

WOOLF'S THE VOYAGE OUT: AN ARCHETYPAL JOURNEY

---

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND FINE ARTS

BY

GEORGIANA MILLERMAN, B.A.

---

DENTON, TEXAS

AUGUST 1979

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Chapter	
I.    THE JOURNEY: PHASE ONE. . . . .	6
II.   THE JOURNEY: PHASE TWO. . . . .	26
III.  THE JOURNEY: PHASE THREE. . . . .	56
CONCLUSION. . . . .	75
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	79



## INTRODUCTION

Works of literature as poetic, oblique, and mystic as those of Virginia Woolf invite speculation and analysis. Woolf's novels have undergone diligent study by scholars because of their capacious yet elusive quality. Her later novels are highly esteemed for their ingenious experiments with style and content. In what many critics consider her masterpiece--The Waves, a series of soliloquies--Woolf presents a unique approach to human personality and to death. In To the Lighthouse, she experiments with the application of various stream-of-consciousness techniques to autobiographical material. And in another important novel which has received much critical attention, Mrs. Dalloway, she studies the inner life of a wealthy society woman. She presents several themes again and again throughout her novels: the search for self, the relationships between men and women, and the ever-present reality of death.

But it is an early work which initiates Woolf's treatment of these themes. The Voyage Out is essential to readers who wish to have more than a passing acquaintance with Woolf's work. It contains the seeds of all her later novels and provides a valuable foundation on which to build an understanding of her literary endeavors. Nevertheless, many

critics have dismissed The Voyage Out as an insignificant first novel. The traditional style of writing and the seemingly inauspicious story of a young girl falling in love and dying has deterred many readers from discovering deeper levels of meaning. Some refrain from discussion entirely while others give it only a perfunctory nod. However, as Jean Guiguet remarks, "It is immediately obvious that the interest of this novel does not lie in its incidents. . . . One might quote about this first book a remark of Proust's which applies to all the rest and to which Virginia Woolf would certainly have subscribed: 'The plot . . . the plot, my dear fellow, what is the Plot? What is the plot of the Divine Comedy or of Shakespeare's Sonnets, or Tristram Shandy, or Ecclesiastes?'"<sup>1</sup> Obviously, Guiguet sees significance not in the plot itself but in what lies beyond the plot. In addition, David Daiches notes that Virginia Woolf's central concern is with the inner life.<sup>2</sup> It would follow then that the interior of Rachel Vinrace's mind is the essence of The Voyage Out. Her reactions to the people and activities around her and the processes her mind goes through

<sup>1</sup> Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 188.

in an attempt to integrate new experiences and ideas are more important than actual events. Alice Kelley studies the novel in terms of two opposing views of the world: the factual view and the visionary view.<sup>3</sup> According to Kelley, Rachel perceives the world from a visionary angle while various other characters, including St. John Hirst and Ridley Ambrose, perceive it from a totally factual angle. Such an analysis is similar to Nancy Bazin's focus on the masculine and feminine minds in the novel.<sup>4</sup> The masculine mind is synonymous with the factual, and the feminine mind is linked closely with the visionary. Bazin asserts, as does Woolf, that a combination of the two viewpoints provides the individual with a proper balance.

Avrom Fleishman, however, introduces an approach to The Voyage Out which is singular in its significance and which merits a detailed exploration. He states:

The elementary narrative of a heroine's development is here given greater universality by being treated as a journey in quest; her social maturation and growth of consciousness are informed by their relations with widespread patterns of initiation; and her experience of love and death

<sup>3</sup> Alice van Buren Kelley, The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973), p. 54.

is heightened by being set in a landscape of primal nature and primitive man.<sup>5</sup>

Viewing the novel in terms of the archetypal journey or quest provides a means of seeing the novel as a totality rather than seeing only certain aspects of it. Such an archetypal approach to the novel views the structure in terms of a three-fold pattern: separation, initiation, and return. Northrop Frye describes the three stages of the quest as "the agon or conflict, the pathos or death struggle, and the anagnorsis or discovery."<sup>6</sup> Bernard Blackstone perceives the same kind of structure in Woolf's work. He writes of a "movement of uncertainty, of discovery and relief."<sup>7</sup> This inner action when seen through the lens of the archetypal journey elucidates The Voyage Out and provides an understanding of the significance of Rachel's experience. As Rachel makes a physical journey, she also embarks upon a spiritual journey in search of self. Before she can reach a state of completion, she must pass through the stages of the archetypal journey. The first stage the protagonist experiences

<sup>5</sup> Avrom Fleishman, Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf: British Writers and Their Work (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 31.

is the act of separation from all that is familiar; here Rachel is separated from her homeland and all that it represents. Next, the protagonist experiences an initiation which may consist on one event or a series of events which lead him to insight and maturity; by severing herself from England, Rachel becomes open to many new experiences, which serve as initiatory events. The next phase of the archetypal journey is that of the return. After the separation and the initiation, the protagonist returns with new awareness or maturity, which suggests a rebirth or completion; Rachel's trek up the river and her ensuing death complete her spiritual odyssey. Admittedly, the inherent meaning of The Voyage Out is greatly illuminated by Woolf's employment of the archetypal journey.

## CHAPTER I

### THE JOURNEY: PHASE ONE

The pattern of the archetypal journey which is inherent in western literature occurs throughout the various ages and cultures. One finds it in Oedipus, in Hamlet, and in Huckleberry Finn. Here too the three phases of the archetypal journey--the separation, the initiation, and the return--give structure to these works, for each phase is significant and essential to the development of the protagonist. However, the separation phase is of utmost importance if growth is to occur, as is evidenced in Oedipus. Upon being told by the oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother, Oedipus determines never to return to Corinth. He therefore separates himself from all that is familiar to him and begins a journey in which he will have to overcome great obstacles before he can save a kingdom and marry the queen. Similarly, the journey in Hamlet is metaphorical; yet the three stages are present. Hamlet must separate himself from his innocent, carefree youth before he can be initiated and gain self-knowledge. Additionally, Huckleberry Finn is a wanderer, and is "separated from his culture, idealistically in search of a reality more profound

than that embraced by the materialistic society he has rejected."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the separation of the hero from that which is familiar, whether it is from a way of life, a land, or an attitude, is the primary significance.

The first segment of the journey of Rachel is a separation that is both physical and psychological. Rachel is physically separated from England and the aunts with whom she lives. As the ship leaves England, so too is Rachel sailing away from her past: ". . . this voyage out becomes a symbol of Rachel's growing and going out into the world, of her facing life as it is. . . ." <sup>2</sup> She is a young, inexperienced woman leaving her homeland for the first time and venturing out to see what the world has to offer. Setting out on the journey provides her infinite possibilities for growth, for adventure, for love. It means moving out of the stasis of the routine daily life into the fluidity of change:

All the smoke and the houses disappeared, and the ship was out in a wide space of sea very fresh and clear though pale in the early light. [Rachel and other passengers] had left London sitting on its mud. . . . They were free of

<sup>2</sup> N. C. Thakur, The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 14.

roads, free of mankind, and the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all.<sup>3</sup>

The stability and solidarity provided by having the earth beneath one's feet is gone; it is replaced by the ever-changing motion of the sea. Rachel has left the staid, sheltered environment of her aunts' home to join the flow of life outside. As the ocean dips and swirls, Rachel, whose name means "sleep," "lamb," and "innocence,"<sup>4</sup> is thrust out of the safety of a world bounded by maiden aunts. The enrichment that new experiences bring provides a catalyst for inner growth; therefore, the voyage outward to experience coincides with a voyage inward to self-awareness. James Naremore equates Rachel's literal voyage out with a "spiritual voyage inward":<sup>5</sup>

In departing from the brightly-lit busy streets of London and voyaging to a village with the exotic, watery name of Santa Marina . . . [Rachel enters] a strange, passionate, half-obscured world which is analogous to the private self.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Voyage Out (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1948), p. 27. All further references to this work appear in the text.

<sup>4</sup> James Hafley, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> James Naremore, The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Naremore, p. 31.



Rachel's previous life has consisted of the affectation of propriety rather than the development of the private self. It is not what one is that is important but what one appears to be. Rachel's aunts have taught her how to serve tea properly but not how to think for herself; they have taught her to be a lady but not to trust her own instincts. She is familiar with the social graces but totally unfamiliar with her own inner resources. At the beginning of the voyage she is like a fragile eggshell: smooth on the outside, but with very little on the inside; she is exceedingly insubstantial. Although her aunts have provided her with knowledge of the correct social amenities, her inner formlessness shows through. Helen perceives her weaknesses:

Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large inquiring eyes; denied beauty, now that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of color and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than normally incompetent for her years.  
(p. 20)

Such a lack of substance is definitely a product of concentration on the exterior rather than the interior person.

That Rachel is insubstantial is not surprising, since her mother died when she was eleven. At that time she was left in the hands of an insensitive father, who soon entrusted her to her aunts for safekeeping. The fact that

Virginia Woolf's own mother died when she was thirteen may be significant here. An adolescent who is trying to establish an identity needs a strong, loving, caring, supporting relationship with an adult--preferably a mother. Rachel remembers her Aunt Lucy saying to her, "But you know I care for you, don't you, dear, because you're your mother's daughter, if for no other reason . . ." (p. 36). Such obvious lack of genuine feeling for Rachel as an individual is traumatic for the girl. The aunts attempt to present the appearance of love by attending to the superficial requirements rather than the more profound needs of the individual. The result is a twenty-four-year-old girl who seems "more than normally incompetent for her years" (p. 20).

