

Rachel M. Mininger

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PERSONAL PROFILE

A disciplined and enthusiastic graduate of Virginia Military Institute, with concentrations in Literary Studies and Rhetoric and Writing, seeking a PhD in English. Completed my studies with Distinction and Honors in English. Strong interest in research, having completed a three-semester honors thesis studying the connection between Margaret Fuller's transcendentalist feminist philosophy and the expression of gender roles, male and female friendship, and marriage in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Worked as the VMI English Department Intern and Fieldwork Teaching Assistant. Currently serving with AmeriCorps as a College Advisor with the Virginia College Advising Corps.

EDUCATION

Virginia Military Institute: B.A., English

May 2023

- Concentrations in Literary Studies and Writing and Rhetoric
- Departmental Honors
- Institutional and Major GPA: 3.7

Relevant Courses: British Literature in Cultural Text; Victorian Literature; American Romanticism; British Literary Traditions; Power and Politics in Shakespeare; Major Figures: William Faulkner; American Literary Traditions; Philosophy and Literature; Capstone I; Honors Thesis I & II

St. Anne's College, Oxford University: Virginia Program at Oxford

Summer 2022

- Early Modern History Tutorial, A-
- Early Modern Literature Tutorial, A- (67)
- Independent, daily lectures on Early Modern Period History and Literature, with a focus on William Shakespeare

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS THESIS

Spring 2022-Spring 2023

"Louisa May Alcott in Conversation with Margaret Fuller: Transcendentalist Feminism and Jo"

Advisor: Dr. Steven Knepper

I argue that Louisa May Alcott was influenced by Margaret Fuller's Transcendentalist feminist philosophy regarding gender roles, male and female friendships, and marriage. I analyze how Jo's character and relationships in *Little Women* reflect Fuller's philosophy. I use biographical research to establish that Margaret Fuller was a friend and colleague of Bronson Alcott, Louisa May Alcott's father. As is seen in his journals, Bronson Alcott aimed to raise Louisa May Alcott and her sisters in Transcendentalism, including Fuller's feminist ideals. My analysis reveals that Fuller's philosophy of the fluidity of gender roles emerges in *Little Women* through Jo, who has traditionally masculine traits and seeks to engage the public sphere. Jo's relationship with Laurie

also shows Fuller's idea of harmony between the masculine and feminine since Laurie holds traditionally feminine traits. Fuller promoted friendship as being the basis for marriage. However, in my analysis even though Laurie and Jo do not marry, Fuller's philosophy of friendship can be seen in their relationship. Alcott builds on Fuller's philosophy of friendship being the basis of marriage to show that male-female friendship can be valuable independent of marriage. Finally, I argue that Jo's marriage to Professor Bhaer is a cautionary tale about rushing into an unequalitarian marriage due to loneliness and fear of becoming an "old maid." My thesis provides an alternative view of the conclusion of *Little Women* and a deeper understanding of how Alcott was influenced by and builds on feminist philosophy. In doing so, my thesis enriches our perspective on feminist thought within literature preceding the First Wave of Feminism in America.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- "Expeditions and Lessons with Middle School Youth: Literature and Personal Growth," Virginia Military Institute Undergraduate Research Symposium, April 2023

RESEARCH SKILLS

- Inquire into and analyze literary texts as works themselves and within cultural context
- Work well in collaboration with advisors, professors, and peers
- Incorporate criticism well
- Debate and defend my analysis coherently and confidently
- Manage time with strategy and professionalism, making and adhering to a personal schedule of research, writing, and collaboration

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

College Advisor for Virginia College Advising Corps, AmeriCorps June 2023- Current

- Advise High School Seniors and Juniors on the application process for college, including 27 First-Generation Students
- Plan and execute multiple events; including, Virginia College Application Week, Community College Program Fair, College Representative Visits, Military Recruit visits, FAFSA Completion Workshops, College Tours, and Decision Day
- Coordinate with school administration, guidance counseling staff, and Community College Outreach Coordinator to reach and help Seniors create post-high school plans
- Host college essay writing workshops and revise essays to help students communicate their stories to colleges

