when rereading these works in my forties? If I'm being completely honest, yes, I am quite different—but so many things about me haven't changed in the slightest. Thus, the "empirical" road would need to try to flesh out precisely which changes in me opened up these possibilities for seeing the texts in a new way; one could easily do this, I suppose: I do have a ton more knowledge now than when I was in my twenties; so many more texts have been read, so many more philosophies and thinkers have been encountered and digested. But that still leaves me unsatisfied. Ideally, it would be nice to find some way to make it so that the object—the art object—is not some fixed, unchanging, seemingly eternal thing, always willing to give up new angles, new perspectives, new ideas, from up out of itself. I am also somewhat allergic to thinking of the object itself as infinite, as infinitely giving. Perhaps in some facets of itself it is, but it's not infinite, it cannot be infinite: there are so many things I can't get the art object to do (it can't do my taxes for me, as a silly and banal example). I am not against infinity as such, I should say, it's simply that I would like to try to find this infinity that is connected to the object and to have it be situated in the right place, space, and in the right relation to the actual object out there in the world.

I know that William has himself thought about these questions *a lot*—I'd be a rich man if I had a penny for every time this ontological question about the aesthetic object surfaced for him, *for us.*Once again, see pages 8-9 of his The Well-Located Man" reflection: "In the first place, it is not clear that the text (any text) has the quality of the gem - that it is there, in full, with its beauty and meaning on display. It seems necessary, at least for us two, to wrangle with the text a great deal before its beauty really came to the fore." I think it's a deeply ingrained move (Hegelian for sure) within me to, when presented with two options, always search for a third thing that is lurking in and around the relation between the two.I would just like to note something quite nice—and

that is how William himself managed to imbibe (through osmosis? I know we never theorized it in any real strong way, it was *just something we did*) this very Hegelian move of always looking for the third: "Towards the end of this period, I should say it was last May, we dispensed with our debate and decided to look at language from perspectives that would not cohere, necessarily, with either of our positions. This has become a usual technique for us; when we two unstoppable forces find ourselves at an impasse, we abandon our respective tracks all together, and attempt to find consensus along different less well-traveled roads" (7). A nice first stab at locating this infinity properly would be to return to an idea that shows up in the work of Henri Bergson. Bergson has this wonderfully counterintuitive way of thinking about knowledge and what exactly knowledge does when it knows an object—rather than thinking that knowledge is somehow "additive" (I know more and more about certain aspects or qualities or whatever, of a thing), thinking is fundamentally *subtractive*. As Keith Ansell Pearson puts it: "Bergson's key argument is to point out that in order to pass from matter to perception or from the objective to the subjective, it is not necessary to add anything but, on the contrary, only that something be subtracted. In other words, consciousness functions not by throwing more light on an object but by obscuring some of its aspects.""The Reality of the Virtual: Bergson and Deleuze," *MLN* 120 (2005): pp. 1112-1127; p. 1118. The "empirical" explanation I mentioned in the previous paragraph seems like it was purely additive (but not on the side of the object; the "additions" were on the side of the subject: *I* knew more, *I* had more knowledge, more experience, whatever, that I could bring to bear on the Hemingway object).I would like to set aside for the moment the objection that science gives to the lie also to this idea of knowledge as fundamentally "additive" and not "subtractive" in nature. But this purely "additive" conception of knowledge doesn't seem to jive at all with the Bergsonian idea that when we investigate an object, we're always *subtracting*, *extracting* out particular qualities or facets of the thing under study. But—and this is, I think, just for the sake of argument—what if I'm subtracting in the two cases (me reading Hemingway at twenty and then again at forty) the same qualities? What if I'm extracting very similar (if not identical) facets of the aesthetic object? What if I'm interested in and looking for the exact same things in each case? (I said this was "just for the sake of argument" largely because I did wonder earlier in the previous section: "Why is it that I was only starting to see them while in (and after) conversation with William?") Assuming that one could subtract/extract out the very same qualities, would that still explain why I could come to this object in a new way …? Perhaps—but this seems hard to accept: I cannot literally relive the past, cannot, really, extract out all these facets of the thing in a way identical to very first time; I can't really repeat the past in this way. So if there's no change on the side of the object and the changes on the side of the subject—even if they are fundamentally "subtractive" in Bergson's sense—don't quite get one to the finish line, what is to be done next? And is there still a way to maintain the aesthetic object's own independence, its own agency, its own nature? Something's changed, obviously, in between a reader's two (temporally separated) engagements of a work, but

what and where? The outlines and borders and boundaries of the theorization I am failingly groping towards here are not yet fully fleshed out, but I would like to try it out.I am terribly fascinated here, I should say, by the idea that what is so great about our best students is how disruptive they can be of our old ways, our old patterns—the great student is constantly poking the teacher, constantly destabilizing the things the mentor has allowed to become just so many habitual patterns of thinking. This issue here of the nature of the aesthetic object that has animated William so strongly is a perfect example: it's taken what I always found to be quite smooth in my own thinking and littered it with potholes, making the functioning far less smooth. This is, perhaps, one of the greatest gifts a student could ever give a teacher. The problems that William raised to me: *I don't have answers to them*—and *I don't quite know what to do with them.* I'm wrestling and struggling with them mightily, but I would like to try here to unravel all the knots that William tied in my thinking. Again: there's no greater thing a mentee can do for their mentor, that's for sure.

Perhaps an analogy could be helpful here—and perhaps the more banal and more commonplace the better.No surprise, this analogy comes from William. Everyone has no doubt had the experience of rearranging a room in their place of residence: a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen, any one will work for our purposes here. Now, one could say that if we take the TV, the couch, the loveseat with the coffee stain that won't ever seem to come out no many how many we wash that cushion, the piano, the table we use for doing puzzles, etc. and simply rearrange them all, put all of them in different spots in the room, it's legitimately arguable if the room has actually really changed, at all. After all, all the things are still there; the physical qualities of the room haven't been altered: same dimensions, same low ceilings, same pasty North wall with the paint peeling, nothing in the physical materiality of the room is different. And yet, I think we all would agree with the intuition, the feeling, that it would be right to say that the room *isn't at all the same as it once was.* It seems unobjectionable to say that it *isn't at all* "the same room" anymore.

The philosophical and linguistic traditions would seem to have a bevy of different ways to account for this phenomenon. One quite quickly thinks of the way Ferdinand de Saussure talks about a similar kind of thing when thinking about what really distinguishes, say, an 8:30 train from a 9:45 one to Paris. One can change out all of the parts of the train—swap out the engine, all the conductors, all the seats, all the passengers, and the 8:30 train is functionally the same as any other run on any other day. Saussure's argument is that everything about the train can change, the only thing that needs to be present is some way to distinguish the 8:30 train from the 9:45 train (we could even imagine the exact same train making the 8:30 and 9:45 runs, they're the same train simply because "8:30" differentiates it somehow from the 9:45 one). Saussure uses this rather simple and banal example to illustrate how linguistic functions work: the only thing that really defines a "b," for example, is the fact that it's not a "p." (Saussure also thinks this is how writing works as well: there are so many different ways to write or style a "K," for example, but despite all their

differences they're still the letter "K" because they're not the letter "Q".) This might be one way to talk about our rearranged room example. Change out all of the positions of things within the room (just like switching conductors on the train) and we still have the "same room," in some sense because, again, as an example, the "living room" is distinguishable from the "kitchen" (just as the 8:30 and 9:45 trains are differentiated from one another).

There are, of course, still other ways to talk about this. The work of Graham Harman—of the "Object-Oriented Ontology" (OOO)—likes to talk about the ways in which an object (like our room or our train) cannot be reduced down (Harman calls this move "undermining"See his "Undermining, Overmining, and Duomining: A Critique" in *ADD Metaphysics*, ed. Jenna Sutela (Aalto, Finland: Aalto University Design Research Laboratory, 2013) for more on this technique. to its parts: swap out all of the people that work for the IRS, change out all the office furniture, change everything you might like about the object called "the IRS" and there is still this object that persists throughout all these changes and swappings-out. In other words, according to Harman, an object like the IRS cannot simply be (as Hume says) just "a bundle of qualities"—because we could imagine changing all kinds of "qualities" possessed by the IRS without fundamentally altering the object as such. So, in our room example, "the room" can't simply be equated with its qualities precisely because an object as such always "exceeds," in some sense, the qualitative facets that one might want to reduce it to at the end of the day. I am, I should say, quite sympathetic to this way of thinking about objects—as profoundly irreducible to the parts of components that make them up. That said, the fact that there is something like an (or is it "the") "IRS object" that somehow "hovers over" and "above" all of its component parts still makes it difficult to explain why our rearranged room still gives us the intuitive feeling or sense that the larger "object" called the "living room" is itself somehow changed after we move around all the components that make it up (but, again, noticing that only certain changes give us this feeling: a living room that was a little less dusty might not give us this feel that "the room was fundamentally not the same" to the one that existed pre-dusting—although, I suppose it could: there's no doubt a nice cleaning day can do wonders for a room, to be sure, but perhaps not for our "sense" of the room).

What all of the reading I have been doing with William—in particular the reading that has had us working through Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*—is that Deleuze's early text might give me a language with which to talk about—what, again? no, not living rooms, but the experience of "seeing new things in an old text one has read long before"—why it is that one can come to a text and discover all kinds of new things about that are neither in the text (the text hasn't changed) nor in the subject perceiving said text (again, assuming that I'm not a fundamentally different reader at twenty than I am a forty). What really got my gears turning here was a fixation/fascination William brought to the office one day: an idea that shows up in *Difference and Repetition* that is itself notoriously knotty (Henry Somers-Hall, in his readers guide to *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, calls it a "somewhat obscure notion,"Henry Somers-

Hall, *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013), p. 91. It seems to be a commonplace within the secondary literature on Deleuze's work to simply fold something like "the virtual object" into Deleuze's larger discussions about "the virtual," as such. Even Keith Ansell Pearson seems to take this track, in his previously cited "The Reality of the Virtual: Bergson and Deleuze," when he writes: "In Bergson and Deleuze, the notion of the virtual works in the context of specific problems and operates on a number of different planes. in this respect it requires a pluralist ontology since one can speak of diverse modalities of the virtual, even though one is, in fact, speaking of a being of the virtual; for example, one can speak of the virtual or partial object, of the virtual image, virtual memory, and so on" (1113). I've found this conflation of the "virtual object" with "virtuality as such" to be quite unsatisfying—and one of things I'm trying to do here is work out precisely why. but I think that's putting it *terribly nicely*). This concept is what Deleuze calls "a virtual object."*Difference and Repetition*, pp. 98-103. I'll spare everyone as many messy details as I can here; I'll especially try to bypass quickly over how this object is designed to speak to certain interventions Deleuze wants to make in the Freudian tradition, along with his very keen desire to take a fundamental Freudian dicta (namely, we human beings have this tendency "to repeat" certain actions, behaviors, thoughts, etc. precisely because some kind of content within our psyche has been "repressed"—we can't bring it out into the open, so our psyche finds alternative pathways for this content to find its way out into the world, so to speak); Deleuze wants to say the prior to repression is actually repetition: "We do not repeat because we repress, we repress because we repeat" is Deleuze's mantra here.Ibid., p. 105. However, I will have to do a tiny bit of foundation work here in order to make Deleuze's creation and use of this "virtual object" really purr like a well-oiled engine—so, forgive me here for all this preliminary philosophizing.

Deleuze's fundamental position is to say that although it is perfectly fine for us to talk of ourselves as being "subjects" or "selves" or "egos" (in Freud's terminology), there is a great deal left out when we try to think about all of the things that happened in order for something like the "ego" or "self" to come to be. Deleuze notes that "[b]iophysical life implies a field of individuation in which differences in intensity are distributed here and there in the form of excitations [Freud's word]" (96). Now, in Kant's system, the way in which our faculty of "sensibility" (so, all the ways that our senses: sight, hearing, etc.) works is pretty simple: this system takes in all kinds of sensations, which, as Deleuze says, are "already formed, and then merely"[relates] these to the *a priori* forms of their representation which are determined as space and time" (98). For Kant, what the subject as such does is it makes judgments—and it synthesizes: it takes input from sensibility and then churns those through certain categories of logic, entailment, Reason, etc. "Synthesis" is an activity solely of the subject and there is no way to say that the faculty of sensibility in any way "synthesizes" a sensory manifold in order to then pass it down the assembly line to the faculty of rationality, logical coherence, etc. Deleuze wants to think

differently, especially about how this "biophysical life" mentioned earlier relates to this "field" (of sensibility)—and he is willing to say that this field is in some sense synthesized prior to the active synthetic activities of the subject. So, Kant says there's no synthesis that's not done by a subject (by a self or an "ego," if you like)—Deleuze disagrees, saying that the field of differences is synthesized, but it's not synthesized by an active subject, since (at the spot in the genesis of the self Deleuze is interested in), there is no "self" or "subject" yet to do the synthesizing in the first place—he thus invents what many might consider to be a silly oxymoron (at least from the Kantian system): he says that we subjects are the result of all kinds of "passive syntheses." Deleuze's main example here is the formation of an eye: "An animal forms an eye for itself by causing scattered and diffuse luminous excitations to be reproduced on a privileged surface of its body. The eye binds light, it is itself bound light" (96). Now, again, in Deleuze's picture here: there's no self, no subject, that is doing the binding and synthesizing, thus his use of the word *passive* in "passive synthesis."

Deleuze's next step is to show how something like the active and synthesizing self is itself built upon all of these passive syntheses—and it cannot be the case that once the "active self" arises all the passive synthesizing just drops out or goes away: these passive syntheses persist all throughout us as active subjects, active beings. In order to illustrate this further, Deleuze puts forward the example of a child learning how to walk—it's also the moment where we get the first mention of this strange "virtual object," thus I need to cite this long passage in its entirety:

> A child who begins to walk does not only bind excitations in a passive synthesis, even supposing that these were endogenous excitations born of its own movements. No one has ever walked endogenously. On the one hand, the child goes beyond the bound excitations towards the supposition or the intentionality of an object, such as the mother, as the goal of an effort, the end to be actively reached "in reality" and in relation to which success and failure may be measured. But on the other hand and at the same time, the child constructs for itself another object, a quite different kind of object which is a virtual object or centre and which then governs and compensates for the progresses and failures of its real activity: it puts several fingers in its mouth, wraps the other arm around this virtual centre, and appraises the whole situation from the point of view of this virtual mother. The fact that the child's glance may be directed at the real mother and that the virtual object may be the goal of an apparent activity (for example, sucking) may inspire an erroneous judgement on the part of the observer. Sucking occurs only in order to provide a virtual object to contemplate in the context of extending the passive synthesis; conversely, the real mother is contemplated only in order to provide a goal for the activity, and a criterion by which to evaluate the activity, in the context of an active synthesis. There is no need to speak of an egocentrism on the part of the child. The

> child who begins to handle a book by imitation, without being able to read, invariably holds it back to front. It is as though the book were being held out to the other, the real end of the activity, even though the child seizing the book back to front is the virtual centre of its passion, of its own extended contemplation. (99)

As one could no doubt see just from this passage along, things are dense here, exorbitantly so. At first glance, it might look as if what Deleuze is talking about here is some kind of genesis of something that we might all take for granted all too often. How does one take some object, X, as a kind of "substitute object" for some other object, Y? What exactly happens when the child "takes its own thumb" as if it were (or just "for") the mother's breast? (And what makes it such that the child can derive some degree of pleasure or enjoyment—or just have it be "soothing" somehow—from its own thumb?) The ramifications of something as simple as this "substitution" move is not to be taken likely: would we have anything like the beings we are, would we have anything like "culture" or whatever if one didn't have this facility to "substitute" one thing for another? One could say that the simplest way to describe what language is is as a system that substitutes one thing for another: the word substitutes for a thing in its absence. What might not follow from such a simple procedure—this procedure that allows one to "take X as Y" or to "take X in the place of Y"? Now, this can't quite be what Deleuze is after, precisely because—again, at this level of the genesis—the child has no system of representation yet that would allow one to draw some kind of equivalence such that "the thumb" can be taken as a substitute or as a "representative" of the object that is called "the breast." Such a system might be available at the level of the active, synthetic, subject of Kant's system, but not at this level with the child first learning how to walk or the very young child that sucks its thumb.

