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<Crouch, Patricia A. "Gender in the Jungle: *The Voyage Out* as a Response to *Heart of Darkness*." *Women Writers: A Zine*. Editor Kim Wells. Online Journal. Published: January 7, 2002. 22 pages. Available at:<<http://www.womenwriters.net/dec2001articles/crouch.html>>. Date Accessed Here.>

### **Gender in the Jungle: *The Voyage Out* as a Response to *Heart of Darkness***

**Patricia A. Crouch**

Although Virginia Woolf never mentions *Heart of Darkness* in her essays on Joseph Conrad (Neuman 57), we nevertheless find echoes of the novella, as Shirley Neuman points out, in a number of Woolf's works, including *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts*. But nowhere do we find stronger echoes than in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, published in March 1915. As Neuman observes, "like *Heart of Darkness*, it opens with an outgoing ship in the Thames estuary with London, its lights emblematic of civilization, behind it; its protagonist voyages against an ocean (seeing signs of the military might of nations along the way) to a jungle town or 'station' that is a microcosm of the society left behind, then proceeds upriver, through silence, to encounter disease and death" (62). Despite these many parallels, Woolf works to re-write Conrad in a sense by bringing the women of *The Voyage Out* into the jungle and thus into a traditionally

masculine sphere. In doing so, she draws women out of the “beautiful world of their own” (64) to which Conrad’s Marlow wishes to consign them, enabling her to trace, in the character of Rachel Vinrace, the struggle for female empowerment and self-determination.

Valerie Sedlak and Rita Bode offer intriguing feminist readings of *Heart of Darkness*. While acknowledging that the “fictive world of *Heart of Darkness* belongs to men, nineteenth-century, imperialistic, European men,” Sedlak, for example, says that “Conrad’s women do display a separate consciousness” (443). Bode takes this contention a step further, postulating that *Heart of Darkness* depicts a “powerful female network, which frequently takes charge and assumes control of the novella’s events” (20). In both the narrator’s and Marlow’s visions, of course, this would not seem to be the case. As the novella opens, the narrator depicts the Thames as a masculine sphere “crowded with memories of men and ships it has borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea” (18). It is a place recalling the “dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germ of empires” (19). Although these ships of history plundered for the glory of the “Queen’s highness,” when that female figure meets the ship as it docks along the shore, it “thus pass[es] out of the gigantic tale” (19) of masculine adventure and glory and into another sphere—one which presumably permits the presence of women.

When Marlow soon after reflects that, when he was a child, “there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there” (22), we may only feel that his dream is one permitted to men alone, since such blank spaces presumably do not allow for female exploration. Marlow makes clear his feelings about the inherent separateness of the male and female domains when he remarks, in speaking of his aunt:

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over. (27)

What Marlow fails to acknowledge, of course, is that women are relegated to this so-called "world of their own" by men and that he himself perpetuates this division when he allows his aunt to believe that, in working for the Company, he will be acting as an "emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (27), despite his own recognition that "[t]o tear treasures out of the bowels of the land was . . . [the Company's] desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (46).

This hypocrisy of male rhetoric was something about which Woolf herself was both conscious and critical, especially as it pertained to war and violence. Woolf as a woman apparently found little consolation in the sort of fictional "moral purpose[s]" (46) which painted English and European greed and imperialism in missionary terms and which euphemistically transformed the subjects of imperial conquests into "pilgrims" (38). Like Marlow, Woolf recognized that no spiritual purpose underlay the violence perpetrated by her native country and its European neighbors, a point which we see evidenced in Marlow's description of the French warship he sees during his journey to the Congo:

It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts . . . In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent . . . There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board

assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere. (28-29)

Despite Marlow's attempts to shield first his aunt and later Kurtz's Intended from the ugly truths of the masculine world in which he lives and operates, it seems true, as Bode contends, that "[i]n Marlow's case, powerful women seem to control his destiny at every turn" (23). Desperate to obtain the appointment with the Company which will enable him to explore the "blank space" which most fascinates him, Marlow ultimately admits: "would you believe it?—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job" (23). Having failed at his own attempts to "worry" (23) the Company into hiring him, Marlow has no alternative but to draw on his aunt's influence in order to attain what he seeks. Similarly, as Bode remarks, "[t]he Intended helps to send Kurtz into the heart of darkness, and the African mistress seems to define the darkness for him" (25). Bode sees in these examples evidence of a female control which Marlow both denies and "fears" (21).

