



Guide to Writing a Thesis in English (M.A. and M.S. Degrees)

Contents

- A. [Eligibility](#)
 - B. [The Master's Thesis Track: Overview of Steps](#)
 - C. [Applying to Write a Thesis \(Step #1\)](#)
 - 1. Application and Initial Proposal
 - 2. Choice of Topic
 - 3. Approval and Next Steps
 - 4. Deadlines
 - D. [Registering for Thesis Credits \(ENG 590\)](#)
 - 1. Registering for ENG 590
 - 2. Satisfactory Progress
 - 3. Continuation Credits (IDS 900)
 - E. [The Thesis Proposal \(Step #2\)](#)
 - 1. Preparing the Proposal
 - 2. Submitting the Proposal
 - 3. Deadlines
 - F. [Drafting and Revising the Thesis \(Step #3\)](#)
 - 1. Consultation With Thesis Advisor and Second Reader
 - 2. Thesis Guidelines
 - Length
 - Structure
 - References
 - List of Works Cited
 - 3. Formatting
 - G. [Submitting the Thesis \(Step #4\)](#)
 - 1. Handing in Your Thesis
 - 2. Evaluation
 - 3. Final Submission
 - 4. Deadlines
 - H. [Switching Out of the Thesis Track](#)
- Appendixes:
- Appendix I [Timeline](#)
 - Appendix II [Sample Thesis Application: Statement of Purpose, Description of Project, and Writing Sample](#)

A. Eligibility

Applicants for the thesis must be matriculated students who have completed or are currently completing 15 credit hours with a 3.0 average. Applicants in the M.A. program must also have completed the language requirement.

B. The Master's Thesis Track: Overview of Steps

M.A. and M.S. students who apply and are approved to write a thesis will complete 30 semester hours of coursework and register for 6 thesis credit hours. The production of the thesis typically takes from nine months to a year and consists of the following steps:

Step #1 – Apply to Write a Thesis: An initial application and project description, due one month before the end of the semester prior to that in which the student intends to register for thesis credits. Applications are reviewed by the faculty Graduate Committee. If approved, the student registers for either 3 or 6 credits of ENG 590 (Thesis Seminar).

Step #2 – Thesis Proposal: An official proposal, due either in Week 8 of the first semester of ENG 590 (if the student is taking two semesters to write the thesis) or Week 4 (if the student is taking one semester to write the thesis). Upon satisfactory approval from the committee and / or the completion of any necessary revisions to the proposal, the faculty advisor forwards a signed copy of the proposal to the Graduate Coordinator and enters a final grade for the first semester of ENG 590. The Graduate Coordinator notes acceptance and attaches a copy of the student's proposal for English departmental records in SSC Navigate.

Step #3 – Drafting and Revising the Thesis: The student completes multiple drafts of the thesis itself, revising in consultation with the advisor and first and/or second reader.

Step #4 – Submitting the Thesis: A complete draft of the thesis is due to the committee by the Monday of the twelfth week of the semester in which the student intends to graduate. Upon receipt, the faculty advisor should notify the Graduate Coordinator to confirm a scheduled date for a Final Committee Review. The "Final Committee Review" is not a formal defense but rather an informal review and discussion of the outcomes of the thesis, which may take one of several forms, based on the decision of the faculty advisor and committee: (a) a final in-person review of the thesis with members of the committee; (b) an equivalent video-conference via Teams, Zoom, WebEx, etc.; or (c) an email deadline by which all committee members will submit final comments to the candidate

The final, correctly formatted draft of the thesis and signed committee approval form is due to the Graduate Coordinator by the Monday of finals week. Once the candidate has been notified that their formatted thesis is satisfactorily received, they must file a copy of the thesis with the university via ProQuest.

C. Applying to Write a Thesis (Step #1)

The application to write a thesis is *not* a formal thesis proposal. It is a statement of intent to pursue the Master's Thesis track and an initial description of the student's projected topic. That is, the applicant is requesting permission from the departmental Graduate Committee to proceed to ENG 590.

Applications are reviewed by the Graduate Committee and evaluated on the following criteria:

- evidence of a reasonable and focused research topic, related to the student's completed coursework;
- a working knowledge of the primary texts / authors at stake in the proposed project;
- designation of an appropriate list of potential faculty advisors for the project

1. Application and Initial Proposal

Applicants should apply no later than one month before the end of the semester prior to that in

which they hope to begin the thesis. Applications should include the following:

- (a) A typed cover page listing the student's name, number of credits completed for the degree, GPA, and a list of three English faculty members with whom the candidate has discussed serving as a potential thesis advisor or committee member for the project (only one will be designated if the thesis application is approved, though the other(s) may serve as a second reader)
- (b) PDF or print-out of the student's graduate transcript (unofficial transcripts are fine)
- (c) A statement of purpose (no more than 300 words) explaining why the applicant wishes to write a thesis. This statement should address the applicant's educational and professional goals; why the thesis serves those goals better than the exam; and the coursework completed that has prepared him or her to pursue the project.
- (d) An initial description of the thesis project (no more than 500 words). Your description may be provisional but should identify the primary texts / authors at stake in the thesis you would like to write, some of the secondary criticism on your intended topic, and explain why you think this project merits further research and exploration. [For a sample description, see Appendix III below.](#)
- (e) An academic writing sample from one of your graduate courses, with Works Cited page

Submit your thesis application to the Graduate Coordinator: Dr. Joel M. Dodson, Engleman D265C, dodsonj2@southernct.edu

2. Choice of Topic

The thesis should be written on a topic related to the student's main area of academic interest, and she or he should have had course work related to that topic. Prior to applying, applicants should discuss their interest in writing the thesis and potential topic(s) both with the Graduate Coordinator and at least one of their proposed thesis advisors.