It is fascinating to think here about what the "virtual object" is doing here as well. Why does the child need to "[construct] for itself another object, a quite different kind of object which is a virtual object or centre and which then governs and compensates for the progresses and failures of its real activity"? And why is so significant that, as Deleuze asserts, "[w]hat is important, however, is that neither one of these two centres [the real mother out in the world and the virtual object fashioned by the child] is the ego"? (100) Some things seem clear to me (although *none of it* might be at all clear to other readers!): the concern here might be even further brought out into the light by wondering how and why the child can derive *pleasure* from sucking its thumb. Deleuze's argument that the real problem here is one that Freud himself doesn't raise in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (and thus can't really account for), namely, "how pleasure ceases to be a process in order to become a principle, how it ceases to be a local process in order to assume the value of an empirical principle, which tends to organize biophysical life …" (96). Now, Deleuze's true quarry here is not ours—he wants to argue that if there is such a thing as a "principle" of some kind in the psyche (like Freud's "pleasure *principle*"), then this "principle" already presupposes a whole slew of "repetitions" where all of these initial "excitations-as-differences"

got "contracted" into something that could then be "bound" by the psychic system. In between the pleasure derived from the thumb and the "real mother" out there in the world is a third thing, this strange "virtual object" that can (eventually, perhaps) serve as some kind of intermediary in between the thumb and the mother pops out. The "pleasure" in Deleuze's picture here would seem to have nothing to do with the thumb or the mother, but, instead, it would have everything to do with the child's passive syntheses' facility with this "virtual object" that is split off from "real" objects in the world (while also remaining quite difficult to "locate" in any strict sense).

Deleuze has a little bit more to say about how this virtual object relates to "real objects":

> We see both that the virtuals are deducted from the series of reals and that they are incorporated in the series of reals. This derivation implies, first, an isolation or suspension which freezes the real in order to extract a pose, an aspect, or a part. This isolation, however, is qualitative: it does not consist simply in subtracting a part of the real object, since the subtracted part acquires a new nature in functioning as a virtual object. The virtual object is a *partial* object—not simply because it lacks a part which remains in the real, but in itself and for itself because it is cleaved or double into two virtual parts, one of which is always missing from the other. … It is—not only by its origin but by its own nature—a fragment, a shred or a remainder. It lacks its own identity. (100-01)

The real payoff of all of this "virtual object" talk comes through the way in which Deleuze utilizes it to talk about relationshipsOgf o to our own pasts. He has a quite simple problem here that he wants to tackle: how can two experiences—radically separated in time—be connected up in such a way that the past event can affect, in some way, the present moment. How exactly do two distinct temporal moments actually get linked up (or associated) with one another at all?

> The difficulties in conceptualising repetition have often been emphasized. Consider the two presents, the two scenes or the two events (infantile and adult) in their reality, separated by time; how can the former present act at a distance upon the present one? How can it provide a model for it, when all its effectiveness is retrospectively received from the later present? (104)

Somers-Hall glosses this thusly:

> When we looked at the syntheses of time [this concern occurs earlier in the same chapter of *D&R* as all the virtual object discussion does], the problem with understanding association as operating purely in terms of actual memory was that everything was like everything else in some way. That meant that it was impossible to explain why a particular experience conjured up this memory. For Deleuze, what

> ties together two series of events is that the same virtual object is at play (incorporated) in both series. This explains why a past event can still influence the present, not because of the actual events themselves, but because of the virtual object incorporated into them. This also explains why it is the case that we can see, for instance, in someone's character, a repetition of the same relationships, or the same actions, in different situations. The subject does not reason by analogy on the basis of their past responses, but is reacting to the same event incorporated into a different state of affairs.
>
> In this sense, we can say that what is repeated is something that has never actually been present, but rather that the 'same' virtual object is present in disguise in the various states of affairs that make up the repetition There is no first term to the series itself, however, as repetition takes place in response to the drives rather than the ego and its object.Somers-Hall, pp. 93-4.

The key idea we want to focus on here is this idea that there are two series with "the same virtual object … at play (incorporated) in both series." One event gets linked up with the present moment not through any listing of similarities between the two experiences (this would seem to be what Somers-Hall means when he says that one "does not reason by analogy," one does not list out shared things across the two different series), but through a similar "virtual object" that is "incorporated" in the series while still remaining somewhat outside of the pair of series. So what would all this philosophical jargon and baggage look like with our rearranged room analogy we started with above? I like this idea that what really gives us the feeling that the room is not quite the same after all the rearranging is the fact that the two series share the same virtual object. Even in this analogy, the "virtual object" is as it should be: somewhat spectral, somewhat ghostly: it has effects on all the qualities of the room, but it is not easily locatable within the room itself. This odd object orients the rooms, but is not itself orientable from within simplistic listing of qualities/quantities of the room itself. It has "no place" within the room itself, but still "acts as a distance" on the two different series, on the two different rooms. It would also seem like this picture would allow one to maintain Deleuze's insistence on how the virtual object seems always correlated with (or connectable to) the "passive syntheses" of the self: I do not necessarily reason my way (through analogy, following Somers-Hall's language again) to this strange feeling that the room is somewhat different—it seems to be something that I undergo … thus giving us this feeling of passivity we would like to keep. All of this would seem to be consistent, too, with giving us a picture where the real change from the old room to the rearranged one is not easily locatable within me (the subject who encounters the rooms) nor is it easily locatable within any of the objects within the room itself. This virtual object would somehow be "in between" the subject and the object. The virtual object does not necessarily "belong to me"—it seems to simple to say that the virtual object is "mine"—; it might be "mine," but only to the extent that we are willing to say in belongs to all of the "passive

syntheses" that have constituted me.

So now seems like the point in time where we want to try to think about what all of this means for my two different readings of Hemingway. For some reason that I wish I could more fully elaborate, explicate, and elucidate, I find all this Deleuzian "virtual object" talk incredibly alluring when thinking through my two different readings of Hemingway. As already noted, nothing in the object—nothing in the Hemingway texts—have changed … and yet my "sense" of them has done something such that I can step into the room and feel a difference—even though nothing in the room itself has changed too drastically. It is at this point that one could legitimately ask how solid our room analogy is at the end of the day. Wouldn't we have to describe/account for a slightly different scenario—namely, one where all of the furniture stays in the exact same spot but where we still have a different "sense" of the room? Wouldn't that have been the proper setup that would make clearer why one might want or need to go to Deleuze's "virtual object" in the first place? Ideally, it seems simple enough—after all the legwork—to say that the placing of different pieces of furniture in different slots can change the "sense" of the room, can create a shift in the "virtual object" that is the room. It would be nice if we could also get the virtual object to play a role, too, in the situation where nothing gets moved or changed or slotted elsewhere and yet we still have the feeling that the room is different despite nothing changing. It's possible that even in this case, the "virtual object" still functions without making it so that we cannot easily say that everything about this scenario is due to me as a subject. As we've noted already, the text of Hemingway hasn't ostensibly changed; I have perhaps changed a little (but not much). Has the virtual object that is shared by the two series (me reading Hemingway at 20 and then again decades later) undergone a change of some kind—and where might see the traces of such a change, where might such traces be registered and located?

Moreover, at one point do we want to add an element, a component, here that would seem play a perhaps quite crucial role, namely, the fact that I engaged in this whole exercise *with William* present and by my side? Can another person serve as a kind of "virtual object" for a subject? Deleuze's account of this bizarre object seems to skirt this line very, very closely without ruling such a thing out entirely. He does mention—in his narrative of the child—that the "real mother" is (can be) present along with child and he does not do much more than warn us about too quickly collapsing the "real mother" into the "virtual object" and losing the latter altogether. To rehearse it once more:

> The fact that the child's glance may be directed at the real mother and that the virtual object may be the goal of an apparent activity (for example, sucking) may inspire an erroneous judgement on the part of the observer. Sucking occurs only in order to provide a virtual object to contemplate in the context of extending the passive synthesis; conversely, the real mother is contemplated only in order to provide a goal for the activity, and a criterion by which to evaluate

> the activity, in the context of an active synthesis. (99)

In between the thumb and the mother would be the virtual object; in between me and Hemingway's texts would be … William? But would William not occupy that position at all? Would it perhaps be better to say that the Hemingway texts themselves slid into the slot of the "virtual object"? If we ourselves added William as a third term here (two is never enough to do anything with, apparently—one always need at least a third …), it would give me some way to talk about how I potentially used his reading as providing me with "a goal for the activity," as Deleuze puts it. Thus, the addition of a third, another reader, in this case, could function as this "virtual object." Still, even in this reading, it would be important and necessary to note (tweaking things slightly) that William himself, the flesh-and-blood "real" William would not so be this virtual object, but some kind of virtual thing would have been "incorporated" in his presence here (one would need to make this argument because, if Deleuze and Somers-Hall are right to say that the virtual object needs to be shared by two different series, William himself couldn't quite fit this picture given that he wasn't there for me twenty years ago). Still, something like this virtual object could have ended up being something that, in some sense, "embodied" … at least for me.

Now I can easily imagine some rather frustrated—or perhaps just bored—responses to what all probably sounds like useless philosophizing and the worst kind of academic/scholarly navel-gazing. Wouldn't it have been far more simpler to have just said that I'm the one lending "the room"—the texts of Hemingway—some kind of sense and when this sense changes (but, again, one could wonder: how exactly does this sense change and what if I am not the active agent of this change, but, perhaps, this change "happens to me"), the changes happens solely on the side of the subject, on the side of "me" who interacts with the room …? "Why not just say," I can imagine my interlocutor replying,"—as you weren't willing to do at the start of this whole tangent—that the subject has changed and thus the way this new subject reacts to and relates with the 'new room' (even though nothing has changed) simply means that the different sense is fashioned not by the object at all, but solely by the subject?" I suppose I am willing to concede this as at least part of the best explanation, but something like the "virtual object" seems necessary to me in order to be able to talk about how the sense of a thing can change even though the thing itself hasn't changed at all.

There is a passage in the fourth plateau of Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* where they seem to be engaging all of this from a slightly different angle and perspective. They are interested in a speaker's use of the exact same language in different contexts and in different temporal moments over the course of a day:

> In the course of a single day, an individual repeatedly passes from language to language. He successively speaks as "father to son" and as a boss; to his lover, he speaks an infantilized language; while

> sleeping he is plunged into an oniric [*sic*] discourse, then abruptly returns to a professional language when the telephone rings. It will be objected that these variations are extrinsic, that it is still the same language. But that is to prejudge the question. First, it is not certain that the phonology is the same, nor the syntax, nor the semantics. Second, the whole question is whether this supposedly identical language is defined by invariants or, on the contrary, by the line of continuous variation running through it. Some linguists have suggested that linguistic change occurs less by systemic rupture than by a gradual modification of frequency, by a coexistence and continuity of different usages. Take as an example the statement, "I swear!" It is a different statement depending on whether it is said by a child to his or her father, by a man in love to his loved one, or by a witness before the court. Once again, there is no reason to say that the variables are merely situational, and that the statement remains constant in principle. Not only are there as many statements as there are effectuations, but all of the statements are present in the effectuation of one among them, so that the line of variation is virtual, in other words, real without being actual, and consequently continuous regardless of the leaps the statement makes.*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 94.

Would this be what we are after here? That the words in the various versions of the sentence, "I swear!" are exactly the same—but their sense is constantly varying as it moves from that of the father speaking to the son to that of the father speaking to his beloved? What would really be of interest, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, is not that the words stay constant and remain the same (thus one shouldn't focus too much on the "invariants" across the three different situations), but that there is a "line of continuous variation" running through all the constants and things that stay "the same." Is this "line"—which Deleuze and Guattari describe explicitly using the word "virtual"—that is virtual, "real without being actual," not a perfect (later—and slightly tweaked, admittedly) description of this odd object known as the "virtual object" in *Difference and Repetition*? I think this is very possible—and this odd "sense" of the "I swear!" statement as the line of continuous variation coursing through it constantly alters, shifts, mutates, and metamorphoses everything in those two words (it's slightly mad—at least according to "good and common sense"—what they say here: that "it is not certain that the phonology is the same, nor the syntax, nor the semantics") a good way to explain why it was that William could open-up all of these same Hemingway texts for me after years of being able to see nothing changed, nothing new, in them, prior to William coming my way? All the details are not fully fleshed-out here, but it's getting me closer to where I want to be.

1.2.6 Future Work with William

In order to hopefully show that everything in the last section doesn't end up just being useless "navel-gazing," I would just like to mention that William and I have decided to see if we can't get all of this work here to bear some fruit. We would like to try our hand at writing together about one of Hemingway's short stores—our first venture will be focused-in on "Hills Like White Elephants."William is going to do this, but, as mentioned earlier in Section 1.2.5, he and I are going to take a stab at writing together about Hemingway as well. As we know, it's not a bad idea to test one's learning by seeing if someone can put into action, into effect (I know, shocker!—what a terribly banal thing for a teacher to say) and I would like to apply that little dicta to myself and my newfound enjoyment of engaging with Hemingway's works. We have spent an entire week in March doing pretty much nothing but talk through this very short "short story" and have both have found a quite insane quantity of richness within it. Even better, William has already scoured the secondary literature and we have found precious few scholars focusing in on what we would like to highlight. Even better than that, our areas of focus are in very stark contrast to some of the standard and canonical readings of this text. As I compose this now, we've already started drafting and I am incredibly excited to what comes out of all of this work.

1.2.7 Concluding Remarks on William's Trajectory

I wanted to begin this section with a series of rhetorical questions, something like the following:

> How exactly is one to talk about a student who has had the most profound and significant impact on one as a teacher? How should one best discuss someone who is by far one of the greatest students one has ever had in an entire twenty-year long teaching career? How might one try to articulate how exemplary, unique, and singular such a student is at the end of the day? How ought one discuss the enormously important intellectual rapport they have developed with this student? How does one talk about a student that one feels is probably one of the greatest students they will ever have, no matter how many students they might encounter in the future? Nietzsche says somewhere that it is a poor student who never surpasses her teacher. And how indeed to talk about a student who will, without a doubt, achieve this Nietzschean recommendation?

These would, I am certain, strike my readers here as, in fact, perfectly rhetorical. Haven't I done exactly this? How to talk about a student William? Well, the answer's already here before any and every reader of these thoughts. Still, I want to re-spin the record, assuming my readers might still be willing to indulge me this, and say something a little new, say something a little different than I did above.

