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[1]

Dr. Kevin Andrew Spicer 15 December, 2022

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.[2]

Introductory Remarks:

Before jumping into the reflective meditation and narrative I wish to put forward below, I would like to just briefly lay out the special situation here that I hope these remarks of mine will speak to in a way that is helpful to our readers. It is true that the corpus of work being put together here is quite distinctive—and, I would imagine, rather unprecedented in many ways. I am unaware of prior projects similar to this one here at USF—and could very well speculate that something like this is the very first of its kind. Not only is the collection of materials quite unique, but our wish to have these materials serve as equivalent to the "Writing Portfolio" that students graduating with a "Writing Concentration" normally present undoubtedly reads as quite idiosyncratic as well. Given such a singular state of affairs, I would like to describe—not only as MaKenzie's faculty advisor, but also as her co-author—the array of materials on offer here to serve as evidence of her having completed work that satisfies the ethos of the "Senior Capstone" requirements for the English major here at USF.

The two of us together would like to present three artifacts to English faculty

[1] If all goes to plan, this essay—titled "Holmes, that's some Santa Claus *shit*": Reading Lydia Millet's *A Children's Bible* as an Ecological Crime Fiction Hybrid—will appear in the *Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction and Ecology*, more details to follow below.

[2] bells hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 198.

members—Drs. Anna Ioanes, Veronica Popp, and Beth McDermott (now Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences)—and our plan is also to be "co-presenters" of sorts during the "Thesis Presentation" part of the capstone (this too, I suppose, is also something idiosyncratic as well in the Department's history):

1. A reflective essay by MaKenzie, chronicling her time here at USF over the last two years—it will be a kind of retrospective of her experiences, learning, growth, and much more—with special focus on a great deal of what went into work on our co-authored essay.
2. This reflective narrative of my own, here, which will highlight the whole process of what working on this collaborative project with MaKenzie has been like from my angle and perspective—I will also have recourse from time to time to talking about the tenure of MaKenzie's time here at USF, especially since I have been an avid ally, supporter, partner, mentor, teacher, etc., right from the very start of her USF career. (Our original plan was to have both of us compose the texts in 1. and 2. in parallel—without too much involved discussion about how each of us wanted to tackle the task. As is very routine for us—and as will no doubt become much, much clearer in my narrative here—we jumped the gun just a tiny bit and were rather impatient, so we started sharing our reflections while still in the drafting/writing process—we were both well along in the composition process when we decided to rather informally share how things were going). In this process, it became clear quite quickly that there were a fair number of things that we learned we were already hitting on in parallel: ideas, topics, and so forth each of us wanted to highlight for focus, independently and prior to sharing our own respective reflective thoughts with one another.)
3. A circulated copy of the final draft sent along to the editor of the *Routledge Companion* text our essay will appear in.

We are looking forward to a great many things this week: MaKenzie's graduation day, the end of the semester and the chance to get her moving on to the next steps in her career, her future, and, yes, taking some time with English Faculty to share our experiences here. We all know, as teachers, that, in so many different ways, quite singularly focused and differentiated learning for each individual student is the *nec plus ultra* of pedagogy. MaKenzie got a quite individualized education, tailored and differentiated quite singularly just for her. That said, I do strongly believe that such a curated college experience has laid the groundwork for her to do anything and everything she might want to in the future. There is a great deal more to be said on this front, but in the interests of getting on to the main event here, I will save all that for another time and venue. Thus, with some context about what has necessitated this *sui generis* capstone corpus here, I would like to dive right in and get started.

Background Information on the Co-Authored Essay:

The impetus for this entire project began this past summer when MaKenzie came by the office one day, saying that she was looking for something new and different to read. I told her that there was a text that I had taught in my Spring Semester YA Literature course that no one really enjoyed—although I adored it: Lydia Millet's 2020 National Book-Award nominated novel, *A Children's Bible*. She took and read it ravenously, as is her *modus operandi* with everything she does and with which everything she engages. I myself had been keeping an eye on the "CFP" website maintained by the University of Pennsylvania—as I'm sure most of us working in the humanities do from time to time—and I recalled a post for scholars interested in contributing to *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction and Ecology* under the editorship of Dr. Nathan Ashman. We had already been working together very closely together for the last year-and-a-half and thus I was starting to be a bit more intentional in keeping on the lookout for opportunities for MaKenzie and I to put into more legible form all of the work that we had been doing ever since she came to USF back in the Fall of 2020. (I already knew almost from the very day we met that I wanted us not to just study and learn together, but to *make something together* as well.) Having read the book and decided that she greatly loved it, I jumped at the chance as it seemed to be the perfect kind of opportunity I'd been searching for: "Let's write something together about it," I said. MaKenzie, as per usual, was more than game. (Of course, MaKenzie was–quite understandably–a tiny bit trepidatious as she did ask if I was certain that I wanted to work with her. As I told her, I've never had a student in my entire twenty-year career that I would ever even have considered something like this, but she's one in a bazillion and I therefore let her know that I was absolutely certain that I wanted us to work together and that we should go for it.) We spent a few days talking through the novel and then composed an abstract to send along to Dr. Ashman to see what he thought of it. We went through two drafts of the abstract (both are available in the Appendices below), with only minor changes between them. Dr. Ashman was quite enthusiastic and excited and very happy to offer to include our finished essay in the proposed collection.

How We Went about Things:

We started working in earnest when the Fall semester began—we both reread the text and thus the (largely unconscious) work of letting the text simmer and cook and churn commenced. We divvied up a good deal of the secondary literature that we wanted to bring to bear on this text: so many texts and essays got read by one of the two of us (this is not even to mention many of the texts the both of us read together as well). MaKenzie took Félix Guattari's *Three Ecologies* and although the final product didn't end up utilizing this text as much as we had originally anticipated, I think it was still fruitful to have it under our belts. I am quite struck by how much of the work of thinking through this

was so often largely unconscious. We let ideas, thoughts, vague premonitions, and hints course through us—the material we're engaging traversing through all of our past thoughts and experiences, linking things up, connecting notions to other conceptualizations—and connecting it all to on another's thoughts as well, of course—, all "behind the scenes," as it were. This was definitely the case—so much so that it gets difficult to say how the "final product" is actually fulled related to all this work that comes before it. Is the final product really an illustration of this prior work? Hardly. So many dead ends, so many paths scouted that weren't able to be fully travelled, the final product is a rather poor illustration. That said, so much of what we thought about together over the past six months did end up in the final drafts of the essay. (Of course, when we try to take into account all of the rhetorical constraints that are a part of academic writing—the most salient one being the word limit on the final essay: between 7000 and 7500, no more and no less, with apparently no exceptions possible—the number of avenues that we discovered during our thinking that didn't find their way into the final product would make that number grow seemingly exponentially.)

