

Silencing the Politics of Literature in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*

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In an early episode of Virginia Woolf's ([1915] 1920, 57) *The Voyage Out*,¹ Rachel Vinrace retreats from Helen Ambrose and Clarissa Dalloway because these “prosperous matrons” have made Rachel feel “outside their world and motherless,” and

1. While Woolf first published *The Voyage Out* in 1915, she also revised the novel for an American edition in 1920. In many ways these two versions are, as Mark Hussey (1995, 332) observes, “considerably different.” The majority of the revisions between the English and the US editions are in chapter 16, and Louise DeSalvo (1980, 113) argues that, apart from biographical material, Woolf mainly excised details about Rachel and Terence that gave “the only glimpse provided of the kind of life they might have shared had Rachel lived.” For an introductory account of the versions and revisions of the novel, see Hussey's (1995, 332–35) entry on *The Voyage Out* in *Virginia Woolf A to Z*. DeSalvo's *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage* (1980) and “Sorting, Sequencing, and Dating the Drafts of Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*” (1979) and Elizabeth Heine's “The Earlier *Voyage Out*: Virginia Woolf's First Novel” (1979) provide more complete accounts. DeSalvo tends to give biographical and psychological reasons for the differences between the two novels, and her conclusions are therefore often speculative.

I use the US edition of *The Voyage Out*, adopted by Harcourt, despite Heine's (1990, 446) precept: “Even when a change in the editions published after 1915 is known to have been made by Virginia Woolf, it is rejected unless it clarifies the sentence structure of the 1915 text.” Heine's argument is published in Hogarth's (English) reprint (which adopts the 1915 text), and it thus seems arbitrary unless intended to refer only to the editorial decisions behind her particular edition. The novel is in fact a fluid text, and because Woolf approved both editions, each must be interpreted in its own right. In particular, I have chosen to follow the 1920 US edition (Harcourt) primarily because it contains deletions of the names of authors Rachel reads throughout the voyage, effectively offering, as Beverly Ann Schlack (1979, 322) says, “a Rachel Vinrace shorn of any wisdom or knowledge derived from reading Browne, Keats, Nietzsche, Thomas à Kempis, Whitman, and Samuel Butler, among others.” More is thus left *unsaid*, as Terence describes his novel *Silence*. Woolf's US edition furthermore depicts Rachel as more of an ingenue to literature and therefore less resistant to the violence it creates at the hands of others. This edition reveals, as Patricia Klindienst Joplin (1981, 2–3) says, that *The Voyage Out* is “a book about books, a book about education, and the ways fiction shapes life,” albeit in such a way that “points at” but does not directly “name” the truth about which she writes (Woolf 1948, 49)—an aspect of her fiction that is important for the last step in my argument.

she consequently returns to her room in the *Euphrosyne* and becomes absorbed in a “Bach fugue.” Rachel’s flight from the encounter with Helen and Clarissa—an experience of being dissociated from the world of her fellow travelers—is in many ways emblematic of her tragic voyage. Yet the fugue that concludes her journey to the South American colony of Santa Marina is not a musical composition;² instead, Rachel’s voyage provokes the fugue of her identity, the subversion of her sense of self. Dissociative fugues—that is, the psychological disorder provoked by a flight from a familiar environment resulting in the loss of one’s identity (VandenBos 2007, 291)—became prominent psychiatric diagnoses after the turn of the century, apparently originating in France in 1887 (Hacking 1996, 33). Indeed, Ian Hacking argues that the rise of the diagnosis represents “an extreme example of a modern malady” and that it became an obsession among modern publics (32).³ The idea of a psychological flight from one’s identity in tandem with an environmental change appears in the Anglophone world as early as Caroline Rollin Corson’s 1901 translation of Pierre Janet’s *The Mental State of Hystericals* (where she translates *fugues* quite literally as “flights”). The *Oxford*

2. The place of the musical fugue in *The Voyage Out*, while being another deep mine worth tapping, lies beyond the scope of the present argument. In fact, there is a growing body of scholarship concerned with the influence of music on Woolf’s fiction: for example, Jane Marcus’s (1984) work on insanity and music; Elicia Clements’s (2005) excellent article on *The Waves*, which invokes fugal form; and most pertinent to *The Voyage Out*, the intriguing essay “‘Putting Words on the Backs of Rhythm’” by Emma Sutton (2010), in addition to her earlier argument regarding the relationship between music and Woolf’s writing process (Sutton 2009). Furthermore, Sutton (2011) has also recently (and convincingly) demonstrated a connection between “hysterical fugues” (following the common medical descriptions in England during the 1920s) and Woolf’s representation of shell shock in *Mrs. Dalloway*, offering the provocative thesis that the novel itself takes on a “fugal form” (i.e., in the musical sense). She thus establishes a connection between the “Bach fugues” that preoccupy Mrs. Dalloway, the hysteria of Septimus Smith, and the form of the novel. However, neither my initial discussion of Rachel’s “Bach fugue” nor the remainder of this essay is able to interact with this body of criticism on music. Music, as it will become clear in the third section of this essay, is analyzed solely for its ability to embody artistic “moments of being.” Of course, such moments also become manifest in Woolf’s later works through other artistic mediums (e.g., aesthetic arrangements of space in *Mrs. Dalloway* or Lily Briscoe’s painting). My argument, I think, supports the criticism of Marcus, Clements, and Sutton and thus contributes to the complex role of “fugue” in its various iterations in Woolf’s corpus. Nonetheless, the dissociative disorder and not music is the focus and primary referent for the term in this essay.

3. The early twentieth-century obsession with fugues—or what was alternatively known as “ambulatory automatism”—is evident, for example, in the popular book *From India to the Planet Mars* (Flournoy 1900), which chronicles the visions of the medium Hélène Smith. Smith had visions of visits to foreign places and, most interestingly, other planets. Later psychologists described Smith’s flights as a version of the fugue disorder. Hacking (1996, 33) also notes that military doctors drew from the discussions of a 1909 psychiatric conference in Nantes, France, to pardon deserters during wartime as *fugueurs* (literally, flyers, or those who flee). In fact, William James also explored symptoms akin to psychological fugues in his 1896 Lowell lectures (35).

English Dictionary further notes that a psychological “fugue” and a “fugue state” were concepts available to the English-speaking world as early as 1910. Rachel’s malady thus draws on a burgeoning cultural obsession, and in this essay I argue that her death is connected to this form of identity displacement. Yet Woolf ultimately employs her protagonist’s fugue and tragic death as a vehicle for a more comprehensive subversion; that is, the novel offers a subtle but incisive critique of the cultural underpinnings of British society, finally silencing the manner in which this cultural system envisions and exploits literary texts as commodities of power.

Rachel’s crisis occurs as a result of the realization that her modern, affluent life—and her “fanatic” love for music in particular (Woolf [1915] 1920, 34)—depends upon horrific imperial, social, and economic structures. This interconnected mode of existence, she discovers, manipulates the cultural realm for its acquisitive interests. Cultural products are consequently not neutral or disinterested objects among Vinrace’s fellow travelers. In particular, many characters produce and manipulate literary canons for the sake of their imperial, gendered, and economic interests through their society’s cultural resources. I thus begin by noting how literature becomes a resource for power that functions both as a social rite and as the grounds for ideological authority. Next, I demonstrate that Rachel’s introduction into this modern social system is thwarted as she discovers what will be described as the “tragedy” of modern existence. Such an encounter occurs not only with Rachel’s dissociative fugue but also as literature itself is displaced and subverted by being transported into colonial space. Despite this dire view of modern society and the place of literature in it, Woolf’s subversive project in her first novel disrupts her readers’ expectations and then posits an alternative. I conclude by arguing that Woolf confronts the view of literature as a commodity of power with her opposing belief in the mystical and metaphysical possibilities of literary moments. Her alternative understanding grapples with the plurality and contingency of human existence through artistic moments of being, which I demonstrate are nonlogical encounters with a transcendent real that grounds quotidian life.