3. Approval and Next Steps

The Graduate Committee reviews each application and contacts the list of proposed thesis advisors to confirm that a faculty member is willing to direct the project.

If approved, the Graduate Coordinator informs the student, and he or she completes the [English Master's Thesis Registration Form.](#)

If unapproved, or if a faculty member is unwilling to direct the project, the student meets with the Graduate Coordinator to discuss the available options, such as revising the thesis application and intended project or remaining on the Master's Exam track.

4. Deadlines

The deadlines to submit your application to write a thesis are as follows:

April 15 (for theses beginning in the fall semester)

November 10 (for theses beginning in the spring semester)

D. Registering for Thesis Credits (ENG 590)

1. English Masters Thesis Registration Form

Upon approval of your thesis application, complete the [English Masters Thesis Registration Form.](#) Forms are due by the last day of the semester prior to the one in which you plan to begin the

thesis. The form requires:

- the name and signature of your designated thesis advisor
- a list of two potential faculty readers (at least one is required for the committee)
- whether you wish to register for 3 or 6 credits of ENG 590 (English Thesis)

Return the registration form to the Graduate Coordinator: Dr. Joel M. Dodson, Engleman D265C, dodsonj2@southernct.edu

While you must ultimately register for 6 credits of ENG 590, these credits may be split up (3+3) between two semesters or lumped together (6 in one semester). Because of the several steps required for final approval of the thesis, it is *highly unusual* for a candidate to complete a thesis in one semester. Students are therefore encouraged to allow two semesters for the thesis, in order to avoid delaying graduation and incurring additional fees for continuation credits.

Once your registration form is received, the English Department chair signs and retains an official copy, and the Graduate Coordinator notifies you of the members of your thesis committee and when you can register for ENG 590 in Banner.

2. Re-registering for a Second Semester of ENG 590

If you have split your credits of ENG 590 into two semesters, please email the Graduate Coordinator no later than the last week of classes, copying your thesis advisor, to request a second section of ENG 590 to be created for you. A second section of ENG 590 will be created only if the thesis proposal has been approved or a report has been sent by the thesis advisor regarding the progress of the candidate's thesis.

2. Grade and Satisfactory Progress

If you have split your credits of ENG 590 into two semesters, you are given a grade for the first 3 credits if your official thesis proposal has been approved and submitted to the Graduate School. (See Section E below.) If you have "lumped" credits into a single semester, you are given a grade after your Masters thesis has been submitted and approved.

If either portion of the thesis progress is incomplete (i.e., your thesis proposal is not submitted and approved by the end of your first 3 credits, or your final thesis has not submitted by the end of 6 credits), your advisor will assign you a grade of I ("Incomplete"). This grade will turn into an F after six weeks unless the advisor files an "Incomplete extension form," though the F will disappear from the transcript once the proposal or thesis is complete.

3. Completing Your Thesis after ENG 590

If you have not completed your thesis by the end of ENG 590, make sure you are in close contact with your thesis advisor. Students who do not complete their thesis on time will receive an I grade for their final semester of ENG 590. (See "[Capstone Experiences](#)" in the Graduate Catalog.) The "I" grade grants you until 30 days following the start of the next semester to complete and submit your thesis. If additional time is needed, an "I+" grade may be requested from the Registrar by your advisor. The "I+" grants no more than 12 months of additional time, based on the schedule you have determined with your thesis advisor. Once your thesis is successfully approved, the advisor will change the final grade for ENG 590 and your degree will be processed for graduation.

E. The Thesis Proposal (Step #2)

The thesis proposal must be completed during the first semester of ENG 590. It is comprised of an official summary and bibliography for the proposed project, which must be submitted to your committee and to the English Department chairperson for approval.

Rather than an extra step in the thesis process, the proposal – if completed satisfactorily – will form the

backbone of your written project, including a significant chunk of the Introduction and Works Cited. As such, it should be completed in close consultation with your thesis advisor.

1. Preparing the Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal must contain the following components:

(i) a title and 250-300 word abstract

(ii) a draft introduction (8 pp. min.) that:

- introduces and carefully describes the topic and proposed argument of the thesis project, including the primary texts and author(s) at stake
- provides a summary of the critical conversation on the topic, including the secondary criticism and/or contemporary theory you will draw upon in the thesis
- explains the specific contribution your thesis hopes to make to that existing scholarship
- closes with a brief overview of the proposed chapters of the thesis

(iii) A bibliography of primary and secondary sources, following MLA style; this should include the journal articles, book chapters, and scholarly books you have found through your research and intend to use (not a sample of relevant citations)

2. Submitting the Proposal

Email the completed proposal – title, abstract, draft introduction, and bibliography - to your thesis advisor and committee for their approval. If the proposal meets with the committee's approval, each member confirms acceptance of the proposal via email to the thesis advisor, and the advisor forwards the committee's confirmation to the English Department Chair and English Graduate Coordinator, who notes the date of approval and places a copy of the candidate's approved proposal, with email confirmation, in SSC Navigate.