For Woolf, however, the sort of power wielded by Marlow's aunt in appealing to "the wife of" some "high dignitary" (27) is a far cry from true female empowerment. In her much later epistolary essay, *Three Guineas*, which was published in 1938, Woolf expresses contempt for the kind of behind-the-scenes manipulation of men which offers the only recourse for daughters and wives tied financially to their fathers and husbands:

The daughters of educated men have no direct influence, it is true; but they possess the greatest power of all; that is, the influence that they can exert upon educated men . . . [but] it is either beyond our reach, for many of us are plain, poor and old; or beneath our contempt, for many of us would prefer to call ourselves

prostitutes simply and to take our stand openly under the lamps of Piccadilly Circus rather than use it. (13, 15)

Woolf would find little to applaud, then, in the actions of either Marlow's aunt or Kurtz's Intended, for they serve merely to illustrate the kind of "prostitution" to which she believed financial dependence damned women in the early twentieth century.

But Bode sees evidence of a different kind of feminine power in *Heart of Darkness* as well—a force represented in the jungle itself. She says that

The physical world itself in the Congo, the fog, the darkness, the impenetrable jungle, severely limits discernment . . . Confronted by the jungle, Marlow, too, seems "out of touch with truth." In other words, he seems to enter a world which closely resembles his view of female experience. This association becomes particularly significant when we consider that the jungle itself is referred to consistently in female terms. Its embrace, its presence, its very soul are feminine. The wilderness "had caressed him . . . taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh" . . . runs Marlow's sensuous immersion into a separate other world corresponding disturbingly to the female world which, on a conscious level, he dismisses. It is the nightmare underside of his "beautiful" world of women, a nightmare, in part, at least, because he is forcefully drawn into what he had so confidently placed apart. (22)

Although Bode's argument may seem to the modern reader like an affirmation of women's power in the novel, to Woolf this view would perhaps seem to exemplify instead her contention, which Christine Froula identifies in *Three Guineas*, that the subjugation and differentiation of women made possible by the depiction of them as some foreign "other" is exactly what has

enabled men throughout history to justify the violence they perpetrate. In this way, Froula contends, Woolf believed that women served as a scapegoat for masculine violence (33).

Woolf's belief in the scapegoating of women would seem to reflect Marlow's own sense of the role which the natives play in the Congo; by being made to seem "inhuman," the natives serve to justify the violence inflicted upon them: "It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (51).

Even if Woolf had recognized and accepted the parallels described by Sedlak and Bode, she would have found little cause for celebration. As Neuman notes, referring in part to *Three Guineas*:

Marlow does characterize women as the guardians of civilization, but theirs is also a benighted world which demands a lie to maintain its "saving illusion" . . . Like Conrad, Woolf invokes female values to "save civilisation." But where Marlow bows before the coercion of women's "saving illusions," Woolf insists that no such illusion can save, and demands female subversion, a conscious separateness from "unreal loyalties" and the tyrannical "darkness" of domination, in both private and public life. (74)

Despite their ostensible power in *Heart of Darkness*, the women are, in fact, relegated to the "world of their own" which Marlow describes. They are denied the truth by men who rationalize their lies by offering them as protections. Thus, Marlow not only justifies his decision to allow his aunt to continue believing the moralist "rot let loose in print and talk" (27) about the empire's

moralistic desire to civilize the savages of the Congo and elsewhere, but he also rationalizes his lie to the Intended, which entails a betrayal of Kurtz's desire for "justice" (94), on the grounds that the truth is "too dark altogether" (94). For Virginia Woolf, the "truth" of Kurtz's male hypocrisy would have undoubtedly been far "darker" than the truth which it served to conceal.

