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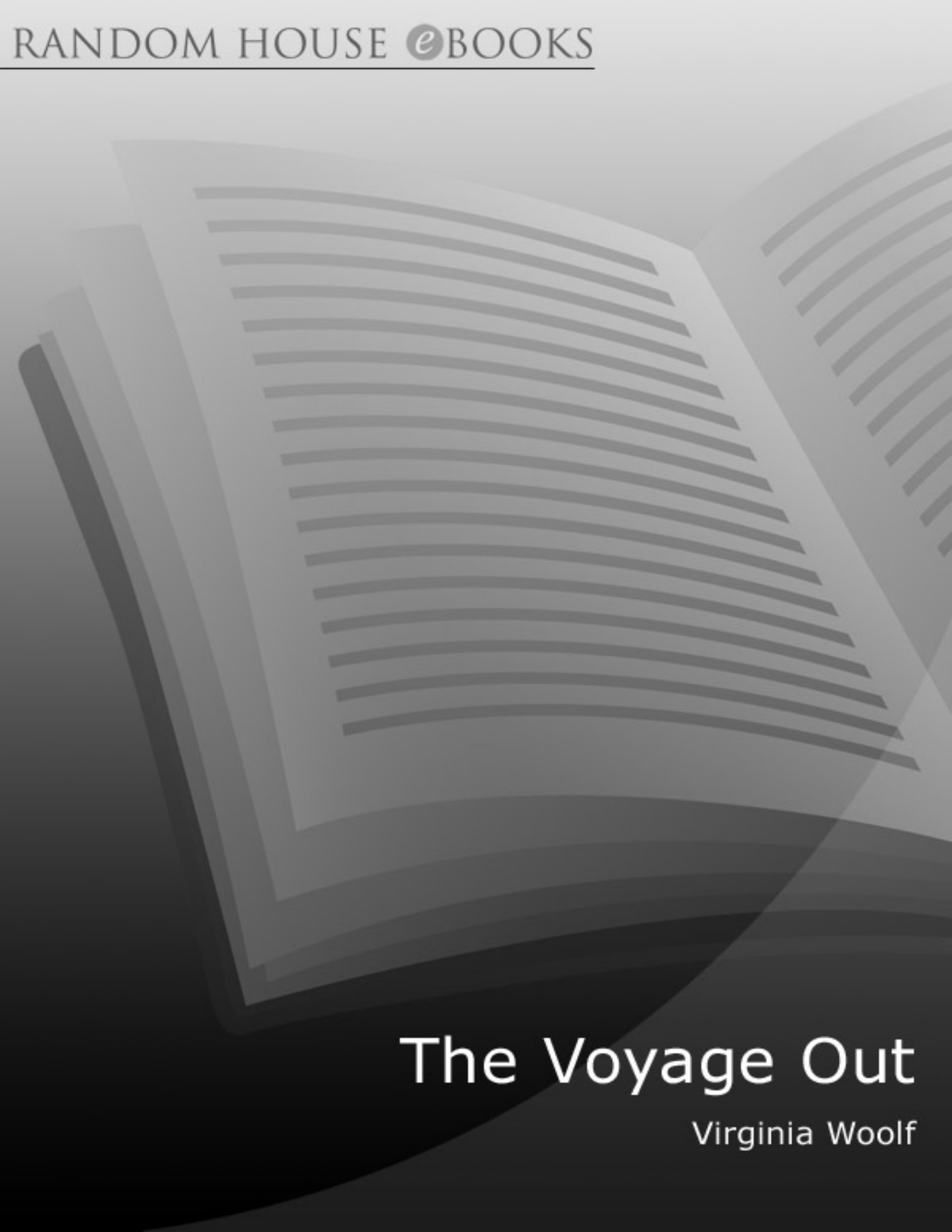

The Voyage Out

Virginia Woolf

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About the Book

With introductions by Frances Spalding and Erica Wagner

The Voyage Out opens with a party of English people aboard the *Euphrosyne* bound for South America. Among them is Rachel Vinrace, a young girl, innocent and wholly ignorant of the world of politics and society. She is a free spirit, half-caught, momentarily and passionately, by Terence Hewet, an aspiring writer met in Santa Marina. But their engagement is to end abruptly, not in marriage but in tragedy.

Published in 1915, *The Voyage Out* was Virginia Woolf's first novel.

About the Author

Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882, the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. From 1915, when she published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf maintained an astonishing output of fiction, literary criticism, essays and biography. In 1912 she married Leonard Woolf, and in 1917 they founded the Hogarth Press. Virginia Woolf suffered a series of mental breakdowns throughout her life, and on 28th March 1941 she committed suicide.

