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**THE DEATH OF RACHEL VINRACE:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S THE VOYAGE OUT**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: THE VOYAGE BEYOND: "D'YOU BELIEVE THAT THINGS GO ON, THAT SHE'S STILL SOMEWHERE - OR DO YOU THINK IT'S SIMPLY A GAME - WE CRUMBLE UP TO NOTHING WHEN WE DIE?"

CHAPTER 2: "WE SHOULD LIVE SEPARATE . . . WE ONLY BRING OUT WHAT'S WORST": "THE MASCULINE" AND "THE FEMININE" IN THE VOYAGE OUT.

CHAPTER 3: "THE IMAGE IN A POOL ON A STILL SUMMER'S DAY": RACHEL, HELEN AND TERENCE.

CHAPTER 4: "AS IF THEY STOOD ON THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE": RACHEL'S QUEST TOWARDS DEATH: ASPECTS OF THE INNER AND OUTER LIFE.

CHAPTER 5: THE SLIDING OF A RIVER AS IT RACES TO A WATERFALL; RACHEL, SEXUALITY AND DEATH.

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with Virginia Woolf's first novel, The Voyage Out, and is a feminist, psychobiographical and sociological reading of this text. Louise DeSalvo (Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making (London: Macmillan, 1980)) and other critics have laid down much of the groundwork for my thesis by establishing many strong biographical links between the text and Woolf's life, therefore it is not primarily my intention to continue this approach, but to extend it by presenting an analysis of the particular patriarchal structure under which the heroine of the novel is oppressed, and seeking to relate this to the patriarchal late Victorian and Edwardian society in which Woolf herself grew up. Whereas the thesis incorporates elements of traditional literary criticism such as analyses of character and interrelations between different characters, nevertheless I couch these in an historical and political framework, seeking associations between the text and its wider historical setting (against which it is partly in reaction), and also explore the sociological and political debates and biases which were of particular concern in the historical period in which the novel was written. Also, my first chapter seeks to contextualize my discourse by analysing the major trends and warring factions in Woolf, and particularly Voyage Out, criticism over the past decade.

My conclusion (and the strength of the argument in the thesis) is that the causes of the death of Rachel, the heroine of the novel, are a complex mixture of the seemingly personal and the covertly political; her death is a product of her own unique personality, of the action of certain close

relationships upon her, and of the historical and political determinants which shape her fate. Another discourse runs through the thesis as it does sub-textually in the novel, that is, Woolf's identification with her central character, and I employ much material from Woolf's autobiographical writings to flesh out this additional dimension to the reading of the text, thereby encouraging the multiplicity of convergent readings to which it opens itself.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I consent to it being made available for photocopying and loan.

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my maternal grandmother, Doris Mary Hawke (1896-1972), a woman whose courage and endurance still stand as a shining example to all who knew her:

. . . the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the
language
of the living (Eliot).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS IN TEXT

<u>AR000</u>	<u>A Room of One's Own</u>
<u>B</u>	Quentin Bell, <u>Virginia Woolf, A Biography</u>
<u>BP</u>	<u>Books and Portraits</u>
<u>BTA</u>	<u>Between the Acts</u>
<u>CR</u>	<u>The Common Reader</u>
<u>D</u>	<u>The Diary of Virginia Woolf</u>
<u>DOM</u>	<u>The Death of the Moth and Other Essays</u>
<u>G</u>	Lyndall Gordon, <u>Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life</u>
<u>GR</u>	<u>Granite and Rainbow</u>
<u>L</u>	<u>The Letters of Virginia Woolf</u>
<u>MD</u>	<u>Mrs. Dalloway</u>
<u>S</u>	Jeanne Schulkind, <u>Moments of Being</u>
<u>TG</u>	<u>Three Guineas</u>
<u>TTL</u>	<u>To the Lighthouse</u>
<u>IVO</u>	<u>The Voyage Out</u>
<u>IY</u>	<u>The Years</u>