

The Voyage Out Study Guide

The Voyage Out by Virginia Woolf

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Plot Summary

The following version of the book was used to create this study guide: Woolf. Virginia. *The Voyage Out*. Modern Library, 2000.

In this novel, Woolf follows Rachel Vinrace and Helen Ambrose as they leave England on the *Euphrosyne*, a ship captained by Rachel's father and Helen's brother-in-law, Willoughby. Rachel is young and naive. She frustrates Helen with her lack of knowledge and conversational skills. When they make a stop in Lisbon for Willoughby to do some business, Willoughby returns with two new passengers: Mr. Richard Dalloway and Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway. The two attempt to liven up the vessel with their conversation and congeniality. This warmth draws Rachel out of her shell a bit and she befriends the Dalloways. There is a storm, which makes most of the passengers ill. After the storm, Richard goes out onto the deck and meets Rachel. Richard follows Rachel into her room and, after a wave rocks the ship and pushes them closer, kisses her passionately. Once he leaves, Rachel is frustrated and confused. The Dalloways leave at the next port. Rachel confides in Helen, and Helen is shocked that Rachel knows so little of men and the world. Helen sets out to educate her on the ways of the world, feeling a maternal impulse toward her.

Once they arrive in Santa Marina, a town on the coast of South America, Helen and her husband, Ridley, take Rachel to live with them in their villa. Rachel takes to reading and enjoys having the space and time to begin to know her own mind. One night, after collecting and mailing letters from an English ship, Rachel and Helen take a walk through the little town, ending up at the hotel where English tourists are staying. From inside, they are seen by St. John Hirst who is looking out the window while the other hotel patrons are chatting, smoking, and playing bridge. Briefly, we are transported into the hotel and into the minds of the people inside. Particularly, we witness a conversation between St. John Hirst and his close friend, Terence Hewet. The two are young intellectuals from London, and they discuss Hirst's lack of social skills, particularly with women. Hewet is a very social person and suggests that they lead an expedition to facilitate bonding in the group and for Hirst to practice talking to women.

Helen and Rachel are also invited on this expedition, and they decide to go since they do not know many people in Santa Marina. On the expedition, Hewet strikes up a conversation, finding her interesting as she distances herself from the crowd and people-watches. Together, they come across a couple, Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning, who have just become engaged. They are kissing in the grass, and Rachel and Hewet are caught off guard by witnessing this intimate moment with someone they have only just met. This seems to make them more comfortable with each other, and as they talk, they run into Hirst and Helen, who have also been talking. The four become a fairly close friend group and, after the expedition, spend quite a bit of time together. Hirst particularly attaches to Helen, who he thinks of as the only person whom he can truly have a good conversation with.



Helen and Rachel start spending more time at the hotel with the guests there, particularly Hewet and Hirst, who are also frequent guests at the Ambroses' villa. Hewet and Rachel start spending more time together and realize they have feelings for one another. They are confused and have difficulty discussing this with each other. Mrs. Flushing, one of the hotel guests who is quite eccentric and adventurous, proposes an expedition to nearby village. Mr. and Mrs. Flushing, Hirst, Hewet, Helen, and Rachel make up the party. When the steamer pulls ashore, Rachel and Hewet go for a walk in the woods, while the rest of the party stays on the shore. The freedom of being alone and so far from their original context inspires them to confess their love for one another. They decide to get married, seeing that as the requisite next step to love. On another walk, Helen discovers Rachel and Hewet together. The two tell her of their engagement. The entire party proceeds to the village and explores while Mr. and Mrs. Flushing talk and trade with the local people, as they plan to sell the goods when they are back in London.

Hewet and Rachel start life as an engaged couple. They clash over little things like going to tea with the hotel guests together. Rachel hates being the center of attention, but Hewet thinks they should be more social. Despite these minor disagreements, it is still clear they are comfortable with each other and content to take long walks and talk or read poetry. Unfortunately, their happiness does not last. Rachel falls ill, and because of the incompetence of the local doctor, her condition worsens. Hewet is in denial and argues with Helen about the severity of Rachel's condition. However, Rachel starts to hallucinate vividly. Hewet, in a panic, sends Hirst in search of another doctor. Eventually, he returns with a doctor who is much more competent - Hirst has plucked him from his vacation nearby. Though this doctor is much better, he is grave when he observes Rachel and makes it clear there is not much he can do for her. Eventually, he gently informs Hewet that he should go upstairs. Hewet sits with Rachel before she peacefully dies in her sleep.

Hewet is distraught, but Hirst cannot help feeling relief that the entire ordeal is over. We are taken back to the perspective of the hotel guests as they murmur here and there about how sad Rachel's death is. A storm blows up, and for a while, all of the hotel guests stand in silent awe together in the big room, powerless against nature. As the storm winds to a close, Hirst returns to the hotel. The guests are settling into their evening routines, many watching a game of chess two old men are playing. Hirst sinks into a chair, finally resting, watching as the guests chatter and eventually disperse to bed.



Chapters 1-6

Summary

The Voyage Out opens with Ridley and Helen Ambrose walking through London to catch their ship along the River Thames. She is overcome by the prospect of leaving her children for their voyage to South America. The couple boards the waiting boat, which is captained by Helen's brother-in-law, Captain Willoughby Vinrace. On board, she meets Rachel Vinrace, whom she finds uninteresting and uneducated in the ways of the world, and Mr. Pepper, who is a fussy academic. She resigns herself to a dull journey.

After a couple of days at sea, the boat stops, in order for Captain Willoughby to conduct business in a port in Lisbon. When he returns, he is accompanied by Richard and Clarissa Dalloway. Richard is a politician, and Clarissa is his worldly, well-educated wife. Rachel is immediately struck with admiration for Clarissa's sophistication and aims to befriend her. Clarissa is very outgoing and tries to liven up the party with her enthusiasm, getting into light intellectual arguments about Jane Austen, for example. She expresses her admiration for Rachel's skill at the piano, but having her listen makes Rachel flush and stop playing.

Rachel latches onto the Dalloways, intrigued by their exciting lives and interesting personalities. Clarissa is intrigued by Rachel and tries, with some success, to draw her out of her shell. Rachel talks to Richard about his life in the country as a boy and his career in politics. Rachel seems truly engaged for the first time, asking questions and admiring Richard's impressive persona and life. Their new friendship is interrupted, as for three days a violent storm rocks the ship, causing many characters (particularly Clarissa) to become ill. After the storm is over, Richard goes out for fresh air and meets Rachel. Wanting to continue their earlier conversation, Richard follows Rachel into her little room. A wave knocks Rachel into him. He kisses her passionately, and he murmurs "You tempt me" (89). He seems to be afraid of what he has just done. They separate and are awkward around each other for the rest of the journey, before the Dalloways leave at the next port. Clarissa anxiously requests the other passengers visit the Dalloway home in London.

Afterwards, Rachel and Helen discuss what has happened. Rachel is frustrated and confused, and Helen tries to calm Rachel by assuring her that a kiss does not need to be this concerning, and that it is natural that men desire women. Rachel concludes that she "liked him" despite her confusion and frustration (94). She reflects on how it felt to be desired. Helen takes charge of Rachel's education and gets her to agree to stay with her in the village instead of continuing with her father on the ship.



Analysis

There is a lot of playful intellectual discussion on relevant topics - earlier drafts of the novel apparently delved more seriously and explicitly into political and social commentary, but much of this commentary was edited out in subsequent revisions of the text. Woolf explores, through the guise of dialogue, a cross-section of viewpoints on social and political issues relevant to her time. It also serves to develop characters quickly by directly soliciting their thoughts on character-defining issues, such as feminism, the English colonial empire, and the key pieces of literature.

The sometimes lofty discussions also remind us of the wealthy, educated status of many of the main characters - they don't need to work for a living (or their work entails more abstract labor) and spend their time puzzling over life's bigger questions. The women are particularly interesting to observe in these sections. Different styles of being an independent, intellectual woman are explored. Helen and Clarissa are contrasted: Helen is stubborn, fiercely independent, and matter-of-fact, while Clarissa dominates the social sphere with her social graces and general excitement over people, art, and culture.