Throughout Rachel’s voyage, Woolf presents subtle parallels to empire and patriarchy in the way the travelers imagine literary canons and manipulate these texts as cultural commodities. By literary canons I do not necessarily mean static, publicly acknowledged lists of books and poems (although Miss Allan’s *Primer* suggests such an identifiable body of texts). Instead, I mean those writers, nar-

ratives, and literary texts that Woolf's characters understand as generally representative of their intellectual, cultural, and national ideals. Such canons are manipulated in the sense that they support enactments of social privilege and are used to exercise power over others, thus becoming cultural objects that function as potential resources for negotiating power (hence, following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, I refer to them as cultural "capital" and objectified "commodities"). Admittedly, most cases of appreciating and interpreting literature have undertones of power and violence simply because no interpretive act is passive or disinterested. Yet the kind of manipulation that Woolf explores in *The Voyage Out* refers to the ways literature buttresses oppressive and exploitative frameworks, particularly patriarchy and empire. It is this complicated interweaving of texts and power that makes Woolf's own literary project so subtle, but also this interrelationship is what makes Rachel's voyage so tragically modern.

Culture, Power, and Literature

The manner in which Woolf interrogates the co-optation of literature by structures of power is well known among scholars.⁴ Bourdieu (1986, 243–45), for example, has made the argument that beginning in the nineteenth century literary texts function as "cultural capital" that buttresses the interests of social elites in "embodied" forms—that is, through cultural privileges and social rites to power (see also Bourdieu 1996a, 214–23). In *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu (1996b, 294) likewise argues that the powerful gain recognition and "consecration" through the symbolic capital of education, such as the *Bildung* (education) acquired at the grande écoles of France or Oxford University. Bourdieu (2001, 69–79) applies this kind of rhetoric regarding the underpinnings of power to his analysis of Woolf's (1927) *To the Lighthouse*, observing that Mr. Ramsay's *libido academica* is supported by a set of symbolic games of domination that ultimately preclude women from participation (Bourdieu 2001, 74–75). This same rhetoric applies to Woolf's characters in *The Voyage Out*, I argue, for they are not merely aware of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shakespeare, and Sophocles. Their conversations are in

4. Feminist and postcolonial theorists have noted for decades that literature itself often supports the domination of the "other." Apart from Jed Esty (2007), Christine Froula (1986), Shirley Neumann (1983), Kathy J. Phillips (1994), and Mark A. Wollaeger (2001, 2003), whose respective works are discussed later in this essay, other scholars who have recently contributed to the large body of scholarship on Woolf's treatment of the power politics of literature include Judith Allen (2010), Naomi Black (2004), Melba Cuddy-Keane (2003), and Anne E. Fernald (2006).

fact obsessed with a whole gamut of literary subjects, both classical and modern. For example, immediately following the Bach fugue, Woolf introduces the dominant relationship of her characters to literature. Clarissa Dalloway, motivated by her “interest” in Rachel (59), interrupts the young girl’s piano playing and begins to criticize the books lying in her room. The two characters, whose interactions later haunt the younger woman, begin to discuss *Cowper’s Letters*.⁵ Clarissa says William Cowper “wrote awfully well,” at least if the reader “like[s] that kind of thing—finished his sentences and all that” (57). Yet the greater disagreement comes when Rachel and Clarissa differ on the Brontës and Jane Austen. Mrs. Dalloway intends to find favor with her younger counterpart, and so she states that she “cannot live” without these authors, especially Austen (58). Rachel demurs, and her opinion surprises Clarissa, who wryly responds: “You monster! . . . I can only just forgive you. Tell me why?” (59). Significantly, Clarissa’s response is not innocuous banter, for she demonstrates the manner in which literature may become an item within a cultural marketplace—a space in which agents compete to manipulate and define their culture.

Clarissa’s manipulative use of literary texts becomes evident as the conversation continues. Rachel answers her by proposing, “She’s so—so—well, so like a tight plait” (58). Vinrace’s estimation of Austen’s work is admittedly a sweeping generalization of a profound author. Yet Mrs. Dalloway, an opinionated member of the upper class, quickly dismisses Rachel’s evaluation and then ridicules her (supposed) romantic sympathies: Rachel prefers Shelley’s *Adonais* (1821), which, in Dalloway’s reading, becomes at first “divine” but then ultimately “nonsense” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 58–59). By conceptualizing Shelley’s and Austen’s works in this way, Clarissa commodifies them within a type of cultural economy, a realm where society manages, produces, and consumes its own culture. Yet Clarissa also creates her own literary canon—that is, Austen is a requisite author within the category “literature”—to differentiate between legitimate (“necessary”) and illegitimate (“nonsense”) social norms. Clarissa’s relegation of Shelley’s poem to the realm of the absurd thus evinces the subtle manner in which she uses literature as a medium of power to create and arrange the cultural arena.

5. Rachel is most likely reading an early collection of the English poet’s correspondence, which William Benham edited in 1884. In terms of this selection’s relevancy to *The Voyage Out*, it is not insignificant that William Cowper had recurring periods of insanity, religious doubts, manic depression, and several attempted suicides. That Vinrace is reading Cowper may ominously foreshadow her own psychological disorientation and identity confusion.

Clarissa later gives Rachel a copy of *Persuasion* (Austen 1818), telling her husband that she hopes this book will ingratiate “our beloved Jane” to the young woman (Woolf [1915] 1920, 62). Clarissa’s selection of this particular novel is itself ironic, for in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot falls in love with Frederick Wentworth, a young officer in Britain’s navy, but decides not to marry him based on the advice of Lady Russell, among others, because Wentworth is poor and without social means. This advice later turns out to be severely mistaken, because Wentworth becomes a famous captain and gains vast wealth through his many victories in the Royal Navy. Anne Elliot realizes that she should have disregarded the materialist advice of Lady Russell and married Captain Wentworth. The obvious irony of *Persuasion* is that Anne, at least according to the values of Lady Russell and the novel’s other elites (which are by no means coterminous with Anne’s convictions in the end), has missed the opportunity to become the wife of a wealthy seafarer who builds the British Empire.⁶ Clarissa’s selection of *Persuasion* thus represents a narrative of ideals that she, like Lady Russell’s advice to Anne Elliot, forces upon Rachel in an effort to determine her destiny. The highest achievement of such a narrative involves marriage and perhaps even union with an imperial figure (in the person of Wentworth), even as Clarissa herself supports Richard’s service to the empire through her social and domestic roles. Clarissa attempts to manage not only Rachel’s destiny through *Persuasion* but also the cultural economy, vying for the value of “resources” that support her (and her husband’s) sociocultural ideals.

The objectification of Austen becomes even more insidious when Richard enters the discussion and agrees with his wife’s choice, remarking that Austen is “the greatest female writer we possess” (62). His role in this exchange is significant, because Rachel later calls Richard a “huge imposture,” an oppressive object stifling her life and “blocking up the passage” like Mrs. Paley (258). Richard also believes that Austen’s greatness is due to the fact that “she does not attempt to write like a man” (62), as if there were discrete essences between *men* and

6. Again, it would be mistaken to suggest that Anne Elliot marries Wentworth because of his money. Nonetheless, the domestic and societal values of the elite are not so easily repudiated in Austen’s work—the lines are not so clearly drawn. Edward Said’s (1993, 80–96) famous analysis of Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, for example, demonstrates the shared system of domestic and foreign values that the novel endorses. My analysis of Austen does not emphasize the degree to which she is complicit with oppressive social structures, despite her protagonist’s shame at being persuaded by them and subsequent rejection of those values. Instead, my concern is the extent to which texts become objects in economies of power.

women. Richard Dalloway's role in the novel further taints his assessment of Austen, for he conspicuously appropriates literary texts for his gendered biases. Richard soon reveals that Austen's "greatness" is ironically insufficient—an evaluative judgment that evinces his patriarchal ideology.⁷ Richard's praise for the author as a decisively "woman" voice—and thus what he assumes to be the depiction of a woman's world—fails to sustain his admiration when faced with the exigencies of his political career. Clarissa chides her husband, because "Jane . . . always sends you to sleep!" Richard dismisses his wife's lighthearted rebuke, but he also tacitly assumes that a divide exists between the experience of "woman" (epitomized in Austen) and "the labours of legislation," the halls of "empires," men, and the "guns" of the "real world" (ibid.). Richard, through the creation of a literary caricature and the manipulative denigration of his own construction, asserts the gendered interests of his view of the world. "Jane Austen"—that is, the author as Richard's cultural emblem—undergirds the disparity between men and women in his societal ideals, thus representing, as Rachel says, the domestic values typified in a "tight plait."