That said, there are some signposts, landmarks in the landscape, that I could easily mention here. For starters, the course that MaKenzie did together this semester for "Ancient Literature" where we read all of *Genesis* and *Exodus* ended up becoming quite significant for the essay. When we pitched the abstract, there was very little that had to do with the theological narrative thread that weaves its way throughout the entirety of Millet's novel. However, as MaKenzie and I made our way through *Genesis* and *Exodus*, all kinds of connections bubbled to the surface. Things that I had not at all seen as all that important upon my first and second reading of the novel came into the foreground quite strongly and starkly. The unconscious thinking and churning turned up all kinds of connections that I totally missed on the first two read-throughs. MaKenzie pushed them to the top of the boiling soup. We charted out connections between characters in the novel and Moses and Aaron, connections to the story of Jacob (Israel)—all kinds of opportunities for articulating Noah and his ark and so much more became possible. Having gone through these old texts opened up everything up for me, for us. The abstract clearly set out the novel's recourse to certain Oedipal structures and pictures; rereading *Genesis* and *Exodus* forced us to think about adding another kind of "detective game" in the novel that got read through this theological lens.

After months of just letting everything simmer and cook, we started to really delve into all of this—starting, again, with yet another (re)reading of the novel with, this time, especial focus and attention given to how the theological resonances and allusions were working in the book. Of course, one might wonder why this narrative strand wasn't somehow present right from the very beginning of everything: after all, the book's title explicitly invokes this, *A Children's Bible*. I'm not sure why it wasn't visible, but, for some reason, it just wasn't quite there. Would we have come across this lens if we hadn't been working our way through the *Hebrew Bible*? I'm not sure, maybe, but it's hard to actually come

to some conclusion about such an "alternative history" counterfactual. I'm sure we would have stumbled back over it, but the path probably would have been much more convoluted and circuitous. After a third read-through we had a good sense of how to proceed. Before starting to write—after months of letting all this thinking work us over unconsciously—we once again divvied up the writing workload. I asked MaKenzie to take the whole treatment of the "Oedipal detective game" that the children play in the novel—and this largely because ever since coming to USF, MaKenzie has gotten a profound crash-course of sorts from me in psychoanalytic thinking (Lacan mostly) which she quite brilliantly put in conversation with the readings of Freud that Dr. Ioanes presented to Critical Theory students in the Spring of 2022. MaKenzie gravitated to Freud and psychoanalysis in a really profound and impactful way—it would be difficult to say precisely how much she has resonated with that tradition over her time at USF. Did it help things that I myself work within this tradition? Probably. I would take the whole theological angle of the novel, mostly due to the fact that my background expertise in theology was a little stronger than hers. Thus, we tried to work in a way that spoke to each of our own individual strengths and capacities, while also constantly building a foundation of practicing how to "think together"—this is something that has, if I'm truly honest, been the very pinnacle and ultimate highlight of my entire career as a teacher. MaKenzie and I have often talked about some of the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari wrote and thought together. I am still of the opinion that very few of us actually manage to ever learn how to *think with* another person. Yes, we often "think *with*" others—but this only seems to go as far as spatial proximity between two individuals. Learning to "think with" another, learning how to get one's speeds and rhythms and movements of thought synced up and somewhat "in line with" another human being is a rare thing. I know I myself never really managed to do it to the degree we have before she and I crossed paths—and I have been fortunate enough to have had a good experience co-authoring and co-writing in my own scholarly work (with Dr. McDermott[3]). (It is my plan to return to this larger philosophical concern about "thinking *with*" another person—I am merely signposting it and will hopefully come back to it later on in this narrative.)

Having gotten a Google Docs in our shared Drive folder for our work together, I tossed up an opening paragraph (most of which either got cut or was incorporated into other spots of the essay), just a short two-hundred word paragraph to give us a kind of small wall to bounce our thinking off of as we truly got writing in earnest. We let the tentative introductory paragraph stand for a little bit—and then one day I came across an essay by Deleuze that I had never read before. (I'm not even sure what led me to it—I think it was Russell Ford's "Deleuze's Dick,"[4] but, again, I can't recall what forced that article across my path in the first place.) Entitled "The Philosophy of Crime Novels,"[5] it is a rather cute

[3] See our "Poeticizing Ecology/Ecologizing Poetry: Reading Elizabeth Bishop's 'Poem' Ecologically" Vol. 33 No 1. (2017): pp. 48-67. The full text is available here.

[4] *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2005): pp. 41-71.

[5] Available in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans.

(and short) little essay about one of Deleuze's literary loves: detective fiction. I passed it MaKenzie's way, thinking it might help out a little bit with her writing of the first section devoted to the Oedipal detective game. MaKenzie read the essay voraciously and came to our next meeting day saying that she found it incredibly fruitful for thinking through this strand of the novel. Not only that, but discussion between the two of us facilitated the opportunity to think about even further ways in which this essay might be useful for my "theology" section. Putting this in another way, we knew how we wanted to read the Oedipal structures, but still needed some way to flesh out a couple of things:

1. Why bother to read the novel through Oedipus at all in the first place?
2. How to link the invocation of Sophocles's drama beyond the simple (and perfectly commonplace and well-known) fact that *Oedipus Rex* is the very origin of the detective novel genre.[6]

Deleuze's essay provided us with a way to think through this—and, even better, a way to potentially link up both the Oedipal and theology detective games through the presence of the climate crisis in *A Children's Bible*. This gave us one of the missing pieces that we had been (perhaps, again, somewhat unconsciously) missing—a way to actually get the essay to indeed do what the collection was hoping to accomplish: linking the "crime fiction" genre with questions of an ecological/environmental nature.

There was quite a flurry of writing after this talk about Deleuze's little text—I led the way and got a huge chunk of my section written quite quickly and fairly fluidly—it was in these large "blocks," very "modular." I don't usually write in chunks—the metaphor of "flows" and "flowing" often seems much more apropos—, but this seemed to be the best way to perform the collaborative dance steps MaKenzie and I were trying out here. (Actually, since MaKenzie are both composing reflections about this shared process, I will be quite excited to get her full perspective on this. My sense is that the writing she completed did seem to "flow"—and I will be curious to see if she would quibble with this metaphor, saying, instead, that it was much more "blocky" than it appeared to me from the outside.) As my chunks and blocks came into greater and greater distinctiveness and focus, the main concern was figuring out precisely how many of the theological allusions within Millet's heavily overdetermined text I could actually manage to cover (given, again, our word count constraint).

It was very clear to both of us that the novel does not follow that stereotypical conception of an allegory—i.e. like the one we get in, say, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* where there are very clear one-to-one relationships between things and ideas. If it was possible to read a character as hinting at[7] being an analogue for

Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 81-85.

