FINDING HER ROOM:

THE LIFE AND WORK OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

A thesis submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree,

Master of Letters

Jonathan Sanford

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 2014

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a labor of love, but it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge those that have assisted me in making this work come to life.

To Brian Watson for his editing prowess: You've saved my skin! Thanks so much!

To Tyson Woolman for HIS editing prowess: Your sensitive and heartfelt suggestions have made this entire process infinitely less stressful.

To Heather Pedoto: I know Virginia Woolf isn't Addy, but she's certainly almost as cool. Thanks for your part in editing!

To Shavonne Peters: Thank you for helping me remember to laugh.

To Jana Trojanowski: What can I say that hasn't already been said? Thank you—for everything.

To Jess Stoddard: You always know what to say.

To Rebeccah Newman: Thanks for being an ear to listen and an incredible supervisor!

To Cassandra Laity: Thank you so, so much for agreeing to share in this journey with me.

To Neil Levi: Thank you for encouraging my love of Woolf's work.

To Jeffrey Sanford: Thanks for being yourself and my father. Also, thanks for the "Y" chromosome! I love you, Dad.

To Sherri Sanford: You are truly the best mother I could have ever asked for. I love you!

Finally, to the man in my life, Nathaniel Christopher: Absolutely none of this would have been possible without your love, support, and encouragement throughout this ordeal. I look forward to many years of life and laughter with you. I love you!

Introduction

"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."[1]

When one reads Virginia Woolf, one gets the distinct feeling that one is reading a map of her mind. Certainly, Woolf crafted her fiction to comment on the issues important to her—feminism, homosexuality, and mental illness were all socially taboo topics that appeared in her prose. However, perhaps the most intriguing idea Woolf had was that of a woman's "room," the place of her own where a woman can retreat to realize her full potential. In this thesis, I aim to define what exactly a Woolf's "room" is as well as analyze three female characters—Clarissa Dalloway from *Mrs. Dalloway* and Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay from *To the Lighthouse*—in order to explore how Woolf's idea of a woman's room translated into her fiction.

[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1929), 4.

Woolf's Journey to Her Own Personal Room

Virginia Woolf was forever plagued with her own insecurities. She published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in 1935 at age thirty-three, but her life in fiction began eight years before with the book's conception.[2] But the road to the novel's final publication was plagued with self-doubt and loathing. She rewrote the novel an unknown number of times and was obsessed with perfection. Julia Briggs says, "once she had embarked upon it, her first novel had to justify her commitment, not just to others, but to herself. She was a perfectionist, and each new draft disappointed her high hopes and increased her fear of failing."[3] Woolf's insecurities drove her to extremes in the attempt at perfection, arguably exacerbating her already well-documented mental health issues.

Over time, though, Woolf's insecurities lessened; by the time *The Voyage Out* was published, she was well on her way to becoming a respected author. But it was only when she published *Jacob's Room* in 1922 that she came into her stride and began to, fittingly, find her room. "'I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice'," she said on completing it.[4] Her husband Leonard "thought it was her best work so far, amazingly well written, a work of genius."[5] This is

---

[2] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 1.

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] Ibid., 105.

[5] Ibid.

when she began to write what she wanted, writing for herself, not bending to the pressures of the outside world.

However, *Jacob's Room* was not as successful as she'd hoped. The book was criticized for being somewhat thin and lacking character development.[6] However, the revolutionary style utilized in the novel carried over into the work she began on her short fiction collection *Monday or Tuesday* (1919)—and it is hailed as an important example of modernist style. *Jacob's Room* continued Woolf's interest in the human psyche, forgoing conventional plot to focus on characters' internal monologues as motivations for their actions. I will discuss this style and its importance further later in this chapter.

Woolf continued this writing style in what I regard as her first true masterpiece—*Mrs. Dalloway.* The novel is consistently held as one of the finest examples of modernist literature. Further, it is now considered one of the most important works of fiction of the twentieth century.[7] It is here where Woolf truly finds her room.

---

[6] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 108.

[7] Lev Grossman, "All-TIME 100 Novels," *Time Magazine*, January 8, 2010, http://entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100-novels/slide/mrs-dalloway-1925-by-virginia-woolf/.

Moving into *Dalloway*

Woolf's innovative style, dubbed "stream-of-consciousness"[8] by literary analysts, served her well in writing the novel. In it, the eponymous Mrs. Dalloway, first name Clarissa, spends a single day planning and hosting an important party—one in which the *crème de la crème* of London high society is slated to attend. Yet the party is a ruse, an attempt by Clarissa to mask her inner turmoil, a defense mechanism to protect herself from her inner pain.

Woolf is much like Clarissa in this respect—where Clarissa uses parties, Woolf uses writing. Woolf's writing allows her mind to explore its very darkest depths (in particular, with Septimus Warren Smith, the shell-shocked war veteran. Like Septimus, Woolf was a victim of severe trauma.)[9] Furthermore, Clarissa is an exceedingly introspective individual, monitoring and analyzing the movements of those around her in relation to herself and deciding ultimately that she is simply another face in the crowd, no more or less extraordinary than another citizen of the world, much like Woolf. Of course, whether or not Woolf found

---

[8] Esther Lombardi, "Stream of Consciousness," *About.com Classic Literature*, 2014, http://classiclit.about.com/od/literaryterms/g/aa_stream.htm.

[9] Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). For more insight into Woolf's trauma, I suggest referencing this book by Louise DeSalvo. A noted Woolf scholar, DeSalvo has captured the sexual abuse Woolf endured in her childhood in illuminating and painstaking detail.

herself extraordinary is certainly cause for speculation, but arguably, Woolf saw simultaneously her significance and insignificance in the world:

> Did it matter then, [Clarissa] asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely? All this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?[10]

In this quote, Clarissa's position within society is arguably completely negated by the reality that regardless of whether or not she actually exists, the world will still continue with or without her. In this sense, Woolf is saying that as long as one is alive, the contribution one makes to the world is what truly makes one significant. Clarissa's contribution to society as a member of the elite upper class is her parties; Woolf's contribution is writing. Both make significant contributions, but Woolf the character (meaning Clarissa) does not find her room. Woolf the person, however, does.