3. Deadline

Your thesis proposal must be completed by the following deadlines:

- For students writing the thesis over the course of two semesters, a completed thesis proposal is due to the thesis advisor and second reader(s) by the end of the 8th week of the first semester of ENG 590
- For students attempting to write the thesis in a single semester, a completed proposal is due to the thesis advisor and second reader no later than the end of the 4th week of the semester in which the student is registered for ENG 590

F. Drafting and Revising the Thesis (Step #3)

1. Consultation with Thesis Advisor and Second Reader

Unless the thesis advisor suggests other arrangements, students should consult the advisor regularly, submitting material chapter by chapter for comments and suggestions. Students are strongly urged to submit a completed draft of the thesis to the first and (if applicable) second reader for comments and suggestions no later than mid-way through the semester in which they plan to submit the thesis, since second readers' comments must be addressed before theses are finally submitted to the Department

Chair.

2. Thesis Guidelines

In addition to meeting the requirements of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies, all theses written in the English department will meet the following guidelines.

Length

Completed theses should be a minimum of 50 pages long.

Structure

For acceptance by the university, English theses must include: (a) an introduction, incorporating a literature review (a section summarizing the existing scholarship and critical conversation on the research topic) and a clear description of the argument, thesis, terminology, and significance of the project; (b) individual chapters (with titles), presenting the body of the thesis's argument and substantial supporting evidence; (c) a concluding chapter, which provides closure without restating what has already been said, and which may include suggestions for future research in the area, and (d) a bibliography of all primary and secondary sources cited in the thesis (i.e., Works Cited).

Reference Style

Theses prepared in the English department will follow the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook's* formatting guidelines.

List of Works Cited: A complete list of references cited in the thesis. The title, Works Cited, appears in capital letters centered two (2) inches from the top and only on the first page of the section. (Example: WORKS CITED)

3. Formatting

In formatting your thesis, consult and follow carefully the Sample Thesis Title Page and Sample Thesis / Dissertation provided by the School of Graduate and Professional Studies:

Sample Thesis Title Page

https://www.southernct.edu/sites/default/files/a/sites/grad/20140930_sample.pdf

Sample Formatted Thesis

<https://www.southernct.edu/sites/default/files/a/sites/grad/Capstone-Sample.pdf>

G. Submitting the Thesis (Step #4)

1. Handing in Your Thesis

A final draft of the thesis is due to the committee by the Monday of the twelfth week of the semester in which the student intends to graduate. Upon receipt, the faculty advisor should notify the Graduate Coordinator to confirm a scheduled date for a Final Committee Review. The "Final Committee Review" is not a formal defense but rather an informal review and discussion of the outcomes of the thesis, which may take one of several forms, based on the decision of the faculty advisor and committee:

- a final in-person review of the thesis with members of the committee
- an equivalent video-conference via Teams, Skype, WebEx, etc.
- an email deadline by which all committee members will submit final comments to the candidate

2. Evaluation

Faculty readers will be guided in their evaluation of theses by the following considerations: the topic must be substantial and clearly defined, and the outline and development of material should demonstrate logical thinking. The thesis must represent careful analysis of primary materials and appropriate synthesis of secondary materials. The final manuscript must be consistent with the principles enunciated in the Graduate School's Thesis Guidelines and the *MLA Handbook*.

When the advisor and the second reader(s) have approved the thesis, they will indicate their approval on the signature page of the English Master's Thesis Acceptance form, which should include a final copy of the thesis abstract:

[English Master's Thesis Acceptance Form](#) (updated Sept. 2021)

Since the advisor or the second reader may require minor or major revisions before approving the thesis, the student must include adequate time for potential revisions in the thesis timeline. Neither reader will sign the signature page until final revisions and editing, if necessary, have been satisfactorily completed.

3. Final Submission

A revised, correctly formatted draft of the thesis and signed [English Master's Thesis Acceptance Form](#) is due to the Graduate Coordinator by the Monday of finals week. Once the candidate has been notified that their formatted thesis is satisfactorily received, they must file a copy of the thesis with the university via ProQuest.

For instructions on how to publish your thesis via ProQuest, follow the steps at the School of Graduate and Professional Studies: <https://www.southernct.edu/grad/current-students/student-research>

4. Approval for Graduation

In order to be approved for graduation, the candidate must send electronic confirmation of successful submission to ProQuest to (i) the faculty advisor, (ii) English Chair, and (iii) Graduate Coordinator no later than 48 hours before final grades are due. If the student is still enrolled in ENG 590, the faculty advisor then enters a final grade for the thesis. If the student is no longer enrolled in ENG 590, the English chair notifies the Registrar (via Degree Works) that the capstone has been successfully completed and the faculty advisor files a grade change for the incomplete grade.