I know in the section devoted to MaKenzie's work, I cited those wonderful lines from Phillips about "unofficial interests." I want to return to that here. I have also already mentioned how William's cover letter of interest for pursuing graduate-level work talks a great deal of the work that he and I have done together (I myself have already talked about this at length too now). I would just like to note that all of that work falls strictly within the realm of Phillips' "unofficial interests."" William graduated from USF this past December with a degree in mathematics. All of the conversations that William and I have had over the past two years about everything had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with his "official" focus on mathematics. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that William just slogged through his mathematics work and courses, just trying to "get by" with interests handed to him by others. That said, it's been clear to me—already from the very first day that we met—that the real spark of joy and enjoyment in William came not in the realm of mathematics, but in the field of philosophy. If one glances at his transcripts, they'll see very few courses that fall under my area of expertise as a member of the English Department (which, obviously, makes perfect sense for a mathematics major at a liberal arts university that, somehow, does not offer a BA in philosophy); this is just another way to say that William possesses a profound inquisitiveness and intellectual curiosity that I have never seen in any other student in my entire twenty-year career as a professor, teacher, and educator (excluding, just for the moment, MaKenzie, of course). Such a thing is so rare that it is difficult to find the words best suited to describe how profoundly open to philosophy, open to thinking, in general, William is at the end of the day—and I hope this reflection has given readers just a tiny little taste of this truth.

I, as William's mentor (it's possible this isn't quite the right word, maybe something simpler like "intellectual conversation partner" is more accurate—yet, I second-guess myself even here as I have not hesitated in this reflection to use that moniker—and MaKenzie's argument that this word needs to be the one we used precisely because of its already mentioned "lack of an expiration date" quality to it has really convinced me fully), rubbed off on him quite a bit—maybe perhaps too much. I myself—as a student and even still now as a professor—find myself interested in everything, always wanting to learn whatever I can about everything I can. William's disposition and personality strikes me as eerily comparable to my own. So much of the thinking, reading, and conversing together that William and I have done has been laser-focused in on his purely "unofficial interests"—and this seems to me to be the greatest recommendation that one could give in terms of his potential: he's chased an enormous quantity of knowledge of the philosophical tradition—with especial focus, as his cover letter and my reflection here both highlight, on the Continental tradition post-Kant. It is possible to unearth from Phillips' work on Freud what a good teacher looks like: she is someone who gets a sense of what it is that drives a student, what it is they enjoy and love doing, and then they teach to that—each and every time hoping to increase the intensity of that enjoyment and love. It is even better—"perfectly ideal," one might say—when a teacher can say to a student,

as Deleuze was so fond of noting, that increasing this intensity is something that the student and teacher must do together. As Deleuze puts it, in trying to describe how one might "teach someone to swim":

> The movement of the swimmer does not resemble that of the wave, in particular, the movements of the swimming instructor which we reproduce on the sand bear no relation to the movements of the wave, which we learn to deal with only by grasping the former in practice as signs. That is why it is so difficult to say how someone learns: there is an innate or acquired practical familiarity with signs, which means that there is something amorous—but also something fatal—about all education. We learn nothing from those who say: "Do as I do". Our only teachers are those who tell us to "do with me", and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce.*Difference and Repetition*, p. 23. I cite this passage too many times to count in my "Reflection," *op. cit.*, on MaKenzie's work.

I would like to say how invigorating this pedagogical (and philosophical) focus here is; how right is Deleuze to say that one learns best not when the teacher says, "Do exactly like me," but, instead, "Do with me"? I think he is 100% correct and it is this issue of the "with" that has been so central when I think back on my time with William.Yet again, I turn to William here, who was very well-aware of the importance of this "with"—here he is describing our experiences with Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "I understand, as I did immediately when reading the play, the aversion. It is a horrific, terrible, absolutely beautiful and ingenious play that should be read by every living soul. Once is quite enough. I mention that moment in particular because it confirmed, at least for me (Spicer will say he held this confirmation long before) that I was competent, or at least capable, in this area. I had walked with my best friend over the scorched soil of Lear, and had survived the tread. Not easily, certainly, not even comfortably, but I had made the journey with him, arm in arm all the way" (9). Again, the presence of this "with" is so legible and clear here: "... but I made the journey with him, arm in arm al the way." No doubt it is even more true to draw the conclusion from this that Deleuze does: "there is something amorous … about all education." Quite true. William's unofficial interests led him to me, led him to someone that tried to incarnate this Deleuzian idea that one learns best when one does something with another.Obviously, and this probably goes without saying, this idea could serve as the entire mantra of all the work with MaKenzie, too. I would like to say—trying to maintain as much humility as I possibly can here, as it is my usual *modus operandi*, as I've already said countless times before—that William's intellectual growth over a very short period of time has been nothing short of staggering, breath-taking. He will say that it is all due to me, but that is not quite right: this growth did not happen due to either one of us alone, it happened in that space of "the between," it happened in between the two of us as a pair of thinkers.

As mentioned above numerous times, exceptional and exemplary students like William are all the same, so the mantra goes—but one still needs to find the unique way into their thinking, into their reading and exegesis, into their worlds. Many incredibly brilliant students want you to push them, to push them in every way—to push their thinking, to push their arguments, to push their reading and writing. Others do not necessarily want a challenge, per se; they are after something slightly different. It seems to me (and I pray it seems this way to my readers now, too) that what William wanted was a partner, a mentor that could help him find new ways to handle the philosophical problems that intrigued, obsessed, and so often frustrated him ("frustration" should by no means be read in a negative way hereOne could very easily note here a fundamental Lacanian insight about the relationship between "knowledge" and what one might call "enjoyment" (Lacan's word is *jouissance*). As Lacan lays this out vis-à-vis Aristotle, it is only when there is some kind of failure in our *jouissance* that we then seek out and fashion knowledge (see pp. 54-55 of Lacan's *Seminar XX*). As Bruce Fink glosses this key intuition: "In his discussion of Aristotle, Lacan says that knowledge finds its motor force in a deficiency of jouissance … We find the pleasures available to us in life inadequate, and it is owing to that inadequacy that we expound systems of knowledge—perhaps, first and foremost, to explain why our pleasure is inadequate and then to propose how to change things so that it will not be" (*Lacan to the Letter: Reading* Écrits *Closely* [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004, p. 155]). Furthermore, Fink notes that "[k]nowledge is not motivated by some overflowing of life, some 'natural exuberance.' Monkeys may show signs of such exuberance at various moments, but they do not create logics, mathematical systems, philosophies, or psychologies. Articulated knowledge (that is, *savoir*), according to Lacan, is motivated by some failure of pleasure, some insufficiency of pleasure: in a word, dissatisfaction." Was William's own "frustration" (or "dissatisfaction" in Fink's terminology) not a textbook example of the way in which his own knowledge (so much knowledge!) of the philosophical tradition was spawned out of his being profoundly dissatisfied? (I will have more to say about this matter of *jouissance* below, in Section 5.2.)). He wanted someone to give him a toolbox to help him unlock things, texts, ideas, arguments. He will say I did that for him and so, so much more. It is often difficult for us teachers to accept how profoundly impactful we can be on our students and the trajectories of their lives (or maybe it is just difficult for me in particular)—no doubt this becomes even more legible and palpable when we think about our most gifted students. I know he will describe me as doing this for him—impacting him in ways that are impossible to fully enumerate and account for. As I say, I am not sure it's rocket science: just find the student's path of desire, how that desire works and wants to function, and then speak to that. Simple enough. Partners, true (thinking) partners along every single step of the journey—with a promise to do that for them long, long into the future. William, in particular, sought me out, sought me out with the hopes that I could be someone to help him open things, ideas, etc. up. I would like to say that I was successful in giving him what he wanted, what he needed, what he deserved. He can open the densest philosophical texts, ideas, and arguments. He can do

it all on his own now, even if he would say that he's still really grateful that he will always have me around to help him think through things when he hits a snag. I do not really feel that he needs this anymore from me (again, invoking the Nietzsche aphorism one last time, only the failed student never frees herself from the thought of the teacher)—he needs no more help from me on that front now, that's for sure. Still, it is certainly true that it is always good to have (conversational) partners in thinking.

What will William go on to do with this philosophical foundation that he now possesses? Will he wander over into something like the philosophy of mathematics? Or perhaps into something in the arena of the philosophy of language? Or into metaphysics and ontology? Or into the realm of aesthetics? I am not sure, although I do know that it will be something incredibly special and unique. Now, it is true, I do have "a stake" of sorts in William and his future—but not because he will just end up being another feather in my cap—far from it! I have told him more times than I can count—and no doubt the truthfulness of this was aided by the fact that he and I were always playing within this "in between" space of his "unofficial interests"—that I have a stake in him and his growth because I have absolutely nothing that I want *from him*; I do, on the contrary, have all kinds of things that I want *for him*, in some deep and strong sense: I want him to be strong, autonomous, free, sharp, driven, confident in his intellectual abilities and capacities (which are, let me be honest, nothing short of incredibly impressive). I want for him to be intense in his intellectual engagements and sparring matches and in everything else that he will go on to do in his life and his future. Do I want him to ultimately look like me? Absolutely not. I want him to take what we have done here—again, totally "unofficially"—and make something absolutely new and strong and compelling and powerful. Countless times I have said to him: "Please, please venture forth and make something new of all this stuff we've been reading and talking about. Would I be fine with you going out and making something of this crazy soup we're cooking here that ends up looking like what I would dislike? Absolutely … but don't do that," I would always joke. I do have an investment in him, there's no doubt about that and I do want him to feel as confident about himself as I am. Students like William just do not come around very often. I think that he is going to be a real force in the future—and if I can figure out how to have contributed to that in even the tiniest of ways, then there's absolutely nothing else that any teacher could ever want. Back to Table of Contents

1.3 Concluding Remarks on Teaching as a Whole

Looking back on all I have written for this section, I can imagine some rejoinders: how insane, how mad, to take five years' worth of teaching and speak about two, *only two*, students. It's absurd; it's that simple—and everything in this reflection about these two students can't be anything but pure exaggeration. If I am being totally honest, I am quite sympathetic to such a response. The sheer number of words I've devoted to them (and the infinite number of thoughts I

have had about them both all throughout their academic journeys here at USF) does suggest a profound intellectual closeness—perhaps a frightening proximity, even, that is simply just not supposed to happen in the academy; isn't all of this writing here just indicative of an all-too-excessive and unruly passion for a teacher's two most favorite students? Isn't this kind of profound passion and love for one's students something that really—again, let's be totally honest here—has no place in our industry when we think of ourselves as "professionals"?

I cannot help but return to a work that I cited as an epigraph in my "Reflection" on MaKenzie's project from bell hooks.*Op. cit.*, p. 1. hooks writes about this kind of "passion" that is not to be shown:

> When eros is present in the classroom setting, then love is bound to flourish. Well-learned distinctions between public and private make us believe that love has no place in the classroom. Even though many viewers would applaud a movie like *The Dead Poets Society*, possibly identifying with the passion of the professor and his students, rarely is such passion institutionally affirmed. Professors are expected to publish, but no one really expects or demands of us that we really care about teaching in uniquely passionate and different ways. Teachers who love students and are loved by them are still "suspect" in the academy. Some of the suspicion is that the presence of feelings, of passions, may not allow for objective consideration of each student's merit. But this very notion is based on the false assumption that education is neutral, that there is some "even" emotional ground we stand on that enables us to treat everyone equally, dispassionately. In reality, special bonds between professors and students have always existed, but traditionally they have been exclusive rather than inclusive. To allow one's feeling of care and will to nurture particular individuals in the classroom—to expand and embrace everyone—goes against the notion of privatized passion.bells hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 198.

I think that, in so many ways, the reigning ideology of teachers-as-professionals still finds "something suspect" about "[t]eachers who love students and are loved by them." I am a little bit loathe to write what I am about to here, but I feel some strong sense of urgency and need to do so. I have painted a picture above of myself as constantly running support for my two most loved students; constantly keeping them and their goals and their desires and dreams always at the forefront of my mind over the past two years. That is true. But I do need to confess that this is only half of the equation, perhaps. Despite the fact that MaKenzie may always edge out William slightly in terms of being my most favorite and most loved student, there is no doubt that these two are brilliant—absolutely phenomenal—intellectuals, thinkers, readers, and writers.It is only at this very moment, in just this moment, that I wonder: are MaKenzie and William repetitions of one another, or do they just merely "resemble" one an-

other? I cannot even begin to fathom how I have typed out as many words about them as I have to create this reflection here and this connection is only now hitting me so profoundly. I have already said how no two students are ever really the same—yes, there are all kinds of ways in which they "resemble" one another, but, as Deleuze notes so correctly, it is only in the realm of repetition (and not in the realm of resemblance) that something like the singularity of the other can be glimpsed. Singularities *do not resemble one another*, but they do "repeat each other" in a way that takes nothing away from that very singularity and uniqueness (the *haecceity*, to borrow Scotus' term, is maintained only within the realm of repetition, not within the realm of resemblances). MaKenzie will have no peer, as I've said, and I have the feeling that no student will ever come quite as close to William in terms of ingenuity, sheer quantitative intellectual growth, and significant philosophical sensitivity and prowess. But does this really explain—if such a thing can even be explained, one should say—by these two students' abilities, capacities, and skills? On a good day, I say yes—but I still have the nagging feeling that the other major part of what was going on here was something else quite a bit different.

These two students wanted and needed something from me that I actually had to give them. MaKenzie has said more times than I can even mention that the greatest thing about our crossing paths was not that I served as a wonderful teacher, advisor, and mentor to her; no, the greatest thing was that I was a really great *friend* to her, became one of the best friends she'd ever had (and I hope that there will never be a day when this isn't true—nor will there ever be a day when thinking about this comment of hers doesn't bring tears to my eyes). Did the two of them want friendship and intellectual companionship from me? Yes, I think so. It is true, too, that they wanted my intellectual expertise—they wanted the knowledge that I have spent my entire adult life chasing, corralling, and attaining. It might be that I am the quintessential "odd one out," but, prior to meeting MaKenzie, I had never, ever had a student at all interested in this side of me. Before William, I had never had a student who asked me, for example, what I worked on as a scholar; I have never, ever had a student that actually wanted all of this academic knowledge I have accrued over my career. I would like to say that I have something of a track record of being a good teacher; but all this knowledge (of philosophy, of literature, of psychoanalysis, of Shakespeare, of Heidegger and Lacan and Derrida and Foucault and everyone else)—no one has ever really seemed to have wanted such things from me. I am aware, too, that one might say that this is all completely and totally par for the course for a university like USF, where the focus is so heavily placed on teaching, not on the other areas. I know that our tenure policies tell us that these areas of scholarship (in particular) and service are not to be short-changed; but I have never seen a student also shared that sentiment and perspective. I have never met a student for whom that registered at all on their radar.

It is possible that this is all nothing more than a confession of a profound lack and deficiency on my part. Have I chased opportunities to share my own scholarly work with students? Absolutely. Have I hoarded my real scholarly expertise,

kept it hidden and locked away from students? Never. But when William told me very early on in our relationship that he sought me out because he saw on my profile on the USF website that I worked in Post-Kantian philosophy, he was the very first student in my entire teaching career that has ever said such a thing to me before. I do not really say all of this to complain and gripe—it doesn't particularly bother me at all that students don't really care about all of the knowledge I've gathered in my career. Again, I understand, most students do—I think—care about us in our roles as teachers, but I've never found them to be all that concerned with us as scholars. But MaKenzie and William were different: they wanted that knowledge, craved it incessantly, demanded it constantly with an enthusiastic hunger that was absolutely unprecedented for me—and this hunger was so sublimely beautiful, words fail me trying to describe it fully. (And, I should say that even months after graduation, they still do: William comes multiple times a week to continue talking philosophy and literature as he waits to hear back from graduate schools; MaKenzie, as well, sometimes comes by after work in the afternoons and uses her Fridays—her off-day each week—to spend all day in the office working with me on our next essay project together. Indeed, she recently said that she was looking forward to life after graduation because it would "give us a lot more time to continue writing together." Music to a teacher's ear, that's for sure!)