Despite what Pitt calls Woolf's "great admiration and liking for [Conrad] as a writer" (141) and Woolf's assertion in her obituary essay about Conrad that his "earliest writings" have an "air of telling us something very old and perfectly true, which had lain hidden but is now revealed" (qtd. in Pitt 141), she nevertheless believed, as she wrote in her 1918 review of The Women Novelists, that there is a "difference between the man's and the woman's view of what constitutes the importance of any subject" (qtd. in Blain 118). The nature of this difference, Woolf wrote, "lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but that each sex describes itself" (qtd. in Blain 118). Thus, although we may try to deny that *Heart of Darkness*, as Bode suggests, seems primarily designed to describe "a kind of male ritual, a moral and sexual initiation into 'manhood,' concerned primarily with men" (20), Woolf would undoubtedly have tended to read it in this light.

Based on Woolf's descriptions of the respective purposes of male- and female-authored fiction, of course, we may also deduce that she intended her readers to see her own novel, *The Voyage Out*, as an exploration of "womanhood," even if her professed purpose, as she described it in a February 1916 letter, was "to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again" (Pitt 146). This is not to say, however, that Woolf's novel does not grapple with many of the same issues which we find in *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, as Pitt remarks, "The dominant theme of the novel is Rachel's self-discovery, and it is this exploration of the self which is the strongest

link between *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness*. In Virginia Woolf's novel, the areas of discovery include the knowledge of the self as something unique and apart, and knowledge of others" (141).

Many of the lessons which Rachel learns in *The Voyage Out* parallel those learned by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Perhaps most importantly, the jungle teaches both Rachel and Marlow that the world and the individuals who inhabit it are ultimately unknowable, and it shows them that language can neither fully represent nor comprehend truth or reality. Taken together, Pitt suggests,

the hostile, elemental forces in nature which both writers evoke are thus partly used to support a theory of the futility of human endeavour and hope, particularly in *The Voyage Out*, where Rachel is largely a victim of death and these hostile forces, which lend support to Helen's theory of life as one which "made chaos triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and everyone groping about in illusion and ignorance." (144)

Chapters 20 through 22 of *The Voyage Out* chart the growth of Rachel's awareness of the ultimate incomprehensibility and uncontrollability of the world, and of the words which try to control and comprehend its reality. Not only does the "great darkness" of the jungle "ha[ve] the usual effect of taking away all desire for communication by making their words sound thin and small" (265), but it also defies the party's attempts at description, and thus possession. When Hewet attempts to read poetry aloud, a "bird gave a wild laugh, a monkey chuckled a malicious question, and, as fire fades in the hot sunshine, his words flickered and went out" as "the number of moving things entirely vanquished his words" (267). Similarly, the word "beautiful" seems "a strange little word" to Helen, "and Hirst and herself both so small that she forgot to answer him"

(268), while “[e]very word” the Flushings utter “sounded quite distinctly in Terence’s ears,” yet he wonders “what were they saying, and who were they talking to, and who were they, these fantastic people, detached somewhere high up in the air” (275).

Similarly, and despite his assertion that he has “a voice too, and for good or evil . . . [his] is the speech that cannot be silenced” (52), Marlow says that “[t]he idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion” (28). Like Helen and Terence, Marlow senses the greatness and ultimate inexplicability of the landscape which surrounds him: “I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets” (79). As Trethewey notes, Conrad “illustrate[s] the final inability of language to capture the presence, the inwardness, the contextual fullness of lived experience” when he has Marlow declare, ““it seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise . . .”” (104).