H. Switching Out of the Thesis Track

Students who determine that they will be unable to complete their master's thesis may opt instead to take the comprehensive exam. However, the decision to move from the thesis option to the comprehensive exam *must be made prior to completing the first three credits of ENG 590*. Students who have split their thesis credits into two semesters (3+3) must notify the Graduate Coordinator prior to the end of the first semester of ENG 590 that they wish to withdraw from the Masters Thesis track. Students attempting to complete the thesis in one semester (6 credits) must notify the Graduate Coordinator of their intent to withdraw prior to the university "withdrawal" deadline (week 8).

If the switch is approved, students will receive a W for the thesis course. NB: Retroactive withdrawals and/or exceptions to this policy will not be made once the deadline to withdraw from the thesis course passes. A student who misses this deadline and is unwilling or unable to complete the thesis has the option of completing the degree via the alternative capstone (the comprehensive exam), but the "F" received in ENG 590 (the thesis course) will remain on the transcript.

Students must complete their new capstone no later than one year following the withdrawal from the

thesis course (e.g. if the student withdraws in the spring semester, he/she will have until the end of the following spring semester to complete the new capstone experience). This deadline also includes the completion of any additional required coursework related to the new capstone experience (Note: this deadline assumes that students have time remaining on their planned program).It is the responsibility of the student to register for the comprehensive exam on time.

Thesis students should be aware of the ramifications of moving from the thesis option to an alternate option. For instance, two additional courses (6 credits) are required for students in the M.A. or M.S. program who switch from the thesis track to the comprehensive exam track.

Appendix I - Timeline

Sample Timeline for Writing an English Graduate Thesis

To graduate in May, follow this general timeframe:

- **Jan-March of Previous Spring** - Contact potential thesis advisors and begin discussing your proposed topic during the prior spring semester. As you think about potential advisors, look at the areas of expertise and interest that faculty members list on the English department website (NB: don't be shy about approaching potential advisors—advising theses is part of our job and something most of us like to do!) Remember that you need to submit the names of three *potential* advisors with your thesis application, so speak with several people to explore where your project might take you.
- **April of the Previous Spring** - Complete an application to write a thesis no later than one month before the end of the semester prior to that in which you hope to register for thesis credits; see the dates provided in Section C4 above
- **May of the Previous Spring** - Once your thesis application has been approved, submit the [English Masters Thesis Registration Form](#). The Graduate Coordinator will let you know who has agreed to be your second reader(s) and when you can register for ENG 590. Contact your committee to begin planning for the thesis proposal.
- **Summer** - Start reading for the thesis over the summer; take copious notes; start drafting your proposal; form study groups with other thesis writers to share and discuss proposal drafts
- **Fall Registration** - Register for the thesis credits when the Graduate Coordinator contacts you to let you know a section of ENG 590 has been opened for you. You need to complete your registration by the first week of classes.
- **September or October** - Submit your thesis proposal to your advisor and second reader by Week 8 of the fall semester.
- **December** – Email the Graduate Coordinator no later than the last week of classes to request that a second section of ENG 590 be created for you.
- **January-March** – Submit and revise drafts of your thesis chapters to your thesis advisor and members of the committee.
- **April** – Submit the completed thesis to the committee no later than the Monday of the 12th week of the semester, along with an unsigned copy of the [English Master's Thesis Acceptance Form](#). Arrange a date with your committee for “Final Committee Review.”
- **May** – By Monday of finals week, submit the final correctly formatted draft of the thesis and signed committee approval form to the Graduate Coordinator, and await approval for submission to ProQuest. Once you are approved to submit to ProQuest, send confirmation of successful submission to the advisor, Graduate Coordinator, and English Department chair *no later* than 48 hours before final grades are due.

Questions? Please contact the Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Joel Dodson, at
dodsonj2@southernct.edu

Appendix II

Sample Thesis Application

Sample Project Description

In the proposed thesis, I plan to pair Virginia Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room* with E.M. Forster's *Maurice*. In classifying the different rooms in each novel, it is clear they can be divided not only into public and private spheres, but also into natural and unnatural worlds. By this argument, the outdoors can be seen as the utmost natural "room," and the location of many sexual encounters or awakenings. It is in nature that Maurice first receives his sexual education and realizes that he never intends to marry; likewise, Jacob's sailing trip with his friend Timmy Durrant is heavily coded with sexual imagery.

In the case of *Maurice*, the leading homosexual characters are plagued by the unwelcoming, unnatural rooms of their home; there is danger when they reveal themselves as homosexual, whether intentionally or not. Even Alec Scudder, Maurice's lover, threatens Maurice with blackmail when their relationship exists solely in the secrecy necessary in Clive's home. Their relationship cannot exist in this unnatural world society has constructed; there is no place for their love, because they exist outside the room of heterosexuality. The outside world, therefore, is where Maurice finds his most natural and most intimate experiences; the boathouse with Scudder, his natural adventure with Clive that ends in Maurice being expelled, and the constant attention to rain connect Maurice to nature in a deep way, implying that Maurice's sexuality is ingrained in him. He cannot change.