Sexuality and self-knowledge are big focuses in this section. Rachel, who has mostly been kept in the company of her aunts in Richmond, or else her father, Willoughby, does not know how to respond to men. Unlike Helen, a worldly and experienced woman, Rachel is completely caught off guard by Richard's advances. Rachel's confusion over the kiss with Richard Dalloway will be recalled at moments throughout the rest of the book as she struggles with ideas about who she is, what she wants, and whom she wants. A lot of the discussion in this book about sexuality and desire seems to revolve around questions about which feelings are authentic, and which do we will ourselves to feel. The constant questioning of self, and the inability to fully know what about ourselves is innate and purely us, projects onto questions of love and desire. If we cannot know ourselves completely, or anyone else completely, how do we recognize love, and how do we attain a sense of certainty that this feeling is not just what we think we are supposed to feel in a given situation? Self-knowledge is something Rachel struggles with particularly, and is a theme which Woolf returns to throughout the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Helen Ambrose and Clarissa Dalloway are both independent-thinking, intellectual English women of about the same age. Still, the two have very different mannerisms and do not seem to relate to one another at all. Compare and contrast how each woman is independent and stubborn, and how they differ from one another. Does Clarissa's devotion to her husband compromise her independence? Why does Helen dislike Clarissa?



Discussion Question 2

Rachel was raised by her aunts in Richmond, in the absence of any distinct male figures (aside from Willoughby, who is still not consistently around). How does this shape her as a character?

Discussion Question 3

Methods of communication and the limits of communication are big themes in this novel. Discuss the different ways in which the characters on the voyage express themselves. What impediments do these methods create in getting through to the other characters?

Vocabulary

iridescent, hansom, presentiments, effervescing proverbial unkempt, self-abasement, tresses, jocular, impertinent



Chapters 7-12

Summary

The Euphrosyne arrives in the bay, with the Ambroses, Vinraces, and Dalloways on board. They go to the house, which was offered to them by Helen's brother. They are greeted by a Spanish-speaking housekeeper and some pigs that are being kept in the house. The refined English sensibilities of their original housekeeper, who has come with them from the Euphrosyne, are shocked. They tell Mr. Pepper that he should journey on, because it will be more exciting, but he takes the hint that they do not want his company, and he takes a room at the hotel nearby, where many other Englishmen/women are staying. Helen gives Rachel her own room, which gives her space to read and practice the piano. Helen notices Rachel maturing and growing into her own mind, developing her taste in books and learning to enjoy solitude with her own thoughts. For quite a while, the party lives a quiet life, mostly reading and going for walks.

One day, Helen and Rachel decide go for a walk and collect their letters from an arriving ship. Rachel pleads with Helen that Helen promised they'd "see life" that evening - meaning walk around the village. The two end up straying to the hotel where all of the other English tourists are staying. They watch through the window, and catch a glimpse of the typical post-dinner drawing room scene of English manners, with people playing bridge and smoking cigarettes, chatting about each other. They are seen by St. John Hirst, whose curiosity they pique, but they flee immediately when they realize they have been spotted.

This part of the book seems to mark the beginning of a reintroduction to society for Helen and Rachel. Following their sighting, we are introduced in more depth to the English guests of the hotel. Woolf begins playing with point of view. Instead of following Helen and Rachel home, she delves into the minds of the English people staying in the hotel, and sketches their various relationships and entanglements. Two of the primary characters introduced at this stage are St. John Hirst and Terence Hewet, who discuss the sighting of two women (whom we know to be Helen and Rachel) outside the window earlier while they played bridge. Hewet, who is positive and intrigued by people, comes up with the idea to lead an expedition to the top of a nearby summit.

Helen and Rachel are invited, through Ridley's connections to people in the hotel, and they decide to go. Throughout the journey, Hirst tries his hand at talking to women, because Hewet has told him he needs to practice. Hirst's intellect and withdrawn personality (despite being outspoken when it comes to intellectual questions) puts off Evelyn and he ends up talking to Helen, whom he feels very comfortable with. Hewet observes Rachel observing the party from a distance, and the two start talking. They come across the newly engaged Arthur Venning and Susan Warrington, who are kissing on the grass, just hidden from the main group by some trees. Bonded by witnessing this unusually intimate moment together, the two feel more comfortable with one another.



After a while of talking, Helen and Hirst appear behind them, and the four introduce themselves and talk as a group.

A dance is held to celebrate Arthur's and Susan's new engagement. Hirst tries to relate to Rachel but is exasperated with her narrow reading - he promises to lend her his copy of Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ("‘D’you mean you’ve reached the age of twenty-four without reading Gibbon?’ he demanded." (189)). Rachel is frustrated, feeling small and ignorant because of Hirst's condescending manner. Later, Hirst attaches to Helen, marveling at her being his intellectual equal, and a person he can finally talk to. He explains how isolated he has felt and how he misses Cambridge, where he could always find someone to talk to and debate intellectual questions with.

Rachel is surprised by how much she enjoys the dance, even playing the piano after the regular musicians left in order to prolong the dancing for everyone else. After the dance, Hewet and Hirst are wide awake, so they walk Helen and Rachel back to the villa, as they have missed the last carriage home. They sit together for a while, Helen asking about how Rachel's perspective has shifted from the dance, Rachel peacefully stacking stones. Hirst claims that he has discovered the meaning of life, though everyone is too tired to really inquire what he means. Hewet and Hirst make their way back to the hotel as the sun is rising.

Analysis

This section marks the beginning of Woolf's play with scope. She introduces the reader to many new points of view, regardless of whether these characters will turn out to be influential to the central plot. There is a sense of un-focusing as she does this, disrupting the traditional style of narration, which would only inhabit a few points of view, and only with the intention of explaining the motivations of major characters. Stylistically, this is very characteristic of Woolf - her writing makes one very conscious that every person, however briefly mentioned, contains within them their own life story which is just as rich and varied as anyone else's. She reacts against the idea that some characters are simple while only the central characters are complex and thoughtful, giving us momentary direct glimpses into the thoughts and feelings of peripheral characters. We are brought, for example, fairly deeply into the thoughts of Susan Warrington, who wonders if Arthur Venning is interested in her and reflects on her frustratingly servile obligation to her invalid aunt. Later, during the picnic Arthur proposes to her, and we enter both of their minds as they separate from the main party and lay kissing in the grass, hidden by the trees.

After spending so much time sketching their journeys at sea and their idyllic seaside residence, Woolf moves in this section to bring back conflict, and she does this by reintroducing her characters to society. Because of her new acquaintances, Hewet and Hirst, Rachel begins, yet again, to question her identity and her true thoughts and feelings. Hirst, for example, frustrates Rachel and makes her feel intellectually inadequate, even while the reader realizes from Hirst's thoughts that he also is



uncomfortable in social situations and is actually making an honest effort to befriend her. In reintroducing her main characters to a new group of strangers, the frustration of miscommunication is also reintroduced. Rachel and Hirst, particularly, struggle with being at ease socially and making themselves understood.

Hewet and Hirst are presented as foils, despite their close friendship. Both intellectuals, the two differ most prominently in their attitudes toward people. Hewet is open and social, forgiving toward possible slights and willing to make allowances for people and their circumstances. Hirst is more judgmental and finds it difficult to relate to people, in part because of his learning. He is incredulous at Rachel for having not read Gibbon's text on the fall of the Roman Empire, not understanding how a person can reach the age of 24 without having read it. Because he is a product of Cambridge's intellectual sphere, he is constantly disappointed when people are not as well-read or intellectual as he is. As the book continues, Hirst attempts to correct this, realizing that human relationships ultimately have more value in life than being the most well-read person in the room. His epiphany after the dance, which is later revisited in greater depth, is that love is the most fundamental thing in life.

This is the first time we encounter the forest as a symbol in the book. Hewet and Rachel stray from the group and see Susan and Arthur. Both of them are moved by what they've seen: "a certain intensity of vision...remained with them. As a day upon which any emotion has been repressed is different from other days, so this day was now different, merely because they had seen other people at a crisis of their lives" (173). Because they witnessed this moment, which was supposed to be private, together, there is a new intimacy and ease they feel with each other, and they talk freely.

There's a strange fixation with being instant friends, deep conversations, and intimacy - Hirst is trying really hard to get at the heart of his new acquaintances, insecure about his social skills/likability, and starved for meaningful conversation. Helen, Rachel, and Hewet also have a similar disdain for small talk and the desire to jump into deep relationships, despite only being acquainted for a short while. However, Woolf shows that, despite your intentions, you cannot instantly know someone just because of the quality of questions you ask them, or how smart you all are. The four form a cohort with the intent of becoming instantly close, asking each other to give a quick sketch of themselves so that the others can know them and they can talk familiarly. Eventually though, in later chapters and only after spending a lot of time together, the four do become quite close as friends.