Also by Virginia Woolf

Night and Day
Jacob's Room
Mrs Dalloway
To the Lighthouse
Orlando
The Waves
The Years
Between the Acts

TO L. W.

Virginia Woolf

THE VOYAGE OUT

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
Erica Wagner and
Frances Spalding

Erica Wagner on *The Voyage Out*

IT IS HARD to avoid reading *The Voyage Out* biographically – looking not so much for clues to the author's life, but for clues to one's own. The novel's title makes it a paradigm for every first fiction, and by extension a metaphor for the setting-off into life: particularly if that life is the life of a writer.

Woolf's own biography is not irrelevant. By 1912 she had completed a near-final draft of the novel, while she was still Virginia Stephen. On August 10th of that year she married Leonard Woolf, and then proceeded to drive herself hard to produce a novel she could regard as finished – by the time it was published in 1915, when she was 33, it had gone through at least five drafts (an early version, entitled *Melymbrosia*, was published in 1982 [ed. Louise de Salvo, New York Public Library]). Twenty years after her marriage she would write in her diary: 'If it were not for the divine goodness of L. how many times I should be thinking of death.' *The Voyage Out* sets marriage and death against each other as opposing forces: after Rachel Vinrace's death, a great storm 'seemed to be driving waves of darkness across the earth'. And as Virginia Stephen and Leonard Woolf were married at St Pancras Town Hall, a thunderstorm raged outside.

I was 16 when I first read *The Voyage Out* – an unlicked girl, Helen Ambrose might say. I had set off on my own voyage, as everyone does at around that age (perhaps the

equivalent, in the late 20th rather than the early 20th century, to Rachel Vinrace's 24), although mine had a physical as well as a spiritual component. For reasons that can be no better articulated than Rachel's 'I want –', I had left the easy progress of life in my native New York – where I lived contentedly with my parents and went to the school I loved and had been at since I was four – and come to London to live with a family of strangers and attend a strange school. London is not South America, of course, but an ocean is an ocean and cultural chasms are, I now think, exaggerated and not diminished by the speaking of a common language. I remember, can still feel, the constriction of my heart when I read Clarissa Dalloway's words on seeing ships of the British Mediterranean Fleet, described by Woolf as 'bald as bone', 'with the look of eyeless beasts seeking their prey'. 'Convulsively Clarissa squeezed Rachel's hand. "Aren't you glad to be English!" she said.'

Rachel does not reply as the warships pass, 'casting a curious effect of discipline and sadness upon the waters'. Woolf's tone is ironic, recounting the talk that follows the sighting among the ship's company at lunchtime: 'all of valour and death, and the magnificent qualities of British admirals'. And still Rachel says nothing, leaving her would-be moral guardian Helen Ambrose 'really wondering why Rachel, sitting silent, looked so queer and flushed'.

Rachel's youth and inexperience put her outside the complacent circle of certainty that exists on the ship during the voyage to Santa Marina and later continues to exist, balanced between the hotel and the Ambrose's villa, in Santa Marina itself. 'Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man's in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; she would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said.' She is an explorer, just like the Elizabethans who first visited the South American coast. And yet the wilderness that the

novel explores is not the heart of darkness that Conrad placed in the depths of the jungle: the shadowy interior that Woolf – and Rachel – attempt to penetrate is that of the 'civilisation' from which they come. Rachel attaches herself to the conventions of that civilisation by becoming engaged to Terence Hewet, when the party have embarked – at his urging – on a river journey into the country's interior. It is this journey, according to several of the English inhabitants of Santa Marina, which is also to blame for Rachel's death.

To the reader – to this reader, at all events – it seems clear, however, that the journey cannot be true culprit for Rachel's fever. The emotional weight of the novel does not rest on the journey, but on Rachel's decision or indecision. 'As each day … parted them from the strange day in the forest when they had been forced to tell each other what they wanted, this wish of theirs was revealed to other people, and in the process became slightly strange to themselves'. Rachel's estrangement from herself, the result of her engagement, takes the most extreme form: body and soul are parted. Before they are engaged she reminds Hewet of the night when she first saw him, when she peered in at the windows of the hotel with Helen Ambrose, unseen. 'I like seeing things go on – as we saw you that night when you didn't see us – I love the freedom of it – it's like being the wind or the sea.' In the suffocating heat of her fever, she feels herself to be trapped by the sea, no longer able to embody its freedom: '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 someone turned her over at the bottom of the sea.'