Other characters also use literary canons as markers of education and social distinction. Bourdieu (1990, 68) notes that such cultural rites of passage are required of societal debutants and new entrants into a field of practice in order to discern their compliance with a group's "fundamental presuppositions." For example, Rachel, at St. John's behest, reads one of Edward Gibbon's histories, which she initially finds full of "glory" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 201). Vinrace later tires of Gibbon's style, however, because it "goes round, round, round, like a roll of oil-cloth," and Hirst overhears her exasperation. After expressing his own contrary opinion, St. John exclaims, "I give you up in despair," and Rachel then believes "that her value as a human being was lessened because she did not happen to admire the style of Gibbon" (201). Literature in this episode, whether Hirst intends it to or not, becomes a means for demonstrating his intellectual prowess, for establishing societal borders. The "other," whose alterity is often based in gender, class, race, or national difference, is defined here simply through

7. I recognize that the term *ideology* is often vacuous, indicating tritely the beliefs that do not agree with the wielder of the label. I also understand the Marxist heritage of this term and that, until Louis Althusser, *ideology* referred primarily to the system of knowledge undergirding capitalism and bourgeois culture (i.e., Marxist thought was not ideological). Therefore, I circumspectly use the term to designate those power interests that create cultural and social structures for their own acquisitive ends—an expansive definition allowing that anything may function ideologically.

alternative literary impressions. Because St. John represents the acme of English culture—"One of the three, or is it five, most distinguished men in England," as Hewet says (144)—his condemnation authoritatively silences Rachel's difference, categorizing her among the "obsolete" (201). Hirst tacitly marks Rachel's alterity, locating her within his stratified view of society. Her difference becomes in a simple, interpersonal sense an occasion for imposing the ascendancy of the "right" cultural preferences.

The examples of the Dalloways and Hirst are central cases of the cultural commodification of literary texts in *The Voyage Out*. In effect, these characters seize upon Austen and Gibbon and fashion them into what Sean Latham (2003, 12), following Bourdieu, calls "cultural capital" at the service of gaining access to larger "social capital," viewing such canonized works as goods within a "commodified cultural marketplace" (63). The "capital" of literary canons—that is, persuasive opinions about Gibbon or Alexander Pope—become elements of influence within an underlying power system. One's "value as a human being" depends upon competition with this capital: insofar as individuals endorse the right authors or argue persuasively, they will not become "obsolete" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 201). Authors and their works may or may not support the system of evaluative judgments undergirding this power structure, but the social system itself depends upon this cultural capital in the sense that it uses literature to mark education (and thus power), provide material for gender constructions, or become a good that is marketed within the economic arena. Indeed, Ridley Ambrose's scholarly vocation is another remarkable example, for his position endows him with the institutionalized authority of the university, the bastion of Britain's intellectual and cultural life. This status is by no means innocuous, for as Helen's casual reflections reveal, there is a connection between Ridley and the imperial Willoughby. The vocations of the two men emerge in her mind not as distinct enterprises but subtly related in their mutual concern for producing Britain's goods. Helen reflects: "Ridley was a scholar, and Willoughby was a man of business. Ridley was bringing out the third volume of Pindar when Willoughby was launching his first ship. They built a new factory the very year the commentary on Aristotle—was it?—appeared at the University Press" (24–25). Helen senses a parallelism between the two men that only becomes explicit through the emerging association between literature and power. Her inchoate recognition of their shared task reveals not only that their vocations support national interests but also that a connection exists between the cultural and the imperial realms.

The connection between the vocations of Willoughby and Ridley is more concretely seen as the former exports more than goats for the sake of empire: his ships also bear Ambrose's books. Both economic goods and literary texts are borne by the ships of empire. Furthermore, the *Euphrosyne* imitates not only the interdependence of the cultural and the imperial realms but also the social stratifications of British society. For example, Mrs. Chailey, whose physical appearance shows "that she belonged to the lower orders" (28), laments "where [she] sit[s]" (29), her small room "near the boiler" on the *Euphrosyne*, which offers an ironic metaphor for her situation in life. She later helps Helen organize Ridley's books in the Ambroses' spacious and fully furnished room (30–31). The disparity between the two spaces is striking, and the fact that Ridley owns so many books and "know[s] his ABC," as Helen says, ironically justifies the couple's need for a larger and more amiable space (31). It thus becomes clear that, for travelers such as the Ambroses, the Dalloways, and St. John Hirst, literature is interdependent with a mercantile, classed, and imperial world.

Subverting the Politics of Literature

These subtle but persuasive evocations of the place of literature on the *Euphrosyne* suggest that, for Woolf, education and indeed culture itself become in modern societies mediums of violence, structuring the public realm in oppressive ways that may even be antithetical to the arguments of the texts themselves. Woolf protests her society's use of literary texts, however, through Rachel's progressive journey into the heart of darkness,⁸ the margins of her society's empire. Apart from exposing these economies of power, Woolf challenges such a view of literature by subverting its very conventions, as many commentators have recognized regarding *The Voyage Out* and the genre of the bildungsroman. Susan Stanford Friedman (1996, 109, 123), for example, has noted that the novel "narrates a failed *Bildung* for its protagonist and inscribes a successful *Bildung* for its author" through the "vertical narrative" of intertextual challenges to literary and cultural conventions. Mark A. Wollaeger (2001, 51–54) has also recognized that

8. Several authors, including Hermione Lee (1996) and Alex Zwerdling (1986), have compared *The Voyage Out* to Joseph Conrad's ([1903] 2007) *Heart of Darkness*. For more on Woolf and Conrad, see especially Neumann's (1983) "*Heart of Darkness*, Virginia Woolf, and the Spectre of Domination" and Marianne DeKoven's (1991) chapter "The Vaginal Passage: *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out*," both of which argue in different ways that Woolf attempts to chart her own path beyond Conrad's novel.

the novel evokes the conventions of the bildungsroman genre, while Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985, 47–53) argues that Rachel's death embodies Woolf's efforts to "write beyond the ending" of the marriage plot, which amounts to the disruption of a critical rite of passage into British society.

Similar to these other analyses, Jed Esty (2007) reads *The Voyage Out* as a disruption of the conventions of the bildungsroman, yet his postcolonial lens reveals a critical component of Rachel's voyage in relation to Woolf's larger project regarding literature (and thus his essay is especially relevant to the present argument). Esty (72) argues that the transportation of the novel's setting from England to Santa Marina allows Woolf to expose a "deep-structural link between the fiction of adolescence and the politics of colonialism—between, that is, modernist aesthetics and modern colonialism" (72). Vestiges of England's colonial efforts in South America (not to mention its Spanish occupiers) are constant reminders of an imposed order, a refusal by modernized nations to allow its colonies to develop. Woolf challenges this imperial system, however, by frustrating Rachel's own development into a modern "human being" (Esty 2007, 73), thus ironically identifying her with the colony that facilitates her voyage into (putative) autonomy. As a result, readers of nineteenth-century bildungsroman would expect Rachel's trajectory to be a successful maturation and introduction to society. Yet unlike Jane Austen's characters, Rachel never attains social maturity, epitomized most commonly in the ceremony of marriage or even the progressive ideal of autonomy (compare DuPlessis 1985). Woolf's novel is therefore "anti-developmental fiction" in the sense that it interrogates patriarchy and empire as they create a "horrifying stasis, the permanent absence of a special developmental destiny" not only in its representation of the South American colony but also in that of its young protagonist (Esty 2007, 73, 84). As the literary and cultural expectations of Woolf's readers are subverted, literature as a formal category encounters an uncertainty analogous to what Rachel Vinrace experiences in the Santa Marina colony. Indeed, it seems that literature itself, when transported to foreign, colonial space, experiences a dissociative fugue. This unsettling of what constitutes the literary is analogous to Rachel's own burgeoning identity crisis, and by this identification Woolf offers a subtle protest against the intellectual framework supporting the structures of power in modern British society.⁹

9. Latham (2003) insists that the author retains her preferences for upper-middle-class refinement. His argument is essentially a genealogy of the conflict arising between the cultures of English