However, shortly after Rachel begins the voyage, her personality begins to take on definition. Just as the ship is moving toward a particular destination in South America, Rachel begins moving toward selfhood. The ship becomes a metaphor for Rachel:

Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank, until it seemed doubtful whether the ship would ever run against any of those wrinkled little rocks again. But, on the other hand, an immense dignity had descended upon her; she was an inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, traveling all day across an empty universe with veils drawn before her and behind. She was more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert; she was infinitely more mysterious, moving by her own power and sustained

by her own resources. The sea might give her death or some unexampled joy, and one would know of it. She was a bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men; in her vigour and purity she might be likened to all beautiful things, worshipped and felt as a symbol. (p. 32)

An examination of this passage reveals an analogy of ship to Rachel herself. As the ship moves away from the cold, suffocating atmosphere of her aunts' home, Rachel is liberated from the narrow confines of her past as the ship is liberated from the channel when it reaches the open sea. The significance of England and the way of life it represents shrinks in Rachel's mind as the land appears visibly to shrink. The dignity of the ship "traveling all day across an empty universe" compares to the dignity of Rachel's inner journey, because the search for self is a noble endeavor. The universe may seem empty because the search is such a solitary venture, and while one is looking inward he is momentarily unaware of an outside world. The ship is "lonely" and "mysterious," just as the individual is ultimately alone on the inward journey. A certain isolation is necessary. The ship is mysterious because, like a person, the exterior reveals only a small portion of the total being. One viewing the ship from the outside cannot know what the inside is like, and there is always mystery involved in relationships, because one person cannot totally know another. Since there

is a definite division between individuals, Rachel must depend on her own power and her own resources as the ship does. Later, Helen and other persons assist Rachel, but essentially she must rely on herself. It is what is inside her that will support her--not what is outside. Moreover, the sea is not holding the ship afloat; the ship is holding itself afloat. If the sea may be seen as "life itself," then it has the potential power of bringing death or "some unexampled joy" to Rachel. It has the power both to destroy and to create delight. Although Rachel possesses a great deal of power over the person she is to become, there are outside forces over which she has no control; life will give Rachel moments of "unexampled joy" and ultimately death.

Significantly, the ship also is referred to as "a bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men." At the risk of being too obvious, again the connection must be made between Rachel and the ship. She has no sexual experience; indeed, she has little experience in human relationships. She is the untarnished, untainted symbol of purity embarking on a journey to knowledge and fulfillment. Just as a bride is on the threshold of a new life in marriage, Rachel is on the threshold of life itself.

The last phrases of the passage contain the words "vigor," "beauty," and "worshipped." We are reminded of the energy and effort that are required for any journey and

especially for an expedition of self-discovery. There is a certain splendor associated with self-knowledge--not that the self is necessarily beautiful but that the knowledge is beautiful. It is something to be admired, worshipped.

Woolf then says explicitly that the ship is a symbol.

Although she does not say what it symbolizes, the implications are quite clear that the ship is symbolic of Rachel.

Critics indeed agree that the ship symbolizes Rachel and that the voyage represents her personal journey. Kelley feels that she resembles the ship as she leaves the "Victorian" world of her aunts, "but she needs to find an identity distinct from the rest of the world before she will be ready to unite herself with another."<sup>7</sup> Guiguet agrees when he states that all of the characters on the ship have escaped "from that setting of space and time within which events are inscribed and within which we inscribe our own lives, and become merely centres of feeling, consciousnesses reduced to what is purely inward. . . ."<sup>8</sup> In addition, Kelley states that personal growth is the theme of the novel.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Alice van Buren Kelley, The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), p. 199.

<sup>9</sup> Kelley, p. 8.

It should be asserted here that such a "reduction" is essential to Rachel's development. Without it she would continue to be a mere facsimile of a person rather than an actuality.

It must be suggested that Rachel's inner voyage is made possible only because of the literal sea voyage. The separation from her aunts and from the Victorian atmosphere of their home is necessary to Rachel's growth. For in addition to looking inward, she needs new and varied experiences to help her shape herself. She therefore must separate herself from the limited world her aunts have created.

Furthermore, the process of separation, for Rachel, involves disengaging herself from old patterns of behavior. By viewing her behavior early in the novel, we see what an insecure, formless young woman she is. We can also see clearly how she changes. Early in the novel, Rachel has a tendency to stammer when she talks. Stammering seems to be a physical expression of an emotional struggle. The hesitation involved in articulation depicts the hesitation Rachel feels about herself and her abilities. Her difficulty in expressing herself is related to her fear of rejection. Rachel is exceedingly unsure of her identity; therefore, it is a considerable risk for her to express anything about herself. People may find her unacceptable, and to a person with a weak identity, such a fear of rejection is overwhelming. Therefore, the hesitation in her speech reflects

the hesitation within. Later, as Rachel simultaneously gains social experience and confidence, the stammering disappears.

Nevertheless, until she attains a degree of confidence, Rachel finds it necessary to withdraw. To a person who is insecure, an effective method of withdrawal is important. Rachel needs a means of escape when dealing with the outside world becomes too difficult. The method she chooses is that of playing the piano. After trying to communicate with her aunts, she concludes:

Her efforts to come to an understanding had only hurt her aunts' feelings, and the conclusion must be that it is better not to try. To feel strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly perhaps but differently. It was far better to play the piano and forget all the rest. (p. 36)

Certainly, Rachel finds many risks involved in relating to others, for words and actions are easily misinterpreted, and these unwarranted impressions lead to rejection. But the solitary activity of playing the piano offers a release for Rachel. It allows her to vent her emotions in a way that is safe and private. For Rachel, music is a form of therapy, yet its role changes as her needs change. Later she uses it as a means of attaining vision, a way of coming into contact with herself. At the moment, though, she uses it as a much-needed retreat from the world.

The small bit of information we receive concerning Rachel's relationship with her aunts is useful in elucidating the reason Rachel finds others a source of tension. Since "to feel strongly" creates "an abyss between oneself and others," the need to numb her feelings is intense.<sup>10</sup> Thus, she uses music not only as an emotional outlet but as a means of controlling herself:

Absorbed by her music she accepted her lot very complacently, blazing into indignation perhaps once a fortnight, and subsiding as she subsided now. (p. 37)

Phyllis Rose compares Rachel with her creator, the young Virginia Stephen, who like the heroine was uncomfortable in the role of hostess.<sup>11</sup> In the novel the first time Rachel retreats to her piano is shortly after she has had to act as hostess to the passengers on the ship: "Rachel copes with her difficult position by retreating from it and burying herself in her own cabin with her piano."<sup>12</sup> Rose sees Rachel as the shy, dreamy, withdrawn, secluded part of

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Leaska, The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End (New York: The John Jay Press, 1977), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Rose, p. 53.



Virginia Stephen.<sup>13</sup> The responsibilities of serving tea properly while being charming and entertaining practically overwhelm Rachel. Although she has been taught the social graces, she is crippled by the lack of inner resources which provide confidence and a strong sense of self. She is indeed socially inept. Leaska observes that Rachel "finds human associations an enormous strain and is disproportionately anxious. . . ." <sup>14</sup>

There is another reason, however, for Rachel's retreat to music. In addition to relieving her anxiety over her performance as a hostess, music compensates for the lack of communication on the part of others. It is true that she has great difficulty expressing herself, but she also sees others as being deficient in the act of relating:

It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. (p. 37)

Music atones for the deficiencies in human relationships. It neutralizes to some extent the intense need for communion with others. To truly know and be known by other human beings is a terrifying prospect to many persons. Hence, people do not say what they mean. While Rachel is guilty of

<sup>13</sup> Rose, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Leaska, p. 26.

such dishonesty herself, she is appalled at the realization that others are equally deceitful; the music serves to assuage her feelings. James Hafley sees the main concern of The Voyage Out as the "dispute between the individual and society," and he sees Rachel as struggling to find where she fits in.<sup>15</sup> In these early segments, she seems to find comfort only with her music in the solitary confines of her room.

Although Rachel's utilization of her music separates and alienates her from the outside world, it also is a bridge to the outside. At first, she immerses herself in her music because of her physical and emotional separation from the other travelers. Eventually it becomes a catalyst which leads to self-knowledge and then to relationships with others.

Before Rachel can experience her music as more than a retreat, she must begin encountering people who will aid her in her development. The ship provides her with the opportunity to escape the dullness of existence with her aunts and to enter the world of relationships. Hence, the physical separation from England allows her to separate herself from her old patterns of isolation and solitariness, as Thakur notes:

<sup>15</sup> Hafley, p. 16.

. . . for Rachel, who had lived a secluded life under the protection of old aunts, it was a voyage out into the world of experience and comprehension of life. Rachel's going out from the misty and cold London to the dazzling, sparkling heat of South America symbolizes her growing out of her cool and unsensuous girlhood into a warm and sensuous maidenhood.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, to make the transition from total innocence into awareness, Rachel needs assistance. She must break from her solitary world and enter the world of the Dalloways and the Ambroses, who play a significant role in Rachel's enlightenment. They help her to disconnect herself from the meaningless fog she has been dwelling in, and through them she begins to see new possibilities for life. The ocean voyage is the beginning of her awakening "from her private view of life."<sup>17</sup> Richard Dalloway's kiss is a part of Rachel's preparation for the world of reality. Although she is in an amorphous state at the beginning of the novel, "her encounter with Richard Dalloway began the shaping process that would slowly create for her a definable selfhood."<sup>18</sup> The kiss itself may be viewed as the physical enactment of

<sup>16</sup> Thakur, pp. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Jane Novak, The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study of Virginia Woolf (Coral Gables, Florida: Univ. of Miami Press, 1975), p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Kelley, p. 19.

Rachel's separation from innocence. Although it is a relatively innocent, impulsive act, it has great repercussions on Rachel's life. Francis Shafer asserts that Dalloway introduces Rachel to passion,<sup>19</sup> but this passion is emotional rather than physical. Her strong reaction indicates the extent of her ignorance and inexperience:

Her head was cold, her knees shaking, and the physical pain of the emotion was so great that she could only keep herself moving above the great leaps of her heart. . . . She became peaceful too, at the same time possessed with a strange exultation. Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at. (p. 76)

Rachel suddenly realizes there are aspects of life that she has been totally unaware of. Her heart pounds with excitement at these infinite possibilities. This brief moment of awareness when she begins to realize the extent of her own ignorance is exactly what is needed to prepare her for her later initiatory experiences. The break with innocence which the kiss provides is an essential step in Rachel's journey to selfhood. Alice Kelley believes that Richard represents the factual view of life that Rachel needs to be exposed to. Although Rachel will later be able to experience brief visionary moments, she needs the acuity that fact supplies

<sup>19</sup> Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (London: Morton and Co., 1965), p. 33.

to create an individual out of the mass of nothingness of which she is comprised:<sup>20</sup>

Only by seeing what vision is not can one recognize consciously what it is; only by recognizing what one's self is not, can one form a complete identity and choose one's path toward reality. And if one is defined by one's opposite, the potentially visionary Rachel, feminine and intuitive, will best be defined against a man, a masculine, factual man.<sup>21</sup>

Rachel perceives the solidarity of Richard and feels that he has some special knowledge about life.<sup>22</sup> This experience marks the beginning of Rachel's curiosity about life--a curiosity which is necessary to her journey. Without such curiosity one does not grow, and growth is the subject of The Voyage Out.