[6] See Ernst Bloch, "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel," *Discourse*, Vol. 2 (Summer, 1980): pp. 32-52.

[7] I am thinking one of the ways to further flesh this out would be through Adam Phillips's wonderful little chapter, "A Stab at Hinting" in his *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Thoughts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

a Biblical character, it was easy to find further connections to other characters, to other stories. The allegory in the novel works much more similarly to the way this is theorized in Paul de Man's work[8] than it is in any (often over-simplified) versions of allegory within various theological traditions. Wanting to be attentive to all of the ways in which the book's elements were heavily over-determined, a good deal of the composition involved deciding how many of these elements we could ultimately get to line up with the larger goals of the collection.

The thing that really managed to center much of this was not only MaKenzie's reading of Deleuze's "Crime Novels" essay, but also another short essay by Jerome Jeffrey Cohen that MaKenzie read and the she was responsible for bringing to our shared conversations. In his "Noah's Arkive" text, Cohen rehearses a short history of usages of the Noah story over time—and a particular sentence drew MaKenzie's attention and focus very strongly, a summative sentence of sorts where Cohen notes that "[t]he flood makes evident a lack of affective connection already present, the everyday inability of sympathy to cross boundaries of nation, race, species, class."[9] No doubt the somewhat quick accrual of "blocks," or "chunks" of the paper, managed to push things even faster: getting these chunks down on paper was rather generative all its own. We thus had things coming into much clearer form: we had the theological strand, we had a still somewhat wispy sense of how we wanted to link the theological parallels to the "ecology" side of the collection's proposed goals, and, as MaKenzie wrote and created her first section of the essay, we had the "crime" part of the title not only through the Oedipal detective game but also through Deleuze's larger theorization of the genre as a whole, where on the kinds of truth highlighted as working in this genre became easily linkable to the vision of truth we wished to show operating in the theological strand of the book. We were getting something that started to look like a fully-fledged skeleton here.

Now, I should note that things were still not incredibly smooth here. Even after the initial flurry of writing, I myself had to start an entirely new file that was simply going to keep track of "excised passages." We did not work in such a way that we got everything into the document only to then start the process of cutting. We did seem to work "in parallel" to some degree through the composing process. Time and again I had passages that I wrote that ended up getting moved from the main file of the essay over to the "excised_passages" file. MaKenzie's work on this front was infinitely better than mine, I should say. She got everything down in her section and had—if I remember correctly—a fairly large paragraph or two where she had commented something like: "I'm not totally happy with this paragraph ... not sure if we should move it elsewhere or incorporate it into another paragraph." I don't think we ended up moving a single paragraph from MaKenzie's section to the other file—I think only paragraphs that were mine ended up there. We did not end up moving the paragraphs MaKenzie wasn't too initially happy with; we often incorporated the major ideas in them to other

[8] *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982).

[9] This essay is available fully online here.

spots. Most of them ended up in the third and final section of the essay, which is also something I would like to talk about here now.

As I said, the fashioning of the first two sections—one created largely by MaKenzie and the other by me—was fairly quick. We were still left with the problem of how precisely we wanted to integrate the two sections, hopefully in a way that felt fluid and in no way forced. We wanted to have as little of the "mortar work" joining all the bricks together to be smooth, no gaping holes. I am not quite totally certain if our methodology here for this last section was all that new from the way we created the other sections; I think what I would like to try is to lay out how I think it went and proceeded and then see if I need a new way to talk about that creation. I think it is the case—and I am guessing that MaKenzie herself might be able to confirm this—that we had all of the threads that we wanted in place, but didn't quite know how to weave them together. I originally told her that we would each take a section to write and that I would myself be responsible for writing the third, slightly more analytical, and summative section of the work. I took a day or two trying out a bunch of different scenarios—thinking that since I promised to take this section, I would do it largely on my own—, but never really quite hitting on the right angle or direction. That didn't last for long and I started to notice that there was something about this process that wasn't quite consistent with the way we had been working so far on the entire project. I suppose I ended up feeling like this wasn't really going to pan out.

I don't believe that I had any real principled reason whatsoever to want to take the whole last section myself—I think I was trying to be attentive to MaKenzie's workload in general and wanting to make sure that I didn't put too much on her plate. As per usual, I offered to perhaps carry a little bit more of the load so that she didn't have to, I suppose. It didn't really work out at all, as I hit a bit of a snag myself and found myself struggling for some kind of conclusion for the essay. After having spent the last two years learning to think with MaKenzie I did what she and I have both done so often over that time: I just brought the problems and obstacles and snags and other things to her. She helped me clear things up almost immediately. Not only that, but some of the paragraphs she had composed for her section that she wasn't too enthused about became significant linchpins in that third section after we finagled them a little bit, remolded them slightly—repositioning some ideas, reworking some phrases, etc.

Just one example might possibly serve my purposes here for illustration, but there was a chunk that MaKenzie had in her section where she added it and then commented: "I'm honestly not totally sure where to stick this paragraph and/or whether it should be broken up and stuck a couple of places." She went on to say that she saw a place where it could go:

> I think this could flow really well into my parts about the classic/noir series because the parents' morphing/deindividualizing (totally made that up) can line up with the lack of "truth" that come with the

conclusion/resolution of a noir series novel.[10]

It was truly only through conversation that we were able to leverage the paragraph this comment was appended to in the final section of the essay where the pair of us combined this idea of the "parents' morphing/deindividualizing" phenomenon MaKenzie speaks about here with Deleuze and Guattari's focus on multiplicity—especially as this gets cashed out in many of the former's treatment of indefinite articles.[11] MaKenzie and I together linked this up with a somewhat odd little detail—namely, that all of the parents get referred to by the narrator, Eve, with speech tags that read, "…, a mother said," "…, a father said," etc. and that we read in a quite different way than one of the book's reviewers ultimately wanted to read it[12]—not only keeping in mind with the Deleuzian take on indefiniteness, but also with the way it operated in league with the Oedipal detective game (which MaKenzie expertly read through the lens of the children wanting to remove the traces of their familial relations) and its connections with the novel's questions about "the crime" that is the climate crisis. It was very well done—and it would be impossible to say which of the two of us did it. It wasn't either one or the other of us—it was both of us, *together*. I think that MaKenzie put this to me in conversation best: she said that after looking through the last section, she confessed that she herself could not tell which of the two of us wrote it.[13] This was due, she correctly noticed, to the fact that we did in fact write it together. "I saw things that I had said in our conversations showing up there. I wasn't really sure where exactly my thinking left off and yours began." Indeed, I could hardly not agree more.