Discussion Question 1

Rachel finds Hirst exasperating and condescending, while we see from his thoughts that he thinks this is the way to make conversation with her. Do you think that Hirst is a sympathetic character? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Look at the conversation between Evelyn and Hewet. Do you think Hewet is right in thinking she is being disingenuous or flirtatious, or does she simply want his answer to her questions? Is Hewet being too judgmental of Evelyn, or is Evelyn even aware of the impression she is creating?

Discussion Question 3

Is the group close as friends, or are they close by necessity, because of their need for companionship in an unfamiliar place? Do you think that people can become close through questions which are more personal, or is closeness more a product of extended time spent around the same people, until they become familiar? To what extent is Woolf's depiction of these interactions satirical?

Vocabulary

deride, cleft, subterfuge, obsequious, solicitude, sanguine, somnolent, calvacade, repartee, platitude, insolence



Chapters 13-18

Summary

After the dance, a new intimacy exists between Hirst, Hewet, Helen, and Rachel. Hirst and Hewet visit the villa frequently. Rachel is conscious of a new perspective in life following the dance. She goes for a long walk the next morning, singing and thinking over the events of the night before. Rachel asks Ridley about Gibbon, which has been recommended to her by Hirst. Rachel discovers that Hirst has already sent her a copy. Rachel goes for a walk with her new copy of Gibbon and a text by Balzac which Ridley has given her. She is happy and wanders somewhat aimlessly, thinking abstractly about what love is and how to know what one feels. It is ambiguous as to whether she has a particular person in mind or whether she just does not understand the feeling.

The hotel patrons check their mail and are reminded of their friends and family back in England. A series of small sketches of minor characters follow. For example, Mrs. Paley, who is Susan Warrington's invalid aunt, remarks the difference in Susan's confidence and demeanor after her engagement. Hirst notices Hewet deep in thought and, somewhat sarcastically, asks him if he is in love. Hewet becomes irritable and goes for a long walk by himself. He goes up to the villa and overhears a light conversation between Helen and Rachel. Hewet is struck by Rachel's voice. He sneaks back to the hotel unseen. After he gets back, Hewet is cornered by Evelyn, who asks him what he thinks about the two proposals she has received while she has been in the Santa Marina hotel. Hewet is tired and inattentive. Evelyn is frustrated by his inattention, wanting to befriend Hewet and seek his opinion on the matter. He tells Evelyn that she should inform both men she has no intention of marrying either of them.

Ridley, in a moment of paternal concern for Rachel, asks Helen about the young man (Hirst) who has sent the book, wondering about his motivations. He says, "Young gentlemen don't interest themselves in in young women's education without a motive" (240). Helen reassures him, and the two go down to tea with Mr. and Mrs. Flushing. This is their first substantial appearance in the novel. Mrs. Flushing makes alarming, eccentric comments about wanting to burn all books of a certain age, preferring only to read modern texts. This alarms Ridley, the classical academic. Hewet and Hirst are also present. Rachel realizes the effect of their presence: "Rachel's heart beat hard. She was conscious of an extraordinary intensity in everything, as though their presence stripped some cover off the surface of things; but the greetings were remarkably commonplace" (246). Hirst tries to make the argument for reading Gibbon when Rachel complains that she cannot get through it. Hirst frustrates Rachel with his condescension. Hewet and Rachel leave to go for a walk, and Helen and Hirst stay at the house to talk. Hirst asks if Helen likes him, which she says he does. Helen tells Hirst he would like London, so he should go to the bar rather than stay at Cambridge. Hirst, who has been agonizing over his future and his unlikeability, is relieved by this conversation and feels affection for Helen. She is the only person he is able to talk to naturally.



Hewet and Rachel go for a walk, and they talk for a long time. They are frustrated with the feeling that they have things to say to one another but that they do not know what they are. They talk about Rachel's life with her aunts back in Richmond and what their daily routines consist of. Hewet is fascinated with quiet domestic life Rachel describes, questioning her attentively about the particulars. He talks about his own life and his aspirations as a writer. His main project is a novel called *Silence, or the Things People Don't Say*. At the end of their walk, when Hewet drops Rachel off back at the villa, he is frustrated, thinking "What was the point of talking, talking, merely talking?"- though they talked for hours, he still feels as though he does not actually understand her or his feelings toward her (276). Rachel is similarly frustrated.

On Easter, many of the hotel patrons go to a church service. Rachel listens to the words of the service and is frustrated when she realizes she no longer gets the simple spiritual joy of going to church. She instead finds herself analyzing the speech and being incensed that others in the church are simply nodding along, unquestioning. After church, the Flushings insist that Rachel have lunch with them. She is distracted, thinking of Hewet and if he is nearby. Across the room, Hewet is upset that Rachel is, he thinks, ignoring him. He goes for a walk by himself and realizes he is in love with Rachel after all.

Analysis

The themes of self-knowledge and the inability to truly know oneself really comes through in this section. Hewet is in denial about his feelings for Rachel and is frustrated with Hirst for remarking that Hewet must be in love, as if it is obvious, while Hewet himself struggles to understand what his emotions are trying to communicate. There is a separation here between the feelings felt and the interpretation of those feelings, and both Hewet and Rachel have difficulty bridging the gap. Woolf seems to be gesturing at the fact that our emotions are socially defined, just as much as anything else. We do not know what we feel unless it falls into a clearly recognizable social cue. This comes into play later on when Hewet tries to decide if having feelings for Rachel means he needs to marry her. Things which are assumed to be innate responses (infatuation/fixation becoming love becoming marriage) are constructed from our expectations as much as our actual impulses.

Hewet's role as a novelist is also significant in the ongoing conversation about literature and what is worth reading. It is unclear whether or not Hewet is actually a good novelist, or whether, after the book ends, he will ever actually write or publish anything. Rachel is in awe of the fact that someone she knows is an actual writer and that he is so confident in his abilities ("about as good as Thackeray, I should say" (271)), even while she has an immense artistic gift of her own, in her musical skills.

This also marks the beginning of some of Hewet's eyebrow-raising comments about women. He comments, for example, that because women are so obedient to men, he does not understand what they would do with the right to vote. He is infatuated with Rachel's description of her soft, domestic life in Richmond. He seems to indulge himself



with the idea that he is progressive in his appreciation of women and their ideas, but at the same time, his expectations about their innate qualities is undeniably determined by expectations he has of their gender. Describing men as brutes, he still thinks he is more fit to inhabit the male world, especially in his career as a writer. He belongs to the intellectual world of ideas, while he puts Rachel into a noble portrait of quiet domesticity, a life that Rachel was never fully satisfied with.

During this section of the novel, there are parallel moments of intimacy with Rachel and Hewet, and Helen and Hirst. Hirst, it is strongly hinted, has feelings for Helen, although above all, he admires her mind and sees her as the only person aside from Hewet who is worth talking to. While Rachel and Hewet are off on their walk, Hirst nervously asks Helen if she likes him. He is starved for companionship so far away from home, and her immediate reassurance that she likes him as a person is a relief. Helen also decides his future here: he will go to the bar, because London will suit him. The question he has wrestled with for so long is answered quickly and simply, and he decides to do as Helen has advised him. The relationship between Helen and Hirst is necessarily less sexual (Helen is married to Ridley and has no romantic intentions toward Hirst), but it is also less naive. While Hewet values Rachel, feeling affectionate toward her and interested in her as a person, Hirst reveres Helen and, despite his preoccupation with his reputation and general impressiveness, allows Helen to decide the course of his much agonized-over career path. The fact that his admiration for her can exist without any hope of romance or physicality speaks to the depth of their understated but strong connection.

Importantly, this chapter is also when the idea of the expedition to the village is introduced, a plot event that will steer the novel toward both the emotional climax of Rachel and Hewet's love and also Rachel's death at the end of the novel. From this point, the novel takes on a quicker succession of major events, instead of just a series of intellectual conversations.

Discussion Question 1

Are Hewet's questions about Rachel's life and/or his comments about women condescending? Should Rachel have reacted differently?

Discussion Question 2

Why can Rachel not enjoy church anymore, as it is implied she did in the past? What has caused this shift in her outlook? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

In this section, Hewet ponders, "Did love begin that way, with the wish to go on talking?" (227). Does it? Is he pretending not to love Rachel when he knows he does, or does he genuinely not know how he feels? How much of love and the behaviors of love are



taken on because that is expected, and how much is natural, springing directly from the feelings themselves?