Friedman's, DuPlessis's, and Esty's analyses foreground significant components of Woolf's ingenious challenge to the political appropriation of literature, yet what *The Voyage Out* also uncovers through its interrogation and subversion of "literature" is that this modern cultural situation is ineluctably tragic. The tragedy of Rachel's voyage is circumscribed by a confrontation between liberal values and societal expectations regarding her identity, her role in the culture. This conflict is, in other words, a clash between worlds—or a revelation about the truth of her world. For example, Rachel discovers, "So that's why I can't walk alone!" when she begins to realize that "men are brutes" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 82). Her adolescence is characterized by the naivety of the "nineteenth century" (34), but as her voyage delves deeper into the "darkness" of the colony at Santa Marina, a modern world emerges along with an increasing dissonance that becomes unendurable.¹⁰ At first the confrontation that her modern education provokes is enlightening: Rachel begins to "be m-m-myself . . . in spite of [Helen], in spite of the Dalloways, and Mr. Pepper, and Father, and my Aunts" (84). She grows in confidence about her skills at the piano; she is becoming assimilated into upper-class liberal values regarding individual autonomy and self-creation. But Rachel's "nineteenth-century" adolescence clashes with her journey into modernity (34)—the enlightenment engendered by the values of modern society—and her failed voyage between adolescence and modern maturity is finally tragic.

What is "tragic" about Rachel's modern voyage becomes apparent as her music incites the confrontation between her two worlds or forms of education.

social classes. This genealogy is too involved to deal with in any exhaustive sense in the current context, although Latham's frequent cautions against dichotomizing Woolf's views into an elitist/democratically liberal binary is relevant. In particular, if Woolf evolves the category of "snob" into "our modern conception of the arch and sophisticated intellectual" (63) and then responds to this category in an ambivalent fashion, it is important to realize that Woolf's criticism of the class structures of society were at times tempered by her own prejudice that "the lower classes *are* detestable" (quoted in Latham 2003, 64). Latham's caution therefore allows us to approach without naïveté Woolf's challenge to the creation and manipulation of literary canons as materials that undergird the power structures of English society.

10. Of course, Woolf's exploration of the two sets of values is hardly a trite binary of Victorian/modern or nineteenth/twentieth century, tacitly evaluating each side as stifling/enlightening, respectively. An ancillary argument refuting such a simplistic view is in *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians*, where Steve Ellis (2007) demonstrates the unfounded nature of this reductionistic interpretation of Woolf. Ellis argues that Woolf's attitude toward her literary and social predecessors—the Victorians and other transitional figures, such as Henry James—is not dismissive. Woolf's work often "attempts to communicate with, retrieve and proclaim a heritage that should not override what has succeeded it . . . through a dovetailing, or partnership, between the best qualities of the old and the new" (8–9).

Although Rachel's "nineteenth-century" education is a product of the patriarchal structures of her father, Rachel is nonetheless able to become a musical "fanatic," whereas characters in later episodes dismiss her interest as puerile and relegate its importance to other activities (*ibid.*). The musical possibilities of this world are a product of what Christine Froula (1986, 65) describes as the "chrysalis pattern of initiation," which paradoxically provides women with a degree of skills, education, and leisure in order to confine them to the dwelling place. Rachel's crisis begins with a conflict between her "fanatic" art—for she believes that "music goes straight for things"—and her conviction that novels are evasive (Woolf [1915] 1920, 212). During the ball Rachel divulges to Hirst, "I also play the piano very well, . . . better, I expect, than any one in this room" (153). The ensuing scene suggests Rachel's growing self-confidence, but St. John expresses little concern for this disclosure, and instead he pursues another subject: "About books now. What have you read?" (154). Later, Evelyn similarly disparages Rachel for playing the piano, insisting: "We none of us do anything but play. And that's why women like Lillah Harrison, who's worth twenty of you and me, have to work themselves to the bone." Evelyn argues that music, along with other forms of art, are "play" and that they have nothing to do with "real things" (248). Such claims aim, as Helen says, to "prove how absurd most of [Rachel's] ideas about life are" (97). Whereas Rachel's music represents a burgeoning realm of individual creativity and even spontaneity, her fellow travelers advance a serious, organized, or socially mature mode of modern existence.¹¹

The conflict between Rachel's music and her *Bildung* into modern society suggests that, whether in the colonial margins or the metropolitan center, the modern project of self-creation—of becoming "m-m-myself . . . in spite of" others—ironically occurs within a tragic social double bind. Rachel's opportunity for self-creation, her identity's voyage out from "Father, and my Aunts," is not only conspicuously dependent upon others (and thus not an autonomous pursuit) but also a value materially supported by a social and global system of limited, exploitative opportunity. This situation is tragic in a sense similar to the

11. The "modern" quality of Rachel's *Bildung* raises the helpful reminder that such a designation does not refer to a monolithic entity. Richard's "modern" society, for example, is quite different from the "moderns" of Benjamin Franklin Wedekind (Woolf [1915] 1920, 67, 172). By Rachel's "modern" *Bildung*, therefore, I do not refer to the values of Woolf's modernism but to the complex series of social changes within mass culture, politics, religion, industry, and so on, at the turn of the twentieth century. There are, in other words, multiple modernities.

early aesthetic definition of tragedy advanced in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* by Friedrich Nietzsche ([1871] 1993), whom Rachel reads in an earlier draft of the novel (Schlack 1979, 322). That is, Rachel voyages not only to the heart of Santa Marina but also to *Weisheit*, to Nietzschean wisdom that reveals the unchangeable and nearly unendurable horror of reality. In Nietzsche's early inchoate view, the climax of a character's tragic confrontation with truth occurs as a result of the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian forces in drama. Although Woolf is not mechanically illustrating Nietzsche's argument, Rachel's failed *Bildung* embodies a clash between her identity—prone to the self-creation engendered by music—and the strictures of her culture, particularly the orderly decrees of Ridley Ambrose (Woolf [1915] 1920, 171), Helen's attempts to fashion her after the values of modern liberalism (207), and Hirst's intellectual dogmatism (201). These Apollonian-like forces—law and order—confront Rachel throughout her voyage,¹² and they soon reach a climax in the remote South American jungle during two unsettling, enigmatic encounters, which are obliquely connected to her death.

Before her death, Rachel unknowingly presages her tragic fate during a strained conversation with the other tourists and her father at the beginning of her voyage. Mr. Pepper, who “looked like the image of Buddha” (22)—strangely reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's ([1903] 2007, 7) Marlow, who “had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes”—discusses the future possibilities for the empire's exploration and expansion (Woolf [1915] 1920, 22). Willoughby Vinrace responds to Mr. Pepper's “surprise” that his fleet is not being sent to explore the “great white monsters” of these unknown regions, saying, “No, no, . . . the monsters of the earth are too many for me.” In an oblique aside, Rachel sighs, “Poor little goats,” and her father then responds, “If it weren't for the goats there'd be no music, my dear; music depends upon goats” (23).

This passage (albeit obliquely) connects Rachel's love for music with her father's work that “built his Empire” by intimating that her upper-middle-class privilege depends upon the capital interests of mercantile and imperial England

12. Nietzsche admittedly includes the “orderly” among the Apollonian impulses of art, and indeed Rachel exhibits both a fascination with romantic, emotional pieces (e.g., Beethoven) and an abiding fixation with ornate, baroque composers (e.g., Bach). Neither composer fits exclusively or simplistically within Nietzsche's binary, but the fact of Rachel's interest in a diverse range of musical sources further complements the tensions she experiences. (I would like to thank one of the anonymous readers of *Genre* for pointing out Rachel's diverse musical interests.)