Rachel is a woman of her time, as Woolf tried hard to be. The marriage which she saw as saving her from death—although it would not, finally, keep her from suicide – was not a conventional one: children didn't enter into it, for one

thing, and Vita Sackville-West did. The thread of a discussion of woman's suffrage runs through *The Voyage Out*, and Rachel becomes engaged to a man who is freely able to recognise how women's lives are curious, silent, unrepresented. 'It's the man's view that's represented, you see. Think of a railway train: fifteen carriages for men who want to smoke. Doesn't it make your blood boil? If I were a woman I'd blow someone's brains out.' Now, of course, women have the vote, and it would be hard to say that their voices are unrepresented: and yet, and yet.

At 16 I felt more than bafflement at the strange culture that confronted me in England. Walking the streets of Kentish Town in the early evening, gazing into the lighted windows of houses and wondering who was comfortable in there, wondering if I'd somehow belong – I was also wondering where I would belong in a much wider sense. What was expected of me? Not just by the imaginary families in their golden rooms, but by society at large. At the bluestocking schools I attended on both sides of the Atlantic, it was taken for granted that a Contribution Would Be Made, that one would sail forth confidently into the world like an Elizabethan adventurer. The battle had been won, by their accounts: but it seemed to me, when I set out into the world outside those schools, and especially when I put pen to paper, that it had not. The pieces of a life, whatever life is chosen, do not lock together with the regularity of paving stones—and this is true for men as well as women, of course.

The Voyage Out is Woolf's first attempt to envision a way those pieces might fit together. Like almost all first attempts, there is something unsatisfactory about it, something too stark and bald in the contrasts it offers; marriage opposed to death, English civilisation set against a virgin wilderness. And Rachel herself a mystery, not quite fully realised, too much at the mercy of Richard Dalloway's kiss, of St John Hirst's Gibbon, of Helen Ambrose's well-

meaning lectures. Her journey into life is aborted by her death before she has really had a chance to set out and discover what she can become. Reading that death at 16 I could barely believe it was so (just as Terence Hewet can barely believe it is so), that the author should allow her adventurer to be drowned still in port. And even worse, that life should continue: the guests at the hotel, though sorrowful, go on as they always have: when the storm after her death passes, the sky is beautiful again, ‘a deep and solemn blue’, and St John Hirst falls asleep in his chair, the figures before his half-closed eyes no more than a procession of objects.

Sixteen years beyond my first reading of this novel, that ending looks different to me, more hopeful. Rachel Vinrace’s incomplete journey is only one version of a life: her own life, Woolf’s life, my life. When the book has been closed another can be opened, and the pen can be set to paper again. Woolf’s pain and pleasure, the pain and pleasure of any serious writer, was to be a stranger in a strange land, a journey always on the horizon. The voyage out, after all, is never ending.

Erica Wagner
March, 2000

Frances Spalding on *The Voyage Out*

'NO, I SHALL never marry.' So Rachel Vinrace, aged twenty-four, determines as she travels on her father's ship to South America. 'I shouldn't be so sure of that,' retorts a fellow passenger Clarissa Dalloway who, with her husband, boarded the ship mid-route. Mrs Dalloway's reply hints at what the reader may already have guessed – that, in the course of the narrative, some alterations will occur to the separateness and isolation experienced by Rachel and others. 'Why do people marry?' Rachel persists. Virginia Woolf, who began *The Voyage Out*, her first novel, some five years before her own marriage, was likewise vexed by this question. Her reactions to it had been stirred in the summer of 1905 by a remark made by her sister Vanessa. It remained imprinted on Virginia's memory and surfaced later in one of her memoirs. Vanessa, 'stretching her arms above her head with a gesture that was at once reluctant and yielding,' had announced: 'Of course, I can see that we shall all marry. It's bound to happen.'

An awareness that relationships are often unsatisfactory, fragmentary and hazardous haunts this book. It churns with protest, while staying safely within the Victorian narrative tradition in its use of plot, incident and the development of character. It is as a result a powerful, disturbing novel, incandescent with insights which at times strain against the conservative vehicle chosen for their conveyance. This uneasy relationship between form and

content, between a nineteenth-century genre and ideas that belong to the twentieth century, creates a tension that reflects Virginia Woolf's position at the time that the book was written. As the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, the eminent literary critic and founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, she had absorbed the literary culture of late Victorian life. But by 1907, by which date she had embarked on the novel which eventually became *The Voyage Out*, she was part of Bloomsbury, a group of friends who met regularly simply to talk, and in doing so arrived at a dissenting attitude of mind that challenged many of the precepts which their Victorian forbears had upheld.