Nevertheless, Rachel's dream on the night following the kiss suggests a desire to return to her former innocence:

She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down.  
(p. 77)

<sup>20</sup> Kelley, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Kelley, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Kelley, p. 15.

The connotations are blatantly sexual, as many critics agree. The long damp tunnel which leads to a vault suggests the vagina. The Freudian implication is that Rachel is experiencing a desire to return to the womb. That she has ventured out into the world both excites and terrifies her. Although she feels a momentary exultation as a result of the kiss, the dream reflects a deep-seated fear. She wishes to abort her journey or rather to change directions and to journey back to the security of the womb. Bazin suggests that Rachel desires the oneness implied by a return to the womb, but that she "does not experience there the perfect love and complete security which she seeks in oneness; instead she experiences the terror of confronting her shadow-self . . . represented by the deformed man."<sup>23</sup> Bazin notes also the similarity between the dream and the death of the protagonist in Antigone, which Mrs. Dalloway mentions earlier:

The use of the brick vault in the dream . . . was probably inspired by the story of Antigone who was imprisoned in a rock vault because she defied Creon, whose son she was to have married, and thus the 'grave' was made her 'bridal chamber.'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973), p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> Bazin, pp. 65-66.

The similarity to Rachel's circumstances is evident; in a sense, at the end of the novel she chooses death rather than commitment to Terence in marriage. Thus, her grave is her bridal chamber. Viewing the dream differently, Phyllis Rose notes that "the horror . . . does not lie in being trapped in that damp space but in being trapped in it with someone, a deformed brute of a man."<sup>25</sup> To her, the dream indicates Rachel's fear of violation rather than an encounter with self.

Nonetheless, in both views, exultation after the kiss is countered by the nightmare. Paradoxically, her narrow, sheltered upbringing which was designed to protect her is responsible for her exaggerated reaction to a kiss.<sup>26</sup> Her overwhelming fear of sex makes her wish to retreat into her former state of innocence. Of course, such a step backward is impossible. Rachel is separated forever from that state of utter naivete.

When Rachel tells Helen of the kiss and her reactions to it, Helen is duly shocked. She finds it difficult to believe that a girl of twenty-four could be so naive. Nevertheless, the kiss is significant as a developmental step for Rachel. It also makes Helen aware of the extent of Rachel's

<sup>25</sup> Rose, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Rose, p. 56.

ignorance, and Helen's reaction is exceedingly important since it is she who decides to tutor Rachel in the process of maturation. She becomes a guide for Rachel's journey to selfhood. Realizing that Rachel is

ripe for further self-education, [Helen] makes preparations both symbolically and practically, for this second phase of the girl's journey; for she is determined that her niece must have all the free rein she needs, away from unyielding social demands, in order that she may define herself and approach life with an awakened consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

Helen then provides the essentials for Rachel's further separation from ignorance and formlessness.

Once the ship approaches the coastal town of Santa Marina, the separation segment of Rachel's journey is complete. She has experienced the physical separation from England and her aunts; she has experienced a separation from lifetime patterns which are detrimental to growth; she is separated from ignorance about sexual matters. She has begun "the voyage out of the social and sexual restrictions of her life among maiden aunts in England, out of her lonely room toward the embrace of something 'outside' . . . ." <sup>28</sup> She has made the break from the past which is necessary for her participation in later initiatory rites. As Novak says,

<sup>27</sup> Kelley, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Naremore, p. 23.



"The voyage section is a self-sufficient microcosm of experience that awakens her from her autistic life."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Novak, p. 73.

## CHAPTER II

### THE JOURNEY: PHASE TWO

In the literary tracing of any archetypal journey, a protagonist moves from the known world to the second phase of his journey, the initiation state. Free from the past, the protagonist is now open to the process of initiation. Being vulnerable to the offerings of life enables him to grow; away from familiar surroundings and people, behavior patterns, or attitudes he is exposed to the possibilities of life. These experiences awaken the protagonist to new insights into self and the world outside self, as Hamlet illustrates. When Hamlet separates himself from the care-free days of the university, he is forced to confront the reality of his father's death and ultimately his own ability to act. Similarly, Huck Finn is separated from the innocence of youth and must brave the struggles which life places before him. Oedipus, another archetypal questor, must answer riddles and fight battles to prove his worth. Each of these archetypal heroes must survive the rites of initiation before he can reach maturity. Just as these literary works involve the process of initiation, so too The Voyage Out traces this process. Avrom Fleishman observes that the

"action, symbols, dealings with innocence and enlightenment, love and death are brought together to create a story of initiation in line with the mythos of heroic quest."<sup>1</sup>

Rachel Vinrace, as a result of her separation process, is prepared to continue her journey toward awareness and to proceed through various experiences which spur her growth.

Rachel's initiation takes two forms. The first is the growth which results from solitude; the second is that which results from the influence of other people, particularly Helen, Hirst, and Terence. Admittedly, the two forms overlap; the quality of her solitude is influenced by her experiences with other persons, and the depth of her spiritual life relates directly to the impact that they have on her. As Kelley notes, Rachel must define herself alone, through moments of vision and in respect to other people, before she can reach her destination.<sup>2</sup> The illuminations or initiatory events which Rachel experiences in solitude are fleeting moments when she perceives what Woolf would term "reality." Sometimes these moments occur during or after an encounter with another individual.

<sup>1</sup> Avrom Fleishman, Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Alice van Buren Kelley, The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 20.

Such moments of vision are quite similar to James Joyce's epiphanies, which Morris Beja defines as ". . . a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind--the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it."<sup>3</sup> Beja notes that such moments are to Woolf "far more important than the meanings they involve."<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is the experience or the process itself that is significant--not the knowledge gained. Woolf "believes that not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end."<sup>5</sup> It is through a series of such visionary moments during her time in South America that Rachel moves toward a conscious awareness of her selfhood.

That the initiation phase of Rachel's journey transpires in South America is significant, for the coastal town of Santa Marina provides an exotic background for the maturation process of a young woman. Harvena Richter notes that though the title of the novel is The Voyage Out, the voyage itself is definitely inward and that it is symbolized by Santa Marina, whose name suggests "the watery world of

<sup>3</sup> Morris Beja, Epiphany in the Modern Novel (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1971), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Beja, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Beja, p. 115.

emotion and the inner depths."<sup>6</sup> Naremore perceives the South American landscape as being both beautiful and terrifying when he states that there is a "frightening and destructive quality in all this beauty, which is not very far from death itself."<sup>7</sup> The lush, warm environment of Santa Marina presents a distinct contrast to the damp, gray atmosphere of London. Woolf's description of the landscape is significant because it reflects the breaking of old ties and the resulting emotional growth that Rachel experiences. The South American jungle, which is fertile, primitive, and bursting with life, is the appropriate setting for Rachel to come into contact with the depths of her being. Gone is the stullifying atmosphere of her aunts' home.

In this vibrant, unfettered environment, Rachel now begins the initiation phase of her journey. The first stage of the initiation evolves gradually. Helen provides Rachel with a room of her own where she has the opportunity and privacy to grow and thrive at her own pace:

Among the promises which Mrs. Ambrose had made her niece . . . was a room cut off from the rest of the house, large, private--a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. (p. 123)

<sup>6</sup> Harvena Richter, Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage (Princeton: The Univ. Press, 1970), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> James Naremore, The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 31.

Indeed, this room gives Rachel the space and solitude necessary for self-growth. In this room Rachel reads Ibsen and various other "moderns" who cause her to question the meaning of life. Three months pass and Helen reflects that Rachel ". . . has made up considerably . . . for time spent in interminable walks around sheltered gardens, and the household gossip of aunts . . ." (p. 124). Elsewhere in her writings Woolf also emphasizes the importance of having a particular space--"a room of one's own"--in which one can develop and begin to define oneself. Rachel does just this as she reads, explores ideas, and plays the piano in the uninterrupted privacy of her room:

Rachel read what she chose, reading with the curious literalness of one to whom written sentences are unfamiliar, and handling words as though they were made of wood, separately of great importance, and possessed of shapes like tables and chairs. In this way she came to conclusions, which had to be remodelled according to the adventures of the day, and were indeed recast as liberally as anyone could desire, leaving always a small grain of belief behind them. (p. 124)

Thus, as Rachel's physical world has expanded by her voyage to South America, her intellectual world also begins to expand. In the solitude of her room she confronts ideas and concepts as fresh and foreign to her as the jungle of South America is to a girl who is accustomed to the "sheltered gardens" of London.

The mental stimulation which the books provide and the seclusion of the room combine to create an atmosphere which precipitates an important moment of vision. The significance of the experience for Rachel is the subject of this passage:

The morning was hot, and the exercise of reading left her mind contracting and expanding like the mainspring of a clock. The sounds in the garden outside joined with the clock, and the small noises of midday, which one can ascribe to no definite cause, in a regular rhythm. It was all very real, very big, very impersonal, and after a moment or two she began to raise her first finger and to let it fall on the arm of her chair so as to bring back to herself some consciousness of her own existence. She was next overcome by the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an arm-chair, in the morning, in the middle of the world. Who were the people moving in the house--moving things from one place to another? And life, what was that? It was only a light passing over the surface and vanishing, as in time she would vanish, though the furniture in the room would remain. Her dissolution became so complete that she could not raise her finger any more, and sat perfectly still, listening and looking always at the same spot. It became stranger and stranger. She was overcome with awe that things should exist at all. . . . She forgot that she had any fingers to raise. . . . The things that existed were so immense and so desolate. . . . She continued to be conscious of these vast masses of substance for a long stretch of time, the clock still ticking in the midst of the universal silence. (p. 125)

Woolf makes this experience sound almost mystical; the sense of obliteration Rachel experiences is paradoxical because at the same moment she is questioning whether or not she even

exists, she experiences depths of feeling and perception that intensify her existence. Such moments of deep reverie promote growth and thereby enhance her being. As with epiphanies

some of these moments seem to be what might be called 'secular mystical experiences,' in which a person feels the sensations but not the convictions of the mystic. He feels himself outside of time, in eternity; he experiences an irrational enlightenment, a new awareness of something that cannot be explained; he feels that he is becoming a part of a much broader unity. . . ."8

It is as if the universe is opening up to Rachel for the first time. The vastness she perceives contrasts strikingly to the limited world in which she grew up. At once she glimpses the vast possibilities open to her in the boundless universe; at the same time, she sees her life as a light which passes over a surface and vanishes. She senses the ultimate evanescence of her existence. That she asks herself the question of what life signifies that she is beginning to expand her horizons. She no longer blindly drifts through life; she pauses and asks what it means. The questions themselves are signposts on the road to maturity, and the questions, not the answers, supply Rachel with the beginnings of a sense of self. As these moments of vision

<sup>8</sup> Beja, p. 123.



accumulate in Rachel's experience, the indistinct outline of her personality begins to sharpen and to come into focus.