(*ibid.*). Yet when set within the “tragedy” of Rachel’s voyage and death, the *goods* of her father’s commerce also become significant. In fact, Woolf foreshadows Rachel’s fate through an ingenious turn on the etymology of “tragedy” and Willoughby’s trade. The term *tragedy* developed (via Latin) from the Greek form *tragoidia*. As Dante Alighieri (1889, 395) explains in a letter to his patron, Can Grande, *tragoidia* derives from the combination of *tragos* (goat) with *oide* (song, ode).¹³ Woolf’s thorough knowledge of Greek language and literature charges this foreshadowing with significance (see Woolf 1948, 56), for Rachel’s own *oide* later comes into direct confrontation with the impersonal system that her father’s trade supports (Woolf [1915] 1920, 23). Indeed, Willoughby Vinrace is a global tradesman, concerned primarily with his own mercantile “empire,” but consequently he also depends upon Britain’s naval protection and participates in a complex financial system with the empire’s own global interests (*ibid.*). Rachel’s journey is thus an encounter with the horrors of modern existence—a revelation of devastating *Weisheit*—in the sense that her aesthetic culture (embodied in music) cannot be divorced from her nation’s expansive capitalism (embodied in her father’s “goats”). What becomes unbearable for Rachel is the realization that her music—and thus her cultural resources—materially depends upon the death of her father’s “poor little goats.”

The dissociative fugue of Rachel’s identity—her devastating glimpse into reality—becomes final through the process leading to her death. Some critics have argued that Rachel’s illness and demise is necessary for Woolf’s psychological maturation. Phyllis Rose (1978, 58), for example, views Rachel’s journey as a “fictionalized presentation of Virginia Woolf’s own ‘journey’ from Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury.” In this reading Rachel must die in order for Woolf to distinguish herself from her father’s world. Louise DeSalvo (1980, 153), drawing on the allusion to John Milton’s *Comus* (Woolf [1915] 1920, 326), similarly says, “[Rachel] can join those she loves only in death,” arguing later that her oppressive and abusive childhood required the destruction of an adolescent “self.” Froula

13. One common explanation for the etymology of *tragoidia* is that the combination arose during the cult sacrifices to Dionysus, in which the throat of a sacrificial goat was slit and the bleating cry was considered praise to the god. The wild and ecstatic rites associated with the Dionysian cult were believed to inspire creativity in music. Dante explains, however, that the etymology indicates that tragedies are *foetida et horribilis* (fetid and horrible). Either way, positing a precise use of this etymology to *The Voyage Out* would be purely speculative, although the allusion to this genre ought not to be dismissed outright because of Woolf’s penchant for including and subtly hiding allusions and layered meanings.

(1986, 85–88) likewise insists that Rachel's death enables the success of Woolf's later *Künstlerromane* (artistic novels), and she even refers to "Rachel/Woolf" (80). Despite the appeal of these readings, it is difficult to idealize Rachel as Woolf's exact proxy or sacrificial self, especially in light of her arrested development and increasing difficulty in gaining self-understanding (Woolf [1915] 1920, 281). Indeed, as Kathy J. Phillips (1994, 53) explains, *The Voyage Out* "subordinates personality to a range of historical and social determinants which Woolf believes shape individuals." Such psychological and biographical readings are at best partial explanations, but at worst they neglect the work's larger contexts by misconstruing the tragic force of the novel's central confrontation as Woolf's personal, psychological panacea.

Rachel's death is obliquely tied to the tourists' voyage to a remote village in the jungle. Instead of revealing some enlightening truth of her *Bildung*, the journey down the South American river disorients the tourists' system of knowledge along with their cultural commodities. "At one point," the narrator observes, "Hewet read part of a poem aloud, but the number of moving things entirely vanquished his words. He ceased to read, and no one spoke" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 267). The tourists not only find themselves out of place, but their journey in fact leads to disorientation, the result of an encounter with the colonized "other" in modernist works that, as Michael Valdez Moses (2007) demonstrates, generally follows the paradigmatic form of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Moses argues that in such disorienting encounters "the Western mind, far from subjugating the pliable native environment to the scientific and epistemological categories of its omnipotent and omniscient European intelligence, finds itself at a loss, overthrown, confused, panicked, frustrated, and turned back upon itself" (45). Indeed, Rachel becomes the primary recipient of this journey's disorienting effects, particularly as she embodies the disillusionment of the modern world through her colonial encounter. Vinrace's "nineteenth-century" identity cannot offer consolation because of its patriarchy, yet her insistence to become "m-m-myself" also leads her ineluctably on a voyage to *Weisheit*, to the true horrors of her modern life.

As a tourist in the empire, Rachel becomes privy to her party's performances of domination and objectification that occur within the colonized realm. For example, when the party emerges into a lush clearing on their river journey, Mr. Flushing idly says, "It almost reminds one of an English park" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 279)—a statement that oddly confuses the simulacra with their original, defining the jungle according to its English replication. Flushing's confusion,

incidentally, mirrors the narrator's depiction that the same clearing "suggested human care" (ibid.). Their failure to recognize the foreign space in its own right becomes even more redolent of the project of empire, however, as the tourists commodify the foreign country itself. Their souvenirs of necklaces and pottery and even the "experience" of the voyage enable them to possess the land in a touristic sense that is analogous to the way empires have possessed South America through economic and military ventures. Even Hirst, who dismisses Rachel because she has an "absurd life" and "just walked in a crocodile," (154), ironically encounters the unfamiliar world with "childlike excitement." St. John's encounter with the untamed land leads him to exclaim, "What an ass I was not to bring my Kodak!" (279). Hirst's immediate response, like that of the other tourists, reveals a desire to capture the jungle's image, to turn it into a cultural commodity for replication and ownership within his cultural system.

Rachel's encounter with the village reveals the facile and insufficient nature of her modern *Bildung*. Her journey up to this point has suggested the possibilities of her autonomy. Just before they reach the remote village, for example, Hewet says: "Oh, you're free, Rachel. To you, time will make no difference, or marriage or—" (281), but he is interrupted in his catena of social conventions that will not impinge on Rachel's liberty. Like Hewet's statement, the project of the autonomous liberal self is interrupted by an encounter with the colonized world. Not long after Hewet's unfinished proclamation of Rachel's freedom, the tourists leave the steamboat to walk in the jungle. During this scene, Rachel and Hewet confess almost simultaneously, "This is happiness," but then the language of the scene becomes oblique: "A hand dropped abrupt as iron on Rachel's shoulder," the narrator recalls, and she "fell beneath it, and the grass whipped across her eyes and filled her mouth and ears" (283). Gauging by the lack of a response from the other characters, this "abrupt" experience is not a literal depiction of Rachel fainting.¹⁴ Instead, the wildness of the world around her assaults her senses:

14. This enigmatic scene has engendered a diverse and fragmented range of responses from critics. Wollaeger (2003, 58), for example, argues that Helen tackles Rachel and stuffs grass into her mouth after finding out that she and Terence are engaged (see also Friedman 1996, 128–31). Such an interpretation regarding this particular scene depends in large part on changes between the final form of *The Voyage Out*, earlier drafts, and *Melymbrosia* (Woolf 1982). Yet despite the fact that Wollaeger (2003, 59) initially interprets this scene literally, he then reads the vision of "two great heads" that "kissed in the air above her" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 283–84) metaphorically as a "narrative of heterosexual love that Helen and Terrence break over her like an egg." Friedman (1996, 129) likewise draws on Freud and Julia Kristeva in interpreting the scene, concluding, "This revision [between *Melymbrosia* and *The Voyage Out*] represents a progression that itself recapitulates

it disrupts her customary venues for perceiving and understanding the world. Rachel then has an absurdly distorted vision of Helen, and “she was speechless and almost without sense” (*ibid.*). While this scene manifests the symptoms of a psychological fugue—particularly because her vision is similar to an epileptic seizure (“it might have been a bolt of heaven”) and entails memory loss (“for the moment she could not remember who they were”)—they function symbolically for her disorientation with the world (284).¹⁵ The oblique encounter in the jungle thus manifests early symptoms of her dissociative illness, the devastating fugue incited by a colonial encounter in the village.