Finding Her Room—And Writing It

Again, it is with the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* that Woolf begins to truly find her room. Having perfected her revolutionary writing

---

[10] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925), 12.

technique, Woolf explores the vast recesses of Clarissa's mind, not unlike the self-reflection in which she was often caught.[11]

Mrs. Dalloway centers on a woman, Clarissa, struggling (and ultimately failing) to find her room. But interestingly enough, Woolf's later novel *To the Lighthouse* includes a primary character, Lily Briscoe, who does find her room. This moment comes in the middle of what is arguably the most productive period of Woolf's life; between 1925 and 1930, she published three novels (*Mrs. Dalloway* [1925], *To the Lighthouse* [1927], and *Orlando* [1929].)[12] It is perhaps this literary journey that inspires her next major work, the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own*.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf addresses her personal frustrations with the status of women's education. Woolf believed that women had been kept from art (in particular, writing) because of their forced dependence on men in the patriarchal system.[13] Indeed, Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen was of the traditional mindset that it was only worth sending boys to school, which later caused Woolf to become very

---

[11] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 4.

[12] "Virginia Woolf Timeline," *Shmoop University, Inc.*, 2014, http://www.shmoop.com/virginia-woolf/timeline.html.

[13] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 52.

resentful of the fact that she did not have the benefit of a formal education.[14]

Defining "The Room"

In the preceding discussion, I have presented the concept of a woman's "room" as a metaphor. Strictly speaking, Woolf begins by presenting the room as a material object—a woman's "room of one's own" is just that, a literal room where she can go to write:

> In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since her pin money, which depended on the goodwill of her father, was only enough to keep her clothed, she was debarred from such alleviations as came even to Keats or Tennyson or Carlyle, all poor men, from a walking tour, a little journey to France, from the separate lodging which, even if it were miserable enough, sheltered them from the claims and tyrannies of their families.[15]

Woolf presents the image of the literal room, and posits that historically, women simply did not have their own rooms due to the tyrannical influence of men. However, later in the essay, Woolf presents the room as a metaphor:

---

[14] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 54.

[15] Ibid., 52.

> So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not.[16]

It stands to reason, then, that the definition of the room is not merely a literal place, but also a life situation. This is what I mean when I talk about a woman's room—it is a situation in a woman's life where she can feel comfortable creating her art.

Expanding this idea further, it is possible to fit this archetype over the characters in Woolf's novel. Perhaps, then, a room is not just a place where a woman can create art, but also a place where a woman can thrive—where she can truly begin to be herself. Clarissa Dalloway, for example, is superficially an ordinary woman. However, when we take a look inside her innermost thoughts with the help of the lens of Woolf's style, we see that she is a woman capable of extraordinary introspection. As previously mentioned, Clarissa does not find her room, but we see her struggling to do so. Nor does Mrs. Ramsay find her room (although she is arguably more than capable of doing so). However, Lily Briscoe does find her room, and the novel ends with her doing so. How interesting, then, that Woolf bookends Lily's discovery of her room with the story of her personal journey to hers (stopping along the way, of course, to write

---

[16] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 110.

Orlando—a further testament to the very fact that she has found her room). Therefore, this is why I argue that Woolf's struggles are present in each of her characters—they are her.

In conclusion, Woolf's journey along the way to her room was undoubtedly paved with her own insecurities, as demonstrated by her characters. However, her personal quest to find her room was, in turn, undoubtedly rewarding and successful.

Clarissa Dalloway's Futile Struggle

For all her hopes and musings, Clarissa Dalloway is, on the whole, an unhappy person. She has survived significant trauma and arguably has not healed from it. She is trapped in a marriage that is stable but unfulfilling, unable to pursue a relationship with the true love of her life, Sally Seton, a woman she knew from her days in boarding school. Although she arguably attempts to find her room, she ultimately fails.

Clarissa's Trauma and Preoccupation with Death

Mrs. Dalloway is most certainly a book of trauma; both Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith are trauma survivors—Septimus witnesses the death of his best friend Evans, and Clarissa witnesses the death of her sister. However, the two deal with their trauma in very different ways; Clarissa throws parties to distract her from her pain, and Septimus eventually commits suicide by throwing himself from a window. This suggests that Woolf understands that trauma requires certain coping mechanisms in order to sustain life; further, it suggests that writing was a way for Woolf to express her trauma as a manner of healing. Indeed, literary critic Karen DeMeester posits:

> Woolf seems to understand innately that, for the trauma survivor, telling the story of his trauma or what he learned from that experience is 'a personally reconstitutive act and expresses the hope that it will also be a socially reconstitutive act—changing

> the order of things as they are and working to prevent the enactment of similar horrors in the future' (Tal, 'Speaking' 230[17]). After the Second World War, Lawrence Langer echoes that Woolf seems to realize after the First World War when he claims that '[i]n one sense, all writing about the Holocaust represents a retrospective effort to give meaningless history a context of meaning, to furnish the mind with a framework for insight without diminishing the event itself' (qtd. In Tal, 'Speaking' 229[18]; see also Langer 185.[19])[20]

Clarissa's decision to not communicate her trauma implies that she will not heal, but will be forever condemned to cover her pain through throwing lavish parties instead of voicing her experiences. It is partially because she is stuck in grief, she cannot move on to begin to find her room.

Furthermore, Cathy Caruth suggests that:

> …the problem of trauma is not simply a problem of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. It is only in recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience.[21]

---

[17] Kalí Tal, "Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma," in *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*, ed. Philip K. Jason (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 217-50.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Lawrence L Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

[20] Karen DeMeester, "Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 44, no. 3 (1998): 649-673.

[21] Cathy Caruth, "Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals," *Assemblage* 20 (2007): 24-25.

The relationship between trauma and survival, then, becomes ironic in that mere survival is problematic; Caruth states in "Trauma and Experience" that, "…for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*."[22]

Through her confident exterior, Clarissa Dalloway is able to throw a lavish party and to create the illusion that she is content with her life's choices and in love with her dependable husband. However, as her sympathy for Septimus suggests, she is preoccupied with not only the idea of choice, but more specifically, the choice to die:

> Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.[23]

Internally, she is disturbed and left wondering if she made the right decision. Ultimately, only Septimus is able to look past her exterior and into her true feelings, albeit indirectly.

---

[22] Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, ed. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univeristy Press, 2003), 192-98.