Vocabulary

mottled, prodigious, fastidious, odious, ostentatiously, circumspect, scrupulous, penitent, acquiescent, assiduity, verbosity, peroration



Chapters 19-22

Summary

After lunch, Rachel promises to stay for tea later that afternoon. This leaves her with an awkward amount of time, during which she does not have enough time to go home and also does not have much to do around the hotel, as everyone has retreated to their rooms. Evelyn notices Rachel aimlessly reading a magazine and decides to invite her to her room. Once inside, Evelyn tries to interest Rachel in the gossip about her proposals. Rachel is distracted and still frustrated with the church service she has just attended. She is very blunt with Evelyn. She says, "Somebody's proposed to you," and when Evelyn acts surprised and asks if she looks like she has had a proposal, Rachel remarks, "You look as if you had them every day" (311). Rachel is overtaken by the sudden wish to explore the hotel and leaves Evelyn alone in her room. She is discovered by Miss Allan, an old spinster who is working on an academic text about English poetry, and the two talk for a while. Rachel notices the differences between Evelyn's and Miss Allan's rooms, reflecting on how one's room reflects one's personality.

After tea, Helen observes how Rachel reacts when Hewet enters the room and concludes that this is why Rachel has been acting strangely. The Flushings plan to take a small party up the river to a small village, in order to see more of the area and trade for goods with the locals. The Flushings, Hewet, Hirst, Helen, and Rachel board a steamer and set off. After a while, the party stops on the shore for a small break before continuing on. Rachel and Hewet feel the tension between them. Throughout the boat ride toward the village, they have been very conscious of the other's presence, sleeping just a short distance away on the small ship. Helen, Hirst, and the Flushings set up by the water to read and talk, but Hewet and Rachel opt to explore the forest. Once they are alone, they confess their love to one another and kiss. They are late getting back to the rest of the group, and Helen and Hirst have their silent suspicions about what has happened.

After this point, Rachel and Hewet are completely disengaged from conversation with the rest of the group, lost in abstract thought about what has happened. The group returns to the woods for a second time, and Rachel and Hewet walk ahead, ignoring the others calling out to them. Lost in their own world, they discuss their love and confirm to each other that they had not imagined their previous trip into the woods. They also decide that the natural result of their love is that they will get married. Helen comes up behind them in the woods and surprises them, shocking them out of their absorption in each other. It is unclear if Rachel and Hewet are being physically intimate in this section or if they are just being emotionally intimate when Helen walks up. Helen reacts with affection, embracing them both. Hewet informs Helen that he and Rachel are now engaged.



They carry on with the planned expedition to the village. While Mr. Flushing converses with some local people, the rest observe the village and are in turn looked at by its inhabitants with distrust, then disinterest.

Back on the steamer, Helen asks them about their future plans. They solicit her advice about marriage. Helen is suddenly struck by sadness and says that it is wonderful but that marriage is not what you would expect. She goes to bed, and Hewet and Rachel stare out into the black river, thinking about the extraordinary changes that this one trip has brought. As if she thinks she might be dreaming, Rachel asks, "Are we on the deck of a steamer on a river to South America? Am I Rachel, are you Terence?" (365).

When they arrive back at the villa, they are forced to deal with the practical side of being engaged. People send them congratulatory notes and invite them to tea. Rachel and Hewet argue, as Rachel hates all of the attention and how differently they are treated as an engaged couple, while Hewet enjoys being social and wants to go interact with people. Hewet talks to Rachel about his writing, but stops her playing the piano (which is her own passion and skill) to tell her to write thank you letters for their engagement congratulatory notes. Rachel is frustrated by the role that her future marriage will require her to play.

Analysis

In this section, Woolf reasserts her minor characters, delving into their consciousnesses and even depicting some of their private quarters. Woolf, in her writing, is committed to the vision that all characters, no matter how minor to the plot or novel as a whole, each have unique lives, personalities, and stories to tell. In order to illustrate this artistic belief, she occasionally picks a character barely touched on and delves deep into this person's life. Miss Allan, for example, initially seems to be an intellectual upper-class woman. In reality, though, she has had to work hard for her living and has traveled extensively (and mostly on her own). Her life is largely self-determined and she is a professional woman who earns her own money through teaching and writing, offering a contrast to the domestic idyll of the married couple with a professional man and his supportive wife who controls, instead, the domestic sphere. Miss Allan turns out to be one of the most interesting of Woolf's strong women in this novel, despite not actually having much plot significance.

The forest returns as a prominent symbol of unrestrained emotion and physicality as Rachel and Hewet experience an intense moment of emotional release. It marks a pivotal, cathartic moment in the plot, a rare instance of emotional openness. At this point also, Rachel and Hewet decide to get married and, amusingly, try to remember if they had or had not already decided this during their last walk in the forest. The two link marriage and love so closely that marriage, instead of a social institution, feels like a natural progression of love and proof of the strength of their attachment to each other. Practical concerns about whether or not they can live together successfully, which both of them have been worried over, are suspended.



During the second foray into the woods, there is a strangely rendered moment in which Helen discovers the young couple in a moment of intimacy. The two are just talking, it seems, but then Rachel is described as being horizontal, with two heads above her, Hewet's and Helen's. The description is vague: "Helen was upon her. Rolled this way and that, now seeing only forests of green, and now the high blue heaven, she was speechless and almost without sense. At last she lay still, all the grasses shaken round her and before her by her panting. Over her loomed two great heads, the heads of a man and a woman, of Terence [Hewet] and Helen" (358) This moment, while probably not a literal depiction of Hewet and Rachel having sexual intercourse, is still a strange moment physically. Why is Rachel rolling? Did Helen startle her into falling? Were she and Hewet embracing? There is a strange dream-like quality to this scene and its ambiguity which contributes to the sense of the woods as a suspension of the real world, a place where one is more governed by emotion and fantasy than social constraints and logic.

Helen reacts with happiness, embracing them both (reason enough to believe that nothing too explicit was going on). The fact that Helen was able to enter into this private space and be received happily speaks to the closeness that Rachel and Hewet feel with her. The rest of the party stands awkwardly behind, and it is unsure how much they all have seen. This moment really emphasizes how close Rachel and Helen have become, considering how dismissive Helen was of Rachel at the beginning of the novel. As it becomes clear that the two are going to be married, Helen seems to feel a sudden sadness. Rachel and Hewet are at such a point of naive happiness, and Helen realizes how much they still will have to learn about themselves and about marriage. She also feels a strong sense of foreboding which foreshadows Rachel's untimely death at the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Think about the portrayal of the native people in the passage where the English visit the village. What are the differences between how these people are characterized and how the English tourists are characterized? Why do you think Woolf portrays these characters like this? Is there an element of satire?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Hewet and Rachel being discovered by Helen?

Discussion Question 3

How does Rachel's and Hewet's relationship change after they are engaged? How does this change manifest itself in how they interact with each other and in how they interact with other characters?

Vocabulary

inebriate, stolid, diminutive, reticence, urbanity, undulating, saunter, recumbent



Chapter 23-27

Summary

Hirst has come over to the villa to try and escape Evelyn, who seems to have attached to him recently. Rachel and Hewet argue about whether or not they will go to tea at the hotel. Eventually, they make peace and decide that they will go have tea at the hotel with their friends after all, Rachel acquiescing to Hewet's wishes. Hirst follows them and, in a rare moment of emotional sincerity, forces out his congratulations and explains that he realized the meaning of life the morning after the dance, and that the meaning of life is love. Despite his practical concerns about Hewet and Rachel being married, Hirst is glad they are to be married because of the love they have for one another. Rachel and Hewet laugh and continue on their way, in much lighter spirits than before.

They have tea with their friends at the hotel, sitting together quietly and contently. Arthur and Susan, the other engaged couple, have just come in from playing tennis and seem comfortable and happy with each other. Evelyn takes note of this, but wonders how these two couples can actually be happy and enjoy such a calm life together. Evelyn tries to interest the group in her ideas for "a club for doing things, really doing them" (406). No one pays much attention to her, but Rachel and Hewet sympathize with her more because of the harsh things Hirst has just said about her. Hewet and Rachel leave together, eager to be alone on a walk. Evelyn asks what they talk about, to which they reply, "everything" (410). Evelyn wonders if her priorities in life are right, or if she has underestimated the happiness that marriage can bring.

The following afternoon, Hewet is reading poetry to Rachel out in the sun. Rachel is struck by a sharp headache, and Terence takes her inside to lay down. Rachel spends the rest of the day in bed, napping and expecting to feel better when she wakes up. Things only get worse, though, and eventually Helen becomes concerned that Rachel is actually ill. Helen hires a nurse to come sit with Rachel during the night. Rodriguez, the only doctor available in the village, reassures Rachel's friends in the villa that there is nothing to worry about and that Rachel's condition is not serious. Eventually, though, Rachel starts to have feverish hallucinations, and despite Helen's efforts to give her ice and rest, Rachel appears to be getting worse. The doctor still insists that nothing serious is wrong with Rachel.