The conversations we have had all semester long became the very elements that got formed into the final section. I should also offer that I found myself saying something similar—if not absolutely identical—after reading MaKenzie's initial writings in her section. I don't think that I saw too many spots where I felt the urge or need to drastically alter them. If anything, I found myself putting comments in the margin like, "More here, buddy"—very rare was the moment when I suggested drastic alterations, by and large the points I focused on mainly served as locations for further elaboration and extension—a case in point might again be the focus on indefiniteness in the novel: I noted it, passed MaKenzie the key passages in Deleuze's work that spoke to this, and then she did the rest. Additionally, ten times out of ten these spots seemed to be very generative for MaKenzie's own writing: she zeroed-in on those spots, expanded them beautifully—and all in ways that were eerily, very uncannily, close to the additions that I myself would have proposed.

[10] This is from one of the marginal comments on our Google Document of the essay.

[11] This thread runs throughout the entirety of Deleuze's corpus, so picking out specific sources is difficult—most salient of these is his short essay, "Literature and Life" (in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel B. Smith and Michael A. Greco [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997], pp. 1-7) and also the treatment this receives in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

[12] See Jonathan Dee's review, "An Epic Storm Turns a Summer Holiday Into Potent Allegory," review of *A Children's Bible* by Lydia Millet, *The New York Times*, May 8, 2020.

[13] MaKenzie Munson, personal conversation, December 6, 2022.

So far this narrative has sounded like the whole project was really quite smooth and effortless, all things considered. I do not quite think that's totally the case—although, by and large, I think the work between the pair of us was smooth, but there were still hurdles we had to handle cooperatively—and so I thought I might try to speak to what was perhaps the most significant of the little hurdles that we had to tackle (although it doesn't quite seem right to call it a "hurdle" at all). Given the already mentioned profound similarities between MaKenzie and myself—and given also the ways in which she ended up writing parts of her section that were very similar to the way I wrote mine—we have talked endlessly over her time here at USF about questions of writing and, most importantly, issues and matters of what one might just lump under the heading of "style." I think that this all started in a Fall 2021 course on "Philosophy, Rhetoric, Grammar, and Language," where MaKenzie got introduced to a thinker that I know she would name amongst her most favorite of philosophers: Nietzsche. As is so often the case when it comes to young people "getting into philosophy"—I know so many professional philosophers who invoke his name when they describe their "origin story" of how they got hooked on philosophical thinking in general—Nietzsche is so often a major touchstone and entry point for them. In the course we didn't do a ton of work with him; we only read "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense"[14]—but it was clear that she was absolutely hooked. I tried to focus in on the interest this essay generated for MaKenzie and we then spent last Spring doing a very deep-dive into Nietzsche's collection of works (the tutorial ran under the title of "Nietzsche's Styles"), focusing quite strongly on the issue of all his various styles of thinking and writing (we read everything from *The Birth of Tragedy*[15] to *The Genealogy of Morality*[16] to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*[17] to a number of chapters from *Human, All Too Human*[18]). It is quite difficult to describe just how powerful and influential Nietzsche's whole philosophy was on MaKenzie. Although I can indeed take a stab at it—and, once again, it seems to me one of the best ways to do it is through Deleuze and Guattari—:

> This is what a style is, or rather the absence of style—asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode . . . [19]

[14] This essay is heavily anthologized everywhere—as I'm sure we all know so well—just one of many is in David Richter's edited collection, *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3rd Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), pp. 452-458.

[15] *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Guess and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007).

[16] *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).

[17] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021).

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human (I)*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995).

[19] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983), p. 133.

We spent a great deal of time excavating a theory of performative language via Nietzsche's corpus, focusing very closely and carefully on how Nietzsche doesn't just make arguments (in that essay)—instead, he opens language up to no longer being "defined by what it says," but by what it *performs* and brings about, "what it causes to move, to flow, and to explode." And explode MaKenzie's thinking really did after her encounter with Nietzsche. Moreover, we built so many further conversations and lines of thinking upon the foundation his work provided for her—and I think it's hardly debatable to say she came to a very clear sense of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a kind of real or genuine "reading" as well:

> For reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather it is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring-machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force.[20]

This all paid off immensely not only for MaKenzie's overall intellectual growth here, but also in terms of her reading of both Millet's novel and Deleuze's "Crime Novels" essay in way more here than I could ever really fully enumerate even if I had the time. (MaKenzie's section is quite attentive to questions and concerns of a Nietzschean—and Deleuzian—nature, especially her focus on the way "truth" functions in both of these philosophers and in Millet's book as well. I can see very clearly how so much of the work she has done over the past couple of years found its way not only into the content of her parts of the essay, but also in terms of *how* her sections say what they say.)

Thinking about style as that which is absolutely singular to an individual thinker, we spent a great deal of "metacognitive" time this semester talking between us about our own styles; I learned so much about her as we talked so frequently of our own histories of when and how we came to a sense not only of what our writing "looked like," but also how it worked, as it were. I won't rehearse that whole history, but will simply note that we, once again, seemed to be very similar in that we both came to an understanding of our own styles of writing rather early: both of us doing so in high school.

Now, what problem exactly did this pose for us? Well, after we both got most of the large chunks into our respective sections, MaKenzie was the first to notice that it appeared as if what we were doing was writing the essay not just once but twice. There were thus quite a few redundancies—passages that MaKenzie picked up and leaned on heavily in her section that I also utilized in mine. This was perhaps just a simple proofreading/copyediting concern, though I do think it speaks to a much more deeper philosophical matter; whether or not it was ultimately a "problem" to be handled is one that I need to think through recourse to philosophy—and that is what I would like to do now.

I have already spilled so much ink here trying to articulate best this whole

[20] Ibid., p. 106.

process. Despite that fact, I still struggle to figure out how to describe it all in a way that makes some degree of sense. Yes, the thinking was deeply "collaborative" and "shared," but I'm still dissatisfied with those words—they fail to capture things at a much deeper level. It is correct and true to say that we "wrote together"—but the "together" part still requires some further fleshing-out. Rather than ultimately being frustrating, I think it is more accurate to say that what I need to talk about is something that I would want to again crib from Deleuze—and that is with some discussion about what it might mean to say (as I did earlier in this write-up) that MaKenzie and I learned how to profoundly "think with" one another.