Rachel, too, wonders if her engagement, or perhaps the mere fact of her love, is only a dream. She asks Terence, “Is it true, or is it a dream?” (276). Although Terence immediately replies, “It’s true, it’s true,” his words are mere consolations, just as Marlow’s words to the Intended will be. The following day, when Rachel “lightly touched his cheek,” “his fingers followed where hers had been, and the touch of his hand upon his face brought back the overpowering sense of unreality. This body of his was unreal; the world was unreal” (282). Far from being convinced of the “truth” of his apparent communion with Rachel, he asks “What’s happened? . . . Why did I ask you to marry me? How did it happen?” But neither of the young

lovers can explain or comprehend it—“neither of them could remember what had been said” (282). Terence may only say, “We sat upon the ground,” to which Rachel replies, parroting him, “We sat upon the ground” (282).

Of course, this is not the first instance in which Rachel may only repeat the hollow, unreal words of her lover. Throughout Terence’s proposal and her acceptance of it, Rachel does little more than repeat her lover’s words, seeming almost to lack a voice of her own:

“You like being with me?” Terence asked.

“Yes, with you,” she replied.

He was silent for a moment. Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world.

“That is what I have felt ever since I knew you,” he replied. “We are happy together.” He did not seem to be speaking, or she to be hearing.

“Very happy,” she answered.

They continued to walk for some time in silence. Their steps unconsciously quickened.

“We love each other,” Terence said.

“We love each other,” she repeated. (271)

When Rachel “murmur[s],” “Terrible—terrible,” we learn that “in saying this she was thinking as much of the persistent churning of the water as of her own feeling. On and on it went in the distance, the senseless and cruel churning of the water” (271-2). It is not only the mingling of “pain” with “happiness” (285) that causes Rachel to cry out, but the recognition of her own powerlessness in the face of the larger, chaotic world around her.

The passage framing Terence and Rachel’s engagement parallels Marlow’s conversation with Kurtz’s Intended, in which his own words fail to comprehend the truth as much as the

conventional words of the young lovers had. In this case, however, as Bode notes, it is not the female voice which is silenced, but the male: “The interaction of” Marlow and the Intended “suggests . . . the submission of his will to hers. Marlow seems to lose the ability to initiate his own thoughts, to create his own words. He becomes a mere mimic, making her words, his” (28), as in the following exchange:

“His words, at least, have not died.”

“His words will remain,” I said.

“And his example,” she whispered to herself. “Men looked up to him—his goodness shone in every act. His example—”

“True,” I said; “his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.”

. . .

She said suddenly very low, “He died as he lived.”

“His end,” said I, with dull anger stirring in me, “was in every way worthy of his life.” (93-94)

Unlike Terence’s words to Rachel, which attempt to comprehend the truth even as they fall short of it, and which elicit from her a cry of “Terrible!—terrible!” (271), Marlow’s intentional lie has the effect of sparing the Intended from comprehending what Kurtz recognized as “The horror! the horror!” (86) of man’s depravity. Instead of reacting as Rachel had done, the Intended gives out a “light sigh,” followed by “an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. ‘I knew it—I was sure!’” (94). Like Marlow’s aunt, who has been “spared” knowledge of the imperialists’ true motivations, so too has the Intended been “saved” from the truth by Marlow. It is important to note that Marlow experiences a moment of doubt about his actions. Although he tries to justify himself by saying, “The

heavens do not fall for such a trifle,” he cannot help wondering, as he says, “Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due?” (94). For just a moment, Marlow questions the “saving illusion” which he, as a man, has deemed appropriate to the females of his world, and which Virginia Woolf would find so reprehensible. His hesitation lasts only a moment, but in that moment perhaps Marlow is brought closer to the truth of himself than ever before as he admits that he told the lie more to spare himself the “horror” than to spare Kurtz’s Intended: “But I couldn’t. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether. . .” (94).

Thus, although Marlow seems to have learned the lessons of the jungle, in the end he still believes that women cannot endure the glimpse of truth which those lessons apprehend. Woolf’s Terence, on the other hand, quickly forgets what he has learned altogether. Once he has returned to society, Terence reassumes his old belief that truth can be circumscribed and stated factually. After the young couple discusses educational plans for their “children,” Terence “professe[s] his “greatest admiration for St. John Hirst,” whose mind he believes to be “like a torpedo” “aimed at falsehood” (295). During his glowing adulations of Hirst, however, Terence seems finally to recall his audience, a recollection which causes him to cry out impatiently: “But you’ll never see it! . . . because with all your virtues you don’t, and you never will, care with every fibre of your being for the pursuit of truth! You’ve no respect for facts, Rachel; you’re essentially feminine” (295). Terence’s pronouncement recalls, of course, Marlow’s description of the separate female world, where women are not only “out of touch with truth” but threatened by the potential encroachment of “fact” as well (27).