[23] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 280-81.

Implied Lesbianism and Forced Heteronormativity

Clarissa Dalloway is Virginia Woolf's fictionalization of herself. Clarissa chose the reliable Richard Dalloway, having not the opportunity to be with Sally Seton, the girl with whom she shared a kiss at Bourton. Virginia Stephen married Leonard Woolf and became Virginia Woolf but carried on an affair with her female lover, Vita Sackville-West.[24] Although their affair later ended, they remained friends for the rest of Woolf's life. It is perhaps presumptuous to suggest that Woolf would have been happier or more productive or gotten closer to finding her room had she been able to pursue a more permanent romantic relationship with Sackville-West. However, Woolf's preoccupation with lesbianism, homosexuality in general, and the turbulence of married life in her works certainly suggests that she thought often about not only society's obsession with heteronormativity but also her ability to explore relationships with women as a tool to expand her mind towards finding her room.

Clarissa's implied lesbianism goes a step further when she describes an apparently masturbatory fantasy involving the company of women. She feels something missing in her life, and this is inexorably linked to her desire for a woman:

---

[24] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 290.

> It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For *that* she could dimly perceive. …Yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older…she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores![25]

The language used to describe Clarissa's thoughts in this passage strongly suggests a masturbatory/orgasmic fantasy linked to the company of women. Arguably, Clarissa is with the wrong partner because she is truly a lesbian who is being forced into a heteronormative existence. Certainly then, her stifled identity prevents her from truly exploring herself and keeps her from finding her room.

As previously mentioned, Clarissa chose the reliable Richard Dalloway as her husband. As she muses about her choices in partners, she wonders if Peter Walsh, her old friend and one-time marital prospect, would have been better suited for her.

---

[25] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 46-7.

> If I had married [Peter], this gaiety would have been mine all day! It was all over for [Clarissa]…. He has left me; I am alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee…. Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over.[26]

Clarissa's futile musing suggests that perhaps she may have been able to find her room had she chosen Peter as her husband long ago. Certainly, her "great voyage" could be argued to be the potential start of her own voyage in finding her room. But Clarissa chose the more reliable husband because of the expectations put on her by society.

The 1910s and 1920s marked a significant change in women's history. In 1918, British women over thirty who met the proper requirements gained the right to vote. (In 1928, all women over the age of 21 gained the right to vote, giving women the same voting opportunities as men for the first time.)[27] It would stand to reason that along with this shift in voting rights, other rights of women would begin to be analyzed. Traditionally, women were expected to become wives and mothers in Clarissa's time period; as such, this is what she did. Woolf's ability to write about Clarissa's predicament and concurrently challenge the

---

[26] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 70-1.

[27] "Parliament.uk," *Parliament of the United Kingdom*, 2014, http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/keydates/

hypocrisy of societal norms indicates that she believed that if a woman were forced into any sort of life, particularly rigid heteronormativity and gender roles, she would forever be stifled and unable to find her room.

Clarissa's marriage to Richard is also not without its turbulence. Even Peter Walsh believes that Clarissa's choice of husband (and even choice to marry) was a mistake. "…For there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard."[28] Obviously, Clarissa may have preferred to be with a woman, but more than that, Richard is boring:

> [Richard] liked continuity; and the sense of handing on the traditions of the past.… Indeed, his own life was a miracle; let him make no mistake about it; here he was, in the prime of life, walking to his house in Westminster to tell Clarissa that he loved her. Happiness is this he thought.[29]

Richard is described as a creature of habit and routine, something that Clarissa obviously finds tedious.

---

[28] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 61.

[29] Ibid., 177.

Further, Richard is unable to provide Clarissa with what she truly wants. Clarissa wants "support,"[30] but she also wants excitement. Not even Richard's presents are enough to satiate Clarissa's boredom; it is as if Richard is so monotonous that even his surprises are cliché: "For [Richard] never gave Clarissa presents, except a bracelet two or three years ago, which had not been a success. She never wore it. It pained him to remember that she never wore it."[31] Richard's presence in her life has become something of a chore. Arguably, Clarissa is a lesbian, but society in this time period makes that thought so alien to her that she isn't given the opportunity to fulfill her true sexual expression, so she keeps seeking failed relationships with men. It is as if she is not out (meaning that she is not honest with her sexual orientation) to anyone, even to herself.

Ultimately, Clarissa is forced into a role that does not encourage her personal creativity, skills, or identity. Her rumination on how much better her life could have been if any of her choices were different demonstates that she has not been given the space to find her room. No more so is this apparent than in the final moments of the novel, with Peter's stream of consciousness concluding the piece:

---

[30] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 177.

[31] Ibid, 172.

> What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
>
> It is Clarissa, he said.
>
> For there she was.[32]

Peter's "extraordinary excitement" is futile, punctuating with a final note that, his love for Clarissa remains unrealized (and Clarissa's decision is made.) Thus, Clarissa will continue to struggle to find her room, ultimately never realizing it. In essence, the novel's final lines serve as a wistful, suspended realization, that Clarissa's journey remains unrealized, and her life in limbo.

Clarissa's struggle to find her room remains in vain as she is forced to carry on a role prescribed to her through societal pressures. Through trauma, forced heteronormativity, and a monotonous marriage, Clarissa has not and will never realize her full potential.

---

[32] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 296.

Lily Briscoe versus Mrs. Ramsay

Unfolding Lily

In contrast to Clarissa, in *To the Lighthouse*, the protagonist Lily Briscoe has found her room. Throughout the novel, Lily experiences a transformation from that of pensive artist to assertive visionary. Certainly, the final line corroborates this: "Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision."[33]

Like Woolf, Lily is an artist. Certainly her obsessions with the proper placement of objects in her paintings mimic that of Woolf's extreme attention to detail; in her earlier years as a writer, Woolf often took years to complete a book (for example, *The Voyage Out* took five years to complete, including countless rewrites of the entire novel—according to Leonard, she had rewritten it at least five times.)[34] Further, Lily's self-doubt mimics Woolf's own:

> "She braced herself to stand the awful trial of some one looking at her picture. One must, she said, one must…. But that any other eyes should see the residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown in the course of all those days was an agony. At the same time it was immensely exciting."[35]

---

[33] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1927), 209.