Not only is the voyage in this book in part a journey of self-discovery for Rachel Vinrace, it was also for Woolf a useful means by which she could remove her characters from their every day lives and bring them into close proximity. At one point they dream of each other, 'as was natural,' comments Woolf, 'considering how thin the partitions were between them, and how strangely they had been lifted off the earth to sit next to each other in mid-ocean, and see every detail of each other's faces, and hear whatever they chanced to say.' By transporting her characters to South America she also makes possible the contrast between the primeval forest, into which they make an expedition, and the spectacle of London with which the book begins, as Rachel's uncle and aunt, Ridley and Helen Ambrose, walk and drive to where the *Euphrosyne* is docked. Later, when Richard and Clarissa Dalloway join the ship, Clarissa reflects that her fellow passengers are like figures out of *Punch*, a throwback to the 1860s. 'Being on this ship', she explains, 'seems to make it so much more vivid – what it really means to be English.'

Therefore, though largely set on sea and foreign land, *The Voyage Out*, with its myriad of acute social observations, is an intensely English novel. It is as if Woolf

decided to test what it is to be English by leading the narrative into a terrain that recollects passages in Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*. And though the remote tribe Woolf's English party encounters bears no comparison with the raw, brutish, naked wild men who shocked Darwin when he first saw indigenous Fuegians, there is a similar sense of confrontation with feelings and fears that civilised behaviour mostly conceals. As they travel down river, Mrs Ambrose reflects that the country, though very beautiful, is also 'sultry and alarming'. 'She did not like to feel herself the victim of unclassified emotions, and certainly as the launch slipped on and on, in the hot morning sun, she felt herself unreasonably moved.'

Earlier, in the course of a mountain picnic, Rachel has been initiated into the mysteries of adult love when she and Terence Hewet happen upon two other members of the party, Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning, who have just kissed (the only heterosexual kiss in all Woolf's novels, as Hermione Lee has remarked) and become lovers. What follows is as close as Woolf ever came to describing the sexual act. 'They saw a man and woman lying on the ground beneath them, rolling slightly this way and that as the embrace tightened and slackened. The man then sat up and the woman … lay back upon the ground, with her eyes shut and not altogether conscious. Nor could you tell from her expression whether she was happy, or had suffered something. When Arthur again turned to her, butting her as a lamb butts a ewe, Hewet and Rachel retreated without a word. Hewet felt uncomfortably shy.'

Hewet's awkwardness and Woolf's ambivalence makes this an oddly vivid description of heterosexual coupling. The man is ascendant but also needy and dependent, the woman afflicted by either pleasure or pain. No wonder Hewet elsewhere doubts whether human beings really love each other and assumes that the bunching together of human beings in social groups is a way of preventing

ourselves ‘from seeing to the bottom of things’. Intrigued by his friend St John Hirst’s suggestion that you can define people by drawing circles around them, Hewet asks, ‘Are we alone in our circle?’ ‘Quite alone,’ Hirst replies. ‘You try to get out, but you can’t. You only make a mess of things by trying.’ This recurrent stress on human isolation and the failure of communication reaches a nadir of despair when Rachel declares, ‘we should live separate; we cannot understand each other.’

And yet there are numerous moments when this book illuminates an alternative point of view. ‘When a name has dropped out of use,’ Woolf writes, alluding to the fact that Rachel was eleven when her mother died, ‘the lightest touch upon it tells.’ Thus when Clarissa Dalloway picks up Rachel’s reference to her uncle and asks, ‘Your mother’s brother?’, the gentle pressure created by this and other slight questions releases Rachel’s unhappiness; though unable to express herself, she yet has the feeling that Mrs Dalloway is able to understand without words. What is left unexplored by Woolf, who lost her own mother at the age of twelve, is the possible connection between Rachel’s motherless state and her recurrent feeling of being cut off, irredeemably separate.

So much is nowadays known about Virginia Woolf’s life that it is hard to ignore the bones of experience lying at times so closely beneath the fictional text. To my mind, Helen Ambrose (‘romantic and beautiful; not perhaps sympathetic, for her eyes looked straight and considered what they saw’) owes much to Virginia Woolf’s appreciation of her sister, Vanessa Bell. Lytton Strachey peeps out from behind the character of St John Hirst, and much of his and Hewet’s conversation gives the reader an indication of the kind of talk that Bloomsbury indulged in during its early years. Woolf not only incorporates references to Edward Gibbon and Jane Austen, two authors Bloomsbury greatly admired, but she upholds her friends’ belief in the

importance of conversation in a remark given to Mrs Ambrose: ‘Talk was the medicine she trusted to, talk about everything, talk that was free, unguarded, and as candid as a habit of talking with men made natural in her case.’ Even the story with which Rachel entertains Hewet, of Mrs Hunt’s son who was hugged to death by a bear, has its source in Bloomsbury, for one of Duncan Grant’s relations had met the same end.