But Rachel's journey to wholeness necessitates both solitude and interaction with people. One of her first social engagements in Santa Marina consists of a picnic organized by Terence Hewet. It is on this picnic that Rachel first comes into contact with Hewet and St. John Hirst; both play important roles in Rachel's initiation. Several occurrences on the expedition combine to make a sizable impact on Rachel. It is an opportunity for her to observe other people, to observe a panoramic view, to listen to other persons converse about trivial and important matters, and to be confronted about her beliefs. It is important to note that the picnic takes place on a mountain which they ascend on donkeys. The trek epitomizes the archetypal journey: the ascent represents the separation from the village which has become familiar to Rachel; the time on the mountaintop is the initiation phase in which she encounters other "human beings"; the descent is the return phase in which Rachel finds herself somewhat enlightened.

During the meal and immediately after, Rachel sits apart from the others. Hewet notices that she is carefully observing the interactions between other guests. He crawls over to her on his knees; "'What are you looking at?' he asked. She was a little startled, but answered directly, 'Human beings'"

(p. 135). The knowledge one gains from exposure to "human beings" cannot be overstated. In Rachel's attempt to develop an identity, she must decide what she is not as well as what she is. Many of the minor figures in the novel are stereotypes which Woolf attempts to satirize. As Rachel comes into contact with them individually and collectively, she is influenced both directly and indirectly. Helen, Hewet, and Hirst directly influence Rachel, while the other characters influence her only indirectly by exhibiting those qualities which she does not wish to acquire. Some of the "types" she meets on the picnic are quite similar to her aunts from whom she is attempting to extricate herself.

A few moments later Rachel observes "human beings" in quite a different encounter. As she and Hewet walk through the forest, they come upon a sight which disturbs Rachel immensely: Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning are rolling in the grass in an embrace. Rachel's reaction to the situation and Hewet's response reveal their ambivalence:

"I don't like that," said Rachel after a moment.  
 "I can remember not liking it either," said Hewet. "I can remember--" but he changed his mind and continued in an ordinary tone of voice, "Well, we may take it for granted that they're engaged. D'you think he'll ever fly, or will she put a stop to that?"

But Rachel was still agitated; she could not get away from the sight they had just seen. Instead of answering Hewet she persisted:

"Love's an odd thing, isn't it, making one's heart beat."

"It's so enormously important, you see," Hewet replied. "Their lives are now changed for ever."

"And it makes one sorry for them too," Rachel continued, as though she were tracing the course of her feelings. "I don't know either of them, but I could almost burst into tears. That's silly, isn't it?"

"Just because they're in love," said Hewet. "Yes," he added after a moment's consideration, "there's something horribly pathetic about it, I agree." (pp. 140-41)

Rachel's reaction recalls Richard Dalloway's kiss. The idea of sex threatens her extremely. Ironically, Hewet and Rachel feel pity for the lovers when they are themselves on the threshold of love. Although the sight of the embracing lovers shocks Rachel, this moment opens her eyes to the reality of sex and love and prepares her for her own sexual awareness.

After this abrupt encounter with the lovers, Rachel perceives the significance of the present moment and of her own life. As she and Hewet enjoy the view, each becomes quiet and thoughtful:

When it became painful to look any longer, the great size of the view seeming to enlarge her eyes beyond their natural limit, she looked at the ground; it pleased her to scrutinise this inch of soil of South America so minutely that she noticed every grain of earth and made it into a world where she was endowed with the supreme power. She bent a blade of grass, and set an insect on the utmost tassel of it, and wondered if the insect realised his adventure. . . . (p. 141)

This awareness corresponds closely to the vision Rachel had in her room at the villa. The contrast between the vast expanse of the landscape and the inch of soil she scrutinizes recalls her vision of herself sitting in an armchair in the midst of the immense universe. At once she feels tiny and insignificant, yet somehow connected with the cosmos. Though she is a minute part of the universe, she realizes that she controls her being just as she controls the fate of the insect. Such a realization enhances Rachel's self-development.

Shortly after this revelation, Helen and Hirst appear, and Rachel encounters yet another significant experience. After conversing on trivial topics for a few minutes, Hirst suggests that each of them give a short biographical sketch of himself. Each of the four presents data about himself; then Helen initiates a more thought-provoking subject:

"That's all very interesting," said Helen after a pause. "But of course we've left out the only questions that matter. For instance, are we Christians?"

"I am not," "I am not," both the young men replied.

"I am," Rachel stated.

"You believe in a personal God?" Hirst demanded, turning round and fixing her with his eyeglasses.

"I believe--I believe," Rachel stammered, "I believe there are things we don't know about, and the world might change in a minute and anything appear."

At this Helen laughed outright. "Nonsense," she said. "You're not a Christian. You've never thought what you are." (pp. 144-45)

Thus, they directly confront Rachel about her beliefs. Although she states that she believes in God, this discussion lays the groundwork for her later deciding the opposite. James Hafley notes that "Helen, Hewet, and Hirst are almost militant non-Christians, and after the church service Rachel joins their ranks."<sup>9</sup> They force Rachel to examine her beliefs, an examination which results in a stronger, more definite personality.

The growth Rachel experiences during the day is reflected in the firework display which members of the group observe as they descend the mountain. In a twofold manner the fireworks symbolize Rachel's initiation. First, they are a symbolic celebration of Rachel's entrance into the larger world of men, sex, and ideas, for the various experiences Rachel has on the expedition mark a significant initiatory event. Second, the description of the fireworks symbolizes Rachel's journey:

In a moment the slow yellow drop rose again from the plain below; it rose, paused, opened like a flower, and fell in a shower of drops.

The "yellow drop" leaves the earth just as Rachel leaves behind innocence; it rises, pauses, opens like a flower just

<sup>9</sup> James Hafley, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 168.

as Rachel "blossoms" through her vision; it falls in a shower of drops just as Rachel returns fulfilled from her miniature odyssey. Through this brief symbolic action Woolf suggests that the pattern of the archetypal journey is also inherent in a moment of vision.

Because of the insight gained from the journey up the mountain, the picnic has prepared Rachel for her third major initiatory experience--the dance. Here Rachel encounters another opportunity to interact with people in a social situation. She changes noticeably during the course of the evening. At the beginning of the dance, she feels discomfort and distress, as illustrated by her first remark upon entering the ballroom: "This is my idea of hell" (p. 152). As the evening progresses, her attitude changes gradually until she finally becomes absorbed in the music and dancing. Before she reaches that point, however, she has a disturbing encounter with Hirst in which he arrogantly accuses her of being intellectually inferior. Their unsuccessful attempt to dance together reflects their inability to communicate effectively:

. . . but Hirst had no taste for music, and a few dancing lessons at Cambridge had only put him into possession of the anatomy of the waltz, without imparting any of the spirit. A single turn proved to them that their methods were incompatible; instead of fitting into each other their bones seemed to jut out in angles making smooth turning an impossibility. (p. 153)

This passage suggests a clashing of the masculine and feminine worlds rather than suggesting a sense of harmony.

Rachel, although an inexperienced dancer, is a talented musician; therefore, she has an intuitive sense of rhythm. Hirst, a man of the factual world who knows the "anatomy of the waltz," has no conception of the spirit of the dance. Thus, the worlds of fact and vision are in discord.

Following this unsuccessful attempt at social intercourse, they try their hands at a verbal exchange. Hirst quickly becomes impatient with Rachel's weak intellectual background and says insolently, "You see, the problem is, can one really talk to you? Have you got a mind, or are you like the rest of your sex?" (p. 154). Hirst, though definitely overbearing and presumptuous, supplies an impetus that Rachel needs to continue her search for self. Rachel, infuriated by the remark, recognizes her intellectual shortcomings as a result. She knows she has a mind but has failed to develop or discipline it.

Hewet, however, neutralizes Rachel's anger at Hirst by explaining that Hirst's discomfort in social situations is similar to her own. He makes her laugh at the situation, and she sees that "there was something ridiculous about Hirst, and perhaps about herself" (p. 156). Rachel's responses to the two young men quite obviously differ. With Hewet she laughs, converses, and dances with relative ease. The slight

attraction they may have felt for each other at the picnic accelerates during the dance. Thus, the two quite different encounters with the young men further Rachel's initiatory process.

In addition to learning about relating to men, Rachel gains new insight into the power of music. Until this point she uses her music as a means of withdrawal; however, the dance causes her to perceive music as a powerful unifier. As she begins to play the piano after the other musicians have left, the guests respond by becoming less and less inhibited as they move across the dance floor. They invent their own steps as they dance in pairs or alone:

Once their feet fell in with the rhythm they showed a complete lack of self-consciousness. From Mozart Rachel passed without stopping to English hunting songs, carols, and hymn tunes, for as she had observed, any good tune, with a little management, became a tune one could dance to. (p. 166)

Rachel now emerges from her world of solitude into the larger world of communion. She begins to see the value of music as a means to escape her loneliness. Thus, instead of accommodating withdrawal, music encourages creative vision. Because music is a visionary art, Rachel is able to begin using it to discover her own truth.<sup>10</sup> Fleishman notes that

<sup>10</sup> Kelley, p. 13.



Rachel's playing of Bach at the end of the dance reflects her vision and communicates it to others. Her insight into the power of music occurs simultaneously with her realization of the value of communion with others. Such an illumination provides valuable assistance in her voyage to wholeness.

Following the dance, Rachel reflects on the events of the previous evening. She strolls to the villa with Hewet, Hirst, and Helen. The sun rises as they sit outside the gate musing over the dance. Rachel collects the stones around her and builds them into a pile, which symbolizes "the thinking out of her thoughts, and the building up of a pattern of life for herself. . . . She was no longer a timid girl with her wits scattered all over the place. . . . She had become possessed of all her faculties."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Rachel's amorphous quality begins to diminish.