For Terence, truth can be boiled down, summarized and communicated in words, as is perhaps best evidenced by his attempts to write the book which he will call *Silence*. While

Terence recognizes in some vague way that, “now that he and Rachel were going to be married,” the world would be “different certainly” and that his book therefore “would not now be the same book that it would have been,” the nature of these differences eludes him: “He would then put down his pencil and stare in front of him, and wonder in what respects the world was different—it had, perhaps, more solidity, more coherence, more importance, greater depth” (291). In fact, as Rachel has learned from her experience in the jungle, the world has become less solid, less coherent, and the words they use to describe it have become “thin and small” (265). As Bishop notes, “The ideal” of Terence’s book, for Woolf, “would be somehow to capture and communicate experience without reducing it to ‘inanimate phrases.’” (353). Although Terence intends, as Bishop says, “to convey the inner life, to present those things that cannot be baldly stated,” those “‘things people don’t say’” (353), these truths elude him when he returns to the reasoned, civilized world of masculine figures like Hewet.

But Rachel has learned—having being granted an opportunity which Marlow denies both his aunt and Kurtz’s Intended—that the truth of human experience is too complex to be reduced to some passionless, reasoned male rhetoric. Unlike Terence, Rachel is bothered by the fact that words not only often fail to encompass truth but that they often hide or obscure it as well.

Although Blain points out that “*The Voyage Out* is not a disguised first-person novel” (122), the author would undoubtedly have felt very much as Rachel does. As Bayley suggests:

The old doctrines of realism found an unexpected home in the feminist novel.

Uninfluenced by men, women did not live in two worlds, they did not posture and pretend and make things up: they experienced reality simply and as it was. In one sense, as Virginia Woolf admits, both through a character in *The Voyage Out* and

in her essays, they lacked the self-confidence to make things up, but this gave all the more authenticity to their rendering of experience. (81)

Rachel seems profoundly disturbed by the congratulatory letters which she has received from the hotel guests. She thinks that it is “strange, considering how very different these people were, that they used almost the same sentences when they wrote to congratulate her upon her engagement. That any one of these people had ever felt what she felt, or could ever feel it, or had even the right to pretend for a single second that they were capable of feeling it, appalled her . . . if they didn’t feel a thing why did they go and pretend to?” (293-294). The letters are, Rachel recognizes, little more than civilized lies: “I never fell in love, if falling in love is what people say it is, and it’s the world that tells the lies and I tell the truth. Oh, what lies—what lies!” (293).

But Terence dismisses the conventional hypocrisy of the letters, saying, “Of course they’re absurd, Rachel; of course they say things just because other people say them, but even so, what a nice woman Miss Allan is” (294). Once again, Terence misses the point. For someone who professes to be interested in “the things people don’t say,” he displays little practical interest in getting to the heart of these “things.” When he jots in his notebook, “Every woman not so much a rake at heart, as an optimist, because they don’t think” (291), he seems to capture his own essence more clearly than Rachel’s. But perhaps Rachel too has learned that it is futile to “think” about such things, since this would imply the use of reason and logic—modes which can neither penetrate nor comprehend reality. Rachel seems to come closest to understanding when she loses herself in her music, that is, when she relies on intuition and emotion rather than masculine rhetoric.