There are numerous instances in *The Voyage Out* where Woolf’s mind scintillates in a manner that is recognisably her own. Her pounce and flow, her delight in, and gentle mockery of, human life and behaviour animates every page. Amid all the chatter and gossip, the play of character and changes of scene, there is a consistent note of enquiry (‘What is the truth?’ Rachel asks, ‘What’s the truth of it all?’) and a sense that some kind of reality persists beneath the façades, fantasies and anxieties of daily life. Woolf hints at the indomitable in slight things, as when the hotel guest, Mrs Thornbury, takes a cavalier look at *The Times*: ‘When she had heard what one of the million voices speaking in the paper had to say, and noticed that a cousin of hers had married a clergyman at Minehead – ignoring the drunken woman, the golden animals of Crete, the movements of battalions, the dinners, the reforms, the fires, the indignant, the learned and benevolent, Mrs Thornbury went upstairs to write a letter for the mail.’

The ship which carries Rachel Vinrace to South America and to her fate is also a metaphor. At night it becomes ‘an emblem of the loneliness of human life, an occasion for queer confidences and sudden appeals for sympathy’. It is also an image of this novel, with its rich cargo of hope and despair, its moments of recognition and understanding alternating with anger and frustration. To travel with this book is to journey, like Rachel, further into ourselves and into the roving mind of a brilliant exploratory novelist.

Frances Spalding
April, 2000

Chapter I

AS THE STREETS that lead from the Strand to the Embankment are very narrow, it is better not to walk down them arm-in-arm. If you persist, lawyers' clerks will have to make flying leaps into the mud; young lady typists will have to fidget behind you. In the streets of London where beauty goes unregarded, eccentricity must pay the penalty, and it is better not to be very tall, to wear a long blue cloak, or to beat the air with your left hand.

One afternoon in the beginning of October when the traffic was becoming brisk a tall man strode along the edge of the pavement with a lady on his arm. Angry glances struck upon their backs. The small, agitated figures—for in comparison with this couple most people looked small—decorated with fountain pens, and burdened with despatch-boxes, had appointments to keep, and drew a weekly salary, so that there was some reason for the unfriendly stare which was bestowed upon Mr. Ambrose's height and upon Mrs. Ambrose's cloak. But some enchantment had put both man and woman beyond the reach of malice and unpopularity. In his case one might guess from the moving lips that it was thought; and in hers from the eyes fixed stonily straight in front of her at a level above the eyes of most that it was sorrow. It was only by scorning all she met that she kept herself from tears, and the friction of people brushing past her was evidently painful. After watching the traffic on the Embankment for a minute or two with a

stoical gaze she twitched her husband's sleeve, and they crossed between the swift discharge of motor cars. When they were safe on the further side, she gently withdrew her arm from his, allowing her mouth at the same time to relax, to tremble; then tears rolled down, and, leaning her elbows on the balustrade, she shielded her face from the curious. Mr. Ambrose attempted consolation; he patted her shoulder; but she showed no signs of admitting him, and feeling it awkward to stand beside a grief that was greater than his, he crossed his arms behind him, and took a turn along the pavement.

The embankment juts out in angles here and there, like pulpits; instead of preachers, however, small boys occupy them, dangling string, dropping pebbles, or launching wads of paper for a cruise. With their sharp eye for eccentricity, they were inclined to think Mr. Ambrose awful; but the quickest witted cried "Bluebeard!" as he passed. In case they should proceed to tease his wife, Mr. Ambrose flourished his stick at them, upon which they decided that he was grotesque merely, and four instead of one cried "Bluebeard!" in chorus.

Although Mrs. Ambrose stood quite still, much longer than is natural, the little boys let her be. Some one is always looking into the river near Waterloo Bridge; a couple will stand there talking for half an hour on a fine afternoon; most people, walking for pleasure, contemplate for three minutes; when, having compared the occasion with other occasions, or made some sentence, they pass on. Sometimes the flats and churches and hotels of Westminster are like the outlines of Constantinople in a mist; sometimes the river is an opulent purple, sometimes mud-coloured, sometimes sparkling blue like the sea. It is always worth while to look down and see what is happening. But this lady looked neither up nor down; the only thing she had seen, since she stood there, was a circular iridescent patch slowly floating past with a straw

in the middle of it. The straw and the patch swam again and again behind the tremulous medium of a great welling tear, and the tear rose and fell and dropped into the river. Then there struck close upon her ears—

> Lars Porsena of Clusium
> By the nine Gods he swore—

and then more faintly, as if the speaker had passed her on his walk—

> That the Great House of Tarquin
> Should suffer wrong no more.

