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MFA Winter 2022

Packet 1

2022-02-03

Well, this was a trip!

It's been a while since I've had anything that could be called a regular schedule for homework. I participated in a week-long workshop last spring, and while there was homework each night, it felt special and unique, with a new story each night, or a new critique, or a new draft. It's not that this wasn't unique, granted, it was just an adventure getting used to shifting the usual writing schedule away from the project I was working on (though I did manage to finish that shortly after the residency).

This month was pretty nuts, starting with a residency and a very dramatic return home, followed a week later by the convention I was planning at releasing *Toledot* at getting canceled, UPS losing all copies of the book, then starting work at a new job on the 18th. As such, it took me a little bit to get into the swing of writing on this project.

I seem to alternate the types of projects that I work on, going between contemporary lit/creative non-fiction and sci-fi nonsense. This worked out well, having just come off a long kick of sci-fi nonsense (both *Toledot* and *Nevi'im*), so I was actually pretty glad to get back to writing too many words about thinking too much.

The project I'm beginning the semester with is "Seasons", an essay dissecting four poems by a friend of mine who passed back in July of 2021. My goal with the work was to have a pretty straight-forward essay analyzing the poetry and tying it to other examples (Dwale introduced me to Issa, so it seemed fitting), but turn the footnotes into something more personal surrounding my feelings about the passing of both Dwale and my dog in December of last year. This was inspired by the short story "STET" by Sarah Gailey, which also uses notes — editorial notes, in this case — to turn otherwise stale, academic writing into something personal.

I found that the line started to blur, however, the more I worked on the project. The first attempt was a pretty straight-forward analysis, but that proved very difficult and unfulfilling to write, so I began again with something a little less stiff for the main body. This made it easier to write, but also has me questioning the cohesion of the result, so that's something I'd like to revisit when I go to revise this piece, whether or not that takes place in the final packet.

Another thing that I'm beginning to question is the shape that the footnotes take. I began by sprinkling them in randomly, but as I annotated "STET" and started to poke at a text for next packet (Bernstein's "Kaddish"), I realized it might be more effective to fit them to something of an arc, building in intensity as the essay progresses. As it stands, there's a weak attempt at that, but I keep getting distracted by ideas that I want to apply to whatever it is that I'm adding the footnote to. This is another thing I'd like to revisit, though as I move forward with the project, I plan on ensuring that I maintain a focus on this aspect. Without it, I worry that I'll wind up with an unreadable mess of emotions and literary criticism.

If I had to rate my happiness with what I have to offer this month, I'd put it at a 6/10. I don't want to trash it, but neither am I in love with it. It's still a project I'd like to continue, but it's going to take focus to pull off. I showed what I did come up with to a friend and mutual with Dwale, and he had some good advice to offer that I'm still trying to internalize. As it is, I'm trying to write less in a vacuum than I'm used to, and I'll probably be seeking out his help going forward with this so I don't lose sight of reality.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope that you're doing well!

Madison