The influence of the University appears in both novels; Maurice and Clive confess their love while at University, and *Jacob's Room* is full of cryptic sexual images surrounding his student years. For the purpose of this thesis, the University is seen as a natural room because of the freedom allowed to the students in terms of their sexuality. Platonic relationships are not

unheard of, though Clive quickly insists to Maurice that love between men must *only* be Platonic; nonetheless, these mental relationships are beneficial for the characters in both *Jacob's Room* and *Maurice*. In fact, I believe that Jacob prefers male company primarily for the mental stimulation accompanying it.

Indeed, Jacob's sexuality is more difficult to pinpoint than is Maurice's. Jacob is highly sexual, appealing to everyone who beholds him. He has many sexual relationships with women, which are less coded than those he has with men; however these male-male relationships do exist within the novel. Time will be spent in this thesis to decode Woolf's cryptic sexual messages, using cues from her other works as necessary for frame of reference. When these hidden signs of homosexuality are discovered, it is clear that Jacob's homosexuality is influenced by the intellectual appeal men hold for him, particularly in the room of the University. Jacob's own room is the location of his heterosexual relationships, but it is clear in the text that these relationships are unfulfilling, supporting the argument that the home falls into the category of the unnatural room.

In addition to a close analysis of the above mentioned texts, I may also address the motif of the room in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and Forster's *A Room with a View*, because it is so explicit in their titles. Further, I expect to explore the influence that Woolf and Forster may have had on each other's work.

Sample Thesis Application: Writing Sample

The Queer Character of Jacob in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*

Virginia Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room* follows the life of Jacob Flanders, one of many young men to be killed during World War I. The narrative style Woolf employs limits the direct contact readers have with Jacob's thoughts and feelings; instead, a narrator follows Jacob's life,

giving details that must be decoded in order to better understand Jacob. It is through these “details, details, details – enormous, petty, vital details” (Kelsey 439) – which are rarely specific – that Woolf gives life to Jacob. The narrator states, “nobody sees any one as he is . . . They see a whole—they see all sorts of things It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done” (29). This is Woolf’s method of introducing Jacob’s character.

In reading Jacob through these details, it is clear that his sexuality, just like the details surrounding him, is a complicated situation. Jacob does not overtly prefer the company of men to women, or vice versa; instead, Jacob is a queer character. His sexual preferences deviate from social conventions as he chooses to have sex with prostitutes and experiences at least one instance of homosexual love. Jacob’s sexuality is even confusing to himself, as he constantly applies the desires felt for his male companions onto the females he is with, leading only to disappointment when those women fail him in their intellectual capacity. In looking through the details, Jacob can be seen as a man preferring intellectual stimuli, who battles with his desires for female flesh against his quest to have an intelligent conversation.

Woolf’s narrative method argues that humans are not able to be completely classified. In an instance of narrator intervention, we are told that “the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheater, gallery. . . There is no need to distinguish details” (69). Yet not long after, Mrs. Durrant announces “that Jacob Flanders was ‘distinguished-looking.’ ‘Extremely awkward,’ she said, ‘but so distinguished-looking’” (71). Woolf’s narrator almost argues in favor of allowing the details to blend into overarching categories. Details seem to be unimportant, almost; it is simply one’s category that matters. If, however, Jacob is distinguished as Mrs. Durrant believes, then he seems to exist outside the boundaries applied by the narrator; that Mrs. Durrant acknowledges Jacob by

making him distinct in her eyes causes her to break from the rules set forth of general categorization. It also shows that Jacob cannot fit in to these rules.

To Mary Kelsey, *Jacob's Room* consists of “myriad elements, all churning and turning and frothing and surging . . . for everything is somehow inextricably mingled with everything else” (442). These details of life are “mysterious, indefinable” (Kelsey 442). This imagery gives Jacob and his life the ability to flow freely between scenes. A contrary point of view is used by Kami Hancock; she breaks *Jacob's Room* into snapshots, or brief instances of details that define Jacob's life. Hancock argues, “Each of these snapshots of objects adds tiny increments, which create a rhythm of picture followed by picture, undermining a normative perception of time” (10); this is why the narrator frequently draws our attention away from the action of the story and to details, and how “a whole night goes by, and one marks it by the enumeration of noises” (Kelsey 440). Jacob's entire, albeit short, life is able to be shown in such a small period of time because of these snapshots.

David Daiches believes that *Jacob's Room* is Woolf's first novel culminating the techniques she learned through writing her short story collection *Monday or Tuesday* (53). The question Woolf seemed most intent on answering, according to Daiches, was the question of reality: what was reality in literature, and how was it portrayed? While her earlier works had “a certain heaviness and over-intellectualization” (Daiches 42), her later novels, *Jacob's Room* included, were the result of an economical and effective technique, “a prose style that [enabled] her to utilize some of the resources of poetry in creating a view of life as the story moved” (42). This technique would create “a structure that would enable her to transcend the traditional limitations of narrative and construct a meditative web of retrospect, anticipation and analogy that would build up atmosphere and interpret life as the novel proceeded” (42). Instead of the narrator telling readers explicitly what they should be feeling, she instead allows the world

around Jacob to be filled with a sort of poetry of life. “[Woolf] wanted to find a way of writing which would interpret events as it described them, show both the thing and its value, its metaphysical meaning, simultaneously” (42), Daiches writes.