Immediately after Rachel’s disoriented vision of the world, Mr. Flushing leads the tourists through the forest. The narrator, emulating the groups’ surprise, recounts, “And there, through the trees, strange wooden nests, drawn together in an arch where the trees drew apart, the village which was the goal of their journey.” While the group is able momentarily to observe native women undetected, they soon “were seen.” The narrator, either depicting Rachel’s consciousness or the tourists’ impressions, even says that one “lean majestic man” made “the shapes of [Mr. Flushing’s] body appear ugly and unnatural.” Whereas Flushing earlier compares the jungle to “an English park,” he ironically becomes “unnatural” when set in tandem with the reality of the “other.” This ironic inversion of the tourists’ values subverts their putative supremacy by depicting it as facile, as a system of “ugly” simulacra (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the women “took no notice of the strangers,” merely returning their stares and thus evoking the irony that the tourists’ “goal” is not reciprocated (285). Indeed, this “returned stare,” as Wollaeger (2001, 64–67) calls it, evokes a rebellious disinterest and rejection. Soon “the life of the village took no notice of them” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 285), and it becomes surprisingly evident that the women are barely concerned with Rachel, her society, and its cultural commodities and myths. Instead, this encounter makes both Rachel and Hewet “feel very cold and melancholy” (*ibid.*), as if their previously vibrant voyage has waned into ennui. Wollaeger (2003, 52–53, 50)

Rachel’s own terrifying transition into a heterosexual economy of desire ruled by the Law of the Father.” While both Wollaeger and Friedman make intriguing assertions from their biographical and literary-historical readings of this scene, the episode itself seems much more ambiguous and need not be read literally, especially since most interpretations rely on the nonliteral to make sense of this enigmatic exchange.

15. I would like to credit Richard R. Russell with the connection between Rachel’s “disorientation” and her vision of Hewet and Helen. I would also like to thank him for reading an early draft of this essay and for the significant feedback he provided.

argues that the disinterest of the villagers functions as a response to the “untamed native women” of Leonard Woolf’s ([1913] 2005) *The Village in the Jungle* as well as the “quintessentially modernists moments” of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Wollaeger (2003, 54) suggests not only that this scene refuses an illusory omniscient narration of the South American women (contra Leonard Woolf’s depiction of the native people of Ceylon) but also that this crucial scene enables Virginia Woolf to envision “the origins of her own modernism” (69). The net effect of this intertextuality with Leonard Woolf’s and Conrad’s works is that Virginia Woolf is able to distinguish herself from the literary projects of looming male figures, even as Rachel herself struggles toward autonomy and self-creation. The consequence of Rachel’s encounter in the village therefore is that her modern journey has itself lapsed into tedium when faced with the realities of a world outside the tourists’ system of values, and she is thereby becoming dislodged from the texts (both cultural and literary) that otherwise determine her.¹⁶

The group’s encounter at the village is a fundamental challenge to the cultural system underpinning Rachel’s *Bildung*. Not only is Rachel’s voyage into modern society unsettled when confronted with its facile irrelevance within the colonized margins, but also, as Esty (2007, 83–84) notes, the village forces her to recognize “that a vast and impersonal system, in which sex, gender, labor, and power are socially organized, will always impinge on her subjective and autonomous sense of self.” Indeed, the myth of Rachel’s autonomy, the values promoted in the cultural commodities of her modern *Bildung*, and even her music are interdependent with a mercantile and imperial system. The liberal values of the tourists’ cultural system paradoxically flourish alongside (and thus benefit from) the colonial venture. If the values of Rachel’s *Bildung* are insignificant and deeply contradictory when “exposed” to this land putatively enveloped in darkness (Woolf [1915] 1920, 285), then the dissonance between Rachel’s worlds—her “nineteenth-century” adolescence and modern self—likewise creates a subversive self-discovery. The social system underpinning her “self” appears facile, and her world becomes horrifically uninhabitable.

That Rachel has in fact experienced a tragic dissociative fugue becomes

16. If Wollaeger’s argument is correct, then Virginia Woolf, like Rachel, is also leveraged out of the texts that initially circumscribe her authorial identity and her version of modernism. It is noteworthy that Woolf’s revision of modernist (Conrad, Leonard Woolf) and premodernist (Gibbon, Austen) texts would further support my argument that her larger project in *The Voyage Out* is to undermine “literature” in its appropriated and oppressive forms.

evident as soon as the tourists return to their ship. Again, a “dissociative fugue” manifests “either confusion about personal identity or assumption of a new identity,” as such crises are precipitated by a flight to a new environment (VandenBos 2007, 291). This version of the fugue disorder is distinct from the *automatisme ambulatoire* (ambulatory automatism) later subsumed under the same broad diagnosis in the Anglophone world (Hacking 1996, 33–36). But the particular version that fits Rachel’s identity crisis—the dissociative fugue—entails the loss of memory in addition to the other symptoms mentioned above, and all of these unsettling signs follow Rachel’s encounter. She asks Hewet, for example: “Are we on the deck of a steamer on a river in South America? Am I Rachel, are you Terence?” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 289). The encounter has undermined her view of the world; reality is no longer tolerable, and her intellectual categories are disoriented. Indeed, Helen complains that the group has “exposed themselves” (286), and the scene closes with Hewet and Rachel enveloped in darkness and “scarcely any feeling of life” (289). The foundations of her induction into modern society have “exploded,” as Hewet later says of Rachel’s favorite nineteenth-century plays (292). The structures of power are exposed as mere constructions, and the tourists thus realize that they inhabit a culture built upon simulacra and manipulated commodities.

This encounter leads Rachel to believe that she has “advanced so far in the pursuit of wisdom,” which causes her to feel increasingly alienated from the world (*ibid.*). Rachel and Terence continue to vacillate on whether they wish to marry, but more importantly the sociocultural system undergirding their hopes of happiness is subverted by the disturbing glimpse of reality they briefly perceived in the jungle. For example, after they return to the tourist sanctuary, Hewet says to Rachel: “Only a thousand a year and perfect freedom. . . . How many people in London d’you think have that?” Rachel then responds in dismay: “And now you’ve spoiled it. . . . Now we’ve got to think of the horrors” (301). She cannot accept either of her former worlds, because “nineteenth-century” patriarchy inhibits her autonomy, while modern “horrors” have unsettled its own progressive social ideals. In fact, when the couple earlier declares their love for one another, Rachel elliptically murmurs, “Terrible—terrible” (271). Rachel’s enigmatic response refers not only to her dilemma with Terence but also to “the senseless and cruel churning of the water” (272). The prospect of marrying Terence—or at least the possibility of loving him—recalls something horrible about the world. Their relationship, she realizes, unavoidably exists alongside and among “terrible” realities.

Later, she begins to speak with “increasing vagueness” (302), and Rachel even imagines that “she was independent of [Terence]; she was independent of everything else” (315). This independence is not the realization of Rachel’s liberal self, however, because she contrasts her displaced identity with Arthur and Susan, who “seemed to be certain of themselves; they seemed to know exactly what they wanted” (324). This is the last depiction of Rachel’s consciousness before her headaches begin, and the implication is that Rachel’s self is dislodged from reality. She has in fact lost her identity in the confrontation between a “happy” life and an appalling horror of “real things” (324, 301).

When Rachel becomes physically ill, her unsettling vision of reality spreads throughout the tourists’ haven at Santa Marina. The movement of the blinds in her room, for example, becomes “terrifying,” and the floor is unstable, as if Rachel’s fugue has disrupted not only her vision of the village on the margins but also one of the empire’s inner sanctuaries within colonial space (328). Thus when Terence enters her room, Rachel, who is seemingly lost in an illusion, only sees “an old woman slicing a man’s head off with a knife” (339). She cannot distinguish between visions of violence and horror, whether in her dreams or underlying the material world. The terrible awareness gained during Rachel’s encounter in the jungle—the realization of her society’s paltriness and its imperial reaches—replaces both her naive and her modern worldviews. Indeed, her death becomes a modern tragedy in the Nietzschean sense: Rachel is bereft of all illusions regarding her world and culture, and she instead sees only the visions of *Weisheit*.

Rachel’s death finalizes the subversion of the political appropriation of literature, for it obviates the possibility for the ingenue to enter the modern world as a full citizen. Yet while Esty (2007, 83) calls Rachel’s death a “Pyrrhic victory,” it is unclear what “marginalized values” she represents. Indeed, Helen calls her “vague” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 207), and Hewet feels as if a “barrier” lies between them (280). Rachel’s death therefore must be the final disorientation of her *Bildung* along with its modern liberal values, thereby thwarting the system of power and cultural capital that undergirds her society. Therefore, only as a citizen of empire, who ironically and tragically becomes its victim, does she represent the marginal. If there is “victory,” in other words, it is deeply ironic: Rachel, the emblematic modern youth, gains Nietzschean *Weisheit*, and this wisdom yields true understanding of the kind of society into which Rachel is being inaugurated on her voyage. Thus, as Nietzsche ([1871] 1993, §7) says: “No solace will be of

any use from now on, longing passes over the world towards death, beyond the gods themselves. . . . Aware of truth from a single glimpse of it, all man can now see is the horror and absurdity of existence.” Rachel’s vision obviates the possibility of naive solace, and she instead passes into death as a result of her world’s horrors.