Yes, she knew she must go back to all that, but at present she must weep. Screening her face she sobbed more steadily than she had yet done, her shoulders rising and falling with great regularity. It was this figure that her husband saw when, having reached the polished Sphinx, having entangled himself with a man selling picture postcards, he turned; the stanza instantly stopped. He came up to her, laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, “Dearest.” His voice was supplicating. But she shut her face away from him, as much as to say, “You can’t possibly understand.”

As he did not leave her, however, she had to wipe her eyes, and to raise them to the level of the factory chimneys on the other bank. She saw also the arches of Waterloo Bridge and the carts moving across them, like the line of animals in a shooting gallery. They were seen blankly, but to see anything was of course to end her weeping and begin to walk.

“I would rather walk,” she said, her husband having hailed a cab already occupied by two city men.

The fixity of her mood was broken by the action of walking. The shooting motor cars, more like spiders in the

moon than terrestrial objects, the thundering drays, the jingling hansoms, and little black broughams, made her think of the world she lived in. Somewhere up there above the pinnacles where the smoke rose in a pointed hill, her children were now asking for her, and getting a soothing reply. As for the mass of streets, squares, and public buildings which parted them, she only felt at this moment how little London had done to make her love it, although thirty of her forty years had been spent in a street. She knew how to read the people who were passing her; there were the rich who were running to and from each others' houses at this hour; there were the bigoted workers driving in a straight line to their offices; there were the poor who were unhappy and rightly malignant. Already, though there was sunlight in the haze, tattered old men and women were nodding off to sleep upon the seats. When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath.

A fine rain now made her still more dismal; vans with the odd names of those engaged in odd industries—Sprules, Manufacturer of Saw-dust; Grabb, to whom no piece of waste paper comes amiss—fell flat as a bad joke; bold lovers, sheltered behind one cloak, seemed to her sordid, past their passion; the flower women, a contented company, whose talk is always worth hearing, were sodden hags; the red, yellow, and blue flowers, whose heads were pressed together, would not blaze. Moreover, her husband, walking with a quick rhythmic stride, jerking his free hand occasionally, was either a Viking or a stricken Nelson; the sea-gulls had changed his note.

"Ridley, shall we drive? Shall we drive, Ridley?"

Mrs. Ambrose had to speak sharply; by this time he was far away.

The cab, by trotting steadily along the same road soon withdrew them from the West End, and plunged them into London. It appeared that this was a great manufacturing

place, where the people were engaged in making things, as though the West End, with its electric lamps, its vast plate-glass windows all shining yellow, its carefully-finished houses, and tiny live figures trotting on the pavement, or bowled along on wheels in the road, was the finished work. It appeared to her a very small bit of work for such an enormous factory to have made. For some reason it appeared to her as a small golden tassel on the edge of a vast black cloak.

Observing that they passed no other hansom cab, but only vans and waggons, and that not one of the thousand men and women she saw was either a gentleman or a lady, Mrs. Ambrose understood that after all it is the ordinary thing to be poor, and that London is the city of innumerable poor people. Startled by this discovery and seeing herself pacing a circle all the days of her life round Piccadilly Circus she was greatly relieved to pass a building put up by the London County Council for Night Schools.

“Lord, how gloomy it is!” her husband groaned. “Poor creatures!”

What with misery for her children, the poor, and the rain, her mind was like a wound exposed to dry in the air.

At this point the cab stopped, for it was in danger of being crushed like an egg-shell. The wide Embankment which had had room for cannon-balls and squadrons, had now shrunk to a cobbled lane steaming with smells of malt and oil and blocked by waggons. While her husband read the placards pasted on the brick announcing the hours at which certain ships would sail for Scotland, Mrs. Ambrose did her best to find information. From a world exclusively occupied in feeding waggons with sacks, half obliterated too in a fine yellow fog, they got neither help nor attention. It seemed a miracle when an old man approached, guessed their condition, and proposed to row them out to their ship in the little boat which he kept moored at the bottom of a flight of steps. With some hesitation they trusted

themselves to him, took their places, and were soon waving up and down upon the water, London having shrunk to two lines of buildings on either side of them, square buildings and oblong buildings placed in rows like a child's avenue of bricks.