When I think back on the time studying with MaKenzie, I should confess that one of the most humorous things about this whole endeavor involved how we ultimately wanted to try to articulate this collaborative "thinking *with*"—given the fact that one of the things that have always made thinking with MaKenzie really simple comes about because we are strikingly similar in so many ways. As she and I have joked far too many times to count, her mind seems to work in a way that I think might be exactly identical to mine. It is rare—exceedingly so—to come across someone that might actually have "the exact same mind" as you, but it is unquestionably the case with MaKenzie and me. One might think that such an admission would suggest that the process of learning to "think with" another was all too easy in our case. If two people are very alike—isn't it an easy task to learn to "think with" that other person? Perhaps, though I think things are undoubtedly far more complicated. I feel that the line of thinking here is best illustrated through recourse, again, to Deleuze. In a chapter from his co-authored text with Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, the first chapter is entitled "A Conversation: What is it? What is it for?" and in it Deleuze raises the question of what a conversation might have to do with one of his major conceptual terms, "becoming."[21] As he notes,

> To become is never to imitate, nor to "do like", nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or truth. There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at. Nor are there two terms which are exchanged. The question 'What are you becoming?' is particular stupid. For as someone becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself. Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns. Nuptials are always against nature. Nuptials are the opposite of a couple. There are no longer binary machines: question-answer, masculine-feminine, man-animal, etc. *This could be what a conversation is—simply the outline of a becoming.* (2)

Moreover—my apologies for citing these long passages so extensively—but a great deal of what Deleuze extrapolates from his coauthored work with Guattari

[21] See Cliff Stagoll's entry on this concept in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005), pp. 21-23.

in his interviews with Parnet is very germane for my purposes here:

> We said the same thing about becomings: it is not one term becomes the other, but each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two, since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is between the two, which has its own direction, a bloc of becoming, an a-parallel evolution. This is it, the double capture, the wasp AND the orchid: not even something which would be in the one, or something which would be in the other, even if it had to be exchanged, be mingled, but something it is between the two, outside the two, and which flows in another direction. (6-7)

I have found—over the course of my time teaching, thinking, reading, writing, and talking with MaKenzie—that this idea of a *becoming*, a creation of something new and different, occurring *in between* (or in "the between") the two of us is a perfectly apt description of how the work went. I cannot say how true I find this way of talking about conversations as operating "in the between"—and not only true, but very fruitful and incredibly helpful. In between the two there is always a third (thing).[22] What is that third thing that every true and genuine conversation is wrestling with as the whole process proceeds? It's often frighteningly hard to say. There's no way to talk of it prior to the doing of the thing. Maybe all this philosophy of Deleuze is pure overkill: this becoming is perhaps most easily categorized in terms of things like the performative and linguistic performativity in general. (I can't remember where I read it, but there is some simple little aphorism that says there's no real difference between "practicing" and "playing" the piano—they're not separable activities, the only way is to do the thing . . .)

Now, I do not want to say that the way in which Deleuze talks so touchingly about his collaborations with Guattari were borne-out point by point in MaKenzie's work with me on this project—nor do I want to suggest that our work so far is on a par with theirs (although, to be honest, we have talked a lot about how our work together can possibly continue long after she graduates here in December; Deleuze and Guattari will no doubt serve as a wonderful model for our ongoing partnership and collaboration going forward). I am thinking here of a very specific spot, again from *Dialogues*, where Deleuze suggests that the two of them were not always perfectly "in step" or "in sync" with one another:

> We were only two, but what was important for us was less our working together than this strange fact of working between the two of us. We stopped being "author". And these "between-the-twos" referred back to other people, who were different on one side from the other.

[22] I can hear MaKenzie's voice in my head now as it says—and how correct it is to say this—that this is quite akin to a very deeply Lacanian point (although its tenor is still slightly different from the way I want to mobilize Deleuze's discussion of the "in between"): in between the pair of the analysand and analyst is the "Symbolic order" of language, signification, culture, the unconscious, etc. There is never only a two or pair, there is *always a third* present in the relation between the two.

> . . . You know how we work—I repeat it because it seems to be important—we do not work together, we work between the two. . . . We don't work, we negotiate. We were never in the same rhythm, we were always out of step: I understood and could make use of what Félix said to me six months later; he understood what I said to him immediately, too quickly for my liking—he was already elsewhere. From time to time we have written about the same idea, and have noticed later that we have not grasped it at all in the same way . . . " (17)

This description of Guattari as a bit of an obsessive—this is signaled by Deleuze's admission that "he [Guattari] was always elsewhere"—did not seem to match up quite well with our work. Once more, I'm going to find it interesting what she thinks about this, but I have the feeling that she and I were almost *always* on the same page. I like to think that in this project—and all throughout the entirety of the work that we have done, not only for this essay but for all of the other courses she's taken with me—more often than not I felt I always "understood what [she] said . . . immediately." I am not sure if she felt like Deleuze, that this understanding on my part was "too quick" for her liking, but I'd be curious to talk with her about that much more. (We actually jumped the gun here a bit and talked about this on Thursday, December 9, 2022—where MaKenzie mentioned, after I read her this passage, that she did profoundly understand and sympathize with Deleuze's remark about often being able to "put things [Guattari had said to him] to work" only months and months later.[23]) I hope she won't mind too much, but she had texted the following to me once: "I was really worried when I started at St. Francis that I would never find anyone to connect with who thought like I did about anything." She went on to say: "I feel so lucky that I didn't need to worry about anything because I would meet you only shortly after starting!"[24] No doubt this was due to this very deep and very profound rapport that she and I appear to have had ever since the very first time we met.

The Actual Finished Essay:

I thought I might try to transition here just slightly and speak more directly to the actual finished product MaKenzie and I created—sliding away from all of the talk about the process in the previous section. In thinking about what the actual paper looks like, I want to try to highlight some of things I have been meditating about now that it is complete. Mostly, these are things that I know all of us will find all-too-terribly familiar when it comes to academic writing; I've been performing that exercise we very often locate in Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein-Graffs' work (although, of course, this does not originate with them

[23] MaKenzie Munson, personal conversation, December 8, 2022.
[24] MaKenzie Munson, personal communication, November 18, 2022.

but would seem to be as old as rhetoric itself): I've been imagining naysayers.[25] I have a few potential concerns here:

1. I do think it is possible that Dr. Ashman could read the essay as straying a little too far from the original abstract—there are a couple of sources we list there that did not pan-out in our further investigations: our researches just didn't end up taking us in those directions (Guattari's work dropped out, as did the essays by Jonathan Maksit and John Samuel Harpham). I think the essay is actually a slightly better version of the thought proposed in the abstract. Still, I can envision the take as one that strays a bit too far from the originally proposed plan. (In terms of how we might plan to handle this, my guess is that we will let Dr. Ashman's reading drive this—it might turn out that it's not a significant issue at all.)
2. The final, third, section of the paper is one that—despite the fact MaKenzie and I wrote it together (as we essentially did for the entirety of the finished essay)—I still feel we could strengthen. I don't quite think that we have the strongest version of it that we could have. This is not really something that I have shared all that extensively with MaKenzie yet—and it is perhaps also an item that we can plan to tackle if, like point 1. above, it actually ends up surfacing as a concern in any suggested revisions coming from the collection's editor. Probably this is another one of those "we'll cross that bridge if and when we come to it" situations. Of course, I can already imagine ways in which MaKenzie and I might handle this. I think "my" (again, I don't think there is really any "my" here in this entire project) second section is a bit bloated—we could chop a bit from there in order to give us a little bit more breathing space for that third more analytical section. As I say, we'll play it by ear and see how it goes.
3. I can imagine—this is perhaps a fear, worry, anxiety (not quite sure which word best fits) that has travelled with me for as long as I've been an academic writer, I suppose—that the style ultimately ended up being a little *too* conversational. MaKenzie has made the argument in her reflection that this might actually not be a weakness of the paper, but, instead, is one of its strengths. I would concur with this assessment, but can definitely imagine a suggestion for revision where we are asked to rework the tone of the article. I am open to this possibility—but do have a bunch of thoughts at the ready to potentially address it. (I should note that I have been writing for academic and settings and contexts for quite a while now—I have always found editors and peer reviewers to quite like my own conversational style of writing. That said, we know that people's aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities can be quite idiosyncratic—exorbitantly so. Have I ever had reviewers ask me in the past to drastically alter the style and tone? No—not yet. Still, as the old saw goes, "there's always a first time for everything," and thus I do want to note that it's possible that this situation will be that "first time". As I say, we'll see what the editor thinks