Helen, Hirst, and Hewet exhaust themselves taking care of Rachel, fetching this or that, worrying constantly that her illness is more serious than the doctor is telling them. Helen constantly insists they need another doctor, while Hewet, in denial, believes that the doctor must be right and that Rachel cannot be seriously ill. Eventually, though, Rachel's hallucinations worsen. It becomes clear that Rachel is dying. Hewet sends Hirst off to find another doctor. Eventually, Hirst locates a doctor, who is on vacation, pulling him away to come take care of Rachel. When he arrives, the doctor expresses the seriousness of Rachel's condition. The villa is tense, unsure if they should fear the worst. Helen breaks down crying. Ridley cannot concentrate on his scholarly work and



takes to muttering poetry aloud to himself. Hirst tries to force Hewet to sleep and take care of himself, in a rare, open expression of care and concern. Hirst is so emotionally exhausted that he hopes, simply, that this will be over soon, one way or another.

Eventually, the doctor calls Hewet up to Rachel's room. Rachel is dying and her fiancée needs to say goodbye. Hewet's sense of denial is shattered violently. When he goes to see her, Rachel recognizes him and seems to be more mentally present. She greets him and they sit happily together for a minute, before Rachel dies. Hewet feels relief, in a way, that their relationship will always be preserved as a beautiful, possible future that could never be tainted by reality. When someone embraces him (it is left ambiguous whose arms it is, but it is likely that it is Helen), he loses it, crying out Rachel's name and sobbing.

Woolf shifts back to the hotel, where Miss Allan, Evelyn, and the Flushings have learned of Rachel's death earlier that morning. They are struck by the sadness of her unexpected death and have trouble going through the motions of their regular routine. Soon enough, though, other characters move the conversation to other things, trying to save the group from descending into gloom. A massive storm hits, with everyone huddling in the main room, powerless against the force of nature. As it dies down, the hotel guests settle into their usual habits, sewing and chatting.

Hirst arrives, disheveled from having been caught in the storm. He is assured he did everything he could for his friend. Hirst, not wanting to talk, sits and watches a chess match between Mr. Pepper and Mr. Elliot, two old intellectual men. Hirst feels overcome by a sense of relief. The Flushings come in, drenched and exalting in the brilliance of the lightning they have just witnessed. Mr. Elliot beats Mr. Pepper in their game of chess, and Hirst watches silently as the entire hotel group shuffles off to bed.

Analysis

The differences between Hirst and Helen's relationship versus Hewet and Rachel's is interesting to track as the novel progresses. Describing her relationship with Hirst, Helen reflects, "Her friendship with St. John was established, for although she fluctuated between irritation and interest in a way that did credit to the candor of her disposition, she liked his company on the whole. He took her outside this little world of love and emotion. He had a grasp of facts" (385). This contrasts with the expected constancy of Hewet and Rachel. Though the most conspicuous difference is that Hirst and Helen do not have a romantic relationship, the love and respect between Helen and Hirst seems more solidly founded in a knowledge of the other's mind. This is especially clear in how distinctly they see each other's faults and how they do not hide criticism of one another. Rachel and Hewet, on the other hand, experience dissonance as they try to reconcile realistic concerns with the expectation that they should always love each other and want to be together.

In this section, a rare side of Hirst's character is developed as he tries to be more emotionally honest and open. He describes his epiphany about how the true meaning of



life is love and forces himself out of his own emotional reserve to congratulate his friends on their engagement. At the same time, it seems like Hewet and Rachel are becoming more emotionally distant, with their engagement and its formality putting a strain on their relationship. Hirst's burst of epiphany, and the difficulty with which he forces himself to express it, contrasts with how Hewet and Rachel are expected to be simplistically bursting with constant happiness but yet secretly they have doubts about the practical reality of their future together.

There is also a particularly interesting moment in this chapter, which is not important to the plot but is very telling about the English mentality abroad. Hirst tells the group at the villa that "They've hoofed out the prostitute. One night while we were away that old numskull Thornbury was doddering about the passages very late. (Nobody seems to have asked him what he was up to.) He saw the Signora Lola Mendoza, as she calls herself, cross the passage in her nightgown. He communicated his suspicions next morning to Elliot, with the result that Rodriguez went to the woman and gave her twenty-four hours in which to clear out of the place" (388). Hirst is morally outraged by this and the double standard that Thornbury and Elliot were not questioned at all. The hotel owner takes the word of the Englishmen against the word of his fellow local, reflecting a skewed power dynamic that feels somewhat racially-derived and reminiscent of colonialism. There are several small moments like this scattered through the rest of the novel (Mrs. Flushing being surprised the natives are "so artistic" for example - why should that be shocking?).

The most dramatic event of the book is Rachel's death at the hands of an incompetent doctor who insists Rachel is not seriously ill until it is too late to save her. The figure of the incompetent doctor is one that is important in Woolf's writing, because it was important in her personal life. She lost members of her family to similarly exotic diseases, which also turned fatal because of doctors writing off the illness as insignificant or, in one case, treating her brother for the wrong disease until it was too late. The frustration of this incompetent doctor figure is that Rachel's death feels avoidable. Once the more legitimate and competent doctor arrives, he immediately takes the condition seriously and does his best to help, but at this point, it is already too late. This part of the plot feels heavily influenced by Woolf's own mourning and bitter frustration over losses in her own family.

Rachel's death is characterized with heavy symbolism. The day following Rachel's death, a violent storm rises up quickly. Its intensity forces the hotel guests to huddle together in awe and fear. Then, rather quickly, the storm dissipates, and the hotel guests go back to their usual routine of knitting, chatting, and playing chess. Hirst, who has just come from the villa and wants to rest after the long ordeal of Rachel's illness, finds solace in watching the game of chess and, finally, not being expected to speak. The book ends as he watches each person shuffle off to bed. The storm mirrors the emotional climax of Rachel's death and the relief one cannot help but feel when the ordeal is over. Rachel has died, and the weight of the tragedy affects everyone. Still, it is impossible to hold onto that forever, and grief does not preserve Rachel's existence. The ending, in the wake of the storm and of Rachel's death, is very peaceful. Life goes on as normal, the storm clears, and it is not necessarily a bad thing. It just is.



Discussion Question 1

Describe Hirst's transformation as a character. Compare and contrast it with the way he acts and is characterized earlier in the novel.

Discussion Question 2

What is the symbolic meaning of the storm? How does it affect different characters, and what could it mean in the context of Rachel's death?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think about the hotel guests' reactions to Rachel's death? Why does Hirst feel relieved? Are the reactions justified or not? Explain.

Vocabulary

gout, variegated, translucent, garrulous, eddy, cadaverous



Characters

Rachel Vinrace

Rachel is the daughter of the ship's captain, Willoughby. She has spent most of her youth in isolation from people her own age, raised by her spinster aunts in Richmond. This deficit becomes obvious when she is on the ship with the Ambroses and Dalloways. She is shy and described as plain and unattractive. However, she is highly skilled at the piano, and her love for music is one of the most defining attributes of her character. While Rachel does a poor job of communicating verbally, she seems to find it easier to express herself through music or through comparisons of situations or concepts to music. Rachel is arguably the main character of the novel. While Woolf explores the interiors of many different characters, the central events most closely follow Rachel, and the book ends with her death.

Richard Dalloway is Rachel's introduction to sexuality. He kisses her suddenly and expresses his desire for her. She is confused about the feelings this elicits: she is frustrated by Richard, not understanding his motivations or how she feels about it, but she is also intrigued and at times seems as though she desires it to happen again. Throughout the novel, Rachel is prone to fits of frustration when she is not understood or when she does not know how to communicate her feelings. Hirst, in particular, infuriates her by making condescending comments about her educational deficits (the fact that she has not read Gibbon, for example, is inexcusable in a person of 24). At other times, Rachel takes on a child-like appreciation of the world around her, being delighted with simple things like people watching or the shape of the trees.

Rachel falls in love with Hewet, whom she meets on the expedition to the top of the mountain. They spend a lot of time talking, and on a trip into a rural village near Santa Marina, they go into the woods. Liberated from the social constraints of being with the rest of the group, they openly talk about their feelings, kiss, and decide they are engaged. Rachel is frustrated by the way she is treated after she is engaged, everyone assuming she must be perfectly fulfilled and putting her too much in the center of attention. This in turn frustrates Hewet, who is a very social person and likes to be around people. At the end of the novel, Rachel and Hewet's hopes of a future together are destroyed: Rachel falls ill and begins hallucinating. The doctor, who is the only person practicing medicine in the village, is incompetent, and the disease advances past their ability to control it. Rachel dies.

