

Robert El-Jaouhari
FL222
Paper 2
April 17, 2009

An Unwritten [something] of One's Own

There, Virginia kneels where she ought stand – where indeed she *does* stand – exclaiming an adorable world. I think of her as standing; but in the event, she kneels. Must she – must I – kneel, play the ritual, profess the antics? If I open my arms, what do I embrace? There before an unknown altar: rituals, antics, exuberance...and not a trace – of what? Might I have said “of reality”? I might have – but I might also have knelt – I might also have stood – I might also have let you – let myself – alone. What do we make of this? What do I make of this? It's an expression of [something] for sure. How pleasant that the world might be so clear; how pleasant that when I look for your embrace – when I look for my embrace – I might kneel and rant...

But if I stand – if I look to you, speak to you, tell you – Adorable World! – do you answer? How could you...do / answer...how could I... It's another walk in the catacombs, and I slipped; how simple a walk, that I might do something so simple as slip...

You would tell me? I would tell me? Well of course, what have we to do but tell; aye, there's the rub – oops, here's the rub, there's the work, the blot the stain the mash the trouble the presence – the presence? of what? Well of the stain, the blot, what else? Sure sure, it needs laboring; and yet you don't, while I do – now wait, that means I don't while you do – frustrating, frustrating... Just if you could open yourself up...if I could open myself up...If I could open yourself up! No no no, one musn't say these things they sound so vulgar, misinterpretation and all; one might worry and we wouldn't want worry, would we? Would you? Would I? Ah- there's the rub, the blot, the stain, the mash the trouble the presence – where's that damned presence coming from...presence of what!

of anything?

- What grounds this supposed presence? Surely whatever grounds all else...

It's nice how he twirls his whiskers when he says that, isn't it? Of course Plato has, of all the times and places and bodies in whatever, chosen that one – I'll be, he even acts it well. The world has waited for you sir, please please, don't let me interrupt... "presence" is such a general term, universal, limitless – infinite? – no, limitless... Yes sir, how lucky we are it should be limited, made finite, indeed trickling from your very lips, sir! Such little gems! How long you must have pressed the blackness, and with what force! Brava!

Brava? What hath Freud wrought...another walk in the catacombs, and I slipped... Leave him, leave him, let's be back where we were...

where's my – oop, *your* – foothold? Why not move? Well my feet are held...you're the floater, the uncertainty, the lostness but not quite the lost [my eyes here squint, I let my head drop forward just so, eyes yet straight ahead...the look provides emphasis, no? Well if it didn't – there was emphasis] – you're the lostness but not quite the lost – that is, not quite the lost one...and why not? Well, you'd need presence. Oh that wretchedness again, running us straight from where we – where I – began...

Where did we begin, after all? At the foothold – but your feet aren't held – wait now, that's not the way to ask it: better, where did I begin...

Such an absurd question... Not to say it doesn't have an answer, but it seems at first to be outside my grasp – wait... [just as the thought comes so comes the disturbance...ugh, how pleasant were it to have slipped my grasp, my sieve of a hand; but to have it so taken from me, to have it run into hiding from a sidelong glance – a glance even! Whereto, my dear, there'll be no harm... I really ought not bother him with questions of beginnings, his, yours, mine, or ours].

Wonderful – now that the thought's been broken, let's see if we – I – can begin again. But how to begin? Here's me, there's you, simple enough; now whereto? You're moving. Wait, not too far, not too far... Let's bring it back, bring it back, draw the string some, see what we have... "Values in a Universe of Chance" – a collection of writings of CS Peirce. Where does that put you? It puts me in

front of a book, probably a classroom – “How does Peirce feel about values? How does Peirce feel about values in a universe of chance?” – “How does Professor feel about a room without windows?”

- How now?
- What?
- You were responding, I think?
 - Oh no, no such thing – I was dying, that’s all, dying...
 - Oh? Lost our sense of value, have we?
 - I don’t know what *we* have lost; I wouldn’t say *I* had lost anything – or gained anything – or – well I haven’t a whisker to twirl, forget it all...
- Oh, no, no. I wasn’t... [hand gestures] I wouldn’t... [wave it away] no, go ahead, you were saying...”

Really now, I was doing the saying. How do *I* feel about a room without windows? Where’s my Adorable World?! – here, isn’t it? Am’n’t I the footing? Make not I my own room? My own Adorable World? Superciliousness prevails in that case... and again without the proper...form? Sure sure, form, that’ll do. I nod, resign myself to a loss – But of the word, not the world! No now, I’ve still a world without a word, haven’t I? Isn’t it my own, my making, my... No, my Adorable World sets itself around me. Whatever I try, however I move, I am set. People move, nations move, eras move, epochs move, and should there have been windows they’d have moved too – or have been moved. I can’t put my finger – no; I can’t put my tongue on it, that gelatinous *bon mot* that absorbs from each corner of my thought [in such a pleasantly roundabout way] and smacks itself – is smacked? – on the table before me, for *your* sake – for your sake? For my sake?