Rachel’s death thus culminates the undermining of the social system into which Willoughby, Helen, and others attempt to initiate her. Like the novels and poems quoted incessantly throughout the narrative, Rachel is an object to be manipulated and defined according to her fellow travelers’ values. Ironically, their belief in self-creation is embedded in their touristic desire to experience the world under the auspices of empire. In this way the modern value of self-creation becomes disturbingly possible only within a world of limited opportunity: the voyage to enlightenment is materially supported by economic and imperial exploitation, even as Rachel’s music requires the mercantile exchange of “poor little goats.” Thus, as Friedman (1996, 120) observes, “Rachel’s voyage out becomes a voyage in—into the heart of the ideological configurations of empire, gender, and class that her story both acts out and resists.” The tragic reality of her voyage becomes implicitly recognized as Rachel’s disorientation spreads among the other tourists. For example, Evelyn Murgatroyd, recalling the incipient stages of Rachel’s illness, asks: “What did matter then? What was the meaning of it all?” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 367; cf. 123). Miss Allan similarly concludes, not long after she announces the time of Rachel’s death, that she “did not want to go on living . . . did not [see] much point in it all” (356). These events suggest that the colonial encounter has confused and panicked the project of the voyage: the characters no longer find leisure, meaning, or self-understanding in their touristic and cultural frameworks.

The bewilderment of the tourists’ world becomes all the more final through the absence of direct literary allusions after Rachel’s death. This absence of direct allusions extends for twenty pages and two chapters in the 1920 US version. The conspicuous demise of literary banter, of cultural exchange regarding Pope, Shakespeare, and Shelley, is a silence that, like Terence’s novel, speaks vividly by the very fact of what “people don’t say” (216).¹⁷ The tourists’ cultural speechlessness suggests an “immense” demise that unsettles their lives together

17. While actual literary texts are not debated, there is a brief mention of an invented entertainment novel: “*Maternity*—by Michael Jessop” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 371). Yet this made-up book

(*ibid.*). Indeed, it appears that Rachel's death also achieves the death of "literature," the demise of the creation and manipulation of cultural commodities at the service of power. The tragic event and interrogation of the cultural politics even leaves Evelyn wondering: "What did matter then? What was the meaning of it all?" Her despairing questions are emblematic of the fact that, in Woolf's novel, the modern cultural system undergirding empire has been exposed and has encountered the subversion of its identity among the voyagers of the *Euphrosyne*. As a result of the failure of Rachel's introduction into this world, the political co-optation of literature is forcefully silenced.

Woolf's Literary "Moments"

Woolf undermines the ideological appropriation of literature, but this subversion raises the question of whether there are other possible conceptions of the art form. Can literature be something other than "capital" within economies of gendered, cultural, and imperial power? Woolf's apparent alternative in *The Voyage Out* is that the artistic moments in literature have profound mystical and metaphysical possibilities. Literary texts, Woolf suggests, enable the reader to transcend the plurality and contingency of human existence through artistic moments of being. Such a vision, as amorphous and inconclusive as it is, attempts to recover literature from those readers, critics, and elites whose political reach determines their artistic grasp.

Woolf's alternative is evident in one scene when Rachel plays the piano, enlivening a previously "prosaic" dance for her fellow voyagers (165). In contrast to the notion that "nothing in the world was so tedious as literature" (164), Rachel creates a moment of spontaneous and artistic transcendence to rise above the tedium. Her impromptu creativity comes after she reflects on the pictures of the sheet music, some of which feature "young women with their hair down point-

only serves to reinforce the silence of literature—indeed, it is not an actual text—and in no way functions as a resource for power. That is, as Mrs. Elliot suggests in a passive-aggressive remark, reading such novels amounts to "wasting . . . time." The tourists now hardly care to debate such a suggestion, much less Mrs. Elliot's subsequent declaration that "I don't think people *do* write good novels now" (*ibid.*). The rest of the tourists remarkably remain silent, neglecting to exchange opinions in the cultural marketplace. Furthermore, the uncontested assertion that no "good novels" are currently being produced reiterates the death of literature: either nothing of the literary caliber of Gibbon, Pope, or Shakespeare is being written, or such a debate is no longer worth undertaking "after all this illness" during the tourists' modern voyage (372).

ing a gun at the stars" (165). These images of defiance not only contrast with the "tight plait" embodied in Austen but also evoke longings for transcendence and the mystical possibilities of attaining it: "gondoliers astride the crescent of the moon, nuns peering through the bars of a convent window" (ibid.). Therefore, when Rachel begins to play the piano, the scene is already latent with expectations of beauty and stifled aspirations craving for momentary freedom. Rachel creates such a moment through her music, exhorting the dancers to "invent the steps" (166). Helen, Miss Allan, and even Mr. Pepper dance spontaneously, even recklessly. Many other dancers lose their inhibitions and abandon their pretensions. For some, "it was the most enjoyable part of the evening" (ibid.). Rachel's music unites them in a great round dance, swinging until finally the chain "gave way" and the members scatter (167). Their moment of rising above their concerns about what is "becoming," as Evelyn soon remembers, is forgotten through the possibilities of Rachel's art.

Even when most of the dancers retire, Rachel continues playing to herself. The remaining members of the dance congregate around the piano and briefly find rest. As Rachel plays, the dancers "sat very still as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. Then they began to see themselves and their lives, and the whole of human life advancing very nobly under the direction of the music. They felt themselves ennobled, and when Rachel stopped playing they desired nothing but sleep" (ibid.). The congregants enter into something akin to prayer and receive a revelation not of *Weisheit* but of life "ennobled" by art. They perceive how "the whole of human life" may ascend to beautiful heights when directed by the creative and mystical powers of music, whereas their experiences under empire are decidedly "ignoble" and make them "feel very cold and melancholy" (134, 285). Thus Rachel's music suggests that, for Woolf, art may also create moments of transcendence above the power interests and the suffocating strictures of the modern world.

What Woolf (1948, 185, 190) envisions in the possibilities of art is also expressed in her essay "Modern Fiction," where she famously calls John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells "materialists" in contrast to the "spiritual" concerns of James Joyce. Woolf's "imaginative labor" paradoxically employs the same material of reality as the Edwardians (Zwerdling 1986, 18), for she asserts that "everything is the stuff of fiction" (Woolf 1948, 192). As a result, Woolf is, on the one hand, preoccupied with the "stuff" of the world, with "omnibuses," "parcels," "umbrellas, yes, even furs" (Woolf 1925, 17). Her obses-

sion with the quotidian implies that the nature of her “spiritual” values centers on a this-worldly concern for bridging the plurality of human experience. In other words, Woolf’s alternative view of transcendence—she clearly rejects Christian orthodoxy and other institutional versions of the transcendent—envisions pathways of unity in the plural, contingent lives of human beings. This is precisely the type of distinction that James Wood (1999, 94) identifies when he explains: “To the Edwardians, reality was a furniture sale, everything that could be seen, tagged, and marked. But Woolf wanted to break from what she called this materialism, and to look for darker corridors.” These darker corridors are oblique moments of human experience, areas that enlightened logic cannot elucidate.