More evidence of Rachel's newly acquired definition appears shortly when Rachel says:

"I feel like a fish at the bottom of the sea."  
 . . . None of these people possessed any power to frighten her out here in the dawn, and she felt perfectly familiar even with Mr. Hirst. (p. 169)

As Rachel's sense of inadequacy diminishes, other people no longer threaten her and Rachel begins to acknowledge the

<sup>11</sup> N. C. Thakur, The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 29.

power she possesses over her own life. Significantly, she calls herself "a fish at the bottom of the sea," which recalls the archetypal sea image associated with death and rebirth, timelessness and eternity, the unconscious, and the "Mother of all Life."<sup>12</sup> Rachel's former self--naive, innocent, formless--is dying, and a new self--introspective, visionary, cognizant--is being born. The fish and sea images recur in The Voyage Out and reflect Woolf's concern with the life-death-rebirth cycle.

As Rachel's identity continues to evolve, she again experiences a moment of vision reinforcing her sense of self and signifying the present moment in the context of eternity. She walks into the woods adjacent to the villa carrying with her volumes of Gibbon and Balzac. As she sits beneath a tree reading, she ponders on the history of mankind. Her reading

. . . seemed to drive roads back to the very beginning of the world, on either side of which the populations of all times and countries stood in avenues, and by passing down them all knowledge would be hers, and the book of the world turned back to the very first page. Such was her excitement at the possibilities of knowledge now opening before her that she ceased to read. . . . For some time she observed a great yellow butterfly, which was opening and closing its wings very slowly on a little flat stone.

<sup>12</sup> Wilfred L. Guerin, Earle G. Labor, Lee Morgan, and John R. Willingham, A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 119.

"What is it to be in love?" she demanded. . . . Hypnotised by the wings of the butterfly, and awed by the discovery of a terrible possibility in life, she sat for some time longer. When the butterfly flew away, she rose, and with her two books beneath her arm returned home again, much as a soldier prepared for battle. (pp. 175-76)

Rachel experiences new excitement at the prospect of learning and growing. She realizes that she knows very little intellectually and experientially. Naremore observes that as she views the butterfly she enters another consciousness:

. . . [she] falls into a euphoric state, this time described as hypnosis, brought on by her sexual awakening and her growing love for Hewet. She watches a butterfly opening and closing its wings and this establishes a rhythm for the moment.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of feeling inadequate or afraid, she feels exalted at the thought of expanding her knowledge and experience. As she marches home, she shows a determination to face life vis-a-vis rather than attempting to escape it as she used to do.

In addition to the excitement she experiences at the potential of her own life, she has a glimmer of insight into the vastness and the immeasurable expanse of the universe. Paradoxically, this realization causes her to see the immense value rather than the insignificance of the present moment in comparison with the seemingly infinite course of humanity.

<sup>13</sup> Naremore, p. 26.

Such visions are inextricably connected with Rachel's increasing ability to communicate with others. She not only learns to express herself, but she also learns to listen to others with new understanding. Although she used to be easily influenced by others, she now learns to choose discriminately the people she wants to associate with. One very important person whose presence earlier threatened her now becomes an ally instead of an adversary. St. John's constant insistence upon intellectual honesty compels Rachel to continue searching herself and seeking answers. Rose says that the character of Hirst derives from Woolf's lifetime friend Lytton Strachey. She points out that "He is a Gibbon-lover, devoted to reason and polished style, mannered, ungainly, decidedly misogynous."<sup>14</sup> Certainly, Hirst forces Rachel to define and articulate her beliefs and serves as ". . . the sharp-cutting edge of intellectual fact against whom Rachel must measure herself. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Although the journey to selfhood is essentially a solitary one, it cannot be completed in total isolation. Rachel's interaction with other persons comprises an important part of her journey and promotes the initiatory process. Her relationship with St. John Hirst

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> Kelley, p. 20.

provides her with the stimulation necessary to the pursuit of self.

As Rachel moves toward self-knowledge she experiences yet another initiatory event as a result of the church service she attends at the hotel. Unlike the positive experiences she has at the picnic and the dance, the feelings she has during the church service are negative.<sup>16</sup> Although the experience itself is not positive, it tends to define sharply the nature of religious belief. As she sits in the hotel chapel,

. . . for the first time in her life, instead of slipping at once into some curious pleasant cloud of emotion, . . . Rachel listened critically to what was being said. (p. 227)

Again, the influence of both Helen and Hirst is evident. Aware that they are professed non-Christians, Rachel now listens with a critical ear; she concentrates carefully on the words the pastor enunciates. As she scans the faces in the chapel, she becomes increasingly uncomfortable:

All round her were people pretending to feel what they did not feel, while somewhere above her floated the idea which they could none of them grasp, which they pretended to grasp, always escaping out of reach, a beautiful idea, an idea like a butterfly. (p. 228)

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973), p. 69.

They all seek a religious experience to enhance the meaning of their lives, and when they do not find it, they pretend to. Rachel too seeks that which will unify the fragments of awareness she has achieved, but she now realizes that religion does not provide her with such a unity. She discerns the people sitting around her as shallow and hypocritical. They want easy answers; she realizes there are none. The recurrent butterfly image appears here in juxtaposition with the illusiveness of ideas. Like a butterfly, the idea drifts above Rachel's head just outside her grasp.

The intensity of the insight Rachel receives during the chapel service culminates when she focuses her attention on one particular woman; consequently, she then decides that her former beliefs are irrelevant to her present life. Rachel watches the woman and concludes that

She [the woman in church] was adoring something shallow and smug, clinging to it . . . with the assiduity of a limpet; nothing would tear her from her demure belief in her own virtue and the virtues of her religion. She was a limpet, with the sensitive side of her stuck to a rock, for ever dead to the rush of fresh and beautiful things past her. The face of this single worshipper became printed on Rachel's mind with an impression of keen horror, and she had it suddenly revealed to her what Helen meant and St. John meant when they proclaimed their hatred for Christianity. With the violence that now marked her feelings, she rejected all that she had before implicitly believed. (p. 229)

The sight of the woman provides Rachel with a realization of what she does not want to be. In the process of acquiring a definition of herself, Rachel must decide what kind of person she is not. Additionally, she must decide what she does not believe. Rachel's perceptions sharpen as she learns to observe others. Blackstone notes that the "faculty of seeing directly informs the mind that is concerned for what is, not for what ought to be or will be. That is why Virginia Woolf is anti-religious. Belief of any kind blinds and binds."<sup>17</sup> Rachel obviously comes to agree with her creator that her journey to maturity must be made without the comfort and convenience of religion. Thus, another initiatory event has pushed Rachel closer to self-awareness and away from dependence upon forces outside herself.

Rachel demonstrates her newly found autonomy when she directly confronts Helen about her apathetic attitude toward the river trip. Here Rachel perceives Helen as being bound by the factual world:

Thank God, Helen, I'm not like you! I sometimes think you don't think or feel or care or do anything but exist! You're like Mr. Hirst. You see that things are bad, and you pride yourself in saying so. It's what you call being honest;

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf: British Writers and Their Work (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 26.

as a matter of fact it's being lazy, being dull, being nothing. You don't help; you put an end to things. (p. 262)

Again Rachel defines herself by observing another person and choosing not to be like her. That she lashes out against her mentor demonstrates her newly found self assurance. She is no longer the soft-spoken girl who retreats to her piano when she is angry. Not only is she establishing her own identity, she is learning to articulate her feelings and beliefs.

Rachel's voicing of her opinions results in Helen's deciding to take the river trip into the jungle. Thus, another journey begins; Rachel travels with her companions up the river into the depths of the jungle. She simultaneously travels into the depths of her being. The setting of the jungle section is exceedingly symbolic; Woolf's use of language in describing the landscape suggests the feelings of a young girl on the verge of a sexual awakening.

Naremore adds:

The style here becomes not only a foreshadowing of the sense of total communion that the young lovers will feel at the heart of the darkness, but also a means of representing the theme. . . . The dark and beautiful setting of the [jungle] . . . has a general import; it is a state of feeling objectified.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Naremore, p. 28.



Thus, the lush, exotic setting anticipates the primitive sexual urge Rachel experiences. By placing herself in primitive surroundings, Rachel is much more responsive to her own sexual feelings than she would have been in the repressive atmosphere of England. Woolf creates the perfect atmosphere for such an awakening when she writes:

As they passed into the depths of the forest the light grew dimmer, and the noises of the ordinary world were replaced by those creaking and sighing sounds which suggest to the traveller in a forest that he is walking at the bottom of the sea. The path narrowed and turned; it was hedged in by dense creepers which knotted tree to tree, and burst here and there into star-shaped crimson blossoms. The sighing and creaking up above were broken every now and then by the jarring cry of some startled animal. The atmosphere was close and the air came at them in languid puffs of scent. The vast green light was broken here and there by a round of pure yellow sunlight which fell through some gap in the immense umbrella of green above, and in these yellow spaces crimson and black butterflies were circling and settling. (p. 270)

The description of the woods creates a sense of intimacy. The metaphor comparing the atmosphere to that at the bottom of the sea is significant for two reasons. First, the water image, as mentioned before, supplies a unifying element in the novel; second, the metaphor suggests a deep level of consciousness. Naremore notes that "this total relaxation of the ordinary self, the sinking into a 'deeper

consciousness," is a pervasive element in the jungle scenes.<sup>19</sup> The narrow, winding path creates a sense of mystery and anticipation as to where it will lead. Additionally, the green light and the yellow light suggest fertility and enlightenment respectively, and the butterflies, another unifying device, suggest new insight. Fleishman suggests that the butterflies are associated with the human soul. Moreover, he associates the butterflies in the jungle scene with the Garden of Eden. Here the two sexes meet and unify their souls; and as in Eden, a sexual initiation takes place which ultimately leads to death.<sup>20</sup>

An undercurrent of foreboding accompanies the general trance-like mood.<sup>21</sup> Rachel and Terence have difficulty expressing the intensity of their feelings: "Not only did the silence weigh upon them, but they were both unable to frame any thoughts. There was something between them which had to be spoken of" (p. 270). The moment is obviously quite crucial. As Rachel illustrates, one is sometimes at a loss for words at truly critical moments in life. Rachel intuitively feels that she is on the threshold of love, of a sexual union, of

<sup>19</sup> Naremore, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Fleishman, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Naremore, p. 46.

a relationship which will change her life. Thus it is as if she is stricken dumb. Hewet feels the same reticence at the immensity of the moment. Naremore makes the interesting observation that if the descriptive passages were omitted from the passage containing their fragmentary dialogue, one would be reminded of the "tentative conversation of lovers as they experience the sexual act."<sup>22</sup> 'Does this frighten you?' . . . 'No . . . I like it. . . .' 'I like it. . . .' 'Do you like being with me?' . . . 'Yes, with you'" (p. 271). Thus, Woolf subtly suggests a state of sexual tension without stating it outright. Rachel's participation in this verbal exchange, however hesitant, indicates her willingness to involve herself with Terence more intimately.

