I am interested in writing and revising a short work of fiction for the Honors Capstone Project inspired by Norman Maclean’s semi-autobiographical novella “A River Runs Through it.” I cannot hope to match Maclean’s much lauded affinity for the natural world, but I would like to take to task many of the same metaphysical questions he raises. The themes I hope to explore in my own work are as follows: the irreplaceable nature of the human person, a sense of justice in the face of temporality, and the capacity for hope while confronting terrible loss.

The story I plan to write is titled “He Went Through the Floor”; it will follow a young man as he copes with the loss of his brother after a massive sinkhole engulfs the family home. This image is simple, yet powerful; where something stood is now emptiness, removed with a swiftness that cannot be prepared for. I am currently in the process of revising my story, alongside which I am creating a critical analysis of my craft related decisions. This will allow me to focus on revision—and firmly integrate the mechanics of my story with those of the stories I am studying—over the spring semester.

As I revise this piece, I’d like to grow it from a short story into a novella. For me, the distinction between these two literary forms would be an increased focus on a particular character or theme through a vaster expanse of material. While it may seem counter intuitive that a longer work could lead to a greater focus, the novella as a form has been attributed by critics with the capacity to produce this “double effect,” to develop a theme across a broader work without losing intensity. One way to demonstrate this focus and expansion is by creating a larger cast of characters to be developed nearly as significantly as the protagonist. With the novella, characters can share the spotlight without stealing it as there is simply more time to devote to them.

Working with another writer’s piece in mind, it will be important to draw from multiple sources to better suit my needs as a writer. Maclean’s first person narrator offers a convenient intimacy with the protagonist, but I plan to write in third person, and so I will draw from writers like Raymond Carver, Flannery O’Connor, and Ernest Hemingway who have explored the range of effects available through this point of view choice. I want to take advantage of the distance that a third person perspective can offer me in linking craft to theme, where the presence of the invisible can be witnessed and measured in the presence of the narrator. I also plan to read and analyze works on the craft of fiction, from writers such as Eudora Welty and Frank O’Connor. These works focus on and apply the skills associated with reading like a writer, as opposed to a scholar, and they will help me make meaningful choices about craft techniques and their desired effects in my story.