[25] *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

and then go from there.)

4. I think this last one is a concern that could end up being folded under point 3., but I would like to think through a little bit more carefully here, thus enumerating a fourth point when three could well suffice. I want to imagine the very worst-case scenario here. That seems simple enough: Dr. Ashmann comes back our way and says the whole essay needs massive rework—actually, maybe that's not even the worst case scenario. Even worse: nothing about the essay is at all usable and it'll be back to the very original "drawing board," as one might say. I can envision—full disclosure here!—some slightly more principled objections here to the article as it stands now. I can't provide an exhaustive list, but I can offer a "lightning round" array of potential counter-responses—I'll also try to provide some sense of how we might respond to each of them:
    - The paper needs a stronger overview of the ecological theorizing out there ... before leaping into the reading of Millet's novel. — I do think there is something to this; it's true, we do not really lean too heavily on much of the environmental theorizations available to us. That said, I think that we took the route we did largely because we are charting new ground and new territory. It is true—as we try to briefly note at the start of Section 2—that there is not much critical work already in existence such that we would feel impelled to turn to it—it's rather frightening being the first one to put their oar into the water (to ape the metaphor we all know from Kenneth Burke's work) and to try to carve a path through untested and untried waters. Incredibly frightening, I should say. That said, I think the strength of the article is the closeness with which we do try to read Millet's book—all with the hope that others will also find such work generative of a desire to stick their own oars into these waters. Then again: this would require a strong trade-off for us: with only 7500 words we would have to think through some quite substantial changes to the essay as it now stands.
    - The paper needs further set-up of secondary literature on crime fiction more broadly and more generally. — This one, too, strikes me as quite legitimate. Neither of us quite have the full knowledge of this genre—and it's possible such a lacuna could be quite the problem. Still, despite the fact that the field of Deleuze studies has combed through (seemingly) everything in Deleuze's *oeuvre*, there's very little secondary literature on "The Philosophy of Crime Novels" essay that MaKenzie got us to use so heavily and so profoundly. That fact on its own might also speak to a rather innovative reading present with the essay in its current state.
    - The third section needs further theoretical fleshing-out and/or tightening up. — I spoke to this earlier, worrying just slightly that there is a better version of that section out there and available to us—though I am not quite sure exactly what that would look like after significant revision. I think it's out there, but cannot quite get my hands around

it. This is a spot where I imagine we will lean quite strongly on Dr. Ashmann's take on that. (It might go without saying, but this collection strikes me as hitting a quite niche market—and one that would seem to call for precisely the intervention the collection seeks to provide. The conjunction of crime fiction and ecological concerns is itself an example of new territory that scholars are charting. It's exciting to be a part of it, to say the very least. But, again, there are few models here that one could enlist in precisely how best to do this cartographical charting work. First attempts into new lands are perhaps always fraught with complications—and this would seem to also apply not only to MaKenzie and my contribution, but to the collection of essays as a whole.)

5. There is no doubt whatsoever that MaKenzie and I are really diving right into the deep end here—and it's true that everything about this whole endeavor is, admittedly, *very, very, very speculative*. Is it going to work out at all at the end of the day? I would love to be able to say that I am absolutely certain that it will ultimately pan out—but I would be fibbing just a little bit if I said such a thing. I am quite confident that the work is good, but nagging worries will probably always plague one—that is, up until the point when we get a response from the editor (of course, those worries will often plague one long after their work is finally published). Should we have been a tad bit more conservative here—perhaps doing a little bit of practice swimming in the pool before we threw ourselves out into the middle of the ocean? It's hard to say—I can easily see both sides of the argument on this front. (I am not sure if this will call Zarathustra to mind here—I know it no doubt will for MaKenzie—but I cannot help but think of his meditations on an act or activity that is still "too big for one" to undertake at a particular point in time ... as the parable goes, "Oh Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe but you are not ripe for your fruits!"[26]) I definitely think it was worth a shot—and if the editor's response comes back less than wholly positive, then I don't necessarily think the idea of our collaborating was bad, nor do I think it forces us to draw the conclusion that such a journey was premature. Far from it, in fact. If it goes horribly awry, we'll use it as a learning experience, as we do with everything else. On the other hand, if this all works out fairly well, I am going to have an incredibly hard time not interpreting it as providing us with a really profound and remarkable precedent for our continuing to work together going forward. If things go the opposite way—I myself am not at all ready to admit defeat (I think MaKenzie would probably feel very similarly)—we'll reassess and then plot a trajectory for how best to move forward. One could easily just say that if any of these concerns come our way, this too will be good training for MaKenzie. As she already knows—she even mentions this herself in her reflection without any prompting from me (and we haven't

[26] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), p. 117.

> really talked all that extensively together about this yet)—the "revise and resubmit" process is hardly foreign to academic writers. It would be quite odd to have our first attempt go so smoothly such that she/we would be lucky enough to avoid such a rite of passage. As I say, however this goes, it'll just be part of the whole process here that MaKenzie has certainly got a "crash-course" in of sorts this semester. I know we'll be eager to hear back from the editor and will no doubt really look forward to tackling the next steps in the process together.