As Rachel plays a Beethoven sonata, Terence intrudes upon her thoughts by demanding that she explain her sex, as when he asks, “query, what is meant by masculine term,

honour?—what corresponds to it in your sex? Eh?” Rachel resents the interruption, for she has come to understand one of the lessons which Trethewey identifies in *Heart of Darkness*, that “there can be no substantial identity between words and things,” and that “any self that shapes itself according to prescriptions enshrined in language will be, in the absence of something more than language, as insubstantial as words themselves” (106). Rachel recognizes that it would be no less futile to attempt to define “honour” in the feminine world than it would be in the masculine one. As the narrator tells us, “She had, indeed, advanced so far in the pursuit of wisdom that she allowed these secrets to rest undisturbed; it seemed to be reserved for a later generation to discuss them philosophically” (292).

Rachel does, however, hint at her new-found knowledge when she asks, “Does it ever seem to you, Terence, that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter, and that we’re nothing but patches of light . . . like that?” (293). But Rachel’s insight is lost on her lover, who immediately falls back on what he sees as the comforting explicability of the masculine world in which he resides: “No . . . I feel solid; immensely solid; the legs of my chair might be rooted in the bowels of the earth. But at Cambridge, I can remember, there were times when one fell into ridiculous states of semi-coma about five o’clock in the morning” (293). Unwilling or unable to comprehend Rachel’s question, Terence effectively dodges it. Throughout these chapters, in fact, it seems as if Rachel and Terence talk around one another, rather than to one another, and Woolf would seem to suggest—where Conrad does not—that the inability of the two lovers to communicate has as much to do with the differences in their genders as it does with the limitations of language in general. Relegated to separate worlds, Terence and Rachel simply do not speak the same language. Just as Marlow mistook the jottings of the Russian “harlequin” (69)

in the margins of Towson's book for ciphers (70), so too does Terence seem to see in Rachel's words some sort of impenetrable code, when in fact the difference is merely cultural.

Rachel implies her recognition of the limitations of language—which are surely made more keen by these cultural differences between men and women—when she says, “I hate these divisions, don't you, Terence? One person all in the dark about another person . . . why should one be shut up all by oneself in a room?” But again Terence fails to listen or respond to Rachel's concerns; instead, he merely “look[s] at her keenly and with dissatisfaction,” feeling that she had “cut herself adrift from him” (302). Of course, this is exactly what Rachel has unwittingly done by expressing her desire for “something else” (302)—for something more. Terence projects his own feelings of impotence on Rachel when he says, “Men and women are too different. You can't understand—you don't understand—” (302). But Rachel understands more clearly than Terence ever will, simply because she acknowledges that she can never possibly hope to truly understand at all.

This acknowledgment of her limitations does not, however, quell Rachel's desires. In her quest for self-knowledge, she has learned that she cannot simply accept what the civilized, conventional world offers her—marriage: “It seemed to her now that what he was saying was perfectly true, and that she wanted many more things than the love of one human being” (302). Rachel's process of self-discovery, as Pitt notes, was initiated early on in the novel by another female character, her aunt Helen:

Helen is horrified by Rachel's obvious ignorance, and fear, of men and sex. She tells Rachel that the Dalloways, of whom Rachel has been in some awe, are really rather second-rate people, and that she must learn to discriminate and become a person “on her own account.” This statement is like a revelation to Rachel: “The

vision of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or wind, flashed into Rachel's mind, and she became profoundly excited at the thought of living." (142)

Now that Rachel has agreed to marry Terence, she is shaken as she finds herself once more confronted with the realities of the conventional world in which she lives. Although for Terence their marriage will mean little change in his life—"the world was different, but not in that way; he still wanted the things he had always wanted" (294)—for Rachel it represents, significantly, a loss of the very selfhood which she has worked so hard to attain throughout most of the novel.

As Woolf notes in *Three Guineas*, it was not until "the year 1919, by an Act which unbarred the professions" (16) that women were permitted some measure of financial independence. This Act not only came four years too late for the Rachel Vinrace of 1915's *The Voyage Out* but also failed to provide for the economic independence of women who chose to marry. For Rachel, marriage at best meant subsuming her own thoughts and desires to her husband's while she worked her "charm[s]" (*Three Guineas* 17) upon him in order to gain some limited measure of what she truly desired. Her fate would then seem little better than that of Marlow's aunt, who finds herself positively "triumphant" at having secured her nephew a position with the Company through the exercise of her influence with "the wife of" some "high dignitary" (27), who, in turn, undoubtedly exercised her own feminine "charm[s]" upon her husband.