Whether the story is read as a photo album or a flowing river can depend on the situation. The narrator is able to control the “flow” of the story so that we travel down the river of Jacob’s life, stopping in stationary pools when our attention should be directed elsewhere. It is the narrator, therefore, who leads readers in the direction of Jacob’s sexuality, a factor of his life which readers cannot fully pinpoint despite hints from the narrator. On the one hand, Jacob appears to be heterosexual in that he has sexual relations with multiple women. His homosexual desires and interactions are more secret, but are, with the exception of his affair with Sandra Wentworth Williams, the strongest relationships he has.

Jacob’s male-male relationships are infused with a sense of mental and emotional connection, whereas his attempts at male-female relationships – more often than not purely sexual in nature – are based upon physicality, necessity, and lack an intellectual respect. “Woolf carefully entwines the narrative strand that follows Jacob’s sexual education with the one following his intellectual education until the two finally become inseparable” (Harris 421), leading to the relationship between intellectual and physical attraction. Kelsey argues that “what interests Mrs. Woolf within human beings is, first, their intolerable mystery and then all those parts of them that are on the borderland of various levels of consciousness between body and spirit” (436). This distinction between the body (read: physical) and spirit (read: mental, emotionally, intelligent) worlds is what causes Jacob to be so hard to place in the realm of sexuality.

In his sexual encounter with Simeon, the emphasis of the moment is on the mental, intellectual connection between the men. “It was the intimacy, a sort of spiritual suppleness,

when mind prints upon mind indelibly. . . intimacy—the room was full of it, still, deep, like a pool. . . it rose softly and washed over everything, mollifying, kindling, and coating the mind with the luster of pearl” (45). The sexual imagery is clear here, but within it lies the idea of mental stimulation. The emphasis of “mind . . . upon mind” (Woolf 45) in the text brings attention to the mental capacities of the two men involved, it is not “body upon body” that is the focus – though this section is not lacking in sexual implications.

Florinda, Jacob’s most prominent female companion, constantly has her intellectual abilities belittled throughout the novel. It is of her that Jacob remarks, “beauty goes hand in hand with stupidity” (83). The narrator reminds readers frequently that beauty is not substantial: “if you talk of a beautiful woman you mean only something flying fast which for a second uses the eyes, lips, or cheeks of Fanny Elmer, for example, to glow through” (122). Fanny and Florinda are not described as having beautiful minds; their bodies appeal to Jacob, fulfill a need, and do not hold a lasting impression.

For Jacob, “the body is harnessed to a brain” (Woolf 83); therefore, the two must communicate and influence one another. This mind-body relationship implies that it is impossible for Jacob to be completely happy in a relationship unless the needs of both his body and mind are satisfied. He cannot choose to do or like something solely on the desire of his mind, nor can he seek bodily pleasure where there is nothing to appease his brain. This is why his interactions with Simeon, particularly during their sexual encounter, are so focused on the intellectual connection between the men. Simeon, unlike Florinda, does not go “hand in hand with stupidity” (83); he is an educated man, appealing to Jacob’s brain as well as his body. In the midst of their presumable encounter, we have evidence of the communicating body and spirit communication: “[Jacob] appeared extraordinarily happy, as if his pleasure would brim and spill down the sides if Simeon spoke. Simeon said nothing. Jacob remained standing” (45).

Physically, there is the picture of Jacob standing, of his happy appearance. Spiritually, it is clear Simeon's words have a great pleasure-bringing effect on Jacob. The physical aspect is unable to be described; there is just words, minds imprinting, and pearly pools.

Daiches' theory on Woolf's narrative strategy – that she allows interpretation on the part of the reader while she allows the narrator to flow between thoughts seamlessly, allowing the reader to catch on to the implied meaning or not – is used to portray the relationship between Jacob and Bonamy to make the homosexual love less prominent. Woolf uses this method while Jacob is choosing something to read: “he sighed again, being indeed so profoundly gloomy that gloom must have been lodged in him to cloud him at any moment, which was odd in a man who enjoyed things so, was not much give to analysis, but was horribly romantic, of course, Bonamy thought, in his rooms in Lincoln's Inn” (147). In a single sentence, we are taken through Jacob's gloomy sigh to Bonamy's thoughts – Bonamy, who could not know Jacob is sighing. This narrative strategy places Jacob and Bonamy together, though physically they are miles apart; this positions the two males in close mental proximity to each other, where the emotions of one run into the thoughts of another.

Surrounding this section, Woolf makes use of an envelope pattern, seen in poetry to “bookend” an important passage, to draw further attention to the mental connection between Jacob and Bonamy; “‘But the *Daily Mail* isn't to be trusted,’ said Jacob to himself, looking about for something else to read . . . It was to Bonamy that Jacob wrote from Patras—to Bonamy who couldn't love a woman and never read a foolish book” (147). These sentences seal the previous selection in a way that makes it clear the two males find reading extremely important. In fact, their relationship seems defined by what they read and write. Who exactly believes Bonamy had never read a foolish book is unclear, but the omnipresent feel to the text can imply that narrator has stepped in again to show us the connection between Jacob's reading of the

foolish *Daily Mail* and Bonamy's intellectual superiority. The unobvious voice could also be Jacob's thoughts about his friend, thus strengthening further the argument that we are being transported over time and space: Bonamy is thinking of Jacob, and Jacob is thinking of Bonamy. They are connected.