I think it is probably the case that the fact that MaKenzie and I ever met was just blind luck—pure chance. Still, I am so fortunate and grateful that she actually ended up coming my way. I would say that she is one of those students who come around only once in a lifetime, but that would not quite capture it—even if I lived a million lifetimes, I am not quite certain I would have ever come across someone even remotely like her. Students like her just never come around. As I think back on and remember all the work I have done for and with MaKenzie, it brings such a smile to my face to know that, if I am lucky, I will have figured out some way to have contributed in just the tiniest way to all the wonderful things that she will ultimately go on to do in her future. I will be so happy to be able to reflect back on that past from some day "far north of the future," as the German poet Paul Celan put it in his *Atemwende* ("Breathturn"),Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felsteiner (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), p. 227. and be so proud to be able to say that I was "her teacher." Of course, when all is said and done, I am terribly lucky that I didn't really need to live a million lifetimes; in fact, I only really needed one to find someone that I know I will be a friend to and co-author with for life (we'll be "best buddies forever," as she often likes to say), no matter where her future travels take her.

And can my readers even imagine what it was like when William came my way very soon after meeting MaKenzie? Can they imagine my shock and surprise and pure bewilderment when I wondered aloud to myself constantly in those early days, "Two of them? What are the odds?" William has written—and I have already quoted it—about our first meeting, "We said goodbye, and I walked away, in shock of the man I had discovered by sheer luck and chance."

I am not so sure that it was just luck and chance—as I say, he sought me out. Did he know what he was getting when he found me? I'm not sure any of us can ever answer a question (or one similarly posed) like that. My guess is that it's quite possible that he had some inkling, but, again, it probably wasn't crystal clear at the time. Was MaKenzie looking for me in a similar way? I don't think so. Though, again, upon our first meeting I would venture to imagine that it's possible we both immediately knew what we had each found in the other. I was absolutely spoiled when MaKenzie and I found one another; how much more infinitely spoiled when William's initial e-mail showed up in my inbox?

MaKenzie and William are each their own autonomous selves—they are going to chart their own futures (I'll be right by their side every step of the way to help them out in any and every way I possibly can, of course)—but it won't surprise me when I see MaKenzie arguing cases before the US Supreme Court. It won't surprise me when I will read William's works of philosophy. It will be at those moments that I will say—foregoing all of my humility (which both of them say is false modesty on my part and in no way justified when it comes to my mentor- and friendship of the pair of them)—that both she and he were (and are) *my* students.

2. Scholarship

It no doubt goes without saying, but when I think about my scholarship over the years since I was granted tenure, the project with MaKenzie I so exhaustively covered in Section 1 above looms up into the foreground strongly. That said, I have published frequently and often in the interim—my scholarly publication record has thus been simultaneously brisk and sustained. I will plan to canvas only the publications that do not include the most recent one with MaKenzie.

2.1 The Road Taken So Far

Starting in reverse chronological order:

1.) In 2018 I published "*L'extermination de tout symbolisme des cieux*: Reading the Lacanian Letter as Inhuman 'Apparatus' and its Implications for Ecological Thinking"*Op. cit.* in *Lacan and the Nonhuman*, eds. Jonathan Dickstein and Gautam Basu Thakur (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 101-120. and have been pleasantly surprised by often this essay has been cited in the secondary literature on Lacan, psychoanalysis, and environmental philosophizing more generally (well, at least as far as academia.edu is concernedMy review is available on the *Cider Press Review: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry* here.). This article went to press while the Tenure Committee was reviewing my portfolio for tenure, so, technically, I should leave it aside here, but, again, the ways in which this work has been taken up by other scholars in my field pushes me just slightly to include it here.

2.) In 2019 Dean McDermott and I published a co-authored piece together,

"Poeticizing Ecology/Ecologizing Poetry: Reading Emily Bishop's 'Poem' Ecologically."*Op. cit.* A full-text version of this article is available here. The journal issue is dated from 2017 as *The Trumpeter* was a little bit behind in their publication dates, thus the slightly different publication and volume number years. This was my first stab ever at co-authorship and I enjoyed it immensely. It would no doubt be really wonderful if I could spend a bit of time comparing and contrasting the experience I had writing with Dean McDermott and the very different one I had with MaKenzie—I would like to try to do that in a somewhat slapdash way here now. I should say at the outset that I found this whole endeavor to be incredibly rewarding and fulfilling—our argument there is quite strong, it seems to me—but what I found most fascinating about the whole thing was not so much about the "content" or the finished product, instead, I couldn't help but think—again, no surprise here for me—about questions of "form" and "process" and "procedure." I was quite intrigued by the *very* different ways that Dean McDermott and I seem to write. I think, once again, that when someone says they have "written *with* another," there is so much to unpack with regards to this "with" and what that means and how it works, exactly.See this Section 1.1.5 *supra* for more on this "with" that I have already mentioned. Dean McDermott and I did write this article together, but the "with" felt to me to be slightly more attenuated than the way it was with MaKenzie. Beth and I did quite strongly divvy up our sections of that essay in the hopes of having the sections speak most palpably to our respective skillsets: me towards the philosophy and theory, Beth towards the close reading of Emily Bishop's "Poem." With our respective sections completed, most of the work was pretty much all done, all that was needed was the ligaments to link them together in a way that felt seamless and not artificial. I shouldn't make it sound as if we didn't talk about the things that each of us were covering in our sections, but I don't think that we had to do as much "thinking *together*" compared to how much of this MaKenzie and I did. Still, the article is rather strong and I was quite pleased that Dean McDermott and I worked on this together.

3.) "Revolutionary Tenderness: Ecological Philosophy through Continental and Catholic Lenses"*AFCU Journal* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2019): pp. 40-47, was an essay that grew out of a conference I gave at the AFCU Conference when it was hosted by Marian University a number of years ago.The initial title of this talk was "Leading Ecologically: A Franciscan Object-Oriented Ontological (OOO) Call for an Ecology of Tenderness," AFCU Conference, Marian University (Indianapolis, IN), June 9- 11, 2016. This is another piece that really sought to flesh-out all of the research work and study I started a few years ago when I wanted to intervene in some of the ecological/environmental concerns that were becoming increasingly more and more prevalent within the humanities broadly construed. This article allowed me to marshal a lot of old mainstays of my scholarly expertise (Heidegger, in particular) while also getting that old knowledge to articulate with a good deal of the new ecological thinking in general (Morton plays a role here too, I should confess) I had acquired since going up for tenure.

4.) My fourth article, entitled "The AI Computer as Therapist: Using Lacan

to Read AI and (All-Too-Human) Subjectivities in Science Fiction Stories by Bruce Sterling and Naomi Kritzer,"*Fafnir: Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* Vol. 7, Iss. 2 (2019), pp. 49-62. was quite a fun one to write and compose. This grew out of an ENGL200 course on Science Fiction where I had students read Naomi Kritzer's wonderful little story, "Cat Pictures Please."This story is available through *Clarkesworld: Science Fiction & Fantasy Magazine* here. I perhaps had way too much fun working on this article—as I figured out a way to combine a bunch of different interests of mine: science fiction, Bruce Sterling, psychoanalysis and Lacan, and much more. As I say, way too fun writing that one. Not only that, but this piece is one I hope will properly lay a nice foundation for some future work having to do with Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well. (For more on this, see Section 2.3 *infra.*)

5.) My last listed publication here was a review of Virginia Konchan's recent short work of poetry, *Hallelujah Time*.My review is available on the *Cider Press Review: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry* here. This was also another incredibly fun little project to work on. One day Dean McDermott came by to ask if I would be interested in us collaborating again on something. I am not sure if many know, but Dean McDermott is the current Editor-in-Chief there at Cider Press Review. She mentioned to me that a friend of hers, Virginia, had recently published a short book of poetry. The poetry, she said, was heavily inflected with all kinds of allusions to and resonances with "theory" in general; she thus came my way thinking that this might be a wonderful little project for us. I promised to have a read and let her know what I thought of it. I might note here that Dean McDermott seems to know me pretty well; did she know that I would absolute adore the book and become terribly fascinated and intrigued by this wonderful little collection of poems (I don't know the answer to this query—I've yet to ask her)? We had a wonderful conversation about the book—with me ceaselessly trying to multiply and endlessly proliferate all the resonances and echoes, constantly adding to the multiplicity of echoes of theoretical works and ideas that I was finding in Virginia's poems. Dean McDermott, in a moment of really wonderful humility (well, at least, I would like to parse it as humble), suggested that I go ahead and write the review myself while she would handle the editing of the review. (Again, I could imagine all kinds of other scholars who might have been so happy to just pad their CVs with another publication—it's difficult, impossible even, for me to think of Dean McDermott rolling this way, but, once more, this should do nothing to lessen how much humility it takes for a scholar to say, "You go ahead and write it, I'll edit it." This kind of thing is, I've found, exceedingly rare in our field and industry.) I cannot even begin to say how much fun I had writing this review. Even on a first cursory read, the allusions to other poetical (and theoretical texts) within this short book of poems were legion for me. The first poem, "Bel Canto," is deeply indebted both to Nietzsche and also to Ovid's infamous story of "Io";See Book I of his *Metamorphoses* for this story. the second poem, "Joyride," has a clear allusion to Shakespeare's *Richard III*;This poem strongly and directly hearkens back to

that infamous line, “My kingdom for a horse,” from V.iv. the fourth poem gives shoutouts to both St. Paul and the work of George Bataille on “general economy”;Bataille’s clearest treatment of this concept is in his first of three volumes: *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). the ninth poem references *Hamlet*, again, very clearly; the thirteenth poem goes all the way back to Plato; fourteen gives us some Wordsworth. It was difficult—but only the good and healthy kind of “difficulty” is meant here … the kind of difficulty that pushes and stretches one in their thinking; yes, it can be painful, but it’s good to stretch and push ourselves constantly—to figure how to think about possibly corralling all of this multiplicity. I am absolutely certain that no one will be surprised by what I am about to say, but the thing that really helped me figure out how I wanted to think about all of this (and thus write the review) was due to the almost daily presence of MaKenzie in my office. While thinking through this book of poems, I had hit a bit of a wall trying to wrangle things; at the time, MaKenzie and I were just beginning to work through some of Nietzsche’s work very, very slowly and carefully (I’ve already mentioned how significant this thinker ultimately became for her). One day, we were finishing up talking about Nietzsche’s early work, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*,See the edition translated by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980). and were about to transition over to a discussion of his masterpiece, *On the Genealogy of Morality.On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). (This was still “early days” for us in our relationship together; we were still getting to learn more and more about one another’s thinking each and every day.) In the intervening week, MaKenzie had spent a few days wrestling with yet another text by Nietzsche that she grew to love immensely, *Human, All Too Human.*(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986). On this day we got to chatting about the Nietzsche’s infamous use of the “aphorism”—the short little paragraph or few sentences that manages to pack into it an enormous, enormous, enormous multiplicity of sense and meaning. MaKenzie noted how so many of the the titles in *Human* are composed of these wonderful little morsels: “Chemistry of concepts and sensations,” “Intoxicated by the scent of blossoms,” “Art is dangerous for the artist,” “Making Smaller.” Asking her how she thought they worked, she said that the chapter headings—as I put it in my review—“serve as bookends of a sort for what occurs within the meat of the aphorism.” As she has done for me time and time and time again, MaKenzie gave me the little tweak in my thinking that got everything moving. (I was so grateful that Dean McDermott allowed me to keep the footnote in the review where I give all credit to MaKenzie for this fundamental metaphor of the bookend—once more, I take no credit for this; all the credit is due to her.I would often joke with MaKenzie—especially after we came across the CFP for Dr. Ashman’ edited collection and decided we should take a shot at writing something for it—that the whole task of co-authoring the paper with her was so that we could pull her name from out of the footnotes at the bottom of the page in my work and put it right at the top, as a fully-fledged author. Things have conspired to make this ribbing not quite ribbing

anymore at all. I thought the footnote itself hardly skimped on praise for my student, reading, as it does: "… moreover, [the reviewer] thanks her [MaKenzie] for being the impetus for turning to Nietzsche's philosophy as a way to think through and properly describe what Konchan's poems are up to and ultimately what they are doing and effecting." I am not quite sure I could have figured this out without her input—still, it's so much nicer to have worked so hard to, indeed, pull her name up out of the footnote and put it right at the very top.) There's little doubt in my mind the review would have suffered had it not been for MaKenzie's presence as impetus and drive. Looking back on the review, I notice all kinds of philosophers influencing and playing a huge role in this short little review: Deleuze in his solo-work makes an appearance, Deleuze and Guattari show up, Melanie Klein gets a mention, even Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as well."Memoriae Aeternae" clearly has an allusion to Sedgwick, Judith Butler, et. al.: "So what if subjectivity is reducible / to performance, performance / to narrative, narrative to anecdote" (p. 35). I know I don't really need to gush any more about MaKenzie's thinking here in this reflection, but she even had a wonderfully fantastic and beautiful "hot take" on the way the line break is working in that last cited line. Brilliant stuff from her, as always. All of these thinkers are ones whose arguments MaKenzie and I rehearsed over and over again.Again, it's terribly curious to me here in terms of how really, genuinely, sincerely, and authentically MaKenzie has influenced my thinking. My training is, admittedly, in 20th Century French Continental thinking, but the likes of Deleuze and Guattari (just to take the simplest and clearest example) are nowhere in my early scholarship. That early work was focused on the likes of Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida—Deleuze and Guattari were nowhere in that early part of my career. Once again, the task of helping MaKenzie to learn as much as she possibly could about these thinkers pushed me to re-travel paths that I had travelled long before but never quite figured out to "put to work." (I should say here too, not at all as an afterthought, that the work with William really intensified and ratchet-up this focus on Deleuze and Guttari, Deleuze's work in particular—given how central that thinker has been to William's own growth as a thinker and a philosopher.) As I say, I am quite proud of this very short piece and am so happy to see—again, upon another reading—the traces of profound influence that working with MaKenzie produced (and continues to produce) on my own philosophical/theoretical thinking and writing. I am also quite hopeful that Dean McDermott might pass another text my way again so I can take another shot at this genre that is (still) quite new to me—i.e. the genre of the short review.

2.2 Learning How to Code

I am not quite certain under which category this best fits—it could easily find a home in the "Service"; it could just as well go back in the "Teaching" arena—but figure it might be fine to stick it here.Actually, this all sounds to me like "Professional Development," so maybe "Scholarship" is the perfect place to put it. I would like to talk about the part of the past few years that saw me learning

how to code and my initial journeys into the realm of computer programming. I have tried to somewhat extensively chronicle this path on my blog, but would like to talk through it here as well.