While at times Woolf’s (1985, 72) explorations of the “darkness” of humanity and its underlying “pattern” are reminiscent of religious language, she wrote, as Pericles Lewis (2010, 143) says, “in a disenchanting world where unitary models of truth have dissolved.” In response to the proliferation of plural truths and the increasing awareness that human consciousnesses are discrete and diverse, Woolf felt compelled to reject totalizing statements of ultimate truth. Her explorations therefore do not proceed along institutionally religious lines. She admittedly seems to believe in the existence of “truth,” but literature, as an alternative to the rites of the church, posits “the mysteries of things by, precisely, failing to explain them” (Wood 1999, 100). Artistic moments, in other words, offer apophatic occasions to understand an oblique real underlying and grounding human experience. There is no patriarchal God dictating revelation in Woolf’s schema, but she is nonetheless concerned with (re)framing the perennial metaphysical questions of “ultimate meaning” by retaining a sense of the transcendent and sacred. Thus, Woolf writes, there is a “transcending order” that “will not bear arguing about; it is irrational” (quoted in Schulkind 1985, 19). That is, Woolf does not ground ultimate meaning or a greater whole in a Divine Being. She instead enigmatically conceives of a transcendent realm of being, a space where existence is unified and grounded by a mystical sublime, and human beings encounter this sacred “order” through nonlogical venues. This is precisely why art—and literature in particular—are able to unite human beings: it does not share the requirements of empirical and rational discourse (hence Woolf’s confession of believing in the “irrational”).

These mystical and metaphysical possibilities of art are invoked during Rachel’s death. When Hewet enters her room during the final stages of her illness, Rachel finally recognizes him, and the “curtain which had been drawn between

them for so long vanished immediately” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 353). The “curtain” between Rachel and Hewet exists throughout their relationship: it is the “barrier” of their discrete consciousnesses (280). They are distinct persons, each with his and her own values and desires. This isolating impression distances the couple until the experience of her death. At this moment, however, Hewet momentarily perceives a mystical union: “He seemed to be Rachel as well as himself; and then he listened again; no, she had ceased to breathe” (353). Woolf narrates an occasion when the plurality is momentarily transcended. But why does this sublime experience happen during Rachel’s death?

Rachel and Hewet’s union is problematic during their courtship, because they inhabit a world of oppressive cultural structures. Rachel’s death, in contrast, offers a temporary medium for transcending the barriers that divide them, because as a tragic moment it becomes a literary venue for the sublime. Even as Rachel’s failed introduction to modern society evokes a clash of the spontaneous and the ordered—that is, the tension between her music and Willoughby’s empire or, as Nietzsche says, the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian—her death, for Woolf, becomes a tragically artistic moment that reveals the sublime to humanity. Rachel’s death achieves transcendence by becoming tragedy, embodying a literary event.

Woolf explains in certain prose works that rare artistic encounters offer such sublime moments of a nonlogical real. In her important essay “Sketch of the Past,” Woolf (1985) meditates on a conflict similar to the one that Rachel’s voyage embodies. In this essay she contemplates the tension evoked by two moments that haunt her early childhood memories: the first is a flower that seems to encompass the beauty of reality, and the second is the suicide of a family friend, Mr. Valpy. Woolf (72) juxtaposes these “moments,” insisting upon the necessity of the tension between the “horror” that “people hurt each other” and the “reason” or meaning of beauty. Both moments are “sudden shocks” that Woolf (*ibid.*) suggests are unsettling but nonetheless enlightening, for each functions as a “revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances.” For Woolf (*ibid.*), these revelations are human glimpses of the real, her “philosophy” that “behind the cotton wool [of daily life] is hidden a pattern.” Because these revelations are grounded in human art and quotidian experience—not the self-disclosure of a Divine Being—they are at best ephemeral. Yet these “moments of being” are possible for artists, Woolf (73) believes, and they elucidate the oblique meaning keeping humanity from declining into irremediable brutality.

While these mystical, metaphysical moments are certainly not enduring or complete revelations of the sublime (evidenced by Terence and Rachel's short union), these encounters nonetheless ground human existence. Woolf (79) explains later that childhood is constituted by "several violent moments of being." She uses these moments to reflect on the significance of her life and the truth that she believes is a "pattern" uniting humanity. Even as Woolf intimates that personal identity derives from such transcendent moments, the sublime experiences incited by beauty and tragedy provide a *being* to humanity. This becomes clearer (albeit less defined) in Woolf's (1948) essay "On Not Knowing Greek." Woolf (49) argues that Greek drama "points at but cannot indicate" transcendent meaning, which is "just on the far side of language." Instead, for Woolf, the tragedy is that humanity simply cannot know this "far side," despite its longing to do so. Yet Woolf's reflections on the possibilities of artistic moments still affirm that occasional glimpses occur, which make the pursuit of the real worthwhile. Hewet's and Rachel's two consciousnesses become united through this sublime tragedy—"they seemed to be thinking together; he seemed to be Rachel as well as himself" (Woolf [1915] 1920, 353)—despite the fact that this is far from a certain union. Hewet instead leaves his beloved's deathbed distraught, having only experienced the paradox of a moment that, as Woolf says about other literary moments, "points at but cannot indicate" the transcending order of human existence. Thus while Rachel's death silences the modern cultural system that attempts to appropriate literature for its own interests, Woolf affirms the mystical possibility of uniting discrete consciousnesses through art. Indeed, for Woolf, this possibility emerges in the vacuum left by the failure of modernity.

In the novel's closing scene, St. John Hirst sits silently among the other tourists, because "they gave him a strange sense of quiet and relief" (374). He ceases to think about Rachel and Terence without "any sense of disloyalty," and then St. John, whose name may allude to the author of the Book of Revelation—the "John" prone to revelatory encounters—has a vision: "The movements and the voices seemed to draw together from different parts of the room, and to combine themselves into a pattern before his eyes; he was content to sit silently watching the pattern build itself up, looking at what he hardly saw" (*ibid.*). St. John, who is "half-asleep" (375), also has a nonlogical revelatory encounter in which the artist is "having to will himself into artistic sleep" (Wood 1999, 94). Rachel's tragedy allows him to look beyond his own importance, and, as Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, the artistic vision recalls the world beyond his conscious-

ness.¹⁸ St. John thus experiences an artistic (and thus for Woolf mystic) moment of being that, as Lewis (2010, 153) says, “temporarily allow[s] the barriers between one mind and another to evaporate, the problem of other minds to be resolved.” Woolf’s alternative solution to the philosophical problems of contingency and plurality do not lead her to institutional religions, nor does she look for transcendent knowledge in lucid, direct revelations. Instead, Hirst’s encounter with the tragic reality of Rachel’s death becomes, like the lightning storm in the final scene, “a broad illumination over the earth” (Woolf [1915] 1920, 374). Whereas St. John earlier “[looks] at what he hardly saw,” he now becomes “vividly conscious of everything around” through his own artistic vision (ibid., 375). This is precisely why, as Rachel says, “music goes straight for things”: her tragic *oida* inspires a vision that paradoxically reveals “the whole” while also preserving the possibilities of mystery (Woolf 1985, 72).

For Woolf, literature offers revelation without requiring prescribed and unitary confession. This strategy admittedly posits a “suspension” of differences, as Wollaeger (2001, 69) points out, through its belief in a realm beyond race and empire. Woolf’s metaphysical moments suggest (naively) that human beings can temporarily step out of themselves, but her vision also rejects the (often compelling) response of world abandonment when faced with its tragic and oppressive realities. Woolf’s first novel thus ambitiously suggests an alternative to its characters’ gendered, political, and imperial uses of literature. By setting fiction on a voyage into the heart of a foreign environment, she challenges the identity that her culture ascribes to it. Yet Woolf uses this “fugue” to assert the possibilities for literature to offer a meaningful vision of reality, one in which the world becomes momentarily unified and underneath their plurality human beings discover a sublime pattern.

18. The first three chapters of *To the Lighthouse* are almost wholly dependent upon Mrs. Ramsay’s consciousness until she suddenly remembers: “Lily’s picture. Lily’s picture!” (Woolf 1927, 17). Both the reader and Mrs. Ramsay realize in this moment that there is more than her consciousness—her memories, her world—and Lily Briscoe’s art causes this awakening. The self-awareness of *To the Lighthouse*—that is, the novel’s self-awareness of being art—allows for frequent parallels between the “visions” of Briscoe’s painting and Woolf’s masterpiece. In effect, the shared “vision” that Lily and Woolf achieve in the final chapter, in addition to the sleep/somnambulant imagery (e.g., the poet Augustus Carmichael), suggests that art, as is the case for Mrs. Ramsay, awakens the sleeper and stirs the consciousness.

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