[34] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 4.

[35] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1927), 52.

Lily's constant self-conscious rumination is in marked similarity to that of Woolf's own reflection. Consequently, it is prudent (and perhaps even necessary) to view Lily as a literary representation of Woolf herself, much like Clarissa. In this way, Clarissa represents Woolf before finding her room, and Lily represents Woolf after finding her room.

Interestingly, Lily is the most obviously feminist character between herself, Clarissa, and Mrs. Ramsay. At the beginning of the novel, she is thirty-three and unmarried, and she has no plans to become married. At the end of the novel, she is forty-four and still unmarried, and says of her status as an unmarried woman as having "escaped by the skin of her teeth…."[36] Notably, she has this revelation just as it "flash[es] upon her that she would move the tree [in the painting] to the middle."[37] This is arguably a statement of balance; the tree balances the painting's proportions, much like Lily's singlehood leaves her feeling balanced.

Lily's journey to her room again begins with her self-doubt and worry that she will never achieve notoriety as a great artist. Her anxiety is clear from her introduction:

> Such she often felt herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see,' and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. And it was then too…as she began to paint, that there forced

---

[36] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1927), 176.
[37] Ibid.

> themselves upon her other things, her own inadequacy, her insignificance….[38]

Lily's beginning, again, is much like Woolf's. However, after "Time Passes," likely through age and experience, Lily is a new woman, having overcome her fears and painting with courage. Lily's vision at the end of the novel is the definitive completion of her journey. Her vision is the room—the place of her own she enters to complete herself as a whole.

Lily Compared to Mrs. Ramsay

As previously mentioned, Lily is quite revolutionary in her thoughts and actions, not just for Woolf's time period, but to the characters themselves. Mrs. Ramsay finds it odd yet charming that Lily has never married and does not express any desire to do so. "Mrs. Ramsay smiled. With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature, and Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it…."[39] Mrs. Ramsay obviously likes Lily and wants to help her with her painting.

Curiously, though, the comment that "one could not take [Lily's] painting seriously" suggests that, although Mrs. Ramsay finds it

---

[38] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1927), 19.
[39] Ibid., 17.

charming that Lily is unmarried and independent, she obviously judges Lily based upon that fact. It seems as though Mrs. Ramsay is an unfortunate product of the patriarchy. This is because Mrs. Ramsay's duty is and always will be raising her family and being a good wife to her husband:

> When [Mrs. Ramsay] looked in the glass and saw her hair grey, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought, possibly she might have managed things better—her husband; money; his books. But for her own part she would never for a single second regret her decision, evade difficulties, or slur over duties.[40]

Further, Mrs. Ramsay is a traditionalist in her view of the world; she views women as creatures that should first and foremost be good wives and mothers:

> "Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential; which an old woman could take from a young man without loss of dignity, and woe betide the girl—pray Heaven it was none of her daughters!—who did not feel the worth of it, and all that it implied, to the marrow of her bones!"[41]

---

[40] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1927), 6.
[41] Ibid., 6.

Clearly, Mrs. Ramsay is a woman who holds traditional patriarchal views of men and women very seriously. As such, this further strengthens the ideas of Lily's feminism versus Mrs. Ramsay's traditionalism.

Naming Woolf's Characters—Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay

Curiously, Mrs. Ramsay, unlike Lily, is never referred to by her first name. In fact, it remains unclear throughout the novel what her first name actually is. Clarissa Dalloway obviously has a first name, but her marriage obviously overshadows it; not only is the title of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, suggesting dependence upon her husband as a sense of identity, but the very first words of the novel are "Mrs. Dalloway."[42] Additionally, Clarissa's identity is at once gone with the declaration that she is invisible since her marriage to her husband Richard:

> She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.[43]

Clarissa's identity is not her own; it is that of her husband's. Further, in this instance, Clarissa's first name is described as vanishing. Mrs.

---

[42] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1953), 3.

[43] Ibid., 14.

Ramsay's first name has indeed already vanished, but perhaps the reason Clarissa's hasn't is the fact that she is still struggling to find her room, while Mrs. Ramsay is content with never finding her room.

Again, Mrs. Ramsay appears to be in the same situation as Clarissa. Yet, interestingly, she appears content with her identity being stripped from her and attached to that of her husband. Her first name is absent because her worth is attached to her family, which, ultimately is a manifestation of internalized patriarchy. What makes Lily unique is that her identity remains her own, and as such, she is able to find her own room.

Conclusion

In essence, Woolf's fiction demonstrates a creative manifestation of her journey to her room. Woolf's room was a place of encouragement where she felt confident in her abilities to work at the art she so longed to create. With the publishing of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's room had certainly been found, and it reflected in her journey since *The Voyage Out*.

“MARY MARGARET”

ABSTRACT

In my opinion, no formal nonfiction commentary on Virginia Woolf is sufficient to capture what she was truly after. Woolf wrote across many genres, but she is arguably most famous for her fiction, particularly the novels I have mentioned previously in this thesis. It seems fitting, then, that a story attempting to emulate her style—capturing the emotions she undoubtedly would have wanted to highlight, condensing an entire life into a single day—should follow a technical analysis of her prose.

In this sense, fiction in response to fiction becomes part of the commentary itself. It emphasizes that, while the things around us have modernized (I am writing on a laptop, while Woolf wrote on pen and paper, for example) the creative process and the urge to write will never change. Further, and more importantly, it emphasizes that Woolf's style remains timeless—self-examination will remain a key element of the human existence for as long as we remain alive.

The following story is another reimaging of *Mrs. Dalloway*, in the same vein as Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*. Clarissa is now Mary Margaret, and she shares the same passion for writing as Woolf does. Themes from both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* reemerge, again emphasizing that although the setting has changed, thoughts, fears, and passions recur throughout time.

I chose to set the story's date (and other important moments within the story) on June 16 as a nod to Woolf's contemporary—James

Joyce. *Ulysses* is famously set on June 16, 1904; henceforth, June 16 is known as Bloomsday in Ireland as a reminder of Joyce's famous protagonist Leonard Bloom. It felt wrong—blasphemous, even—to set the story on Woolf's birth or death date (not to mention too obvious). But Bloomsday seems to perfectly capture Woolf's essence, particularly the idea of compressing a life (in Joyce's case, several lives) in a single day. Further, we cannot ignore the fact that Woolf wrote *Dalloway* in response to *Ulysses* (the Woolfs were actually approached to publish the novel but could not due to its infamous content.)[44]

In any event, what follows is the only way I know how to properly respond to Woolf—a story.