I would like to lay out my journey of how I came to fall in love with computational/digital study and why I cannot really imagine my non-programming life before learning about the computer programming world; I also can't quite imagine that pre-computer science world to be one I would ever want to return to, frankly. The story starts a couple of years ago when the acting Provost at the time—Dr. Frank Pascoe—called for those of us working within the humanities to think about potential new programs.The very idea of something like this was probably the brain-child more of Anna than of me. Dr. Pascoe was extremely supportive of an initiative—spearheaded by myself and Dr. Anna Ioanes—to put together a Digital Humanities (hereafter DIGH) degree. As many may know, the field of DH has made wonderful headway into our arena, but, still, it is headway made mostly at the graduate level. Institutions that offer B.A. degrees in the Digital Humanities are still few and far between (although we all no doubt know that the future may be one where such a degree becomes a staple at every institution of higher learning). As I hope many might already know, Anna came to USF with a background in Digital Rhetoric and Composition, Digital Media Studies, and other similar areas; she was thus quite naturally drawn to this project for reasons that had much to do with the "design" side of Digital Humanities (DH). I, myself, am always on the lookout for new things to learn—and so I gravitated to slightly different areas within this field than my colleague. Wanting to diversify between the two of us, I have spent a great deal of time learning the more statistical and computational side of things—focusing on learning to code in Python, working on pet projects utilizing Natural Language Processing, data visualization, sentiment analysis of social media platforms, machine learning (to a tiny degree so far), with brief forays into work currently being done through the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), and much more.

Of course, it is true that this isn't completely and totally foreign to my academic background. I had taken a course in Java an eternity ago when I was an undergraduate student (none of it stuck, unfortunately—well, a little bit of it did stick, but not much) and I took a slew of courses in mathematics also as an undergraduate (my linear algebra knowledge stuck better, for some reason, than the Java did). Speaking more directly to the idea of what the future might look like in terms of digital coding and literacy, I myself became something of a textbook case of this learning in action. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the past couple of years have seen me acquire a large knowledge base of skills and abilities connected to this area: knowledge of Python and SQL and Go and Lua, great familiarity with the usual data formats (XML, JSON, CSV), standard data cleaning functions to work with text-heavy datasets (with frequent use of the pandas library), numerous data visualization techniques utilizing standard Python libraries like matplotlib and plotly, all kinds of various algorithms devoted to Topic Modeling, Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine

Learning (ML) broadly speaking and much, much more. I should also note that all this new learning has included a really healthy and robust use of writing in Markdown—I write everything in that format now and cannot ever imagine going back to the days of Microsoft Word and Google Docs (although, to be sure, I still utilize those platforms when necessary). A knowledge of pandoc, coupled with the wonderful citation manager Zotero has greatly streamlined my workflow for academic writing and publishing. Gone are the days of having to manually change the citation style in order to tailor an essay for ten different journals—now I just write a Python script to automate it all for me—what a huge difference that has made. Just getting a small amount of knowledge such that I know what I'm looking at when I get "under the hood," so to speak, has been monumentally impactful for me.

I also think that I have taken up a rather confident position, a position that argues that just this (admittedly rather) basic knowledge of software and script-writing within the field of the Digital Humanities seems to me to be an absolute requirement for students within the humanities more broadly. We often assume that all of our students are highly literate when it comes to working within a digital ecosystem, but the range of abilities and knowledge is incredibly varied and wide-ranging. Every once in a while I will come across a student who has not yet learned how to center a header in Word, for example—I have never come across students with just enough programming knowledge to greatly speed-up and automate their composition processes. As already noted, I cannot imagine what life would be like without such knowledge, which, again, is quite small—it's nowhere close to what people with Computer Science degrees know, but even just a tiny bit of knowledge is huge. Undoubtedly, I have, in so many ways, just scratched the surface here and I cannot even begin to say how excited I am to continue learning as much about the "Data Science" field as I possibly can. I can see the power and significance of all this—even from that barely-scratched surface and have greatly enjoyed thinking infinitely about all of the consequences and implications it all has for future study of and within the humanities in particular—and I can easily see many of the consequences and ramifications of how this might all be put into practice.

In order to provide some slightly more "concrete" examples of all this learning "put into practice," I'd like to try to do that now. I run, every semester, an extremely well-received Gen Ed course on literature centered around what many call "Weird Fiction" (a genre that includes the likes of M. R. James, Lovecraft, Stephen King, and many more). The course structure and pedagogical ethos is quite simple to describe. We have one main text, a large anthology called *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*Edited by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer (New York: Tom Doherty Associates Book, 2011).—I've carved up the book into chunks, each week students have roughly ten or so stories that they can pick to read. They choose which ones and then are asked to compose write-ups and analyses of their three picks, along with a response to a fellow student's post. (As is par for the course here, student autonomy and freedom is the absolute name of the game). I put no limits on student posts

in terms of word counts. I have been really pleasantly surprised to notice that when I do not explicitly give students limits, they have something of a tendency to write and write and write. (Of course, I haven't really tried the opposite setup—i.e. explicitly giving students a word count limit to hit, but, of course, I would imagine many other faculty do this kind of thing: do students in their courses often write *more* than is explicitly required of them? If they did, I think I would find that to be rather surprising.) Obviously, there is an easy way to measure/visualize this.The code used to generate these plots is available here.

I refined a rather extensive technique of student feedback given each week in response to work they do on our Canvas discussion boards. After learning a bit of Markdown and wanting to be able to work on providing this feedback by first working offline, I set myself a very simple task of learning how to work with Instructure's API (through a wonderful little open source Python module called CanvasApi) so that I could compose all of my weekly responses to students in a simple plain text file (the work of Dennis Tenen on plain text composition [this was also something of an impetus to get working with and within Markdown] was incredibly influential on me) and then fully automate the uploading of said comments along with grades for each assignment through a simple Python script.If readers are curious about what this workflow looks like now, where I create a simple .json file that contains all of the comments and grades for each student, please see my blog post on this here. A huge part of this course is based on this faculty feedback—and being able to not have to worry so much about the technical sides of things obviously frees one (and their time) up for all kinds of other wonderful, far more profoundly significant pedagogical concerns. As Robby Burns mentions, "You go to war with the LMS you have"—obviously, if we ourselves can spend less time going to war with the LMS we have, this is almost always a good thing. And, to be honest, I wonder if the only real way to avoid having to fight the LMS is by having access to and learning about how our digital infrastructure really works. As proponents and advocates of open-source software love to say, being able to get "under the hood," so to speak, of our digital software while having some sense of what one's looking at once one gets the hood open, provides one with infinite possibilities. Prior to putting together this Digital Humanities program, prior to learning how to code and write simple Python scripts, I was so often at war with the LMS; today, I fight the LMS quite far less: now I head for the documentation and solve problems myself with a degree of autonomy that I didn't really even know was possible. Now even much more mundane tasks—for example, like structuring one's Department's Assessment data (making sure one has all the metadata they need in the right spots with all the scripts pulling from one centralized location, etc.) so that annual reports become so much smoother to create—is just icing on the cake. It is nice to be able to write scripts to generate, say, network graphs of my students' discussion posts—who's responding to whom, which author/story got talked about the most often each week—and it is quite awesome to be able to write a script to keep track of all of this data spread out over the entire history of the course—a little data wrangling and munging and I

can track everything from the length of student posts to how many times (over the past four years or so) the vast majority of students wrote incessantly about a Clive Barker story in Week 14 of the semester.

Actually, if readers are curious about what some of these "network" visualizations might look like, I could provide a slight timeline here showing all of the results that I worked on iteratively.Again, on my blog this journey is covered here and here—but I'm collapsing them both together here. When I first started out, wanting to simply keep track of which authors students were reading each week, I took an angle that I know computer programmers would sigh and roll their eyes at (fully justified is this response, I should say). I did it manually. As I responded and graded each post, I kept track of which authors were mentioned. Again, a perfectly fine way to do it, but perhaps not all that sustainable. An initial stab for this came in the form of simple attempts to draw the network graphs in Word:

first_iteration

My second iteration simply switched out the program I used to produce the visualization—instead of Word, I switched over to Gephi—which also made it easy for one to alter the sizes of the nodes (and also the colors of the lines); the size of the node is based on its degree; the larger the node, the more frequently that author (or student) was mentioned in a post:

iteration_2

iteration_3

iteration_4

iteration_5

This got me somewhat closer to where I wanted to ultimately be. Recourse to Gephi was definitely helping out and there were even ways to color code things based on the particular course and semester. Thus, if I wanted to look at, say, five different incarnations of the course, I could easily visualize the connections:

iteration_6

So, the visualization part was getting better, but the gathering of the data (the "data wrangling" part) was still onerous. What were my options if I no longer wanted to manually keep track of which authors students were writing about most often each week (again, this part was largely superfluous—the goal of reading student posts and responding to them was to do just that, not keep track of the most frequently cited authors)? Ideally, it would be nice to have some methods native to the Canvas Instructure LMS to download all of the Discussion Board posts from a particular Canvas course shell. Now, there is a way to do this, but I didn't yet know how to do this, so I ended up going in a different direction. It turns out there are some user-developed scripts that will allow one to grab all of the posts; the best Canvas Userscript for this purpose was (and is still, I believe) available through TamperMonkey here). Once one

runs this script while in the "Discussion Board" assignment area of Canvas, one can get a .csv file that has all kinds of fantastic information and data in it. So, at this point, one now has a list of all student names along with the text of each of their posts. The next step was then to write a function to read through all of the student posts and then extract every time a student mentioned either one of the authors of a piece or the title of that piece itself. This is simple enough in the Python coding language. It would look something like the following, assuming we had a file that had a list of all the author names and story titles that we wanted to search in the .csv file for:

```
# The first line reads in a list of author and story names,
# keyed with a unique ID for each one:
# this serves as the list of terms we're searching
# student posts for ...
from author_names import author_Names

def author_extraction(string):
    authorMentions = {}
    for author in author_Names:
        aliases = author_Names[author]
        for alias in aliases:
            if alias in string:
                authorMentions[author] = alias
    return authorMentions
```

This way I could keep track of the author of the post (this is the number in the "source" column where each student got a unique number belonging to them) and also the names of the stories (these are listed in the "target" column):

source	target	week_read	semester
25	45	1	Fall 2019
1	2	14	Spring 2020
3	5	6	Summer 2022
35	56	3	Fall 2022
26	100	5	Fall 2021

seventh_iteration

So, this would allow me to still produce a nice visualization (this one above utilizes the plotly library within the Python ecosystem)—and it was, at this point, all being done by the script/code, no more keeping track of things manually. This was clearly an improvement over where I started. I began with a somewhat simple desire/problem: I just wanted to make it easier to see which authors in the anthology were the most popular—i.e. which ones students mentioned most frequently, etc. Moreover, were these authors the same ones from semester to semester, year to year? I was thus at a point where answering

questions like these became really simple: just pull the data down from Canvas with the TamperMonkey script, feed it into the Python code, and then plot. Easy-breezy.

The latest version hasn't drastically changed things. I have given up using the TamperMonkey script in preference of simply interacting directly with Instructure's own APIFor a slightly more "philosophical" take on this preference for working more "directly" with the API, feel free to see my post on this, especially the "Addendum #1, Tuesday, 17 January 2023" section down towards the bottom. while not going through the "intermediary" that was the TamperMonkey in my original iterations. This now ends up with something like the following, utilizing the well-known "bokeh" library:

The above image should be fully interactive, mousing over specific nodes gives a little bit of metadata about each point (this is a staple of bokeh).All thanks for getting this interactive bokeh plot embedded in the HTML here goes to Barry Sunderland over here.

I should note that all of this is just barely scratching the surface of all my newfound knowledge in this arena. A great many new skills were acquired in order to solve very particular and specific problems. The one above started with a pretty easy problem: how to keep track of the most popular authors in a course with a lot of reading (this no doubt arose precisely because I don't explicitly mandate/require which authors and stories students have to read—*they* get to pick and choose each week, I don't choose for them). I have also turned a good deal of this knowledge and philosophy to (perhaps) even slightly more mundane concerns like Departmental Assessment reports, keeping track of student assessment data, and, also (and perhaps most importantly), learning to not rely so much on "Excel" and to "let that piece of software go."For more on this, feel free to hop over this way. All of this has opened-up a whole new territory for me and the vistas are quite beautiful to look at, I think. As I mentioned earlier, it's hard to imagine what things would have been like had I not come across all of this new knowledge and information—which is perhaps the best definition for when learning and education are "actually working" and "doing what they should be doing."

2.2.1 Connections with the Classroom

I am not so certain that this is something that was brand-new after acquiring all of this DH knowledge, but it is definitely a thing that intensified a little bit after I came to learn more and more. This is again easy to see at work in this previously discussed ENGL200: Weird Fiction course I've talked about already. Repeating myself here, but I had always given students a ton of freedom in terms of the kinds of work that they wanted to do in the course (this was true long before any of the DH knowledge came under my belt). The weekly discussion boards were always required assignments and the course also always included a "Mid-Term Project Proposal" along with a completed "Final Project." The "Project

Proposal" that is due at Mid-Term time is quite wide-open, greatly open-ended by design (a copy of the latest incarnation is available here Students get complete freedom and autonomy to design their own projects—they get to determine how they will be assessed. As I hope we all know, there are as many ways to show ones learning as there are students on the planet. The "Proposal" thus asks students to think about all kinds of things that are staples of good rhetorical thinking: audience, purpose, length, process, the options are numerous.

I have pulled down from the USF Canvas Instructure API all the information about all of the different kinds of projects that students have uploaded to the "Final Project" dropbox for each time I've done the course. Here are some plots of the data:

bar_plot_by_project bar_plot_2 strip_plot_of_project_types

For those interested in the code utilized to produce these plots—along with all the data wrangling that went into figuring out all of the different project types/categories, please feel free to head over here.

As one can see, although it is true that the majority of students have preferred to go the "Personal Reflection" route—and, I should note that these are often glowing with praise about the course—it is also true that students have taken some really rather creative routes to showing and demonstrating what they have learned over the course of the semester. (Even more curious, many of the reflections that a machine learning library would classify as "negative" are due to the fact that these assessments more often than not talk about how the course was "not what they expected," but ended up loving because of this fact; many of the others also greatly contrasted this course and its ethos with literature courses they took in the past and didn't really like at all.Code used to look at the "sentiment scores" for these reflections can be found here.)

2.2.2 More General "Digital Humanities" Exploration

The field of DH encompasses a really wide range of disciplines, areas of focus, projects, and ideas. Where many are interested in working with everything from "computer vision" to "cultural analytics" to archival work in library systems,WIkipedia's entry on "Digital Humanities" gives a really nice overview of the field. I have found myself gravitating to the field of "Natural Language Processing" (NLP) and applications of working with text data to engage questions about style using certain computational techniques taken from the field of machine learning. One could easily say that I work of all this DH work, I myself am a practitioner within the field of the "philosophy of language"—very heavily, in fact, one might proffer—and although work in computational linguistics was hardly in my wheelhouse in graduate school, I find myself vacationing over to that field more and more each day. Therefore, I would like to canvas a couple of pet projects to give a readers an idea of what scholars and academics in this area like myself are up to—and have been up to recently.