Rachel's desire to reach out to another human being increases as she becomes aware of her own positive feelings. She no longer retreats into solitude; she allows herself to experience warmth and passion:

Very gently and quietly, almost as if it were the blood singing in her veins, or the water of the stream running over stones, Rachel became conscious of a new feeling within her. She wondered for a moment what it was, and then said to herself, with a little surprise at recognising in her own person so famous a thing: "This is happiness, I suppose." (p. 283)

22 Naremore, p. 48.

Again the reference to water connotes the unconscious, re-birth, and life itself. It is as if this new relationship causes a re-birth in Rachel, or more likely, brings her to life for the first time. The withdrawn, formless, almost lifeless girl of the early part of the novel surges to life. As the jungle is lush, green, and fertile, Rachel sees her potential for happiness and blossoms into life. As the jungle is productive and creative, so too can Rachel be productive and creative because of her heightened awareness of love. Bazin observes that "In the jungle . . . where men still live as primitive beings, the doubts and conflicts posed by the conscious intellect dissolve and a decision to marry becomes possible."<sup>23</sup>

Under such circumstances, Rachel experiences a further awakening. The lovers are totally enveloped in their own cocoon of bliss and fail to hear voices calling out to them:

The repetition of Hewet's name in short, dis-severed syllables was to them the crack of a dry branch or the laughter of a bird. The grasses and breezes sounding and murmuring all round them, they never noticed that the swishing of the grasses grew louder and louder, and did not cease with the lapse of the breeze. A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder; it might have been a bolt from heaven. She fell beneath it, and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears. Through the waving stems she saw a figure, large and

<sup>23</sup> Bazin, p. 66.

shapeless against the sky. Helen was upon her. Rolled this way and that, now seeing only forests of green, and now the high blue heaven, she was speechless and almost without sense. At last she lay still, all the grasses shaken round her and before her by her panting. Over her loomed two great heads, the heads of a man and woman, of Terence and Helen. (p. 283)

This passage is quite obscure; however, it can be interpreted on both a metaphorical and a literal level. In both senses it has the impact of a sexual initiation. According to Hermione Lee, Woolf is describing an emotional experience in terms of an orgasm:

Helen, who sets in motion Rachel's maturing process, here takes part in what reads as a sexual initiation. The description is alarming and dreamlike, mainly because the characters seem to be depersonalized.<sup>24</sup>

Leaska agrees that the passage can be viewed two ways. He sees it as a possible hallucination because of the "discontinuity" it contains: "Metaphorically, the passage is a highly elliptical transcription of Rachel's actual or imagined initiation into womanhood. But whichever it may be, one characteristic of the passage remains salient: the images suggest exotic turbulence, a swirling mixture of

<sup>24</sup> Hermione Lee, The Novels of Virginia Woolf (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977), p. 45.

sensuality and violence."<sup>25</sup> Hence, the extraordinary passage invites various interpretations. The significance lies in the fact that however one reads it, Rachel does experience a sexual initiation. The lines are full of movement, sensuality, and effervescence. As Schafer notes, "Love comes to Rachel . . . as a human event fraught with paradox and difficulties."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Rachel reaches the climax of her initiatory process. Her expedition into the jungle and her experiences therein culminate the initiation phase of her journey. The entire jungle scenario is similar to one extended moment of vision; Rachel changes, she has new feelings, she has new insights.

Although Rachel has passed through the rites of her initiation, she must still elucidate it and explore its meaning before she can experience a return. She now knows the freedom and solitude a private room can offer. She has begun to read, to think, to question, and to deepen her perception of life. She has gained social experience and

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell Leaska, The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End (New York: The John Jay Press, 1977), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (London: Morton and Co., 1965), p. 36.

knowledge about living. She has developed a visionary insight. She becomes aware of her need for other people; instead of retreating from them, she begins to reach out. As Rachel grows inwardly, she has the capacity to move toward others without the fear of annihilation. She is a stronger, more durable person than she was before. Now she may allow herself to love and be loved. However, she must "explore its [love's] growth, its existence and its potentialities--and perhaps too discover its inadequacy and beyond it, that second loneliness which is the very essence of man's state, a portent of the final separation that awaits [her]. . . ."27

27 Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), p. 198.

## CHAPTER III

### THE JOURNEY: PHASE THREE

The protagonist, having completed the first two stages of a journey suggesting archetypal models, is now ready for the final stage, which is the return. With new insight and experience from the initiation rites, the protagonist is open to the possibility of a return or rebirth as exemplified in Hamlet. Hamlet's journey involves a difficult spiritual quest, but after a "series of painful ordeals" he reaches a sad but wise maturity.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Huck Finn survives "a series of painful experiences in passing from ignorance and innocence into spiritual maturity; he comes of age--is morally reborn--when he decides to go to hell rather than turn Jim in to the authorities."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Oedipus survives a painful initiation and reaches a point of final recognition when he realizes he has killed his father and married his mother. Each of these archetypal heroes attains a kind of rebirth, return, or final insight upon the completion of his

<sup>1</sup> Wilfred L. Guerin, Earl G. Labor, Lee Morgan, and John R. Willingham, A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Guerin, p. 148.



journey. Again this pattern emerges in The Voyage Out.

Rachel passes through the separation and initiation phases of the journey and is now prepared to experience the return.

Rachel's new insight and self-awareness gained from her separation and initiation stages generate within her a yearning for more depth of meaning in life. She eagerly explores her relationship with Terence and examines her wishes and desires for her own life. Woolf suggests such self-investigation and penetration by her use of water imagery, which connotes both the unconscious and the act of rebirth:

To be flung into the sea, to be washed hither and thither, and driven about the roots of the world--the idea was incoherently delightful [to Rachel]. She sprang up and began moving about the room, bending and thrusting aside the chairs and tables as if she were indeed striking through waters. He [Terence] watched her with pleasure. She seemed to be cleaving a passage for herself, and dealing triumphantly with the obstacles which would hinder their passage through life. . . . 'I'm a mermaid! I can swim,' she cried. . . . (p. 298)

Rachel delights at her newly found awareness of life and the potential it offers; furthermore, she is exhilarated by the possibilities love offers. The thought of the seemingly infinite number of opportunities she has for self-definition and fulfillment invigorates her. However, in the midst of her feelings of strength and competency, there is the

suggestion of her hesitancy about sex. That she calls herself a mermaid--a sexless being--recalls her violent reaction to Richard Dalloway's kiss. Although she begins to respect her mind and her visionary qualities, she still denies the existence of her body. Even after experiencing the sexual initiation she prefers to be a sexless mermaid. Rachel's joy and optimism partially diminish as a result of her fear of sex. After she meets Terence, the fear becomes a subtle undercurrent rather than an overpowering aversion. However, her anxiety ultimately causes Rachel to withdraw from Terence.

Equally as powerful, however, as her sexual apprehension is her desire to discover a deeper plane of existence. She yearns to reach beyond the mundane, trivial, everyday existence:

'What's so detestable in this country,' she exclaimed, 'is the blue--always blue sky and blue sea. It's like a curtain--all the things one wants are on the other side of that. I want to know what's going on behind it. I hate these divisions, don't you, Terence? One person all in the dark about another person. (p. 302)

Rachel idealistically conceives of the possibility of knowing another person totally. Although Rachel now relates to others more effectively than ever before, she sees the agonizing limitations of human relationships. Naremore observes this dissatisfaction:

Rachel is constantly preoccupied with a desire to escape the confines of individuality and share her deepest feelings with someone else. . . . The beautiful depths, however, are dangerous. . . . Perhaps not surprisingly, Rachel's desire for love leads eventually to a total loss of self in death.<sup>3</sup>

Rachel's dissatisfaction with human relationships increases her desire to go beyond the reality of this world to that which otherworld offers. The mention of the "blue sea" signifies her association of the sea with rebirth. If Rachel the mermaid could reach the other side of the sea, she feels, she would be reborn. Mermaids are more comfortable in the water of the unconscious than they are in the factual, physical world. Fleishman sees the significance of Rachel's desire for otherworld and states:

Rachel reaches her final stage of vision when she expresses a desire to go beyond her intensified awareness of the given world, to get behind it to a sight of some other world, presumably the realm of death, which is approximated by the images of life at the bottom of the sea. . . . In her meditation, the horizon becomes a boundary or 'curtain' which marks the furthest extent of her vision of the world; she hopes to look beyond it to another order of being and back again from that perspective.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> James Naremore, The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Avrom Fleishman, Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), p. 13.

Rachel's moments of intensity precipitate her desire to sustain the vision they offer. For brief moments she sees beyond the curtain, but she wants the vision to be continual, permanent. These visionary moments allow Rachel to transcend the tedium and the limited perspective with which most of life deals. The immediacy of the moment combines with the universality of all time and all experience. Woolf's conception of the artist's role as that of a visionary eye to see behind the world of facts to the ultimate reality. Supposedly, the artist sees the connections between the immediate and the universal. Rachel, though, sees such connections momentarily but is unsuccessful in sustaining the vision. According to Jean Love, Rachel's inability to elucidate the meaning of life results from her focus on human beings and relationships:

Rather than seeking meaning in geographical locations or by means that are specific to such locations, Rachel looks for it in the lives of individuals, in human institutions, and in relationships between persons. The fact that she looks for meaning in these particular directions expresses also the futility of her search, since human relationships and individual life in the novel are clearly associated with and possibly cause the sense of absurdity.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jean O. Love, Worlds of Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. 99.

Rachel reflects Woolf's disappointment in human relationships; both women seek fulfillment through relationships and are painfully disappointed with the inadequacy they find. The inability to accept the limitations of other persons created great difficulty in Woolf's own life just as it does in Rachel's.