Library Assistant, Operations and Research, Preston Library, VMI August 2020-May 2023

- Assist cadets in research and general operation of library services
- Assist in maintaining an orderly environment and completion of closing and opening procedures
- Check-in, check-out, re-shelve, and ensure the maintenance of library materials when returned
- Work an average of 15 hours a week

ERH-411 Fieldwork Intern and Teaching Assistant August 2020-May 2023

A position to aid the ERH-411 Fieldwork professor with administrative tasks for a range of Fieldwork courses and internships.

- Assist in creating and delivering ERH-411 Fieldwork curriculum
- Write and publish Fieldwork newsletter

- Coordinate transportation, communicate with teachers, and carry out administrative duties to connect local schools and ERH-411 Fieldwork students
- Organize and help publish *Rockbridge County Memoir Project Anthology*, 2023
- Shadow and observe Rockbridge County K-12 English teachers

Prose Editor for *Cadence*, VMI Student Arts Journal Fall 2021- May 2023

- Head Prose Editor, 2021-2022; lead a group of four general prose editors
- Collaborated with the Visual Arts and Poetry Head Editors to arrange and design the 2021-2022 edition of *Cadence*
- Make final decisions on Fiction and Nonfiction Prose selections for the *Cadence* journal
- Edit Prose selections

Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta, International English Honor Society August 2022- May 2023

- Assist President in organizing chapter meetings and campus events
- Aid in the induction of new members
- Coordinate and organize graduating English Major sendoff party and gift reception

English Education Intern, Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty Summer 2021

An internship with a Tennis and Education summer camp in Cleveland, Ohio, through the Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty agency. I was a virtual reading tutor for K-5 level students and an English tutor for 6-8 level students.

- Assisted teachers as a mentor to K-8 students, working virtually
- Implemented a reading program for younger students and determined reading level
- Tutored students in Literature and Writing projects and assignments
- Participated in a class on poverty and social justice
- Collaborated with fellow interns to address COVID issues at individual internships around the country

ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUNDING

- Graduated with Distinction and Honors in English
- 2023 Eric B. Alter '14 Award, 2023
- Colonel Daniel T. Ingram 1921 2023
- Academic Star Distinction (Overall 3.5GPA minimum; or one year 3.5GPA per semester) 2021-May 2023
- Dean's List, Spring 2020-May 2023
- Gary Trinkle Memorial Scholarship (Full Academic Scholarship), awarded once every four years
- English Speaking Union Study Abroad Scholarship Recipient for the Virginia Program at Oxford (\$3,000)
- Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society
- Nominated in the top ten students at the Virginia Program at Oxford
- One of two English Departmental Honors candidates for 2023
- Third Class (Sophomore) English Major Award

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Volunteer Timber Framing Project: Fall 2021, Spring 2022

Audie Murphy Memorial Backpacking Trek: March 2023

Training Week QMD Worker: Fall 2021, Fall 2022

U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps: August 2019 – May 2021

Invited Speaker at Prospective Student Orientation: 2023

Invited Speaker at English Speaking Union: 2022

Freshman("Rat") Physical Training Challenge Instructor: 2020, 2022

REFERENCES

- Lt. Col Steven E. Knepper, Ph.D.; Associate Professor; Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies (ERHS); Virginia Military Institute; knepperse@vmi.edu
- Col. Emily P. Miller, Ph.D.; ERHS Department Head, Professor; Virginia Military Institute; millerep@vmi.edu
- Maj. Stephanie L. Hodde, Ph.D.; ERHS Assistant Professor, Internship Director; Virginia Military Institute; hoddesl@vmi.edu
- Dr. Glyn Redworth; History Faculty; Oxford University; glyn.redworth@history.ox.ac.uk