2.2.2.1 Machine Learning for Stylometry *re* Authorship Attribution

I would like to return to a topic of discussion that I discussed already when chronicling William's work with me on Hemingway. In many of those conversations, he would often draw parallels and comparisons between Hemingway and Fitzgerald (we even read very closely one of my most favorite Fitzgerald stories, "Babylon Revisited"This short story can be found in F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Babylon Revisited and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), pp. 210-30.). I was curious—could one, say, train a machine learning model to tell the difference between a text written by Hemingway and one by Fitzgerald? For sure—and what I still find so fascinating is that the way in which the models can do this are not really all that "complex" or "complicated" or "sophisticated"—at least, they are definitely not more sophisticated than when a seasoned reader can (perhaps somewhat) intuitively tell the difference immediately between Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's stylistic tendencies. So let's write a little Python code and I'll try to take readers through what's going on along each step of the process.Further code for this short project is available in the following GitHub repo.

The first step is data gathering, so we head over to Project Gutenberg.org to grab texts that are available and in the public domain by both Fitzgerald and Hemingway.Many of the works by Hemingway are not in the public domain in the US, but are in Canada. As this strikes me as a perfect case of "Fair Use," one can head over this way for some of those Hemingway works. Once we have some texts that we can use to train and test the classifier models, we can start coding. We will be utilizing one of the go-to machine learning libraries within Python, sci-kit learn, an absolute staple for those working in machine learning. Thus we start with our import statements (we're also using seaborn and matplotlib again for plotting, pandas for data wrangling, etc. [the `load_data` function is just a simple function to read in all the text files and keep track of the author of each text]):

```
from helper_functions import load_data
import os
import seaborn as sns
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import pandas as pd
from sklearn.naive_bayes import MultinomialNB
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import CountVectorizer
from sklearn.model_selection import train_test_split
from sklearn.metrics import classification_report, confusion_matrix, accuracy_score
import spacy
nlp = spacy.load('en_core_web_lg')
```

Next we call our `load data` function to load in all of our text files and then convert that into a pandas DataFrame that contains the text of the work (in the `text_data` column) along with the named author in the `label` column. We also want to let sklearn know which columns have the "text" and which one

contains the "real/true" labels for each text:

```
text_data, labels = load_data('data')
df = pd.DataFrame(list(zip(text_data, labels)), columns=['text_data', 'label'])

X = df['text_data']
y = df['label']
```

Then we utilize one of the functions from the sklearn library that takes the dataset and splits it into "training" and "testing" sets. The training set will be the data that the model is given to "learn" what makes a Hemingway text a Hemingway text (and similarly for Fitzgerald); the "testing" data is just that: those are the texts that the model has never seen before and thus will make predictions on/about. The normal split in machine learning is usually 80% of the data used for training and 20% for testing, but here we're passing a percentage of 30%:

```
X_train, X_test, y_train, y_test = train_test_split(
                                                    X,
                                                    y,
                                                    test_size=0.3,
                                                    random_state=42)
```

Now that the training and testing sets are split up, we can start to transform all of this text data into what the model can understand, namely, numbers:

```
# Create a bag-of-words representation of the text data
vectorizer = CountVectorizer(stop_words='english')
X_train_vec = vectorizer.fit_transform(X_train)
X_test_vec = vectorizer.transform(X_test)
```

What the `CountVectorizer()` function does is it takes all of the words in the text and converts the whole text file into just a long list of words. (This is often called a "bag of words" representation because all the program is doing is, quite literally, counting each word and how many times each word appears; everything ends up in a "bag" because this process disregards grammar and also word order too.) The second and third lines of code just apply this technique/function to both the training and testing sets—for more information, the `.fit` method is explained in the documentation here and the `.fit_transform` here.

Once the text files are converted into a matrix (i.e. the data has been "vectorized"), one can then train a model to make predictions on the testing data. For this little project, we'll utilize a widely used algorithm that is based on "Bayes' theorem," which "describes the probability of an event, based on prior knowledge of conditions that might be related to the event."See Wikipedia's entry on "Bayes Theorem" here. The entry on the "Naive Bayes Classifier" is also available here. This is a very commonly used model for "text classification" problems and it thus serves our purposes here well enough.The implementation documentation for this in sklearn is available here. Once the model is instantiated, we

can fit it on our data as follows:

```
nb = MultinomialNB()
nb.fit(X_train_vec, y_train)
```

So how accurate is the model on the texts that were set aside for the testing purposes? One of the standard ways to see the accuracy of the model is to use a number of metrics—i.e. "precision," "recall," "f1-score," etc.Of course, one could utilize all the rich information that would come from looking at the author's grammatical tics and preferences. A simple workflow for this would take the texts and extract all of the "parts of speech" (POS) for each word in each sentence (the spaCy library is a fantastically awesome workhouse for this kind of thing); once one had "POS tagged" each sentence, those counts—of nouns, verbs, participles, direct objects (something of a big favorite of Hemingway, in particular), even the number of punctuation marks—could be used in further "feature engineering" the model so that it could use those numbers to make predictions. For readers that are interested in how some of the different kinds of classifier handle trying to classify texts by all three authors (Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Steinbeck), the following Jupyter notebook has the code and results. (As a tiny teaser here: a standard logistic regression model's accuracy comes back at 50%, a "decision tree" classifier hit 83%, and the "gradient boosting machine" model hit perfect accuracy and was able to correctly classify texts by all three authors.) Sklearn has a built-in function for this, `classification_report` which quickly provides us with these metrics and scores. Below we'll print out the `accuracy_score` for the testing data along with the other metrics:

```
# Evaluate the model on the testing set
accuracy = nb.score(X_test_vec, y_test)
print(f'The accuracy score for this NaiveBayes Classifier is: {accuracy}')
```

classification_report_for_f_v_h

These are fantastic scores for the model. Of course, there are also nice and simple ways to visualize the predictions the model has made by utilizing what is called a "confusion matrix".This work can be found in *Carson McCullers: Complete Novels*, ed. Carlos L. Dews (New York: The Library of America, 2001), pp. 397-458. This is a simple picture that shows us the number of "true positives," "true negatives," "false positives," and "false negatives." The code to produce the plot is, again, rather simple enough to implement:

```
# Predict the class labels for the test set
y_pred = nb.predict(X_test_vec)

# Compute the confusion matrix
cm = confusion_matrix(y_test, y_pred)

# create a list of class labels
classes = ['fitzgerald', 'hemingway']
```

```
# plot the confusion matrix
sns.heatmap(cm,
            annot=True,
            fmt='d',
            cmap='viridis',
            xticklabels=classes, yticklabels=classes)

# add axis labels and title
plt.xlabel('Predicted Label')
plt.ylabel('True Label')
plt.title('Confusion Matrix')
plt.show()
```

The plot produced looks as follows:

confusion_matrix_for_f_v_h

A classifier with scores like these is considered to be performing extremely well. But what if we wanted to kick the tires on this model just a little bit more by passing it, say, a text by Hemingway that the model has never before encountered, either in training or testing (many machine learning modeling workflows include this as the "validation" set, a sample to make a prediction on that was not in the training or testing datasets)? Well, let's feed this brand-new (to the model) text and see who it predicts wrote it. We'll ask it to make a prediction about Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." Again, easy enough—and the steps are the same (we read in the text file, vectorize it, and then pass it to the model to make a prediction):

```
# Define a new text sample to classify-Hemingway's 'The Snows of
# Kilimanjaro'
with open(r'test_data\hemingway_snows.txt') as f:
    new_text =  f.read()

# Transform the new text sample into a bag-of-words representation
new_counts = vectorizer.transform([new_text])

# Use the trained model to predict the label of the new text sample
new_pred = nb.predict(new_counts)

# Print the predicted label
if new_pred == 1:
    print('The model predicts that this text is by Hemingway ...')
else:
    print('The model predicts that this text is by Fitzgerald ...')
```

This code outputs the following:

nb_model_prediction_for_snows

Nice—a perfectly correct prediction. I should say that one could easily wonder just a bit if the binary parameter here in this problem—a text is either by Hemingway or it's not—does come with some starting assumptions that one could tweak slightly if they wanted. What if the comparison was not between Hemingway and Fitzgerald but between Hemingway and someone a reader might consider to already be somewhat "closer" to Hemingway in terms of style? What about texts by John Steinbeck? Again, we can reuse the code already and simply alter it so that we have the program read in the texts by Steinbeck in the training part of the process. Once again, a very simple Naive Bayes classifier can quite easily distinguish between Hemingway and Steinbeck too:

accuracy_scores_for_nb_models_f_v_h

confusion_matrix_for_f_h_and_s

And, once more, if we pass it a text by Steinbeck (*In Dubious Battle*) for validation, we can ask for another prediction—and we get:

What I find so fascinating about this entire process is what I mentioned earlier, the model can seem to figure out who authored what simply by counting words and keeping track of their frequencies—nothing more sophisticated would seem to be required here. There are, of course, far more intricate algorithms and vectorizers that can be used when working with textual data (the "term-frequency inverse document frequency," TF-IDF for short, is just one example), but such sophistication seems unnecessary—at least here in this particular case. The frequency counts of words seem to be enough to distinguish between the writing of these authors.Of course, one could utilize all the rich information that would come from looking at the author's grammatical tics and preferences. A simple workflow for this would take the texts and extract all of the "parts of speech" (POS) for each word in each sentence (the spaCy library is a fantastically awesome workhouse for this kind of thing); once one had "POS tagged" each sentence, those counts—of nouns, verbs, participles, direct objects (something of a big favorite of Hemingway, in particular), even the number of punctuation marks—could be used in further "feature engineering" the model so that it could use those numbers to make predictions. For readers that are interested in how some of the different kinds of classifier handle trying to classify texts by all three authors (Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Steinbeck), the following Jupyter notebook has the code and results. (As a tiny teaser here: a standard logistic regression model's accuracy comes back at 50%, a "decision tree" classifier hit 83%, and the "gradient boosting machine" model hit perfect accuracy and was able to correctly classify texts by all three authors.) It might perhaps go without saying, but I think these developments ask those of us working within the humanities to potentially rethink how we want to talk about something like a writer's "style." Those working in literature might love to use all kinds of literary techniques, rhetorical tropes, and much more to discuss a writer's style. The machine would seem to be able to get along just fine by merely(?) counting things. As I say, I think this is incredibly thought-provoking for humanistic study more broadly.

2.2.2.2 NLP and Metaphor Detection

In the previous section I mentioned "literary techniques" that the machine learning models might seem to be able to largely dispense with—at least when it comes to trying to determine if a text was created by Hemingway or Fitzgerald or Steinbeck. What if one wanted to play around a little bit while directly thinking about, say, one of those key "literary techniques" that we all associate with literature and fictional texts in general—namely, metaphor? This is a quite fascinating arena of study: how to get a machine to understand something like a metaphorical use of a word, of language. A good deal of work here has been in data annotation and data labeling, that is, the manual (by a human) tagging of datasets for the presence of a metaphor. The largest corpus for this kind of thing appears to be the one created and made available by the "VU Amsterdam Metaphor" project, which offers "about 190,000 lexical units from a subset of four broad registers … academic texts, conversation, fiction, and news texts." Of course, one of the major websites that offer open source access to labeled datasets and machine learning models is huggingface.co—and there is even a transformer model that has already been trained on the Amsterdam labeled dataset that can be freely accessed here. What would we discover if we tried out this model on some fictional stories that we ourselves tagged and labeled? As one might guess already, William was more than willing to do some data annotation ("hand-labeling," so to speak) with me.

Still sticking with our Fitzgerald-Hemingway corpus of texts, we picked out a couple of texts that we would each label.The code for this can be found in the same "fitzgerald_hemingway" repo already cited. I wrote some code to carve up each sentence in Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" along with a couple of other stories by Hemingway. The code got us a nice `.jsonl` file that had fields for the "annotator," the "sentence_number," the "text" of the sentence, and then a "label." Sentences that we parsed as "literal" got an "l"; sentences with a metaphor in them got tagged with an "m."

babylon_revisited_jsonl_file

Now, before I even get to how the model tagged the sentences, William and I found ourselves talking a lot about the rather starkly different ways in which we each thought about literality and metaphor in general. Some quick parsing of each of our annotations show something of a divergence in the way we labeled metaphorical and figurative language in this story by Fitzgerald:

label_comparison_between_w_and_dr_s

It thus appears that I had a tendency to want to parse more sentences as "metaphorical" than did William. If we were really doing this "for real," William and I would have perhaps spent more time before engaging in this exercise norming our annotations—trying to see if we could get "on the same page" about how we wanted to tag things. That said, we did do a little bit of this somewhat informally as we picked out a number of sentences where our labels didn't match. We also took a gander at some sentences that gave both William and I some

trouble—sentences, for example, that we could have tagged as "metaphorical" but ended giving a "literal" label. One in particular is sentence number 52, which reads: "Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain." I annotated this one as possessing a metaphor (my metric here was pretty simple: if the sentence said something that wasn't literally true, it got a "metaphor" label)—ghosts don't exist (or so I think) and thus one couldn't describe something that didn't literally exist as green (or as anything else for that matter, frankly). William also parsed it as "metaphorical," but admitted that there was a way in which the parallelism of hyphenated terms in the sentence could allow one to, arguably, read it as literal: fire can be red, gas can be blue, a green sign can be "*ectoplasmically* green," in some sense. Of course, this sentence is quite a beautiful one: all the terms that are first in the hyphens ("fire," "gas," and "ghost") give one the sense of these colors perceived wispily (thus the "ghost") through the rain in Paris. On the other hand, the terms that follow the hyphens ("red," "blue", "green") all point to explicit, literal, colors. As I say, it's a gorgeously balanced sentence in its syntactic form and semantic resonances.

Now, the intriguing question: how did the model label the sentences—and how did those tags compare/contrast to the labels William and I gave to the data?

comparing_labels

Fascinatingly, the model tagged far more sentences as metaphorical than did William or I. How did it parse that sentence number 52? The model outputs the following:

```
[
    {'entity_group':
         'LABEL_0',
         'score': 0.9895303,
         'word': 'Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue,',
         'start': 0,
         'end': 32},
      {'entity_group':
          'LABEL_1',
          'score': 0.8726921,
          'word': 'ghost',
          'start': 33, 'end': 38},
        {'entity_group':
            'LABEL_0',
            'score': 0.9274696,
            'word': '-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain.',
            'start': 38,
            'end': 91}
]
```

The model returns a list of dictionaries containing the following: a label ("LA-

BEL_0" for a word used literally and "LABEL_1" for one being used metaphorically), a score containing a likelihood/confidence for that label, the words that are being tagged as literal or metaphorical, where the word or phrase starts and ends (with the index starting at 0 and then running to the last word in the sentence). Very curiously—and seemingly identical to my own rationale for tagging this sentence as "metaphorical"—the model highlights the "ghost" adjective as the real culprit here, all the rest of the sentence gets labeled as strictly literal in nature. (I should also perhaps note here that if the model returned at least one "LABEL_1" for a word or group of words in the sentence, that ultimately got entered into the database as "metaphorical"—one could, however, imagine slightly better ways to determine if the sentence is metaphorical, perhaps some kind of threshold where we set the condition as something like: "If the returned list of dictionaries has two or more LABEL_1 tags, then the sentence is a metaphor.")