[44] Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 72.

MARY MARGARET

"A woman's whole life in a single day. Just one day. And in that day, her whole life…. It's on this day. This day of all days. Her fate becomes clear to her."[45]

—*The Hours*

[45] *The Hours*, directed by Stephen Daldry (2002; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2003), DVD,

Mary Margaret said she'd fix the WiFi herself.

Her son Jake had his work cut out for him. There was the ordeal of alerting his father to pick him up from soccer practice that evening (which, inevitably, would be a chore—Jake Senior made a habit of being late or not showing up at all, leaving Jake Junior in tears with Mary Margaret to pick up the pieces.)

Why did I marry him, she thought. Her divorce from Jake had pushed a haze of fatigue over her—lawyers, courts, division of property. Why did the entire world revolve around getting married (the thought of being married again made her nauseous, like morning sickness) when it would invariably fall apart anyway?

But not now. Jake was on the phone with Jake Senior, and Jake Senior promised he'd be by to pick up the sensitive fourteen-year-old, leaving Mary Margaret an afternoon to herself.

An afternoon she would use to write.

Writing had a certain appeal to Mary Margaret; her mother had been a writer but unable to publish anything after Mary Margaret's birth—a fact that Mary Margaret swore led to her mother resenting her. Mary Margaret was determined to follow through where her mother failed: to write something that people would love.

Well, maybe not everyone, but at least something *she* would love. She always wanted something that she could be proud of (besides

Junior. That he still remained somewhat well-adjusted even though his father layered excuse after excuse for his lack of parenting was a small miracle in itself. Junior constantly cried whenever plans with his dad fell through, but he managed to pick himself back up again (with Mary Margaret's help, of course).

And really, why should she have to defend Jake Senior? She found herself explaining his continuous absence as if it were simply a matter of fact. She didn't want Junior to see her with her stomach in knots about her father, which was now compounded by the fact that the WiFi router had decided to, in Junior's eloquent fashion, "crap out."

"Mom, why isn't the WiFi working again? It did this two days ago too," said Junior, who was obviously doing his best to work Mary Margaret's very last nerve today.

"I don't know, son," she said through forced resignation, loathe to let her exasperation peek through her gritted teeth. "Perhaps we will need to get another box." Junior sighed as if he were about to cry again.

Well shit, Junior, she thought. I'm your only mother. I can only do one damn thing at a time. If guilt were a verb, you'd have it down to an art form.

And then, suddenly, she had a vision of her and Jake Senior in the car.

They would be arguing about some triviality of life—he always worked too much, she nagged too much, neither of them could possibly understand each other.

She would be driving them down some heavily wooded road. It would be winter, the snow falling gently yet steadily while their car (a deep, glittery sapphire Ford Focus with a palm-sized hot chocolate stain on the back driver's side carpet she hadn't cleaned after Junior spilled it three weeks before) zoomed down the interstate.

Mary would feel the rage boiling inside her; feel the anger bubbling out of her very pores. She would find the nearest tree, aim the passenger side for it, and—

"MOM!" yelled Junior. "Dad's here." Jake Senior was late as usual from working late nights (she envisioned him snoring open-mouthed on his couch in his small two-bedroom apartment, reading glasses on his forehead, case file on his chest and rolled her eyes,) but at least he hadn't flaked out.

"Oh, dear. Okay. Have a nice time. I love you." She kissed him even though she knew he didn't like it; he would only accept a hug or a kiss if it were from his father. Which she found extremely disheartening since she was his primary caretaker and gave him everything she could afford. And further, it wasn't like she was hurting for money. She recently

received tenure at her plush private university. Jake Senior was a lawyer. Junior wasn't ever lacking in any physical thing.

Jake muttered "I love you too" and ran off, slamming the door behind him.

Now Mary Margaret would write.

She had been working on a story about an emotionally unavailable mother and her cynical daughter, but she felt that motif had lost its power in this day and age. It's a typical plot device, she thought.

She wondered about writing about other typical "women's issues:" marriage, pregnancy, miscarriage, childbirth, happiness, unhappiness, divorce, redemption. All of which she had experienced, minus redemption. She was still working on that one.

What would her life have been like had the two babies prior to Junior made it to term? Would they have made her happier? Would she and Jake Senior still be married? She felt that it was a cop out to blame the failure of her marriage on her two miscarriages, because it wasn't that. They had started really having problems after that (including, but not limited to, Jake Senior's apparent interest in other women as evidenced by his various Facebook dalliances—but could she wholly blame him for that? Her sex drive had diminished since Junior's birth, and she found herself even after that episode wanting sex less and less.)

But then again, she could blame Jake for his other near-infidelities. They made vows, dammit. Did that not count for anything? Was their love so much of a casual throwaway that she would be forever left in the dust because of his dick? Was there something else she could have done differently? She had gone to therapy; they had diagnosed postpartum depression; they had put her on citalopram; her sex drive nearly ceased to exist. She had done everything she was supposed to do. But it apparently wasn't enough? Was anything enough for Jake Senior? Then again, was anything enough for herself?

I may have a first sentence, she thought.

Was anything enough for herself? she typed on her laptop. She had thought it might be a good idea to start *in media res*, and this sentence afforded her the perfect start.

Because really, isn't that exactly where we start things, she thought, in the middle of things? Even our existences begin, from the moment of birth, hell, from the moment of conception, in the middle of things. Like Odysseus, Mary Margaret's journey began in water in the middle of someone else's story.

No, that can't be it. Her journey TRULY began in the middle of her own story.

It was sixteen years ago, on June 16, 1998 (wait, today is the anniversary of that day, she thought, how silly, how funny, how intensely divine) when her story began.

It wasn't because it was the day she found out she was pregnant for the third time (with Junior).

It wasn't because she spent most of the day crying after calling in sick for work, worried she might again lose the baby.

It wasn't because she was worried about her skills as a mother.

No, it was something far more bizarre.