Her death is significant in the context of Virginia Woolf's life: more than one of her siblings died of exotic diseases caught abroad, and they died from complications because of doctors who tried to treat them for the wrong disease or generally performed their duties poorly. Woolf seems to be writing this frustrating, preventable death in response to her own, similar experiences.



Helen Ambrose

Helen Ambrose is the wife of Ridley Ambrose. The two of them live in London with their two children. Like many of Virginia Woolf's characters, Helen is a strong-willed and intellectual woman. Helen is supposed to have been modeled in many ways on Virginia's older sister who took care of the family after their mother died. Helen's character is contrasted with Clarissa Dalloway - while both are fond of books and society, Helen's iron will is decidedly dominating, while Clarissa devotes herself to the service and affection of her husband. Helen scoffs at the doting way Clarissa tends to her husband, and Helen's own marriage is quite different. Helen is content to pursue her own interests while Ridley locks himself up in his study. Ridley does not accompany Helen on any of the expeditions the group undertakes once they reach South America, nor does he seem to attend dances or dinners which do not take place conveniently in his own home. While many of the other English tourists they come across can hardly be known as anything other than a matched set (ie. Mr. and Mrs. Thornbury, Mr. and Mrs. Elliot), Helen and Ridley are decidedly distinct and independent from each other.

Helen is dismissive of Rachel at first, judging that she has no opinions or interesting things to say. Later, though, after Rachel confides in her about the kiss with Richard, Helen decides to take responsibility for Rachel and her education, realizing how little Rachel seems to know about the world and life. She brings Rachel to live with them in the villa which has been leant to her and Ridley for their vacation in South America.

After Rachel's engagement to Hewet is announced, Helen shows a rare vulnerable side, admitting that though she is older and feels responsible for Rachel and the other young people, in reality, she does not know much more than them. When Rachel is dying, Helen works tirelessly to take care of her, but ultimately breaks down when she realizes Rachel cannot be saved.

Terence Hewet

Hewet is a departure from the rest of the intellectuals we have observed before him in this novel, interested in people and in life as much as he is in scholarship (probably more). He is himself a novelist and is working on a novel about silence. He is very close to St. John Hirst and encourages Hirst to leave his comfort zone and do things like lead expeditions or go to dances.

Hewet is perhaps closer to a feminist than any other male character in the novel. He tells Rachel, "Of course we're always writing about women - abusing them, or jeering at them, or worshiping them; but it's never come from women themselves. I believe we still don't know in the least how they live, or what they feel, or what they do precisely...If I were a woman I'd blow some one's brains out. Don't you laugh at us a great deal? Don't you think it's all a great humbug?" (267). Once he is romantically entangled with Rachel, however, he begins to do things which contradict his earlier assertions about gender. For example, he spends a great deal of time interrupting Rachel from playing the piano



to talk about his own work writing his novel. He tells her to stop and instead write answers to all of the congratulatory notes they have received for their engagement.

Many of the major themes of the novel are directly addressed by Hewet in conversation. In the signature style of Woolf, the major themes are often brought out directly in dialogue, as characters sit intellectually wrestling with big topics like the differences between men and women or the value of poetry, and using these discussions to get to know each other. Woolf characterizes people directly, through their own words and thoughts, as they have extended conversations and as she slips directly into the thoughts of even minor characters.

St. John Hirst

Hirst contrasts Hewet, while also being his major source of support and friendship. He often challenges what he sees as Hewet's naivete and sentimentality. One of his chief debates throughout the book is what he should do about his career: go to the bar and become a lawyer or stay at Cambridge. He is a serious intellectual who finds emotional expression difficult, a character type common in Woolf's work and perhaps modeled on members of the Bloomsbury Group, her intellectual circle in London. He is staunchly against religion because he sees faith as conflicting with intellect.

After the night of the dance, Hirst claims to have had an epiphany and discovered the true meaning of life. Later on, when he sees Rachel and Hewet walking peacefully ahead of him, interacting with one another affectionately, he tells them, "'D'you remember the morning after the dance?...It was here we sat, and you talked nonsense, and Rachel made little heaps of stones. I, on the other hand, had the whole meaning of life revealed to me in a flash.' He paused for a second, and drew his lips together in a tight little purse. 'Love,' he said. 'It seems to me to explain everything. So, on the whole, I'm very glad that you two are going to be married.'" He's then described as turning around "abruptly, without looking at them" and walking back to the Ambrose villa feeling "both exalted and ashamed of himself for having thus said what he felt" (394).

Later, when Rachel is dying, he finds it difficult to express his sympathies but exhausts himself doing anything possible that Rachel could need. In his exhaustion he expresses how "He did not mind what happened, so long as the succession of these hard and dreary days was broken; he did not mind if she died. He felt himself disloyal in not minding it, but it seemed to him that he had no feelings left" (441). After she dies, though, he cannot help feeling relief. The book ends with his perspective, as he "lay half-asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him," in the last line of the novel watching the other hotel guests move past him on their way to bed (473).

Ridley Ambrose

Ridley is featured more in the beginning chapters of the book, but overall, in the tradition of Woolf favoring strong female characters, is mostly an attachment of Helen. He seems to worry about Rachel's welfare and to feel very attached to his wife, Helen, fully



comfortable and understood, perhaps only in her presence. In most scenes, he tries to avoid social interaction, preferring to interminably translate his Greek instead of going to dances or on expeditions like the rest of the English tourists.

He is uncomfortable with sentimentality. When Rachel is dying, he does not know how to provide emotional support to Hewet or Hirst, who are staying at the villa in order to be close to Rachel. Instead of trying to talk about Rachel's illness, he paces the floor and mutters poetry to himself until Hirst yells at him.

Evelyn Murgatroyd

Evelyn Murgatroyd, or Evelyn M., as she is generally referred to, is yet another iteration of Woolf's strong women characters, and the product of Woolf's literary exploration of what it means to be an independent woman. Evelyn M. has a number of romantic entanglements and is very casual about the high frequency with which men propose to her. She is flirtatious and at times expresses interest in both Hewet and Hirst.

When we are first introduced to Evelyn M., during the expedition on the mountain, she looks out at the view and talks about how she wishes this was a new land for the conquering. "How it makes one long to be a man!", she says in the beginning of Chapter 11, talking of how she wants to be a part of a conquering party in a new land (167). "I'd love to start life from the very beginning as it ought to be." (167-168). Her idea of being a strong woman brings to mind English history, with strength derived from conquest. Her idea of being a strong woman is being a man, or taking on the characteristics of a man, and her idea of being a man is being a conqueror.

Evelyn M. is constantly going on about how she wants to "do something", in a very abstract way. She frequently talks about how she wants to re-purpose an art history club she attends in London to instead talk about life and "take action". Evelyn M. is a very idealistic character who talks determinedly and vaguely about her goals. Toward the end of the novel, she even mentions how she wants to go to Moscow to be a part of a revolution against the Russian government. She is frustrated by the quiet contentment of many of the other characters, particularly Susan Warrington and Rachel, who are calm and happy in their new engagements. Aside from the central characters like Hewet, Helen, and Hirst, Evelyn M. is one of the characters most affected by Rachel's untimely death, because of how little Rachel got to experience of life.

Richard Dalloway

In *The Voyage Out*, Richard Dalloway marks the beginning of Rachel's education in life. She is fascinated by his life, with his exciting political career and his personal confessions about his early life. He is a distinguished politician, whom Clarissa has brought on a trip in order to help him relax from work-related stress. He seems to see Clarissa, his wife, as an appendage of himself: she is dependent upon him and her job is to love and support him. Still, he seems fond of her and to listen to her opinions and thoughts with genuine appreciation.



After the characters weather a rough storm and emerge into the newly blue sky, Richard follows Rachel back into her room, wanting to continue their earlier conversation. This conversation is one of the first moments we see Rachel opening up, and really trying to formulate her own thoughts instead of just listening to what other people have to say. In this conversation, Richard expands on his ideas about men and women, explaining that he finds the world of politics ill-suited to females: "I have [preserved my ideals] due to the fact that I have been able to come home to my wife in the evening and to find that she has spent her day in calling, music, play with the children, domestic duties - what you will; her illusions have not been destroyed. She gives me courage to go on. The strain of public life is very great." (75). He describes his politics as conservative and seems to have fairly traditional ideas about society, family, and politics.