The river, which had a certain amount of troubled yellow light in it, ran with great force; bulky barges floated down swiftly escorted by tugs; police boats shot past everything; the wind went with the current. The open rowing-boat in which they sat bobbed and curtseyed across the line of traffic. In mid-stream the old man stayed his hands upon the oars, and as the water rushed past them, remarked that once he had taken many passengers across, where now he took scarcely any. He seemed to recall an age when his boat, moored among rushes, carried delicate feet across to lawns at Rotherhithe.

"They want bridges now," he said, indicating the monstrous outline of the Tower Bridge. Mournfully Helen regarded him, who was putting water between her and her children. Mournfully she gazed at the ship they were approaching; anchored in the middle of the stream they could dimly read her name—*Euphrosyne*.

Very dimly in the falling dusk they could see the lines of the rigging, the masts and the dark flag which the breeze blew out squarely behind.

As the little boat sidled up to the steamer, and the old man shipped his oars, he remarked once more pointing above, that ships all the world over flew that flag the day they sailed. In the minds of both the passengers the blue flag appeared a sinister token, and this the moment for presentiments, but nevertheless they rose, gathered their things together, and climbed on deck.

Down in the saloon of her father's ship, Miss Rachel Vinrace, aged twenty-four, stood waiting her uncle and aunt nervously. To begin with, though nearly related, she scarcely remembered them; to go on with, they were

elderly people, and finally, as her father's daughter she must be in some sort prepared to entertain them. She looked forward to seeing them as civilised people generally look forward to the first sight of civilised people, as though they were of the nature of an approaching physical discomfort,—a tight shoe or a draughty window. She was already unnaturally braced to receive them. As she occupied herself in laying forks severely straight by the side of knives, she heard a man's voice saying gloomily:

"On a dark night one would fall down these stairs head foremost," to which a woman's voice added, "And be killed."

As she spoke the last words the woman stood in the doorway. Tall, large-eyed, draped in purple shawls, Mrs. Ambrose was romantic and beautiful; not perhaps sympathetic, for her eyes looked straight and considered what they saw. Her face was much warmer than a Greek face; on the other hand it was much bolder than the face of the usual pretty Englishwoman.

"Oh, Rachel, how d'you do," she said, shaking hands.

"How are you, dear," said Mr. Ambrose, inclining his forehead to be kissed. His niece instinctively liked his thin angular body, and the big head with its sweeping features, and the acute, innocent eyes.

"Tell Mr. Pepper," Rachel bade the servant. Husband and wife then sat down on one side of the table, with their niece opposite to them.

"My father told me to begin," she explained. "He is very busy with the men. . . . You know Mr. Pepper?"

A little man who was bent as some trees are by a gale on one side of them had slipped in. Nodding to Mr. Ambrose, he shook hands with Helen.

"Draughts," he said, erecting the collar of his coat.

"You are still rheumatic?" asked Helen. Her voice was low and seductive, though she spoke absently enough, the sight of town and river being still present to her mind.

“Once rheumatic, always rheumatic, I fear,” he replied. “To some extent it depends on the weather, though not so much as people are apt to think.”

“One does not die of it, at any rate,” said Helen.

“As a general rule—no,” said Mr. Pepper.

“Soup, Uncle Ridley?” asked Rachel.

“Thank you, dear,” he said, and, as he held his plate out, sighed audibly, “Ah! she’s not like her mother.” Helen was just too late in thumping her tumbler on the table to prevent Rachel from hearing, and from blushing scarlet with embarrassment.

“The way servants treat flowers!” she said hastily. She drew a green vase with a crinkled lip towards her, and began pulling out the tight little chrysanthemums, which she laid on the table-cloth, arranging them fastidiously side by side.

There was a pause.

“You knew Jenkinson, didn’t you, Ambrose?” asked Mr. Pepper across the table.

“Jenkinson of Peterhouse?”

“He’s dead,” said Mr. Pepper.

“Ah, dear!—I knew him—ages ago,” said Ridley. “He was the hero of the punt accident, you remember? A queer card. Married a young woman out of a tobacconist’s, and lived in the Fens—never heard what became of him.”

“Drink—drugs,” said Mr. Pepper with sinister conciseness. “He left a commentary. Hopeless muddle, I’m told.”

“The man had really great abilities,” said Ridley.

“His introduction to Jellaby holds its own still,” went on Mr. Pepper, “which is surprising, seeing how text-books change.”

“There was a theory about the planets, wasn’t there?” asked Ridley.

“A screw loose somewhere, no doubt of it,” said Mr. Pepper, shaking his head.

Now a tremor ran through the table, and a light outside swerved. At the same time an electric bell rang sharply again and again.

“We’re off,” said Ridley.