It was on that day, after a long crying jag, that she felt herself get up from off the bathroom floor, clutching her (fifth? fiftieth? five hundredth?) pregnancy test with two little red lines. She threw the test away, bundled up the bathroom garbage, went downstairs, and threw it in with the kitchen garbage. She washed her hands. She walked in front of the refrigerator. She pulled out something (it shone in the light pouring through the window from the hot sun outside) unwrapped its shiny skin, marveled at its yellow near-perfection, and bit into it like a stalk of celery.

(It was a stick of margarine, the brand now long forgotten.)

When she realized what she had done, she cackled at the sheer hilarity of it all. She used to eat butter pats whenever she was anxious as a child—her grandmother or mother used to take them from restaurants

and store them in the refrigerator for later use. Once, she saw her grandmother or mother take out one of the packets and eat it like a square of chocolate. Then, one time after her mother and her father had a particularly violent argument in which her father's eye had been blackened and his nose bloodied, she went back to the refrigerator, took out a packet, and bit into it like she had seen her grandmother or mother do.

She continued to do it in times of distress and kept it a secret until several years later when her mother asked her what the hell she was doing. That was the end of that.

Until now. Now, some ten (fifteen?) years later, she had taken an entire fucking stick of margarine and bitten into it. (Why the hell did they have margarine anyway? She always bought butter. *Jake. Idiot.*)

It was then that she threw the margarine and all the rest of the butter-like products in with the kitchen trash, pulled the bag up, and tied the ends in a knot.

She dragged the trash to the front door, unlocked the door, and dragged it through to the big can outside. But, before she did that, she stopped and wrote *See ya!* on the mirror in bright hooker-red lipstick. She thought of adding *It's been rich* at the end but thought better of it—too Bette Davis in *All About Eve* when she was Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman.*

She threw on a pair of old Keds, grabbed her keys and purse, and headed out for her little Nissan. She got in and stared directly at the rearview mirror. She used the hooker lipstick to paint her lips as bright as possible, set it aside, and revved the engine. Where would she go?

And suddenly, it all became very clear to her.

She pulled out of the driveway and soon onto the highway. There was little traffic at that time, so she parked her car near it and walked toward it.

The George Washington Bridge stood tall over the Hudson, almost daring her. She could do it. She could do anything she wanted to.

She walked along the bridge, peeking over the sides. The water was waiting, inviting her, and beckoning her. And what would happen if she did? The world would, unfairly, continue, and she'd be left with ultimately nothing.

Still, though, didn't it feel good to wonder? Didn't it feel good to have an out? Didn't it feel good to have something that Jake hadn't tainted?

She stood peering out over the Hudson, smiling, and then, a wave of horror washed over her.

I can't, she though and said aloud. She felt her stomach. Wasn't it what she had wanted? She could revisit if it didn't work out.

Then she walked back to her car, drove home, wiped off the mirror, and baked a cake. That evening, when she told Jake, they'd had the best sex of either of their lives. When they were finished and Jake lay lightly snoring, spooned up next to her, she looked out the window and to the moon. She smiled and whispered "thank you" to no one but herself.

Her iPhone chirped at her. It was Jake Senior wondering if he should take Junior out afterwards. She told him to spend as much time with the boy as possible and then set her phone to "Do Not Disturb." She was determined to start writing.

And, just as soon as Jake had messaged her, her train of thought completely derailed. It was just like him to butt in where he wasn't wanted, even after she divorced him. Jake had a terrible habit of micromanaging her life, even from outside of the context of marriage, something which she recognized and nipped in the bud whenever possible. It almost felt as if not spending time with Junior was simply another way of micromanaging her life because when Jake Senior flaked out, she lost her precious little time to herself.

But it wasn't healthy to ruminate on her frustrations with her ex-husband. He was her ex-husband for a reason, and she was determined not to have to think about him any more than she already had to.

And it was then she remembered she'd have to go and look at the WiFi router to reconnect the Internet just in case she had to look something up for her story.

The router was in the living room; it was hooked up through the same system that fed the house's cable television. All she had to do was push a button to restart the router, and things would start working again.

She was so focused on fixing the WiFi that she didn't see Khan under her feet wanting attention. She tripped over him and landed on the couch, unharmed. Bewildered, she laughed at her mild misfortune and looked around for Khan to see if he was okay.

She found Khan lightly meowing under the sofa, afraid she was upset. She wasn't; after all, all Khan had wanted was her to pay attention to him. She felt a little guilty because she hadn't paid attention to him all morning.

Khan was an unusual cat in that he would allow anyone to hold him, pet him, pick him up, or love on him. Further, he would roll over and expose his belly, eager for anyone to rub the soft fur.

He had come into the family a bit unexpectedly. Mary Margaret's friend Sophie had to move because of her job and couldn't take him with her for whatever reason (Mary Margaret always felt that the best thing she had gotten out of her relationship with Sophie was Khan; Sophie was

a bit of a know-it-all and her hair's corn silk hue had always annoyed Mary Margaret. She knew she would never be able to pull off blonde.)

Oh, but not for lack of trying. Mary Margaret had once gotten her hair lightened from its natural shade of chestnut to something resembling Donatella Versace's platinum locks. The result had been, for lack of better words, a fucking disaster. Junior, age five at the time, was frightened of her because of the drastic change, and Jake had asked her what in hell possessed her to do such a thing. (Of course he would ask that; her hair color was one thing he couldn't control.) She ended up changing back to her natural hair color exactly eight weeks after she originally gotten it dyed, and everyone (including her hairdresser) said it suited her much better. Which was frustrating.

Sophie had taken herself and her stupid hair out of Mary Margaret's life and left Khan, who became, after her son, the other love of her life. Khan was an enormous gray cat with intensely green eyes. He always looked mad, but it was just his eye shape; she could not have asked for a sweeter, more loving cat.

She scooped him up in her arms and cradled him like she used to Junior; he purred in pleasure. She had read how pets could help with their owners' blood pressure, and she felt sure that this is what had happened when she adopted Khan. But it wasn't always like that.

Several years ago he had suddenly appeared ravenous at all times. He kept drinking water—so much that Mary Margaret could barely keep up. His litter box was constantly dirty, and she had trouble keeping up with that as well.