There is a storm, and for three days, Rachel and Richard do not see each other. He comes to visit her to finish their conversation, but a wave rocks the boat and pushes Rachel and Richard together. He kisses her passionately. Both are alarmed and separate, and the rest of the journey is awkward between them. He is mentioned throughout the rest of the book as the launching point of Rachel's awakening as a woman, and Rachel's confusion about the kiss leads her to consult Helen about it, which motivates Helen to take Rachel under her wing.

Clarissa Dalloway

This is the first appearance of Woolf's iconic 'Mrs. Dalloway,' later to be the focus of Woolf's novel of the same name. Clarissa is highly educated and serves as a foil to Helen, in their contrasting styles as strong women, wives, and mothers. Clarissa is extremely enthusiastic and social, wanting to know everyone on the ship intimately right away and trying to liven up the group with her conversation. She dotes on Richard, reading aloud to him and fussing that he works too hard and needs a vacation. Because of the admiration Rachel shows her, Clarissa attaches most strongly to Rachel, showing interest in her piano playing and engaging her in conversation about literature. Clarissa is one of the first people to really try to coax Rachel out, soliciting her opinions on books and politics (in particular, interrogating Rachel on why she doesn't like Jane Austen).

Helen scoffs at Clarissa's high society mannerisms and tastes, and the way in which she tends to Richard. Helen's and Ridley's marriage seems more understated and companionable, while Clarissa is vocal about her admiration for Richard, and Richard is confident in his masculinity as a strong conservative politician with his doting wife. She is enthusiastic about life and seems almost purposefully eccentric: "Isn't it good to be alive?" she exclaims while walking on the deck with Rachel, taking in the sight of the ocean (67). She is a key figure at the beginning of Rachel's journey of self-discovery, prodding her to discover and defend her artistic/literary tastes and showing genuine interest in what she has to say. This is complicated by Rachel's sexual interest in Richard, Clarissa's husband, though Clarissa never becomes aware of it. As Clarissa leaves the *Euphrosyne*, she begs them all, especially Rachel, to visit, but Rachel and Richard feel awkward. This is the last that is seen of the Dalloways in this novel.



Captain Willoughby Vinrace

Willoughby is Rachel's father, and the widower of Helen's late sister, Rachel's mother. Willoughby is described as an ambitious man who is very staunchly English. Richard Dalloway mentions that he expects to see Willoughby in Parliament one day. Willoughby seems to be quite gruff, not knowing what to do with his daughter and her education. He assigns her books and mostly leaves her to her own devices. Most of the time, he is at sea while Rachel is with her aunts in Richmond, so the two do not see much of each other regularly.

Mr. Pepper

Mr. Pepper is also a passenger on the *Euphrosyne* with the Ambroses, Dalloways, and Vinraces. He is an academic and a critical representation of the stuffy English intellectual. The other characters respect that he is very knowledgeable, but cannot help but be bored with his long tirades about obscure historical topics. He is vain of his intellect and does not engage much socially with the other characters. After Rachel's death, he remarks somewhat callously that the careless way the servants prepared food at the Ambrose's villa is why he left the villa for the hotel, and that this was also probably how Rachel caught her fatal disease. Woolf, who was a part of the Bloomsbury group, a prominent London intellectual circle, often satirized the emotionally out of touch stuffy intellectual in her work, portraying them critically but sympathetically.

Symbols and Symbolism

The sea

The sea symbolizes the separation between the two worlds, England and South America. The journey over the seas marks an opportunity to be someone else in a separate context, to exist without the same constraints (though the hotel recreates some of those same restraints in its attempt to recreate English society). On the sea, contexts are suspended, and the English people on board are estranged from their English context. During the excursion on the mountain, Hewet reflects on how context gives meaning to experience, noting that people group together not because they necessarily like each other, but because they derive significance from experiencing things together. Not having context means you have to make sense of things without having a way to measure things relatively.

Helen reflects, as they sail out to sea and London becomes increasingly distant: "The sea might give her death or some unexampled joy, and none would know of it. She was a bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men; in her vigour and purity she might be likened to all beautiful things, worshipped and felt as a symbol" (33). The sea represents an unknown future, a lack of the same importance of human life and the quotidian. Humans are small in the face of nature and subject to the will of the sea. Their ship is completely at its mercy and on the sea, they are small and separate from the world that gave their day to day lives and careers significance.

The river

The river represents the current of change and the irreversibility of time. At pivotal moments in the plot, characters look at rivers, feeling themselves swept along with the same speed and inevitability. For example, when Rachel and Hewet are standing together on the steamer, having just decided their engagement and talked with Helen about their future life, they stand in silence as "Beneath them the smooth black water slipped away very fast and silently" (364-365). They are being swept along, and they are not entirely sure of the final destination. However, they are conscious of the movement and the inability to fight against the current.

In light of the ending, this symbolic moment seems foreboding. While the two are fixated on their engagement, the real, irreversible event that has been set in motion is Rachel's death, which has potentially been caused by a disease she contracted while on this excursion. This illness will prevent the future they hoped to build by planning to marry each other.



The Euphrosyne

The boat, the Euphrosyne, represents the self-contained nature of English society, particularly of European intellectuals, and the inflated sense of self-importance this carries. The boat's name is Woolf making a jab at its passengers and their ideas about their intellectual superiority and the superiority of English culture, going to meet the New World.

Michael Cunningham writes in the Modern Library edition's introduction to *The Voyage Out* that the ship's name, the Euphrosyne, was "so named by Woolf as a private joke - it was the title of a collection of solemn poetry she considered ridiculous, published by her husband and some of her friends." In light of this poetic failure, the ship, full of its intellectuals going to pursue leisure and bring their culture to South America similarly feel doomed, silly, and insignificant. The importance they seem to feel, with Richard Dalloway and his career in Parliament, Ridley Ambrose with his Greek, and Mr. Pepper with his constant historical lectures, seems ridiculous against the backdrop of a vast sea, in a small boat.

The forest

The forest represents a lack of restraint and the natural physical impulses, sensuality in particular, that is possible outside of ordered society. The first instance we see of this is when Rachel and Hewet go walking in the woods and come across Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning, two members of the English hotel expedition party on the summit. They have just become engaged and are kissing, rolling around in the grass. Initially, Rachel and Hewet are uncomfortable having witnessed such a private moment, but eventually it actually becomes a bonding moment. Because they witnessed that strange moment together, they become more at ease around each other. This allows their relationship to develop more quickly as well.

Rachel and Terence can finally be open about their feelings, and consummate them physically. We also see this with Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning as they sneak off into the woods, he proposes, and Rachel and Terence find them kissing. This prefigures Rachel's and Hewet's own forays into the wilderness, and represents the lack of social constraint the wilderness gives them. Most of Rachel and Hewet's relationship has been talking, but here they are finally free to talk openly about their love. The more they find themselves overcome, the more speech fails yet again as a form of communication. Here in the privacy of the forest, they transition into physical communication of their feelings. Without this break from social constraint, Rachel and Hewet could perhaps not have become engaged.

Rachel's room

Rachel's room represents her growth as an individual thinker and the development of her own personhood and personality. It is Helen's wish that Rachel undergoes a



transformation during her time with the Ambroses, developing into an individual with her own ideas and experiences, rather than remaining silent and not analyzing her own feelings and thoughts.

This passage best illustrates what Helen had in mind, and how the room allows Rachel to develop her individuality:

“Among the promises which Mrs. Ambrose had made her niece should she stay was a room cut off from the rest of the house, large, private - a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. Rooms, she knew, became more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four. Her judgment was correct, and when she shut the door Rachel entered an enchanted place, where poets sang and things fell into their right proportions” (150).

Rachel's room is described fairly explicitly as a mental as well as physical space. Given the room to think, Rachel reads and plays music, developing her intellectual tastes and opinions on issues. At the beginning of the book, when we are first introduced to Rachel, she is mostly silent and rarely knows what she thinks on a given topic. As we follow her growth as a character, we see her struggle with self-knowledge. Others, like Helen, Hirst, and even Hewet, suggest her books (which are often indicative of their respective personalities and tastes) and attempt to educate her. Rachel struggles with the difference between what is being suggested to her and what she actually thinks for herself. Those who are attempting to educate her struggle with where their opinions end and objective truth or good taste begins.