As a number of critics note, there is a sexual element inherent in Rachel's fear as well. As Blain suggests:

In Rachel, the fear becomes fatally internalized. Terence dismisses peremptorily and without compunction the most important thing in her life—her music . . . and he . . . remains quite insensitive to her anxiety at being exhibited as an object at the hotel tea-party after their engagement. The point is, of course, that there is no conceivable way for Rachel to object to any of this treatment, in terms a conventional male like Terence could understand, except by rejecting him outright. And rejecting a man one has attracted and to whom one has promised sexual fulfillment is in traditional male mythology tantamount to castrating him. (125-126)

Woolf also provides a number of overt suggestions of Rachel's sexual anxiety, perhaps nowhere more vividly than in the girl's deathbed dreams or hallucinations, in which she finds "herself walking through a tunnel under the Thames . . . while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall" (331). Pitt notes that:

For Rachel, the discovery and acknowledgment of feelings are complicated by her fear of sex, which seems to be based on a dislike of man's animal nature and possible brutality and on the fear of a loss of self through the merging of one's identity with another . . . [Rachel's] vision of entombment, which recurs at the end of the novel during Rachel's illness in her fear of being buried alive, is expressed in the image of her lying "still and cold as death." She feels herself being pursued by barbarian men, and "the horror did not go at once . . . she got up and actually locked the door" . . . This horror, as in the cry of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, is associated with images of darkness and death, as well as the depravity of man's nature. (142-143)

Rachel's hallucinations do seem to recall the final madness of Kurtz, who was driven insane by his insights into man's violent, corrupt nature and into his own inability to control this violence within himself. Marlow directly connects Kurtz's knowledge of the chaotic, incomprehensibility of the world with his insanity when he cloaks his description in terms of language and dreams: "I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced—but what's the good? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares . . . But his soul was mad" (83).

Rachel's final, personal horror, of course, is somewhat different from Kurtz's, but she nevertheless comes to recognize the "nightmare" which it represents as a result of the knowledge she has gained within the reaches of the untamed jungle. For Rachel, men's final—and perhaps worst—act of violence is their suppression of women, a suppression effectuated by economic and sexual dominance. In the end, the only way for Rachel to escape the loss of selfhood which this dominance represents is to remove herself utterly from the society in which she lives. Thus, Rachel's death, however accidental, ultimately provides her with the only possible means of escape.

The tragedy of Rachel's death, however, is that it ultimately seems to serve no higher purpose. As Woolf intended, Rachel does not live on as a martyr to the feminine cause, but is soon forgotten—the "vast tumult of life" is merely "cut short for a moment by the death, and go[es] on again" (Woolf, qtd. in Pitt 146). When Rachel dies, Terence may only think or mouth the same sort of conventional, meaningless words which so offended Rachel when she read the letters of congratulation: "No two people have ever been so happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have" (353). As Bishop remarks, Terence's "claim is that of all lovers, and it merely reminds the reader of how inadequate language is to express a complex of intense

emotions, or to capture and convey an individual's character. Only with the anguished 'Rachel! Rachel!', wrung from Terence in the transition to a world devoid of love, does the full meaning of their bond make itself felt" (356-357). And yet the reader wonders if Terence, who continues to deny the truth of what has happened, recognizes his own depth of feeling.

Only Evelyn seems properly affected by Rachel's death, which has made her wonder, "What did matter then? What was the meaning of it all?" (367). These words may signal the beginning of Evelyn's own journey toward selfhood and understanding, but it is unfortunately a journey which Woolf suggests may only lead her down the same, hopeless path which Rachel followed. But in the end, Woolf seems to say, better that women should make the journey, as Rachel Vinrace has done, than allow themselves to continue living the lie of the "beautiful world of their own" (Conrad 64) which men have created for them and which men like Marlow work so carefully to preserve.

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