Some of the differences between our labels and the model's seem easy enough to understand. For example, the ninth sentence has the narrator ask the head hotel concierge if he has seen George Hardt recently, whom the narrator describes as being a "Snow Bird" (one that travels and migrates from Paris to elsewhere according to the seasons). The model returns this as purely literal:

```
[
     {'entity_group':
          'LABEL_0',
          'score': 0.99996173,
          'word': 'And where is the Snow Bird? He was in here last \ week.',
          'start': 0,
          'end': 53}
]
```

Another odd one is sentence 23: "Charlie asked for the head barman, Paul, who in the latter days of the bull market had come to work in his own custom-built car–disembarking, however, with due nicety at the nearest corner." The model parsed it as follows:

```
[
    {'entity_group':
          'LABEL_0',
          'score': 0.95876676,
          'word': 'Charlie asked for the head barman, Paul, who',
          'start': 0,
          'end': 44},
    {'entity_group':
         'LABEL_1',
         'score': 0.99997866,
         'word': 'in',
         'start': 45,
         'end': 47},
```

```
    {'entity_group':
        'LABEL_0',
        'score': 0.99960524,
        'word': 'the latter days of the bull market had come to work in his \ own custom-bui
        'start': 48,
        'end': 151},
    {'entity_group':
        'LABEL_1',
        'score': 0.9997683,
        'word': 'with',
        'start': 152,
        'end': 156},
    {'entity_group':
        'LABEL_0',
        'score': 0.9999219,
        'word': 'due nicety at the nearest corner.',
        'start': 157,
        'end': 190}
]
```

This one is quite curious—I labeled it as literal, though I could easily imagine that use of the economic term (which is, admittedly and after all, a *metaphor*), "bull market," should mean the sentence gets a "metaphor" label (or the adjective "head" to modify "barman" would be enough to mark it as metaphorical). That said, it's curious how the model picks out the "with" and "in" words as ones leading to a metaphorical classification. Again, this is quite odd and further investigation should be able to say a little bit more about what's going on here. (I haven't yet had a chance to dig into this, but definitely will here in the near future.)

One last example here. There is a scene that occurs between the narrator and his daughter, Honoria, from whom the former has been estranged. A very key moment occurs when the two of them go out to dinner together after much time spent apart (Honoria has been living with her aunt and uncle there in Paris):

> When there had been her mother and a French nurse he had been inclined to be strict; now he extended himself, reached out for a new tolerance; he must be both parents to her and not shut any of her out of communication. "I want to get to know you," he said gravely. "First let me introduce myself. My name is Charles J. Wales, of Prague." "Oh, daddy!" her voice cracked with laughter. "And who are you, please?" he persisted, and she accepted a role immediately: "Honoria Wales, Rue Palatine, Paris." "Married or single?" "No, not married. Single." He indicated the doll. "But I see you have a child, madame." Unwilling to disinherit it, she took it to her heart and thought quickly: "Yes, I've been married, but I'm not married now. My husband is dead." He went on quickly, "And the child's name?"

"Simone. That's after my best friend at school."

This is a very beautiful moment where the estranged father and daughter play a little game, engage in a tiny little theatrical drama—and on multiple levels: they pretend that they don't know each other (which is, admittedly, something that does have the ring of truth given how they have been separated); the narrator pretends that he is "Charles J. Wales, of Prague" (this also has a certain tint of truth to it—the narrator's name is Charlie and he does plan to hopefully take Honoria to Prague to live with him when he leaves Paris); then, extending the playacting even further, Honoria herself dives right into the game, manufacturing a fictional persona where she is married (there's a third level if we want to add the aspect concerning her doll as her own "child")—or, *was* married, we should note (the narrator's wife and Honoria's mother is, in the "reality" of the story, herself dead). Human annotators would want to label this entire conversation and exchange as deeply metaphorical (or, perhaps, deeply "figurative" or "fictional" in tone). How would the model handle this?

doll_drama_exchange

One could imagine some reasons why the model might tag some of the sentences here as metaphors. Sentence 172 seems fine—voices can't "crack"; sentence 179 mentions how Honoria "takes the doll to her heart" and the model parses "heart" here as functioning as a metaphor (fair enough, one supposes); but the sentences where Honoria assumes a fictional persona (especially sentences 174-176) are labeled as purely literal. Okay, maybe, but in the context of the story (and not at the level of the word or token), I think most human annotators will use their intuition here and label them as profoundly metaphorical—or perhaps "allegorical," which would be enough for me to mark them as quite metaphorical or "figurative'" in nature.

One wonders, though, what else would the machine need to " know" in order to know that Honoria can't have been (literally) married and thus these lines would need to be read as not at all literal? And, once one knew such data points, could one also incorporate said data into the model's learning? I could imagine some tagging of the text that might include all kinds of "metadata" about the characters in the text. As a simple toy model example, one could envision using some of NLP techniques around "Named-entity recognition" (NER) (this technique would probably also help the model to understand that to speak of George Hardt as a "Snow Bird" is to speak of him metaphorically) that would extract out Honoria's age (we are, in fact, explicitly told when we meet her for the first time that she is nine-years old). Furthermore, one could let the model know that she would thus be quite unlikely to have been married, thus allowing it to potentially read her "Single" response to Charlie's question as not at all literally possible. Of course, it's easy to speculate on all kinds of other "metadata"-esque ways one could try to improve the model's learning and predictions.

Now, I think that what is really fascinating to me about this line of thinking

and investigation is that these machine algorithms are already fascinatingly sophisticated and often really, really accurate in what they can do. And it seems to be the case that the more data (just straight-up "data," more "metadata," whatever) you feed the models, the better and better they get. Just feed it more data and the results seem to get better and better.

2.3 Future Research Interests and Scholarship Plans

I know it is quite customary in works like this to think a little about future scholarship plans. I would like to try my hand at that now.

I would guess that it is pretty clear already that my scholarship record has been rather eclectic. I have written and published on Heidegger, Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze (this is true now after the publication of the essay with MaKenzie), and many other philosophers, composed book reviews about Tolstoy and Wittgenstein and on recent contemporary works of poetry, engaged in a brief foray or two into the realm of ecocritical thought and environmental philosophy, and much more. However, since learning how to code and familiarizing myself with as much as I could about all the standard machine learning libraries within the Python programming ecosystem, Natural Language Processing (NLP), data analysis and data science, and many other realms within the world of computer science, I am anxious to work towards bringing some of these different areas of study into something a bit more cohesive.

As previously noted, I have already published an article focusing on advances in AI as they have been worked through in contemporary science fiction and I am anxious to continue the work already done by Lydia Liu (*The Freudian Robot*Lydia Liu, *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010).) and Isabel Millar (*The Psychoanalysis of Artificial Intelligence*Isabel Millar, *The Psychoanalysis of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).). I would like to bring to bear the work already done here with all that I have learned about programming and machine learning more generally. I think we all know that the boundaries of this still-emerging field of AI is going to ask those of us working in the humanities to familiarize ourselves with this arena more and more as the years go by (no doubt all the hullabaloo about OpenAI's "ChatGPT"I have myself already written a little bit about this new "ChatBot" on my blog here. platform has just ratcheted this up exponentially as of late). As most readers of psychoanalysis know, Lacan's own work was heavily influenced by the early developments in cybernetic theory and thought in the 1950s. Indeed, Lacan's conceptualizations of language and the Symbolic order owe a great deal to the work of Norbert Wiener and many of the other early pioneers of computational theory broadly construed. The next stage of my publishing career will hopefully see me dealing much more extensively with connections between this psychoanalytic vein (and the tradition of 20th and 21st Century philosophy in general) and the advancements in machine learning that the field of computer science has produced in such large quantities over the past twenty years or so. I think

that a great deal of work within the confluence of the Lacanian tradition and "mechanical/machinic intelligence" is still waiting to be done—especially with regards to the way in which our computer algorithms can help us to better understand our own subjectivity as human beings. As I say, this is an incredibly fruitful and exciting arena for those of us in the humanities who have learned how to code.

As a tiny little offshoot of these plans, I have also been really taken, recently, by some of the ways in which we those of us working in the humanities can leverage some of the machine learning models to understand the area of law. Numerous recent blog posts of mine have worked with the Supreme Court Database system (SCDB) to do everything from visualizations of Topic Modeling of the main opinions to the creation of classification algorithms to learn to predict, say, the century an opinion was drafted in. I look forward to continuing to find more and ever new ways to utilize all of this new computer programming knowledge to help me investigate the realms of humanistic study that I used to do without the help of Python. This whole area of computational study has opened up all kinds of new avenues for my thinking and my teaching and I am very excited to see where all the learning about programming will ultimately take me—I hope it will constantly take me back to my home base within the humanities where I can know that base, as T. S. Eliot says, "for the first time" and perhaps in an absolutely brand new way. Most simply put, I am expecting to continue working within all the diverse fields that I have worked in since graduate school, while hopefully finding new ways to tackle these areas with all the computational knowledge I have recently obtained (and will continue to obtain every day).
Back to Table of Contents

3. Service

3.1 Service to the Department and to the University

For four years, starting immediately after attaining tenure, I chaired the Department of English and Foreign Languages. This did involve quite a change in things for me. My time on the tenure clock was brilliantly constructed by my predecessor, Dr. Kathryn Duys, in such a way that gave me a great deal of time to devote to the crafting and polishing of the art of my teaching. However, this obviously changed over the years as I took over the administrative duties of the English Department Chair position. Again, looking back on it, I think that this was quite a transition for someone who originally felt he would live in the classroom if he could; the switch, however, was perhaps somewhat smooth as time went on (admittedly much smoother than it was during my very first year as chair).

Much of my time since being promoted to Associate Professor (and while I was chair) was taken up with the construction of a number of different initiatives, improvements to our program, and also a slew of brand-new things as well at

both the departmental and university levels. A couple of years ago I helped design and implement a brand new First-Year Experience sequence for all of our students; long before that I was coordinator for the older "Core" program; I put in a great deal of time with one of my colleagues (Dr. Duys yet again) getting a "Writing" concentration added to the English Major (a concentration that we have seen a really good number of students pursue and graduate with on their diplomas/transcripts), while also opening up space for interdisciplinary connections between a number of different disciplines in the Humanities. As I mentioned closer to the start of this reflection, over the past couple of years or so Dr. Ioanes and Dean McDermott and I created an eighteen-hour course sequence in Rhetoric and Composition that is now offered to high school teachers with MA degrees interested in teaching dual-credit composition courses in high school. (Illinois Board of Higher Education guidelines require teachers to have either an MA degree in English or an MA in a different field along with eighteen credit hours in the discipline in order to qualify for dual-credit teaching.) In addition to this there is the brand new "Digital Humanities" undergraduate major I've spoken of already.

During my time as Chair, we also saw nice upticks in majors—along with our securing two grants totaling close to $100,000 to help fund a Writing Program Administrator position (I should probably mention that this hasn't yet come to fruition) and also to aid with a couple publishing endeavors connected to USF's centennial year.The grant document for the Arthur Vining-Davis grant to help with the Writing Program Administration/Administrator position is available here and the work for the CIC NetVUE "Reframing USF" grant can be accessed here. Last but by no means least, a dear friend and departmental colleague member (Dean McDermott) was nominated for and won the "Excellence in Teaching Award" a couple of Aprils ago—an honor that is quite significant, given how much focus our university puts on being an absolutely stellar teacher. This last accomplishment is, by far, my, our, her greatest one—fertile and nurturing soil helps brilliant teachers grow and I was (and still am!) incredibly proud of Dean McDermott for winning this award, which is an enormous honor and one that the three full-time faculty members in my department deserve a good deal of credit for. They say it takes a village to raise a child—the same can so often be said of good departments caring for the growth of teachers: stellar teachers are a departmental/group effort, every single step of the way.

I was—this probably goes without saying but I'll say it anyways—serving as Chair when Dean McDermott went up (and was granted) tenure, an extremely significant, monumental achievement. It was, of course, completely, totally, and duly deserved. She more than earned it. I do not really at all want to take any credit for Dean McDermott's successful tenure bid, but only to say that it's not really debatable that such bids may speak to my own success as a supporter/mentor/guide/etc. of junior faculty. Speaking of this staunch and unceasing support of junior faculty members, Dr. Ioanes will be submitting her own tenure portfolio next year and I look forward (one more time) to helping out with that and supporting her application in any and every way I can; she

is a fantastic teacher, brilliant scholar, and wonderful colleague and I anticipate and hope that the process goes swimmingly for her. As I say, any support and help I can provide on that front will be so willingly given it's not even funny.

As a final note for this "Service" section, I would just like to record the fact that In August of last year, I stepped down as chair and Dr. Ioanes took over running the department. This was without a doubt the best decision for me, as it gave me more time to work with MaKenzie and William and get both of them graduated and on to the next set of challenges and adventures in their lives. All decisions come with advantages and disadvantages, pros and cons. This decision was full of nothing but pros, nothing but advantages. I will never, ever, never second-guess it. Back to Table of Contents

4. Looking Back at the Future Plans Set Forth in My Portfolio for Tenure (2018) and Progress on Said Goals

I should be brutally honest and confess here that my Tenure Portfolio is a document that I do not think I have ever looked at since being granted tenure. I have no doubt this is a terrifying thing to admit, but it's the truth. I would venture to guess that I can't be the only for whom this is true—a tenure portfolio (if it is successful) might quite ideally be something we create and then get to say, "Goodness, I'm glad I don't have to look at thing for one more second." Is this the best to do things? Probably not—but I'd be shocked if all of us who have been through the tenure process would deny that we have at least thought something eerily similar to what I confess here. That said, I have no doubt that one of the things that the "Post-Tenure" review process might encourage (though I notice that this is not elucidated or enumerated anywhere in the *Policy Manual*) is our taking out that old thing, dusting it off a bit, taking a gander at it and then saying: "Sheesh, things definitely didn't turn out the way I anticipated they would …" As I say, there are good and bad ways to spin this—and thus with my glaring confession out of the way, I would like to dust this thing off and see if there's anything in it that has stood the test of time.

I do think that there is a way to parse the "future plans" I speculated on there as doing some work. In the closing section of that document (§4: FUTURE PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION), I noted that I thought option c.) was the one for me: "(c) scholarship shall weigh more than service." I wrote there that "[w]hat needs the most work—solely in terms of myself—is my scholarly endeavors."This is taken from my Tenure Portfolio, page 38—the link to it, again, is here. I would like to say that this goal has been more than met. I do not think that I was quite aware (at the time) that Dr. Duys meant for me to take over the Chair position almost immediately upon receiving tenure. Had I known that, I might perhaps said in the portfolio that I envisioned spending a great deal of time devoting myself to Service (which, of course, was exactly what happened

as I ran the Department for four years after 2018). I suppose it's nice to know that despite the bulk of my time switching over to Service endeavors, I managed to nurture and grow my scholarship at the same exact time. If you had asked me at the time if I could envision such a thing like that working out in the way it did, I probably would have replied, "Absolutely not." And yet, it did work out that way. As I say, this is a nice little surprise.

I notice also in that final concluding section a number of endeavors that have not really panned out. I talk there about aspirations of developing an "Institute for the Humanities right here at USF"; I discuss continuing to help with the "Pathways" program and Gen Ed revision more broadly; I also see that it would be wonderful to have a fully-fledged Philosophy major to offer to students; there is, additionally, a discussion of the possibility of creating an MA degree in English. None of this has really come to fruition, sad to say. Is it all bad to say such a thing—i.e. that none of the plans mentioned in the final section of my portfolio have worked out? No, not at all—and the fact, already noted, that I managed to beef-up my publication record is not to be given short-shrift. We all know—I think—how difficult it is for us here at USF to focus on our scholarly production (that's not to say anything that everybody doesn't already know)—the fact that I was able to pull such a thing off while running a wonderful English Department is not to be brushed off too easily either.