This connection through words is certainly a transcendence of "traditional limitations of narrative" (Daiches 42). It is a smooth transition, hardly to be noticed by the reader; we are swept across time and space, are shown instead of told about Bonamy's sexuality, and given an idea of the males' intellectual abilities in juxtaposition to each other. While their mental relationship has already been clearly assumed, this added commentary on Bonamy's inability to love a woman creates a deeper meaning to their relationship. If he cannot love a woman, can he then love a man? The text speaks for itself; Bonamy "was fonder of Jacob than of any one in the world" (148), and "the sharpest of knives never cut so deep" (174) as when Bonamy learns Jacob has fallen in love with a woman.

At an earlier point in the novel, Jacob and Bonamy are also connected through an emotional understanding; "there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy—the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history" (73). Anna Snaith refers to this passage to describe direct interior monologue – in her argument, the technique used for Woolf's narrator – but argues that in this case the direct interior monologue "is used to demonstrate its own limitations" (144). Snaith argues that "inflections and mood cannot be conveyed through direct interior monologue, and so . . . the contingencies of the moment are lost" (144). While she is correct that there is no conveyance of mood in this instance, something greater is being shown to readers: Snaith omits the connection between Jacob and Bonamy, which is an important addition on the part of our narrator. The purpose of this section is not to convey an emotion, but

instead to clearly show the relationship of the two men: Jacob has a part of himself only he can share, and one can speak of Bonamy in the same way. If Bonamy “could not love a woman” (147) and is the same as Jacob, then Jacob likewise cannot love a woman. That only Jacob, not the narrator, can convey something to a second person, and part of this is also part of Bonamy, then there is a secret connection between them; probably a bond which mirrors the pearly pools of intimacy experienced by Simeon and Jacob. It is not the narrator expressing limitations, but rather a showing a respectful distance between the title character – a refusal to break his trust.

Because homosexual relationships were illegal during the time of her writing, Woolf had to be sure to cover the details of Simeon and Jacob’s encounter, for fear of being indiscreet; the heavy code leaves only the reader’s imagination to bring the details forward. Yet a heterosexual relationship could not be frowned upon. Why then does Woolf abstain from being graphic in her description of Jacob and his women? “If Jacob was to carry conviction, he must be given a body as well as the mind of a young man: he is seen sailing and riding to hours – should he also be seen making love?” (97) Julia Briggs asks, arguing that “there was still a great deal of hypocrisy as to what it was acceptable for a woman to know, even a married woman” (98). Woolf could not blatantly portray a sexual act, for she would “shock her male readers and reviewers profoundly” (Briggs 98). Woolf settles for the alternative: she does not code Jacob and Florinda’s encounter, but she does not blatantly describe it, either. Briggs argues “Mrs. Flanders’ letter is made the unwitting witness of what cannot be said in print” (99), as Woolf attests that “to suppose that wood, when it creaks, transmits anything save that rats are busy and wood dry is childish” (95), even though she allows that “behind the [bedroom] door was the obscene thing, the alarming presence” (95).

In addition to the different censorship during the acts of copulation between Jacob and Florinda, and Jacob and Simeon, both encounters end differently, showing the impact of mental

stimulation upon Jacob. When Jacob and Simeon's pearly pool of intimacy is through, Jacob is able to return home, his footsteps sounding "as if the old stone echoed with magisterial authority" (45). After "the obscene thing" (95) with Florinda, Jacob, though still "authoritative" (95), stays in his room; the two do menial things to pass the time, neither satisfied enough to leave for bed, nor too tired to read or fix appearances (96). He does not seem overly satisfied.

Florinda's inability to satisfy Jacob in his intellectual needs is demonstrated soon after their "obscene thing" (95) through her writing. Letter writing is something that Jacob is able to do well; "Jacob had written in his day long letters about art, morality, and politics to young men at college" (97), yet Florinda is essentially incompetent. "Fancy a butterfly, gnat, or other winged insect, attached to a twig which, clogged with mud, it rolls across a page" (97), the narrator says. Florinda is transformed into a crushable creature, similar to the moths Jacob so often tries to catch. Her attribution to nature is not flattering; the mud of her stick pen is dirty, her technique non-existent, and it appears that her writing is thoughtless. In addition, the narrator states that "the impediment between Florinda and her pen was something impassable" (97). If Florinda cannot successfully handle her own pen, it is safe to assume that she is not very good with Jacob's "pen," either. This example can be taken to describe Florinda's inability to satisfy Jacob on a mental level, but can also be a coded implication that her bedroom skills also leave much to be desired.