When she took him to the vet, they immediately diagnosed him with diabetes, and Mary Margaret was nearly sure her life at that point was over. There was just no way she could afford (let alone take care of) a diabetic cat. Insulin shots—she could barely stand getting her yearly flu shot, let alone giving a shot to another living being. The thought of needles made her stomach turn.

No, she had thought. I can't do it. You'll have to put him to sleep.

But then, Khan looked up at her just as she decided to tell the vet to put him down. Those angry-looking green eyes, like he was accusing her. He knew, she thought. He knew she'd rather let him die than have him be sick. Her own eyes teared up. She couldn't give him up. He meant too much to her.

So, six hundred dollars and four hours later, she emerged with an enormous vet bill, an enormous box of needles and insulin she had purchased at Costco, and a somewhat indifferent enormous gray cat. But she knew if Khan could thank her, he would have. (And, what a coincidence, she thought. That day was June 16, 2010, making this the fourth anniversary of the day she didn't kill her cat.)

She went over to check his water and his food. They were both fine. She checked his blood glucose level, and that was fine.

"Okay, you silly kitty," she said aloud. "You'll need to amuse yourself for a few hours. Mommy has to work." And she paused at the fact that she had referred to herself as "Mommy." It made her nauseous again—the thought that she was like one of those (blonde) perfect stay-at-home-mom bloggers that obnoxiously referred to herself in diminutive third person.

No one had called her "Mommy" for at least five years. Junior had stopped using it once he went into his pubescent stage. Mary Margaret didn't blame him. It was hard for anyone to take you seriously at age ten if you still called your mother "Mommy."

And there was still the moment when she found she had to let go, both physically and mentally. It was precisely twelve days after Junior stopped calling her "Mommy."

They were running around town; Mary Margaret had various errands, but they were all within walking distance. It was a beautiful spring day; not a cloud in the sky, the sun beaming warm on their heads and faces. They came up to the intersection, and she reached for Junior's hand.

"That's okay, Mom," he said. "I don't think I need to hold your hand anymore."

Her heart broke that day, split into a trillion and three jagged little pieces. She had failed as a mother, failed to help her son love her through her faults.

She told Jake Senior how she felt later that evening, and he told her she was being ridiculous. All the lack of handholding meant was that he was growing up. She had *actually* done everything correctly.

She agreed with him (perhaps one of the few times that she had done so in their relationship?) but still started crying again. He held her and told her she was a good mother and that there was nothing to worry about. She still cried for about ten more minutes before realizing that yes, she was being a bit ridiculous.

Jake Senior wasn't such a bad guy. He had his moments like everyone else, but deep down he was a good person. Maybe not such a good father or a good husband, but a good person nonetheless. Maybe he just wasn't the marrying kind. Maybe *she* wasn't the marrying kind.

But that was dumb. Mary Margaret always eschewed most traditional displays of femininity, but the one thing she had wanted since she was a little girl was a wedding—a big, beautiful wedding with a stupid white dress (virginity was not her strong suit—she and Jake Senior had had sex several times the night before the wedding, for example) but oh well. She wore that dress with a smile, and she walked down the aisle up to Jake Senior in his fitted gray suit, told him she

loved him, promised to be faithful to him, and kissed him in front of everyone. And then later, she tossed the bouquet at the reception and danced with Jake Senior to "(I've Had) The Time of My Life" by Bill Medler and Jennifer Warnes. It was all very cliché, and later she couldn't believe she had let it all happen, but there it was—polished and gaudy in her memory.

Was anything good enough for herself? The sentence forced itself upon her retinas. The cursor blinked expectantly at her, beckoning her to type away. *Did anything make her happy?* she typed.

Did anything make her happy? she thought. She put more thought into this than she would have liked.

She realized then that the single happiest day of her life was not the birth of her child or her wedding day or the day she adopted Khan or even the day she saved Khan from his demise (or at least postponed his demise).

It was June 16, 1995. She had just finished an overdue paper for her United States History II class. She told the professor she was under severe emotional distress (in reality, she had found a strain of pot that made her delightfully stoned without any paranoia, but it kept her on the couch for most of the semester.) After she had finished the last of the pot, she proclaimed pot "stupid" and ditched it, but not before sobbing to

her history prof that she was under a lot of stress from the semester and begging him to let her take an incomplete so she could finish the paper during the summer. And really, was it her fault that Professor McCann was less interesting at the time than pot?

She remembered that clear as water; she wore the lowest-cut top she had, painted her lips slutty-girl-with-a-Porsche red, drank several cups of coffee to feel as on-edge as possible, and walked up to Professor McCann's office.

Whether it was due to nerves or the caffeine or the fact that her pot stash was running low, she didn't know, but as soon as she sat down in the seat in front of Professor McCann, her eyeballs exploded. Tears streamed sideways, front ways, all ways out of her face, and her professor was so alarmed that all he could do was wait for her to finish and offer a box of tissues. She concocted some story of emotional distress and he offered the incomplete solution, which she graciously accepted.

It was only when she got back to her dorm room that she realized how sad she actually was, but what for, she couldn't tell.

But June 16, 1995—what a plunge! She finished her paper around 8:00 PM, unsure of its actual quality, but uncaring either way. She put on a push-up bra and slinked into the smallest little black dress she felt comfortable wearing, but not before brushing her lips with the same slutty red shade she had used to convince Professor McCann to give her

the extension. She thought about calling one of her close girlfriends but then decided against it; tonight was hers.

She climbed into her beat-up Daewoo and punched it towards the nearest bar. She tossed her hair a few times when she got out of the car, and went inside.

She ordered an extra dirty martini and surveyed the place. It was mostly the local college students all looking bewildered maybe because school was over and they had so much free time. There was some heavily bearded buff guy looking sketchy; there was some anorexic Twinkie-girl looking bored; there was Alissa.

Alissa.

Mary Margaret found herself wondering about her strange fascination with this girl. Alissa was the TA for her US History II class, the very same class she officially finished not an hour before.

It wasn't as if Alissa was anything to look at. Quite the opposite; Alissa was odd-looking, if anything. Mary Margaret found herself guiltily thanking God or whomever that she was more attractive than Alissa.