Concluding Remarks:

It might be a little quick to speed immediately towards a conclusion here, but I already feel as if I may have ballooned this narrative out of proportion already. So, here goes: once again, I find myself—here at the end—returning over and over to bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress*—and in the interests of "bookending" the epigraph of hers with which I began this narrative—:

> There is not much passionate teaching or learning taking place in higher education today. Even when students are desperately yearning to be touched by knowledge, professors still fear the challenge, allow their worries about losing control to override their desires to teach. Concurrently, those of us who teach the same old subjects in the same old ways are often inwardly bored—unable to rekindle passions we may have once felt. If, as Thomas Merton suggests in his essay on pedagogy "Learning to Live," the purpose of education is to show students how to define themselves "authentically and spontaneously in relation" to the world, then professors can best teach if we are self-actualized. Merton reminds us that "the original and authentic 'paradise' idea, both in the monastery and in the university, implied not simply a celestial store of theoretic ideas to which the Magistri and Doctores held the key, but the inner self of the student" who would discover the ground of their being in relation to themselves, to higher powers, to community. That the "fruit of education . . . was in the activation of that utmost center." To restore passion to the classroom or to excite it in classrooms where it has never been, professors must find again the place of eros within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire.[27]

I like to think that there is potentially much here MaKenzie would resonate with very strongly (although there is also quite a bit of language that I know she would quibble with). What I like about this shared project MaKenzie and I worked on is that it seems to push us to tweak hooks's idea here just a tiny bit. I have the intuition that MaKenzie came my way knowing quite well this feeling hooks describes professors as usually having: yearning for something more, but still, for some reason, "inwardly bored." I should confess that I was myself feeling

[27] hooks, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

very similarly before she and I crossed paths in Fall of 2020. hooks is more than correct to agree with Merton that we should strive for helping out students to "define themselves"—autonomy is always the watchword here, as so many already know. All that I would add is that often we professors cannot manage to "find again the place of eros within ourselves"—we ourselves, all on our own, often cannot "rekindle passions we may have once felt" in the past. Frequently we need another (perhaps we always need another) that can play a role in all of this. What if my own "self-actualization" (this is one of the words that I know both she and I would want to be quite careful when using)—which hooks says is necessary in order for one to best teach—is something that only comes about *through* the pedagogical relation? What if I cannot self-actualize myself and only then provide some sort of model to my students? Hearkening back to the Deleuzian position that claims the profound paucity of things that rely on pictures of "modeling" or "copying" or "assimilating" or "imitating" the relation between things: what if I can *become* in some way only through the relation to my student?[28]

I do not wish to sound at all critical of hooks here: I have struggled a great deal recently trying to find some way to talk about the profoundly strong affective relationships that a teacher can have with her student(s); I have searched quite far and wide in the hopes of finding some language to talk about the profound kinds of rapport one can have with their students (most of the time it is the feminist tradition in general that speaks to this affect in the clearest way for me). I think it can often be so incredibly difficult for teachers to make legible and clear what it is that *they actually do* at the end of the day. Do we point to our publishing record? Sure. Do we invoke all of our "service to the university"? No doubt. How often should we simply point at a student and say, "If you want to know what it is that I do, please, look at *her* and all she can do"? I think that as I struggle to articulate all of this, I find that, as per usual, MaKenzie has

[28] It's probably not at all necessary to do this, but I find it hard to resist. I think that the goal—the *very intentional* goal—with MaKenzie has been to follow an insight that is most easily and readily found in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), where he articulates what good teaching and what good *learning* look like, through recourse to the analogy of someone learning 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. (23)

The philosophical/pedagogical focus here has followed quite strongly this idea that one learns best not when the teacher says "Do exactly like me," but, instead, "Do *with me*." Again, I want this issue of the "with" to be as clear as possible in this context (slight sidenote: it's endlessly fascinating to me the way in which Deleuze's thinking seems absolutely consistent with hooks' "Eros in the Classroom" essay that serves as the epigraph to this narrative—"there is something amorous ... about all education." Quite true.)

managed to say it much better than I ever could. She writes in her reflection:

> 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.[29]

I think that this last sentence is the one that I would want to highlight incredibly strongly: "I truly think that we have a special way of working and writing together and that we have some incredibly important things to say." When teachers struggle to explain and show and demonstrate their work as teachers, ten times out of ten we should turn to our students. They so often can say what it is we want to say so much better than we ever could. I said in the previous paragraph that teachers cannot often manage to "rekindle the fires" all on our own and that we so often need another to help us with that. MaKenzie says from very early on she "felt that [her] 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."[30] I have not ever really told MaKenzie this before—well, at least not quite in this way—but she did the exact same thing for me: she rekindled things for me that I could never have rekindled on my own—I myself thought those things were long gone, never to return. Whenever people ask me precisely what it is that I do, I am going to ask her if I can point them in her direction—she, her work, her potential, all of the wonderful and beautiful things she is going to go on to do in her future (and that, hopefully, I will have managed to contribute to in some tiny, insignificant way), all of those things will make clear everything about my pedagogy I would want in ways that I myself could never have articulated without her. Even better, she'll be able to speak so strongly to the fact that it wasn't at all just *my* pedagogy—it was something that happened *in between* the two of us. And that's exactly what I'll want others to know.

As a final parting comment, I would like to say that I am not wholly certain if MaKenzie believes me at all about this—although she has come to know me well enough such that she is cognizant of how significant I think our ethos of quite genuine and profound honesty with one another is a really necessary ingredient of our work[31]—, but it was clear to me even before we ever met, that she was

[29] See MaKenzie's reflection in this corpus.
[30] Ibid.
[31] This ethos—it seems to me—arises from a number of different sources: Freud and the

on the lookout for someone to push her, to push her thinking, her growth, her knowledge, her writing, everything. MaKenzie possesses an intellectual intensity and fierceness that is exceedingly rare—I've never seen it before in any other student I've had the privilege to teach (and I tire myself out now just thinking about how long I've been doing this for—all my adult life, to be frank) and especially not in someone so young. I am not so pompous as to think that I did actually manage to match her energy and to give her the challenge that I truly thought she was not only craving, but that she also deeply deserved; I like to think that I never missed an opportunity to try to help her in any way I possibly could. As she knows all too well—there have been numerous times over our time together where I could not help out in all the ways that I truly wanted to (not for lack of a desire to help and be supportive, far from it, but more because it was incredibly important to me that someone not simply validate and affirm her potential, but to profoundly *grow* that potential too[32]). I thought that I could be to the one to best help provide that validation and affirmation. As I say, I did all I could, all while very often feeling—at least in semesters prior to this Fall—that I was always coming up short.