Aye, there’s the rub... Whether ‘tis nobler to suffer one’s own thought in one’s own mind or suffer the slings and arrows of the properly clear expression... to speak or not to speak...what a miracle I could speak the question... to suffer, in any case: “Literature is strewn with the wreckage of men who

have minded beyond reason the opinions of others” – V. Woolf. And on what grounds? Well, on every ground: no peace inside, no quiet outside, what’s to be done with this folly of a dream for peace and quiet? “We need only draw the curtain of words to behold the fairest tree of knowledge, whose fruit is excellent and within the reach of our hand” – George Berkeley. “We need only draw the fairest tree of knowledge to behold the curtain of words, whose reach of our hand is excellent and within our fruit” – Us [we’ll work on it later, but the idea’s there, no? Well that’s the point, isn’t it?].

But of course I should be expressive; better for my sanity, no? Better for the history to follow, for the propagation of kind, for the furtherance of the race/people/nation/intellectual-class/universe-of-chance... How foolish it all sounds when one lies, in a lawn, in a shade, eyes to the open sky. Into that open sky my Adorable World fades...my adorable world fades...you fade, they fade, professor fades, my own room fades...yet when the sky is full with my world as I had conceived it, when the open sky digests my eye, churns it over upon itself, turns it over upon it self, mixes and moves it, pushes it towards and pulls it from the sun...

When the sky is full it will rain...and I’ll be here, in my lawn – our lawn? – though we’ll move out a little, from beneath our well-rooted tree; it’s probably best I stand in the open – not so much that I might avoid the thunderstrike – but moreso that I can be wet again, that I might stand as my fresh clear thoughts – yes, these are indeed mine, I recognize them, their shape, their color, their feel, scent, their eternal reverberation and indeed their presence – as my fresh clear thoughts return from their cosmic adventure, return to their beginning, afresh, anew... [no no, too far, too far, they are let slip from the catacombs – yes! the catacombs, even in the sky, the twists, the turns, the terror, the darkness, the press on darkness that makes the gem, the shine of the gem that hides the darkness, the dawn of darkness in the light, from the light, within the light, the little lostness defines itself, corrects itself, finds itself, it wants itself!, and for itself, the pulchritudes, the beatitudes, the rectified, the ossified, the reified, the classified, the little boat that leaks the life – The horror! The horror!]

that when the dawn – nay, when the dawning
 opens itself, opens myself
 I should like to be soaked,
 thunderstruck,
 build my world again
 from my very own room
 with this wonderfully skeptical appreciation for windows
 from which I make – I begin – my embrace,
 and a seat – a place? – a spot? – a presence [sure, with a bit of a smirk – let's say presence]
 and a presence unintendedly intended towards the open – the opening – sky,
 Something, probably, that I might make my own.

I was struck by our readings by Virginia Woolf. It seems to me that she recognizes the primordial feeling, thought, or even exuberance that occurs in a thinker well before he can objectify, explain, even exude his thought. I especially remember a line to this point from *A Room of One's Own*, where Woolf realizes the difficulty in naming a great poet for her age because “the living poets express a feeling that is actually being made and torn out of us at the moment” (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1931). I found this to be characteristic of Woolf's work: she seemed to be putting on paper the feeling “torn from her” in the very moment she was writing. Accordingly, this was the approach I took in my creative rewrite.

I did not particularly intend to “rewrite” either of the pieces of hers we read, but to see if I couldn't write in the same spirit. My first draft was fragmented, but of course it made sense to me because I was able to connect the fragments. There I recognized the second half of that “spirit” I was trying to imitate – the expression. Well that I should rile (or try to rile) that spirit in me, and even produce within me something of that spirit, but without the *expression* my imitation was incomplete; I had, to the best of my ability, to express, to objectify, the fruits of my thought.