A slight but perceptible wave seemed to roll beneath the floor; then it sank; then another came, more perceptible. Lights slid right across the uncurtained window. The ship gave a loud melancholy moan.

“We’re off!” said Mr. Pepper. Other ships, as sad as she, answered her outside on the river. The chuckling and hissing of water could be plainly heard, and the ship heaved so that the steward bringing plates had to balance himself as he drew the curtain. There was a pause.

“Jenkinson of Cats—d’you still keep up with him?” asked Ambrose.

“As much as one ever does,” said Mr. Pepper. “We meet annually. This year he has had the misfortune to lose his wife, which made it painful, of course.”

“Very painful,” Ridley agreed.

“There’s an unmarried daughter who keeps house for him, I believe, but it’s never the same, not at his age.”

Both gentlemen nodded sagely as they carved their apples.

“There was a book, wasn’t there?” Ridley enquired.

“There *was* a book, but there never *will* be a book,” said Mr. Pepper with such fierceness that both ladies looked up at him.

“There never will be a book, because some one else has written it for him,” said Mr. Pepper with considerable acidity. “That’s what comes of putting things off, and collecting fossils, and sticking Norman arches on one’s pigsties.”

“I confess I sympathise,” said Ridley with a melancholy sigh. “I have a weakness for people who can’t begin.”

“… The accumulations of a lifetime wasted,” continued Mr. Pepper. “He had accumulations enough to fill a barn.”

“It’s a vice that some of us escape,” said Ridley. “Our friend Miles has another work out to-day.”

Mr. Pepper gave an acid little laugh. “According to my calculations,” he said, “he has produced two volumes and a half annually, which, allowing for time spent in the cradle and so forth, shows a commendable industry.”

“Yes, the old Master’s saying of him has been pretty well realised,” said Ridley.

“A way they had,” said Mr. Pepper. “You know the Bruce collection?—not for publication, of course.”

“I should suppose not,” said Ridley significantly. “For a Divine he was—remarkably free.”

“The Pump in Neville’s Row, for example?” enquired Mr. Pepper.

“Precisely,” said Ambrose.

Each of the ladies, being after the fashion of their sex, highly trained in promoting men’s talk without listening to it, could think—about the education of children, about the use of fog sirens in an opera—without betraying herself. Only it struck Helen that Rachel was perhaps too still for a hostess, and that she might have done something with her hands.

“Perhaps——?” she said at length, upon which they rose and left, vaguely to the surprise of the gentlemen, who had either thought them attentive or had forgotten their presence.

“Ah, one could tell strange stories of the old days,” they heard Ridley say, as he sank into his chair again. Glancing back, at the doorway, they saw Mr. Pepper as though he had suddenly loosened his clothes, and had become a vivacious and malicious old ape.

Winding veils round their heads, the women walked on deck. They were now moving steadily down the river, passing the dark shapes of ships at anchor, and London was a swarm of lights with a pale yellow canopy drooping above it. There were the lights of the great theatres, the lights of

the long streets, lights that indicated huge squares of domestic comfort, lights that hung high in air. No darkness would ever settle upon those lamps, as no darkness had settled upon them for hundreds of years. It seemed dreadful that the town should blaze for ever in the same spot; dreadful at least to people going away to adventure upon the sea, and beholding it as a circumscribed mound, eternally burnt, eternally scarred. From the deck of the ship the great city appeared a crouched and cowardly figure, a sedentary miser.

Leaning over the rail, side by side, Helen said, “Won’t you be cold?” Rachel replied, “No. . . . How beautiful!” she added a moment later. Very little was visible—a few masts, a shadow of land here, a line of brilliant windows there. They tried to make head against the wind.

“It blows—it blows!” gasped Rachel, the words rammed down her throat. Struggling by her side, Helen was suddenly overcome by the spirit of movement, and pushed along with her skirts wrapping themselves round her knees, and both arms to her hair. But slowly the intoxication of movement died down, and the wind became rough and chilly. They looked through a chink in the blind and saw that long cigars were being smoked in the dining-room; they saw Mr. Ambrose throw himself violently against the back of his chair, while Mr. Pepper crinkled his cheeks as though they had been cut in wood. The ghost of a roar of laughter came out to them, and was drowned at once in the wind. In the dry yellow-lighted room Mr. Pepper and Mr. Ambrose were oblivious of all tumult; they were in Cambridge, and it was probably about the year 1875.

“They’re old friends,” said Helen, smiling at the sight. “Now, is there a room for us to sit in?”

Rachel opened a door.

“It’s more like a landing than a room,” she said. Indeed it had nothing of the shut stationary character of a room on shore. A table was rooted in the middle, and seats were