I said earlier that MaKenzie got a singular education here. That is true. For me, as I've noted no doubt way too many times already, there's no one quite like MaKenzie, she's exceedingly unique—somehow, I think she's even more unique and singular than she was two years ago and I cannot wait to see where that singularity and uniqueness take her and what she manages to do with it in the world. There will never come a day when I am not a staunch supporter, ally, and partner of MaKenzie, no matter where she goes and what she does—I sincerely hope that these reflections have managed to speak to the profound work that

psychoanalytic process of free association comes most readily to mind. I also feel that it's good pedagogy when the proper space has been set up for such a thing. Moreover, I think we managed to supplement both of these angles quite strongly this semester when we came across a line from Book II of *The Iliad* that MaKenzie profoundly loved and adored (and it thus became a kind of refrain that one could hear running all through our conversations together) where Achilles, weeping openly, is visited by his goddess mother, Thetis, who asks: "My child— / why in tears? What sorrow has touched your heart? / Tell me, please. Don't harbor it deep inside you. / We must share it all" (Book II, ll. 427-430). Achilles wonders a bit about this call for him to "share it all"—especially when the one asking him to bare his soul already knows the cause of his tears: "And now from his depths / the proud runner groaned: 'You know, you know, / why labor through it all? You know it all so well . . . '." There's no reason to go through it all, rehearse it all, precisely because his mother already knows it all. MaKenzie really quite enjoyed the fact that despite this worry, Achilles says it doesn't really matter, one must "share it all" anyways. There is a powerful force at work here—and MaKenzie's intuition about it struck me as quite precise and quite correct. There is a therapeutic power to this call for honesty, even when that honesty occurs between two who know each other very well.

[32] This is not at all to suggest that I alone made all of this happen. I would be greatly remiss if I did not mention some of the people who were deeply instrumental as well. Huge thanks go from both me and MaKenzie to Dr. Elizabeth Davies (former Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and now acting Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Chicago State University), Dr. Anna Ioanes, and Dr. Beth McDermott—all of whom were supportive of the incredibly unique path that MaKenzie and I have taken together here. I am sure I can speak for MaKenzie when I say that we could not have done any of this without their support—even if their support was something they would describe as simply being that of "signing paperwork" to authorize the entire journey.

she has done while here at USF and to the really great (and potentially very promising) future work that I hope she and I can do in the future—goodness knows we have a list of potential work we could pursue together that's already getting rather long, much like this reflection itself. With that, I'll bring this to a close.

Appendix:

Initial Abstract, Version 1:

Lydia Millet's 2020 novel *A Children's Bible* is not, on the surface, a work of crime fiction. The novel chronicles the vacation of twelve teenagers and younger children whose families join together to rent a mansion ("built by robber barons in the nineteenth century," the narrator, Eve, tells us very early on) somewhere on the East Coast of the US. In order to pass the time, the children decide to play a game where they attempt to keep the identity of their own parents a secret from the other children staying in the house—the one who keeps their genealogy and parentage a secret the longest wins. In parallel with this little game of sorts is a slowly deteriorating "world" outside the cushy vacation spot—an incredibly destructive storm that "[floods] the subway tunnels in New York" and causes "the river in Boston to [overflow] its banks" is just part and parcel of a world that has become for so many of us just a normal part of a world falling apart due to environmental devastation, constant states of emergency, the collapse of the capitalist system, and much more. Who is to blame? For Eve, it is clear the real culprits are the parents, those who brought them into the world—a perfectly understandable reason that makes the whole "genealogy game" incredibly apt for the children of this story. And yet, despite their desire to hide the lines of parental filiation, Eve understands that "there would always be traces. The trick was to hide them." Blurring the lines between the detectives and culprits involved in the apocalyptic events of this novel, we wish to follow the clues laid down by Eve that point to unique conceptions of criminality and guilt that are incredibly à propos and ripe for environmental/ecological philosophizing and thinking. As the world continues to deteriorate, the parents do so as well—resulting in day after day spent in stoned or drunken reveries. Eve and others would love to punish, but she admits it's difficult to pin down the specific crimes. Eve notes that "[e]ach person, fully grown, was sick or sad, with problems attached to them like broken limbs. Each one had special needs. ... What people wanted to be, but never could, traveled alongside beside them. Company." Ultimately, *A Children's Bible* concludes with the conjoining of a game of detection, responsibility, and a subtle paean to the aesthetic realm in general. The traces of us after the end come through the creation not of new gadgets and gizmos, but of art and beauty.

Millet's subtle linkage of the "detective game" the children play to the larger apocalypse of the world of the novel makes clear and visible a strange inversion of sorts: the ones (arguably) who are least in need of hiding and erasing their impacts on the larger world are the children; simultaneously, the ones placed in

the position of detective and investigator are the real perpetrators—and this is not even to mention the fact that they are also situated as being entirely oblivious to the whole game and play of detection. We would like to follow these traces, seeing the ways in which Millet's allegory can help us to better understand our ecological/environmental entanglements. In moments of profound sympathy, Eve understands the tangled subjectivities of the parents and their relation to the larger world. Yes, the ones to blame are those who carry a profound existential lack around with them. How should we best think about this deep and geniune [*sic* in original] lack and its relation to larger ecological questions? In this paper we propose turning to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (especially the latter's solely-authored work, *The Three Ecologies*) to think through Millet's novel in the hopes of weaving together a tapestry that connects the children's detective game to the larger environmental concerns of the novel as a whole. We propose to follow some traces of our own, starting with critical inverventions [*sic* in original] by Jonathan Maksit ("Subjectivity, Desire, and the Problem of Consumption") and John Samuel Harpham's work on the aesthetics of crime fiction ("Detective Fiction and the Aesthetic of Crime", and then branching out to include some of the works of Deleuze on aesthetics and Guattari on ecology.

Initial Abstract, Version 2:

Lydia Millet's 2020 novel *A Children's Bible* is not, on the surface, a work of crime fiction. The novel chronicles the vacation of twelve teenagers and younger children whose families join together to rent a mansion ("built by robber barons in the nineteenth century," the narrator, Eve, tells us very early on) somewhere on the East Coast of the US. In order to pass the time, the children decide to play a game where they attempt to keep the identity of their own parents a secret from the other children staying in the house—the one who keeps their genealogy and parentage a secret the longest wins. In parallel with this little game of sorts is a slowly deteriorating "world" outside the cushy vacation spot—an incredibly destructive storm that "[floods] the subway tunnels in New York" and causes "the river in Boston to [overflow] its banks" is just part and parcel of a world that has become for so many of us just a normal part of a world falling apart due to environmental devastation, constant states of emergency, the collapse of the capitalist system, and much more. Who is to blame? For Eve, it is clear the real culprits are the parents, those who brought them into the world—a perfectly understandable reason that makes the whole "genealogy game" incredibly apt for the children of this story. And yet, despite their desire to hide the lines of parental filiation, Eve understands that "there would always be traces. The trick was to hide them." Blurring the lines between the detectives and culprits involved in the apocalyptic events of this novel, we wish to follow the clues laid down by Eve that point to unique conceptions of criminality and guilt that are incredibly *à propos* and ripe for environmental/ecological philosophizing and thinking. As the world continues to deteriorate, the parents do so as well—resulting in day after day spent in stoned or drunken reveries. Eve and others would love to punish, but she admits it's difficult to pin down the specific crimes. Eve notes that "[e]ach person, fully grown, was sick or sad, with problems attached to them like

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