We all know plans are just that—plans. Still, looking back on this document, I am pleasantly surprised with how some of my work since receiving tenure can be made consistent (trying mightily to avoid the good ol' *ergo hoc, propter hoc* fallacy) with some of the ways I thought things might have gone.

5. Concluding Remarks

5.1 Future Teaching Plans

I would not be completely and honest if I didn't say that MaKenzie and William's graduation hasn't left a profound hole in my work. It is true, they're not really "gone" in any way, and yet, their moving out of the university still presents a noticeable and palpable kind of absence. Despite the fact that both of them have said—and the frequency of this kind of conversation only increased in the late parts of November as their graduation day crept ever closer and closer—that despite the fact that our "situation" would surely be changing once they graduated, our relations and relationships wouldn't change in the slightest, I am feeling quite drastically what a change MaKenzie's not being able to come by three days each week every week has made. In those November and December months, I was trying to prepare myself properly: I knew that I was going to miss her terribly, but I didn't know exactly at the time how much I would miss her. This is all par for the course, obviously, for teachers: students need to go away from us, go on to new things—but that doesn't lessen how much we wish they were still here even after they do

transition to new situations in life.

The *USF Policy Manual* section on "Post-Tenure Review" notes that the reflection should contain: "A description of professional goals and plans for continued professional development in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service for the ensuing five years." To be perfectly candid here, this third requirement is incredibly difficult for me. Where exactly do I go from here, now that my two most favorite students have come and gone (at least in an "official" sense)? Frankly, I haven't the slightest idea how to answer this question. What next steps, indeed, should one take after two of the best years that they've ever had as a teacher in their near-twenty year career, studying, working, reading, thinking, talking, and writing with the greatest pair of students they will ever have? As I say, such queries are frighteningly difficult to handle.

Despite a lack of knowledge here, there are some things that I do, in fact, know. I know that I am greatly looking forward to continuing to read, think, and write with MaKenzie. We have already moved forward on a second project together focusing on the short novella by Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*.This work can be found in *Carson McCullers: Complete Novels*, ed. Carlos L. Dews (New York: The Library of America, 2001), pp. 397-458. We read this piece for her "Gender and Sexuality" course—on MaKenzie's own prompting—and she fell immediately in love with it; she was understandably fascinated and intrigued profoundly by McCullers' treatment of gender there. It was incredibly generative for her. Recently—as the final edits for the Millet paper are getting wrapped up—I joked with her, saying, "Okay, buddy, I kinda got to pick the first project we did together—now it's your turn. What should we work on next?" She was rather adamant that the McCullers project should be next. She has already dove straight into the deep end again, rampaging through the secondary literature on McCullers and on "women in Southern fiction" more generally.I should thank Dr. Ioanes here as she recommended a critical work by a friend of hers that has already sparked all kinds of connections for MaKenzie, Monica Carolyn Miller's *Being Ugly: Southern Women Writers and Social Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2017). I will be terribly interested to talk through this research with her and whether or not she can get Miller's focus on "ugliness" to do some work when applied to *Ballad*, which the latter does not read in her book.This focus on ugliness gets one wondering about whether or not Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005) could be at all helpful here; I notice that Miller does mention this work, but only on one page. There might be more to do here—we'll see! Once she gets going on something, it's hard to stop her (though why one would even want to bother trying to do such a thing is itself a legitimate question here). Of course, I know there were at least five or six other project ideas that she and I batted back and forth towards the end of the Fall semester: I am still dying to have a go at Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, as I've mentioned already. I can easily imagine that one being our next target after the McCullers.

I also greatly look forward to helping William continue his reading and training

in philosophy—all in preparation for (we hope) his starting graduate school this upcoming Fall semester. With him too we have a large number of projects and things we'd like to read and talk about together. I think I should perhaps be a little bit more adamant that he take a shot at writing about Hemingway. He and I developed some really fantastic readings of some of his short fiction—and he's already pulled countless articles and secondary sources, none of which quite giving him exactly what he is looking for in a really stellar reading of Hemingway. Now, I know that we are currently working through (already mentioned) Dickens' *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* (William is reading them simultaneously) and he has been enjoying these novels in a way that I am not quite sure I've ever seen him enjoy anything else before. It's a beautiful and wonderful thing to see and say, that's for sure. As of late, William seems to be taking up some of the qualities that I used to associate pretty much only with MaKenzie: working and thinking about multiple things all at once. The paper that William wrote for his Shakespeare course was also really good—I am hopeful to see how great of a foundation that essay will ultimately serve for his continued thinking (I've already pulled some possible journals that could be fantastic venues for this essay and I can't wait to continue to working on that project with him).

5.2 Future Scholarship Plans

I am also quite excited to continue my forays into the "Digital Humanities" field. I am not quite sure exactly what these future forays will ultimately look like, but the field seems to me so massive that there are all kinds of unexplored nooks and crannies that will no doubt be incredibly fruitful and generative for me. Questions of literary style, queries about literary language, and even the broader philosophical concerns that the field of AI will continue pose and provoke strike me as endlessly engaging. As I mentioned earlier in Section 2.3, it seems to me that psychoanalysis—especially the Lacanian stripe—is quite ideally situated and positioned to talk quite convincingly about AI's potential "threats" or "destabilization" of something like "the human being." It is a basic Lacanian dictum that the human being—as an "animal that speaks"—is cut, split, carved-up by signifiers (by words). We are all (well, perhaps not "all," but certainly the vast majority of us) born into a highly systematic structure (i.e. language)—the words I use to name myself and others and everything else in the universe pre-existed me, I did not create or fashion them. And this system has rules—rules one must follow—that we never consciously (for sure) ever agreed to in any way that would resemble something like a nice, simple "contract" of some kind. Not even that, but my language and my words are also things I don't necessary have any control over—the consequences and results of my speaking can be radically contingent and can produce effects and affects that I myself do not intend. We are thus all possessed by something in us that greatly escapes us.

Is any of this something that the machine or artificial intelligence can approximate somehow? This to me is a wonderfully deep philosophical question. I

think that a lot of the learning I have gained within the machine learning arena focused on NLP and on the use of "large language models" and vectorization methods in general to help translate natural language into something a machine can "understand," has shown me more times than I can count that the way we think about language may edge far closer toward the "machinic" than the purely human (whatever that might mean at the end of the day). I tried to show in an earlier section that really quite simple "probabilistic models" like the "Naive Bayes" classifier can come to some kind of understanding of a text's singular stylistic features. I have no problem granting the argument that when one listens to another person speak, what they are doing (again, not consciously) is just performing all kinds of lightning-quick probability calculations about what word or type of word might come next in the sentence. This would seem to follow quite nicely from the "systematic" nature of the linguistic systems: when English speakers here a noun (or pronoun) and then a verb, the parts of speech that can go in that third slot are not infinite—and even within that particular slot, all kinds of words that fall under that part of speech category are possible, but, again, probability would tell us that some words are more likely to go in that slot than others. Given a system with some kind of grammar, something like the probabilistic models will find a great deal of information and data with which to get a handhold on what's likely to be going on.

This is perhaps just another way of saying that the true uniqueness of the human may not be able to to be fully located there at the level of the "machinic"—or at the level of grammar or at the level of language as a largely "impersonal" system that places certain words into some slots and not into others. The large language models seem to be able to understand this quite well. So, where is something like the uniqueness of the human (again, just assuming for the moment that such a thing exists—and this itself does often strike me as quite a debatable assumption), it can't be the fact that we all operate with a system that none of us designed—this would be a facet of our being that is shared perfectly with the machine. Again, I think that psychoanalysis—especially in the versions that often get labeled as broadly "structuralist" in nature—can handle this automaticity/mechanicity of language quite readily and handily. But the thing that, arguably, may not find a place within the scientific study of language in linguistics is what Lacan calls "the enunciating subject." As Bruce Fink puts it:

> Speech relies on the system of signifiers (or simply on "the signifier," as he is wont to say, implying thereby the entire signifying system of language), borrowing its lexicon and grammar from it, and yet speech requires something else: enunciation. It has to be enunciated, and there is a bodily component that is thus introduced: breathing and all of the movements of the jaw, tongue, and so required for the production of speech.

Fink goes on to say:

> Linguistics concerns itself with the subject of the enunciated or subject of the statement—for example, "I" in the sentence "I think so"—

> which it categorizes as the "shifter." And it takes into account the difference between the subject of the statement and the enunciating subject … Linguistics is forced to take cognizance of the distinction between these two subjects. But linguistics does not account for the enunciating subject per se. The enunciating subject is the one who may take pleasure in speaking, who may find it painful to speak, or who may make a slip while speaking. The enunciating subject is the one who may let slip something that is revealing of his or her feelings, desires, or pleasures.Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, pp. 144-45.

This is, perhaps, an all-too-long-winded way to say that we are not just creatures of the signifying system of language, but are also, simultaneously, creatures of affect, pleasure, suffering, or, to use Lacan's term, we are creatures of *jouissance*, "enjoyment"—we are creatures of *libido* in addition to being creatures of grammar, language, signification, etc. Are our large language models similar to us in this way? Well, no—or, at least, not yet. Perhaps some day they will be, but as of today they seem to be able to be a "subject of the statement" but they are not yet statements of the subject, they are not "enunciating subjects," yet. How good of a definition of something like "intelligence"Here, of course, we're thinking quite directly about the infamous "Turing Test." would it be to say that when a machine can legitimately fall prey to the "slip of the tongue" phenomenon, it is only at that point that we will know that the machine has achieved something like "subjectivity"? I am not sure, but I do quite like this definition, to be honest. As Isabel Millar, previously mentioned above, has noted in a slightly different context: when machines start to speak out of some need to "prove that they are still here," that they "exist," then we will need to rethink everything about them—and us.These lines show up in Millar's reading of Jean Baudrillard's *The Ecstasy of Communication*, where she writes: "He [Baudrillard] alludes to the need to speak becoming more urgent when one has nothing to say. In Lacanian terms the jouissance of the signifier prevails over the constant metonymic slippage of meaning and becomes the mode of survival for the subject. One speaks to prove one is still here" (74). I'm not too worried about machines instantly becoming our mechanical overlords; instead, I just think it's a really wonderful time not only to be doing philosophy and psychoanalysis, but also to be somehow who can do philosophy while understanding a tiny little bit about the programming infrastructures upon which these machine models are being built.

5.3 Future Service Plans

I am not so certain that I have any real clear or clearly defined goals in terms of my service work going forward. I would love to find more time to help grow the Digital Humanities major (DIGH), but it is not all easy for me to see how to handle this without a great deal of time and help that I think I (and my other English faculty) probably do not have in our already busy schedules. I should say that I was extremely happy to see Dr. McDermott take over the Interim

CAS Dean position that opened up with Dr. Elizabeth Davies' departure for Chicago State University. This move was, again, as I say, fantastic, but one of the real clear ramifications of this was that it did impact an already rather thinly-stretched English Department quite significantly. One could easily have argued that our Department was already short-handed given all that English faculty do already now; this short-handedness is still with us—and so I am hesitant to say that we should have been doing much more work on the DIGH front than we have so far. As I've already canvassed here, the English Department has been doing a ton of work over the past couple of years since the pandemic started in 2020; we know we are having to juggle a lot more than we did three years ago (the grad courses for REAL would be just one very legible example of our increased workload as a Department). I should admit that the addition of Dr. Veronica Popp as a Visiting Assistant Professor has been incredibly important for the Department, but, again, we're still a little under-resourced and under-staffed.

I wonder if I shouldn't say just a tiny bit more here about the REAL courses that are now in the normal workload for all of us here in the English Department. It's true that the work for this new set of courses has not been an "instantaneous" success—although, enrollment numbers over the past year-and-a-half have been incredibly robust. The administration here at USF was very supportive (and still is, I should be sure to say straightaway) of this whole endeavor—and there were times when we started to roll things out back in 2021 or so where the enrollment numbers were low, to be sure. But, that said, we now have this thing up and running here and all (I think it's *all*, I would need to double-check the numbers again) the courses since the initial period have been very well-attended. In fact, in the ENGE/ENGM 515 course on "Digital Rhetoric" I am currently teaching, I have a full seminar of 17 students/working professionals. That strikes me—on the outside looking in here—as incredibly successful. The vast majority of the students in that course have been with me almost from the very beginning, as many of them have taken almost all six courses with me over the past year or so. (And, I should just say, for the record once more, that all of them are incredibly excited—they've told me so more times than I can count already—how excited they are to be doing one last course with me before they get done and fully-credentialed through this new REAL offering.) Of course, it is a legitimate question, to my mind, whether or not this kind of thing is going to be "par for the course" going forward—I wish I could say these kinds of cohort numbers are going to be the case as we move into the future, but that would require me to let everyone have a peek at my crystal ball (which I obviously don't have). Still, the courses are fantastic—the teachers/students love them and, honestly, can't seem to wait to do these classes with me/us. If we continue to see this as a long-lasting trend, will we see any more resources devoted to it? Again, I'm looking all around me now as I type this for my crystal ball (now I'm sure I have one, I just can't quite lay my fingers on it), and worry that the best one can do here is to simply remain hopeful. Is there a way to think about this new situation that isn't just crafted from hope and wishful thinking? I myself do not know, though I hope others higher up the org chart than I am

are cogitating on it a little bit.

Transitioning all too quickly here, I should also mention that, as of late, Dr. Ioanes and I have had a number of substantial conversations about the DIGH major—about what it is that we might be able to do to try growing this major. We have come up with some potential ways to focus on this, including (this is perhaps top of the list in terms of our options) the cross-listing of the introductory DIGH 100 course, which is certainly one way we can handle being under-staffed (this path doesn't require another faculty member to take this course in their load, obviously). To my mind, this is far from ideal, but if the last three years have taught us anything, it is that we faculty are so frequently being asked to take pragmatic/practical (far from ideal) solutions to our problems. We will give the cross-listing path a try in the Fall of 2023 and see what that gets us. Do we need to be reaching out again to Marketing for more help promoting this major? Again, probably, but I just cannot quite figure out how to put that on anyone else's plate. Is it enough for faculty to simply design new majors, new curricula, and then just let things run their course? No, probably not, but one wonders how much institutional buy-in and support there has been for these new endeavors. I am cognizant how, seemingly, everyone around USF is stretched-thin, Marketing included; perhaps more communication focused on promotion would be helpful, but I am not sure if that time investment will give us results.

If I am able to perfectly candid and honest here, I have been more than content to kind of just "put my head down" and focus on my students, my courses, my teaching—and, admittedly—letting my service commitments take a back seat. Outside of my teaching, my students, and my classroom, it is far more difficult for me to assess now how fruitful, useful, and productive the time devoted to Service will ultimately be in the future. I can very easily see the rewards that a focus on my teaching has given me and my students over the past three years (indeed, this reflection on my work with MaKenzie and William alone should have already made it very clear what these rewards have been for me—and *for them*); the rewards of time invested in Service strikes me as much more murky and hard to cash-out in clear ways. That said, I will keep cogitating on this, to be sure.

6 A Final, "Final" Concluding Comment

I would just like to bring this to a close here and thank my readers for taking the time—any bit of time, frankly—for looking through these materials. I hope I have made an amply cogent argument for the renewal of my contract here at USF. Once again, all thanks to those of you who have made it to this point in this reflection—I greatly enjoyed taking a little bit of time to compose these thoughts, think through these things, and really get what I believe is a really nice handle on how my time has been spent as an Associate Professor. Or, even better put: it's a nice description of what has been most important to me over

the past few years. Back to Table of Contents