Jacob's swapping between preferring male and female company can be attributed to his love of Greek culture; "the whole sentiment of Athens was entirely at [Jacob's] heart; free, venturesome, high-spirited" (78). These joys Jacob feels bring his thoughts to Florinda: "She had called him Jacob without asking his leave. She had sat upon his knee. Thus did all good women in the days of the Greeks" (78). Florinda's appearance appeals to Jacob's physical needs, as he finds her "wild and frail and beautiful . . . thus the women of the Greeks were, Jacob thought;

and this was life; and himself a man and Florinda chaste” (79-80). He is unable to realize, however, that his fascination with Greek culture can only be mentally stimulating in the companionship of another man. “Now let us talk . . . about something sensible” (77) Jacob says, as he and Timmy Durrant begin to talk about the Greeks, after an un-stimulating evening with Florinda; clearly, Jacob is attempting to attribute Florinda to the intellectual world in which she does not belong. He still needs to return to male companionship to fulfill the gap in his desires.

In addition to the intellectual appeal of the Greeks themselves, there is sexual imagery in the mountain of Acropolis; it “surges into the air, raises itself above the town” (156). Melissa Wisner explains that Acropolis’ description “resembles the rigidity and imposing presence of the patriarchy suppressing women’s independence” (16). This is why Greece appeals to Jacob and his intellectual stimulation; it is a culture of masculine intellectual rule. Further, Jacob is found “stretched on top of the mountain, quite alone” (151), happier than he has ever been in his whole life. This unexplained happiness mirrors the happiness Jacob finds with Simeon; the happiness of mental masturbation.

Before Jacob’s relationship with Sandra Wentworth Williams begins, there are signs of homoeroticism on the part of Evan Williams, her husband. When Evan first enters the scene, we learn he finds beauty a “barrier . . . rather a boor” (150), echoing Jacob’s conviction that beauty and stupidity go together. Because these convictions of Jacob’s are the reason for his homosexual relationships – to achieve a mindful, intellectual relationship with an equal – it is clear that Evan can be read in the same light. He also repeatedly insists that “great men are needed more than ever now” (151), implying both that he believes himself to be a great man, and that he has yet to meet one. However, though Evan is clearly a man he is unable to satisfy Jacob’s need for intellectual stimuli; he was “temperamentally . . . sluggish, he had accomplished

nothing” (151). Because of this, Evan attempts to satisfy himself by enabling Sandra’s affair. He does this through forced castration.

The first castration appears upon meeting Jacob, when Evan “threw away his cigar” (151). This disposal is symbolic in that it is echoed moments later by Jacob and Sandra walking and smoking together, with Evan watching. “How could he refuse that man’s cigar?” (152) the narrator asks. Here, the cigar implies that Evan is turning over his duty as Sandra’s husband to Jacob, by providing him with his own “cigar” while Jacob talks with Sandra, thus engaging in the mental stimulation he so desires. Evan has given his masculinity to Jacob, enabling Jacob to find all that he is looking for in a sexual partner.

Sandra is the first woman in Jacob’s life to pass beyond the borders of Jacob’s heart; “he was surprised by his own knowledge of the rules of behaviour; how much more can be said than one thought; how open one can be with a woman; and how little he had known himself before” (154). Sandra has shown Jacob a glimpse of what he would consider masculine in her personality; she is unafraid to say what she thinks, is intelligent. She also appeals to him physically. The union of the body and the brain disrupts Jacob’s relationship with Bonamy, because Sandra fills Bonamy’s role as an intellectual companion, as well as satisfies Jacob’s physical needs. Indeed, she is described as being of “the English type which is so Greek” (150), further lending her to Jacob’s passions and endearment.

Soon after the connection of Jacob’s mind and body, he dies. Many critics read Jacob’s character as the everyman, or a representation of all the young men killed in the war. While this theory is supported throughout the text and Woolf’s diary, there is also the depth of character that Woolf has given Jacob that deserves consideration. His confused sexual appetite is only part of the Jacob we are shown, but it makes up a great deal of his interactions and his life. In showing the many details of life that she does, Woolf is portraying the confused in all of us,

giving light to an existence that does not attempt to conform to pre-set standards by society. Instead, Woolf is acknowledging Jacob's own unique needs and allowing him to fulfill himself without being exposed to any but the most careful readers.

Works Cited

- Briggs, Julia. "In Search of Jacob." *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2005. 84-108. Print.
- Daiches, David. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: New Directions, 1963. Print.
- Hancock, Kami A. "Deviant Snapshots: Re-Visiting *Jacob's Room*." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* (2006): 10-11. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.
- Harris, Susan C. "The Ethics of Indecency: Censorship, Sexuality, and the Voice of the Academy in the Narration of *Jacob's Room*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 43.4 (1997): 420-438. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/441744>>.
- Kelsey, Mary Electa. "Virginia Woolf and the She-Condition." *The Sewanee Review* 39.4 (1931): 425-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27534697>>.
- Snaith, Anna. "Virginia Woolf's Narrative Strategies: Negotiating between Public and Private Voices." *Journal of Modern Literature* 20.2 (1996): 133-148. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831471>>.
- Wisner, Melissa. "Geographies of Gender in *Jacob's Room*: The Smooth Circles of Dods Hill and the Jagged Mounds of the Acropolis." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 75 (2009): 16-17. *MLA International Bibliography*. 24 Apr. 2013. Web.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Jacob's Room*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2008. Print.