Such limitations become apparent after Rachel's engagement to Terence. One critic comments that "Questions of unity are brought out by the engagement for it does not miraculously unify the lovers so much as it emphasizes their separateness."<sup>6</sup> Rachel sees that total unification with another human being is impossible. She begins to withdraw from Terence when she realizes that he cannot provide the completion for which she strives. Though Rachel has attained a certain level of maturity through her initiation rites, she does not have the wisdom to appreciate the positive aspects of her relationship with Terence. Like a greedy child, she wants all or nothing. The loss of her mother at an early age surely contributes to her intense need for perfection in a relationship. She tries to fill the void left by her mother with a man. Since a lover can never take the place of a mother, she ultimately rejects Terence. This situation

<sup>6</sup> Love, p. 104.

corresponds closely to Woolf's own life. Though Leonard Woolf came close to filling the mother role for Virginia by his close attention and catering to her every need, he could never completely fill the void. Disappointed, Virginia Woolf finally abandoned him by committing suicide.

Similarly, Terence is abandoned by Rachel's death. He intuits her gradual withdrawal and observes that

she seemed to be able to cut herself adrift from him, and to pass away to unknown places where she had no need of him. . . . [Terence says to Rachel,] 'You don't want me as I want you--you're always wanting something else. . . .' It seemed to her now that what he was saying was perfectly true, and that she wanted many more things than the love of one human being--the sea, the sky. She turned again and looked at the distant blue, which was so smooth and serene where the sky met the sea; she could not possibly want only one human being. (p. 302)

That one human being cannot fill all her needs is a realistic realization; however, that she must reject him because he cannot fill all her needs displays tragic ignorance on her part. Feeling frustrated, she turns to "the sea, the sky"--otherworld. Because this world does not offer totality in meaning, she seeks meaning elsewhere. Fleishman notes that the title of the novel takes on greater significance at this point, because ". . . the title of The Voyage Out extends its reference beyond the conventional meaning--an

outward-bound passage--to suggest the course of Rachel's life as a voyage out of life toward death."<sup>7</sup>

Before Rachel whole-heartedly seeks otherworld she has moments of satisfaction with this world. She feels ambivalence between accepting the challenge of living and relating in this imperfect world--and seeking total perfection and unity in otherworld. One brief moment of satisfaction is revealed as she contemplates the pattern of life:

She felt herself amazingly secure as she sat in her arm-chair, and able to review not only the night of the dance, but the entire past, tenderly and humorously as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time, and could now see exactly where she had turned. . . . That was the strange thing, that one did not know where one was going, or what one wanted, and followed blindly, suffering so much in secret, always unprepared and amazed and knowing nothing; but one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people call living. Perhaps, then, everyone really knew as she knew now where they were going; and things formed themselves into a pattern not only for her, but for them, and in that pattern lay satisfaction and meaning.  
(p. 314)

Rachel glimpses the underlying pattern of life which reveals meaning and satisfaction. Her mind expands to include the possibility that persons whom she has judged harshly may have a certain direction and meaning in their lives. This

<sup>7</sup> Fleishman, p. 14.

realization assures her that she too is capable of a purposeful, happy life with Terence. After she had led a solitary existence for most of her life, such knowledge comforts and reassures her. However, this passage hints at a certain helplessness: "That one did not know where one was going . . . and followed blindly." Such lack of control foreshadows Rachel's illness, which indeed precludes any control she has over her own life.

Thus, her feeling of solidarity and unity is short-lived as she falls victim to an unnamed illness. She soon withdraws further into herself than her music or solitude ever took her. The first symptoms of her illness become apparent as she sits listening to Terence reading poetry aloud. The lines of the poem reflect Rachel's own innocence and intensify the water imagery in the novel:

There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,  
That with moist curb sways the smooth severn stream.  
Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure, . . .  
Sabrina fair,  
Listen where thou are sitting  
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber dropping hair,  
Listen for dear honor's sake,  
Goddess of the silver lake,  
Listen and save! (pp. 326-27)

As Rachel listens, she intuitively grasps the significance of the words which seem "to be laden with meaning" (p. 326). The term "nymph" obviously recalls Rachel's defining herself as a



mermaid. Fleishman notes that several similarities exist between the two innocent young heroines:

. . . the famous song points the irony of Rachel's demise: like the Lady of the masque, she has been a virgin wooed by a river, but instead of being aided by a divine force she goes down to her death. The extended quotation . . . operates powerfully to generate the atmosphere of death itself, as couched in the imagery of underwater withdrawal recalled by Rachel in her feverish imaginings. . . .<sup>8</sup>

In this world of fever and delirium, she has no need of Terence. Phyllis Rose agrees when she states that Rachel's mind becomes her only reality:

In her sickness Rachel is utterly alone and un-touchable, her feverish brain inside the fortress-sanctuary of the sick room, the ultimately impregnable space. Her mind, delirious as it is, is her only reality, and she wants no more--she does not want Terence to force her to consciousness, invading her solitude.<sup>9</sup>

Rachel's physical illness enables her to withdraw from Terence and the rest of the world in a socially acceptable manner. Even as she longs for closeness with Terence, she paradoxically is terrified by the possibility of it. The terror overpowers her positive desire for unity with a

<sup>8</sup> Fleishman, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 72.

man. In her delirium she dreams once more of the tunnel under the river:

Rachel again shut her eyes, and found herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall. (p. 331)

Like the earlier dream, this one incorporates a dual meaning. Rachel's fear of her own sexuality is evident here, as the damp tunnel suggests the female genitalia. Rachel is still unable to comprehend or come to terms with her own sexuality and must retreat. Additionally, the dream suggests Rachel's longing for the security and sanctuary of her mother's womb, where she would find protection against emotional and sexual violation. Ultimately death provides her with such a sanctuary.

Woolf associates the refuge provided by death with the sea, as Rachel dreams:

At last the faces went further away; she fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound, which was the sound of the sea rolling over her head. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea. There she lay, sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then some one turned her over at the bottom of the sea. (p. 341)

Rachel experiences a sense of isolation and alienation in the depths of her illness. She is faintly aware of people around her, but they seem unreal. The only reality is that which she experiences in her delirium. These sensations are actually only exaggerations of her attitudes before her illness. Though she has sometimes experienced communion with other persons, her encompassing feeling has been one of spiritual isolation. She feels that true communication is only transitory and cannot be sustained. Thus, being curled up at the bottom of the sea where she sees and hears nothing metaphorically suggests her stance throughout the novel. She is so intensely involved in her own feelings and perceptions that she is unable to conceive of anyone else's. Her own reality becomes the only reality; thus, she "drowns" in her own subjectivity. James Hafley agrees by saying that "love has not only helped Rachel to discover herself, but has also led her to reject all outside herself. To see oneself as reality and the social world as illusion, then, is fatal."<sup>10</sup>

Such rejections stem from Rachel's own feelings of inadequacy. At the same time she is frustrated at the limitations of relationships, she is also overwhelmed at the possibility of being known by another person. The prospect

<sup>10</sup> James Hafley, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 17.

of marrying Hewet means the possibility of being known. Mitchell Leaska suggests that such a prospect causes Rachel to withdraw: "Her only recourse then, on a level far below awareness, is to protect herself; and protection in Rachel's sequestered world is synonymous with withdrawal."<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, withdrawal is synonymous with death in The Voyage Out. For a young person to die is absurd--a wasted life--a non-existent future. It makes all life, all hope, seem absurd. However, believing in the possibility of transcendence into otherworld offers some measure of comfort. That Rachel joins another realm of time and space and reaches the other side of the veil of blue gives meaning to her death.

Because numerous deaths occurred in Woolf's family while she was still young, it is quite reasonable that she would work out a theory of transcendence that would comfort her. Otherwise there would be little reason for her to continue existing--much less writing. It is evident from her biography that on many occasions she felt death to be preferable to life. Her repeated suicide attempts and her final successful one are evidence of her allegiance to death. Psychologists agree that the victim of the loss of a mother

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell Leaska, The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End (New York: The John Jay Press, 1977), p. 38.

early in life often has a death wish. There is an irrational desire to return to the mother--to recover the relationship which was lost through death. That Rachel shares certain biographical details with her creator is quite significant. That the author of The Voyage Out was a young unmarried woman who was ambivalent about marriage is also significant.

Rachel's only alternative to death involves returning to England and marrying Terence. For the young Virginia Stephen, death was a more familiar occurrence than happy marriages were; therefore, for Rachel death seems a more plausible solution to her dilemma than marriage to Terence seems.

If the reader can understand death as a positive aspect of life, he can be reconciled to Rachel's death; such is Woolf's intention. However, she falls short of convincing the reader that death is a triumph. After following Rachel's progression through the separation and initiation phases, it is disappointing to find that she dies before achieving a deeper understanding of the profound significance of human relationships. That she is frustrated and disappointed by the limitations of other persons is understandable; that she is fearful of her own vulnerability is reasonable. But that she fails to see the significance of the process of learning to live among people and opts for death is disappointing.

One is reminded of Dolly Levi's decision of whether to be a fool among fools or a fool alone.<sup>12</sup> Thornton Wilder's heroine chooses to be a fool among fools; Virginia Woolf's young protagonist chooses to be a fool alone. That, it might be added, is the most tragic stance of all.

Though Rachel's return is not one of a more complete vision of life in this world, it is a return to the darkness from which she came. Once when speaking with Terence she compares life to a flicker of light:

'Does it ever seem to you, Terence, that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter, and that we're nothing but patches of light--' she looked at the soft spots of sun wavering over the carpet and up the wall--'like that?' (p. 293)

So after experiencing that brief flash of light, she returns forever to the darkness of another realm. Leaska sees Rachel's death as being self-willed: "For just as one escapes a life too threatening to tolerate, through periods of unconsciousness or insanity as Woolf did, so too can one withdraw from life assured of greater permanence, through death."<sup>13</sup> Rose sees Rachel's death as a withdrawal into "the ultimate room of her own, a reality into which no one else can

<sup>12</sup> Thornton Wilder, "The Matchmaker," in Three Plays (New York: Avon Books, 1976), p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Leaska, p. 38.

enter."<sup>14</sup> Bazin agrees with the theory of escape into other-world and suggests that it is foreshadowed early in the novel when Mrs. Dalloway quotes from Shelley's "Adonais":<sup>15</sup>

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;  
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain  
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
 Can touch him not and torture not again. . . . (p. 58)

This passage reflects accurately Woolf's attitude toward Rachel's death. Rachel transcends the passions of this world--the hate, the pain, and the delight. Woolf prefers the ethereal and mystical realms to that of passion. Naremore compares Rachel's death to occurrences in Proust's novels when the personality somehow evaporates into otherworld:

The Proustian novel shows the personality being liberated from time and space, but Mrs. Woolf goes even further until the personality itself becomes dissolved in total communion with what is 'out there.' Ultimately, the sense of being in contact with 'reality' is replaced by a vast and peaceful darkness.<sup>16</sup>

Rachel finally achieves the communion she longs for; it is not, however, with a single human being but with the cosmos.