I said “to the best of my ability”, and by this I don't intend to argue simply that I'm trying my hardest, and upon that ground justify my result. I mean to highlight the difficulty involved in expression,

and in my imitation I attempted to do as much with those parts I put in brackets. Particularly interesting, now that I look back at it, is where I put ‘something’ in brackets in the title, though left it without brackets in the piece’s final line. This progression of ‘something’ seems to me just as much an expression as any word or string of words one might put on paper: it is the approach of something definite, something concrete, out of something vague, something bracketed as a possibility, as an idea, as a string of letters trying to grip hold of a thought. In the end ‘something’ remains, but now it’s a word on paper, its objectified, it means something more than simply the thought I had and indeed more than my attempt at expressing that something when I bracketed it. The progression of ‘something’ from beginning to end is the submerged truth of my something coming to the top, slowly in stages, from a thought in my mind to an unsure expression to a full-fold grasp of the idea as something objective, something not me (not subjective) though nonetheless for me – and indeed, something for you. This very paragraph could well be the final stage of bringing ‘something’ to realization.

This “submerged truth” should refer the reader back to Woolf’s text: “Yet it is in our idleness, our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top” (*A Room of One’s Own*, 1941). The whole of my imitation is an attempt to bring something to the surface, and watch it acquire a presence [yes, a presence] concretely *for* me and not simply *in* me. The acquisition slipped twice at least, in the catacombs and with an interruption, just as the “truth” slips Woolf’s grasp on a few occasions:

Truth had run through my fingers. Every drop had escaped. (*A Room of One’s Own*, 1940)

But here’s a jerk. “Eggs are cheaper!” That’s what always happens! I was heading her over the waterfall, straight for madness, when, like a flock of dream sheep, she turns t’other way and runs between my fingers” (Woolf, *An Unwritten Novel*, 1960).

Thought...had let its line down into the stream...until – you know the little tug – the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one’s line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? [...] The only charge I could bring against the Fellows and Scholars of whatever the college might happen to be was that in protection of their turf, which has been rolled for 300 years in succession, they had sent my little fish into hiding. (*A Room of One’s Own*, 1926)

So the difficulty in grabbing the fish, the thought, my something.

I think Woolf expressed that difficulty in the writing style of *An Unwritten Novel*: short staccato sentences, mixed with slightly longer descriptions, in a jumble of thoughts coming from several different directions at once.

Air above, air below. And the moon and immortality....Oh, but I drop to the turf! Are you down too, you in the corner, what's your name – woman – Minnie Marsh; some such name as that? There she is, tight to her blossom; opening her hand-bag, from which she takes a hollow shell – an egg – who was saying that eggs were cheaper? You or I? Oh, it was you who said it on the way home, you remember, when the old gentleman, suddenly opening his umbrella – or sneezing was it? Anyhow, Kruger went, and you came "home a back way," and scraped your boots. Yes. And now you lay across your knees a pocket-handkerchief into which drop little angular fragments of eggshell – fragments of a map – a puzzle. I wish I could piece them together! If you would only sit still. She's moved her knees – the map's in bits again. Down the slopes of the Andes the white blocks of marble go bounding and hurtling, crushing to death a whole troop of Spanish muleteers, with their convoy – Drake's booty, gold and silver. But to return –

To what, to where?

An Unwritten Novel, 1960

I found this to really reflect the way a person thinks when they're on the brink of understanding something – here, where the narrator is about to piece the puzzle together. Woolf highlights this brink by bringing an excitement to the narration at those points – the waterfall, the edge – where the thought seems to be collecting itself. She further employs dashes to add to the "jumbled" sense, which dashes I found to be very effective; to that end, I often incorporated them in my imitation. What I found in Woolf's style, and what I found difficult to imitate, was that in those passages that crescendo (waterfall, etc.) something about the text affected the way I read it. In my attempt to imitate, I learned that it was not simply the typography that creates such an effect, but that I would have to affect the tempo as well through word choice, sentence structure, and the like. I certainly found changes in typography to be helpful, however, and most strikingly so in the last, single-spaced section. There, I tried to convey a more structured, more "together" thought through a more tightly-knit format, yet I retained the dashes and bracketing to maintain a feeling of the inevitable difficulty of expression. The 'Something' of that passage is significant: it is the first appearance of 'Something' with a capitalized 'S', and is intended as a peak for the progression of 'something' in the piece. Here, finally, 'something' has some strength, some

standing, some fullness. However, I put 'Something' at the beginning of the line, and while it might be considered capitalized for that reason, one notices that none of preceding lines in that passage begin with capitalized words – besides the 'I' a few lines above – and the significance of the 'S', I hope, becomes clearer.

I also found Woolf using somewhat of an "answer and question" rhythm in *An Unwritten Novel*, which highlights the uncertainty of whatever conclusions the narrator – the thinker – might come to. I do not mean "question and answer": questions followed by answers would have provided too much of a direction for the narrator's thoughts, but by not questioning anything until she had something in hand, Woolf opened the narrator's thought to anything that might slip in – indeed gave the thinking narrator an open sky.