But Alissa was different. She had hair the color of sand in long dreadlocks, tied up with a green neckerchief and matching hair tie. She had several piercings in her ears, places Mary Margaret had never even thought to pierce. She had casual blue eyes and a small Mona Lisa smile (which Mary Margaret fucking hated because it was always as if Alissa

knew more than anyone else. Which she probably did, but it wasn't polite, in Mary Margaret's opinion, to let everyone know that.)

Mary Margaret figured she had nothing to lose from interacting with Alissa since she was done grading or whatever for Professor McCann. She ordered another dirty martini and went over to Alissa.

"Hi," she said to Alissa. "I don't know what you drink, but I brought you this. Looks like you could use it." Alissa looked up at her and smiled.

"At this point, I'd suck the alcohol out of a deodorant stick. Thank you," said Alissa. "Why don't you join me?"

Mary Margaret sat down and began talking with Alissa; Alissa had forgotten her name (understandable when she had 300 students with whom to keep up, but Mary Margaret politely offered it again and Alissa asked forgiveness for her momentary lapse.)

It turned out Alissa had just broken up with Mike, her boyfriend of a while. It wasn't as if she wasn't expecting it, she said, it just finally happened after a few months of speculation. She felt neither particularly sad nor particularly happy. Just ordinary. Alissa couldn't stand feeling ordinary.

Mary Margaret sympathized. She couldn't stand feeling ordinary either, which is probably why she had gotten the pot—she needed a jolt

to her system to escape herself. But she didn't tell Alissa that. She just nodded and said, "Yeah, I hear you."

Some crappy song—no, it was TLC's "Waterfalls," a song that Mary Margaret still enjoyed to this day—came on, and Alissa asked Mary Margaret if she wanted to dance.

Initially, Mary Margaret laughed at the idea—two women dancing would have looked idiotic. Two women dancing was for drunken, poorly thought out nights on the beaches of South Padre Island, both of them declaring that it would be THE BEST SPRING BREAK EVER. But she saw the sincerity in Alissa's eyes and accepted the offer.

They started to dance on the tiny tiled floor, Alissa swishing her hips and Mary Margaret awkwardly twisting. After it was over (and with Mary Margaret feeling foolish) Alissa pulled her by her arm to the bathroom. Mary Margaret never understood the compulsion of other women to go to the bathroom together, but she—

Alissa pushed her gently up against the wall, cupping her breasts, and kissed her. Alissa's tongue swished in and out of Mary Margaret's mouth, and Mary Margaret, although still sober and not sure what exactly was going on, obliged.

Perhaps it was that Mary Margaret *felt* a little drunk, and more alive than she ever had before. The kiss with Alissa awoke her; her entire

body became a high-voltage power line; each touch from Alissa's impossibly smooth fingertips caused power surge after power surge.

When it was over, she found herself beside Alissa in one of the bathroom stalls, her panties somewhere unknown on the floor.

After saying goodbye to Alissa, exchanging numbers, and promising to call her, Mary Margaret went home. When she reached her bed, she found it was still June 16, but only for another moment—11:59 PM.

She found herself smiling through the bedroom window to the moon. She had just slipped her slightly frazzled yet calm body between the cool, clean sheets she stretched over the mattress the evening before, and she realized that this was surely the happiest moment of her life.

She wondered what had become of Alissa. She tried searching her on Facebook, but to no avail. She imagined she would be married by now with perhaps five children. Her husband would be physically strong but still emotionally available, and she would occasionally take a bit of Xanax to quell her anxieties about being a good parent. She would be emotionally friable (what mother wasn't?) but otherwise in good mental and physical health.

"Fuck you," said Mary Margaret aloud, but she allowed herself to smile just enough to show her amusement, much like the way Alissa used to.

Her iPhone chirped at her again (hadn't she set it to "Do Not Disturb"? She could never quite figure the damn thing out; Junior generally had to help her with the technological things) and it was, speak of the devil, Junior himself, wondering if he could go out for pizza with Dad. She said fine, have a good time, just let her know if he was coming home late or spending the night with Jake Senior.

She looked at the calendar in front of her and stared at today's date—June 16, 2014. Here she had marked her family's plans; Junior's soccer practice was the only thing slated today. But in that box, the white vastness expanding before her eyes, she wrote: "WRITE" in big, blocky letters and underlined it twice.

Works Cited

Briggs, Julia. *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life.* Orlando: Harcourt, 2005.

Caruth, Cathy. "Trauma and Experience." In *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, edited by Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, 192-98. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univeristy Press, 2003.

Caruth, Cathy. "Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals." *Assemblage* 20 (2007): 24-25.

DeMeester, Karen. "Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44, no. 3 (1998): 649-673.

DeSalvo, Louise. *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Grossman, Lev. "All-TIME 100 Novels." *Time Magazine*. January 8, 2010. http://entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100 -novels/slide/mrs-dalloway-1925-by-virginia-woolf/.

The Hours. Directed by Stephen Daldry. 2002. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2003. DVD.

Langer, Lawrence L. *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.

Lombardi, Esther. "Stream of Consciousness." *About.com Classic Literature*. 2014. http://classiclit.about.com/od/literaryterms/g/ aa_stream.htm.

"Parliament.uk." *Parliament of the United Kingdom*. 2014. http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/keydates/.

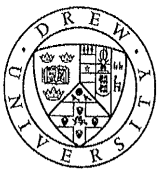
Tal, Kalí. "Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma." In *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*, edited by Philip K. Jason, 217-50. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.

"Virginia Woolf Timeline." *Shmoop University, Inc.* 2014. http://www.shmoop.com/virginia-woolf/timeline.html.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1929.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1927.



THESIS AUTHOR VITA FORM

Full Name: Jonathan Brooks Sanford

Place and Date of Birth: 22 March 1989, Houston, Texas

Parents' Names: Jeffrey A. Sanford and Sherri B. Sanford

Educational Institutions:

	School Name	*Location*	*Degree*	*Date*
Secondary	*Klein Collins High School*	*Spring, TX*	*High School Diploma*	*May 2007*
Collegiate	*University of Houston*	*Houston, TX*	*Bachelor of Arts*	*May 2012*
Graduate	*Drew University*	*Madison, NJ*	*Master of Letters*	*May 2014*

I understand that the Drew University Library may make this document available to scholars and other libraries. If I have processed this volume through University Microfilms International, the purchase of copies will be available only through UMI.

Signature: Jonathan Sanford Date: 24 April 2014