<sup>14</sup> Rose, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Fleishman, p. 36.

She is no longer limited within the bounds of her own person; she is no longer alienated from all that is outside her; she is, in fact, one with all that is outside her. Her death is therefore a triumph--a rebirth.

This positive viewpoint echoes Fleishman's opinion that the focus of the novel toward Rachel's death is not a "denial of her initiation but a confirmation of it."<sup>17</sup> Therefore her death is the final stage of her development and marks the completion of her voyage: "Rachel's descent into death is rendered as a final immersion in the river of her journeying."<sup>18</sup> Rachel's journey is successful and is culminated in death. Guiguet agrees as he adds:

We may wonder then what is the meaning of this victory which is a defeat. Is it not that Rachel has accomplished her voyage out alone, has reached the haven of unity and peace while the others remain tossed on the ocean of division, of multiplicity, of uncertainty and suffering?<sup>19</sup>

Rachel indeed attains peace, security, and serenity.

Though Rachel achieves a spiritual wholeness by dying, Bazin sees the paradox in the occurrence:

<sup>17</sup> Fleishman, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Fleishman, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Guiguet, p. 203.



Indeed, to die rather than establish a relationship may be seen either as courageous or cowardly. Whereas, in one sense, it preserves the integrity of Rachel's spiritual self, in another sense, it denies the realization of her sexual self.<sup>20</sup>

Such a balanced view of the death provides an intellectually honest assessment of the situation. To gain spiritual fulfillment through death Rachel relinquishes the possibility of sexual fulfillment. Although Rachel does not commit suicide as Woolf did, she does not struggle against her destiny; therefore, she chooses, however passively, death over life.

Kelley acknowledges Rachel's preference for death as the one way she can attain the vision she hoped to acquire with Hewet. The only way either of them can attain permanent vision is

. . . for one or both of them to escape the factual world in which the vision can exist only sporadically. Because it is Rachel whose voyage to vision is at the heart of the novel, it is she who must escape; and she can do so only by dying.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Rachel dies and achieves the vision she searches for.

The significance of Rachel's death and simultaneous vision is symbolized immediately following her death by the moon shining through the window as Rachel dies:

<sup>20</sup> Bazin, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Kelley, pp. 31-32.

[Terence] laid Rachel's hand, which was now cold, upon the counterpane, and rose from his chair, and walked across to the window. The windows were uncurtained, and showed the moon, and a long silver pathway upon the surface of the waves.

'Why,' he said, in his ordinary tone of voice, 'look at the moon. There's a halo round the moon. . . .' (p. 354)

The moon is traditionally associated with the female or mother principle.<sup>22</sup> It therefore suggests Rachel's return to the womb, to otherworld, and to wholeness. The halo around the moon creates a sense of this wholeness; the circle implies unity and completion. Rachel completes her journey through this life and is reborn into a realm of timelessness--a realm of endless regeneration--a realm which is connected with Nature's eternal cycle.

<sup>22</sup> Guerin, p. 119.

## CONCLUSION

Various great literary works trace a protagonist's movement from innocence to maturity, using the archetypal journey to do so. The three phases of the journey--the separation, the initiation, and the return--are essential to the hero's attaining self-knowledge. Oedipus leaves Corinth after being told by an oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid the catastrophe he separates himself from all that is familiar to him and begins a journey. His initiation consists of answering riddles and fighting battles; he finally reaches a point of self-knowledge when he realizes he has indeed killed his father and married his mother. Hamlet, another archetypal figure, is separated from his innocence, is initiated by his father's death and the surrounding events, and is, in a sense, reborn into maturity and self-knowledge. Similarly, Huckleberry Finn wanders in search of meaning in life, passing through the three phases of the archetypal journey, and gains spiritual maturity.

As these archetypal heroes gain selfhood, so Rachel Vinrace progresses from innocence and lack of self-knowledge into spiritual integrity. She, too, passes through the separation and initiation phases before achieving the return.

At the beginning of the novel, she is an amorphous figure--young and unformed. The sea voyage comprises the first phase of her journey as it physically separates her from the familiar turf of England, and it allows her the opportunity to separate emotionally from the two aunts who have deterred her development. Additionally, Richard Dalloway's kiss contributes significantly to her separation from ignorance about sex.

After extricating herself from her past, Rachel begins the second phase of her journey--the initiation--in which the development of her personality is inaugurated. The initiation rites, which contribute to the formation of a well-defined self, include the picnic, the dance, the church service, and the river trip into the jungle. Each of these events causes her to confront various facets of herself, resulting in self-doubt, self-probing, and finally self-growth. Her initiation also involves moments of vision in which her awareness and insight are heightened. Thus, both interaction with people and solitude are essential to her initiation.

The final phase of Rachel's journey involves her return or rebirth. Although Rachel is unable to maintain a continuing relationship with another individual, she achieves communion in the metaphysical sense by a transcendence to

otherworld. Her death allows her to exceed the bounds of humanity and become one with all that is outside her.

Thus, Rachel has traversed the three stages of the archetypal journey. She is now where Woolf wants her: at one with the universe. Seeing The Voyage Out through the lens of the archetypal journey clarifies the meaning of the novel and brings it into focus. It is no longer "vague," as some critics have described it, but it achieves depth and clarity when elucidated by the journey pattern. Guiguet sees the theme of the novel as Rachel's question "What is love? What is life?" and notes that "Rachel is . . . the living embodiment of the question, who assimilates the various answers that chance offers her, in the form of denial or acceptance, to extract or elaborate therefrom her own substance."<sup>1</sup> Through the process of the journey Rachel does indeed extract her own substance from the events and people she encounters. Moreover, her acceptance of death loses the sense of absurdity and acquires meaning when seen as the culmination of her journey. Jill Morris' discussion of Woolf's attitude toward death might well apply to Rachel's transcendence to otherworld:

. . . in death, unity with the universal order . . . [is] permanent. By choosing to

<sup>1</sup> Jean Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), p. 201.

identify with a fixed reality that would not change, she . . . [is] able to feel herself part of everlasting life, or immortality. The belongingness she thus establish[es] [is] something much more permanent than society or earthly life had to offer. And when she took her own life, merging with the unceasing river, she secured an eternal bond between herself and reality.<sup>2</sup>

After passing through the phases of the journey, Rachel realizes her preference for death. By developing the theme of the archetypal journey Woolf makes the death wish logical and reasonable. Thus, perceiving the novel as an archetypal journey increases its interest, significance, and meaning. The journey pattern is also evident in some of Woolf's later novels, including Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and Orlando; hence, The Voyage Out indeed anticipates the later works. Discerning the archetypal pattern in the novel validates The Voyage Out as a successful beginning to an important literary career for Virginia Woolf.

<sup>2</sup> Jill Morris, Time and Timelessness in Virginia Woolf (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1977), p. 16.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Jean. The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1974.
- Bazin, Nancy Topping. Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1973.
- . "Virginia Woolf's Quest for Equilibrium." Modern Language Quarterly, 32 (1971), 305-19.
- Baja, Morris. Epiphany in the Modern Novel. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1971.
- Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf: A Biography. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.
- Bennett, Joan. Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945.
- Blackstone, Bernard. "Virginia Woolf." British Writers and Their Work. No. 3. Ed. J. W. Robinson. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Brewster, Dorothy. Virginia Woolf. New York: The Univ. Press, 1962.
- Brown, Carol O. "The Art of the Novel: Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out." Virginia Woolf Quarterly, 3 (1977), 67-84.
- Chambers, R. L. The Novels of Virginia Woolf. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1947.
- Daiches, David. The Novel and the Modern World. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960.
- . Virginia Woolf. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions Books, 1942.
- Fleishman, Avrom. Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975.



- Forster, E. M. "Virginia Woolf." In Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Claire Sprague. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971, pp. 14-25.
- Guerin, Wilfred L., and Earl G. Labor, Lee Morgan, John R. Willingham. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature. New York and London: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Guiguet, Jean. Virginia Woolf and Her Works. Trans. Jean Stewart. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965.
- Hafley, James. The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.
- Hardwick, Elizabeth. Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Holtby, Winifred. Virginia Woolf. London: Wishart and Company, 1932.
- Johnstone, J. K. The Bloomsbury Group. New York: Noonday Press, 1954.
- Kelley, Alice van Buren. The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Leaska, Mitchell. The Novels of Virginia Woolf from Beginning to End. New York: The John Jay Press, 1977.
- ". "Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out: Character Deduction and the Function of Ambiguity." Virginia Woolf Quarterly, 1 (1973), 18-41.
- Lee, Hermione. The Novels of Virginia Woolf. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977.
- Lehmann, John. Virginia Woolf and Her World. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
- Love, Jean O. Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977.
- ". Worlds in Consciousness: Mythopoetic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970.
- Marder, Herbert. Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf. Chicago: The Univ. Press, 1968.

- McLaurin, Allen. Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved.  
Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1973.
- Morris, Jill. Time and Timelessness in Virginia Woolf.  
Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1977.
- Naremore, James. The World Without A Self: Virginia Woolf  
and the Novel. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973.
- Neill, Diana S. A Short History of the English Novel. New  
York: Collier Books, 1964.
- Nicolson, Nigel, ed. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. 1.  
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
- Noble, Joan Russell, ed. Recollections of Virginia Woolf.  
New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972.
- Novak, Jane. The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study of Virginia  
Woolf. Coral Gables, Florida: Univ. of Miami Press,  
1975.
- Poole, Roger. The Unknown Virginia Woolf. Cambridge: The  
Univ. Press, 1978.
- Richter, Harvena. Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage.  
Princeton: The Univ. Press, 1970.
- Rose, Phyllis. Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf.  
New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978.
- Schaefer, Josephine O'Brien. The Three-Fold Nature of  
Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf. London:  
Morton and Co., 1965.
- Spater, George, and Ian Parsons. A Marriage of True Minds:  
An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf.  
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.
- Thakur, N. C. The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf. London:  
Oxford Univ. Press, 1965.
- Walker, Cynthia. "Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out: A Pre-  
lude of Images." Virginia Woolf Quarterly, 3 (1978),  
222-29.
- Wilder, Thornton. "The Matchmaker," in Three Plays. New  
York: Avon Books, 1976.

Woolf, Leonard. Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1963.

Woolf, Virginia. The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Ed. Anne Oliver Bell. Vol. 1. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

----- . The Voyage Out. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1920.