The hotel

The hotel represents the bubble of English society imposed on other cultures abroad - in other words, the hotel represents English colonialism and the insular, self-contained nature of English society. This springs from the idea that English culture is superior to other cultures. While the characters went to South America to vacation away from English society, they have also recreated it in the Santa Marina hotel. The hotel patrons are, for the most part, all from London. Many have friends in common back in England. During their stay, instead of going out and interacting with the local culture, they interact with each other and recreate their habits from home within the hotel. When they do venture out into the native culture, it is often with the air of a curiosity about what they see as exotic and primitive, examining from a distance before quickly retreating back into the world of tea at 5, dinner at 8, then bridge til bedtime.

It is the English haven to which the characters retreat when they are tired of experiencing a foreign country. This phenomenon also brings to mind colonialism and how, wherever they go, the English seem to impose their society onto the landscape of each new place. At this hotel, they have local people employed in the service of recreating the daily life of the English leisure class.



There also seems to be a kind of anxiety with which they recreate what is familiar to them. In Chapter 17, "Acquaintances showed signs of developing into friends, for that one tie to Mrs. Parry's drawing-room had inevitably split into many other ties attached to different parts of England, and sometimes these alliances seemed cynically fragile, and sometimes painfully acute, lacking as they did the supporting background of organised English life" (277-278). Sometimes, the hotel feels like a flimsy recreation, but the ties there are based more on the necessity of companionship rather than real friendship.

London

London represents the absent home which becomes abstract when distant. The receding image of London in the opening chapters of the book returns repeatedly as a symbol of home as the past and the future. During their stay in Santa Marina, the characters are suspended between two phases of life. Hirst is trying to decide his next career move: go to the bar and practice law or stay at Cambridge? Evelyn is contemplating taking part in the Russian revolution and going to Moscow, determined to "do something." Multiple couples get engaged and prepare to start their new life in London as husband and wife upon their return.

London represents the future that Rachel and Hewet could have had. Throughout their engagement, Hewet talks about the walks that they will take by the Strand, the people they will meet, and the places they will go together. Their path forward is suspended until they can return to London. When Rachel dies, their departure is only a few weeks away. As he reflects on Rachel's death, Hewet thinks that perhaps this leaves their beautiful future safe in its idealism, since their expectations will never be forced to reconcile themselves with the reality of married life together in London.

Books

In *The Voyage Out*, books represent their readers and the readers' values and tastes. Through books, Woolf examines the individual mind, looking at its expression and inward cultivation through reading.

In the beginning of the novel, Rachel is mostly indifferent to books, preferring music. However, when they arrive in Santa Marina and Helen gives her books to read and her own room, Rachel starts to develop her own tastes and transform herself through reading. "The landscape outside, because she had seen nothing but print for the space of two hours, now appeared amazingly solid and clear, but although there were men on the hill washing the trunks of olive trees with a white liquid, for the moment she herself was the most vivid thing in it - an heroic statue in the middle of the foreground, dominating the view. Ibsen's plays always left her in that condition. She acted them for days at a time, greatly to Helen's amusement; and then it would be Meredith's turn and she became Diana of the Crossways. But Helen was aware that it was not all acting, and that some sort of change was taking place in the human being" (151). The



transformative power of reading is rendered vividly, and the more she reads, the less shy and more outspoken Rachel becomes, developing her personality and opinions.

Books, and particularly, the books certain characters choose to recommend, are indicative of their personalities and values. The fact that Hirst endorses Gibbon, for example, which is a very serious academic and historical text, reflects his dry taste and academic seriousness. Rachel, on the other hand, takes to modern writers like Henrik Ibsen, reading *A Doll's House*, his now-classic-then-controversial piece on women's liberation. In this way, Woolf characterizes the people in her novel using their literary tastes and their commentary on books.

Hotel rooms (by individual)

People's hotel rooms symbolize the individuals themselves and how individuals color the spaces they inhabit by their presence. When exploring the hotel, Rachel is taken into the rooms of several different guests, and she is offered a glimpse of their lives in private to compare with the way they present themselves in the company of others.

Miss Allan's room is neat and holds two of everything, while Evelyn's is messy and reflects her passionate and scattered personality. Her sentimentality is made clear through the portraits of her parents which she shows to Rachel, telling her of how in love they were and how tragic their life story was. Mrs. Flushing has massive collections of things, picked up over the course of her travels as she barter with the locals. Her eccentricity is made evident by her obsession with this collection, and when she is excitedly trying to plan their expedition, she struggles to find a paper and a pencil, and to spell everyone's name correctly and neatly on the page.

Woolf demonstrates the diverse ways in which people can make a standardized space like a hotel room into something that reflects their unique personality and interests. In this way, she also comments on the overall unique differences one can observe in people, resisting homogenization and simplistic interpretations of people, especially in her minor characters. Woolf is committed to the idea that, if examined closely, every character has a unique story to tell. In offering glimpses of their rooms, Woolf tries to convey that everyone, even the most peripheral character, has their own history and complex motivations for their actions.

Storms

In this novel, Woolf uses storms to symbolize transformative tumult. Through her placement of storms, she effectively dramatizes emotional turmoil taking place in individual characters.

The first storm occurs while the *Euphrosyne* is at sea. All of the passengers, previously composed and sparring intellectually on decks and over dinner tables, are reduced to cowering in their rooms. The dazzling Mrs. Dalloway gets violently ill, as does her husband, Richard, the towering figure of English politics. After the storm is over, but still



in the wake of its tumult, Richard Dalloway kisses Rachel, introducing her to an entirely new range of emotions (and confusions).

At the end of the novel, after Rachel dies, the hotel in Santa Marina is rocked by an intense storm, causing all of the guests to crowd together in a central room to watch in awe and helpless fear. The storm passes quickly and in the wake of this catharsis, the guests go about their evening knitting, chatting, and playing chess. This parallels the intense emotional and physical crisis of Rachel's illness, which has just ended early that morning with her death. Hirst walks in, worn out and having been caught in the rain, and finally rests, having done his duty as a friend to Rachel. Following this crisis, he feels simple, guiltless relief and watches as life continues around him, post-storm.



Settings

The Euphrosyne

On board the Euphrosyne, the Vinraces, the Ambroses, and later the Dalloways (who join them at a port in Lisbon), have little to do but walk the deck and talk, or sit at various meals and talk as they journey toward South America. Michael Cunningham writes in the Modern Library edition's introduction to *The Voyage Out* that the ship's name, the Euphrosyne, was "so named by Woolf as a private joke - it was the title of a collection of solemn poetry she considered ridiculous, published by her husband and some of her friends." (Cunningham, xi). Throughout the novel, English concepts of civilization are discussed and critiqued directly and indirectly. It seems as though Woolf is mocking the kind of misguided "civilization" and "intellectualism" which the ship seems to carry on it, and the way in which the English see themselves as the ambassadors of civilization and culture to the rest of the world, a continuing colonist mindset.

London

London represents the past and future which our characters are suspended in between. In the opening pages of *The Voyage Out*, sleepy, crowded London is invoked vividly as Helen and Ridley make their way to the docks to board the Euphrosyne and start their journey to Santa Marina. Helen is upset to be leaving her children behind. For the Ambroses, London is their past, where they met friends and talked, where they were educated, where they were children, where they married and had children of their own. London is the old world, while Santa Marina and the foreign South America is the new world. London represents the English society of manners and education, while they seek to discover something new in leaving it.

London also represents the future. Though most of the English characters in Santa Marina do not know each other, they are almost all from London, and many have mutual friends there. When they talk about their plans for after their stay in Santa Marina, they talk of meeting up at various clubs or parlors or each others' homes. London is the reference point they all have in common, and talking about London is a way of feeling like they have a shared significance and a future to their friendships. In particular, London represents Rachel and Hewet's future, which they never get to see together. They plan to live in London, and Hewet often talks about how they will walk along the Strand together when they're married. This talk of London is sad in the context of Rachel's death and represents the perfect life they could've had together. This idea of their life together is never marred by reality, which Hewet reflects on once he realizes Rachel is dead: "It was nothing; it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived" (446). In never actually having this reality,



the ideal of this future is preserved for Hewet as what his life with Rachel would have been.

Santa Marina

Santa Marina is a village on the coast of South America where the Ambroses, Rachel, and Mr. Pepper go for several months. This is where the majority of the novel is set. Santa Marina represents a separation of the main characters from their context. In this freedom, they try to define themselves without English society and pursue leisure with things like expeditions and long walks. A lot of the young people are drawn in by the romance of it all and become engaged, but it is unclear if these attachments will last after they return to their normal lives. Rachel and Hewet plan their future lives in London, for example, but it is a place they have never been together. Because Rachel dies, their relationship exists purely in Santa Marina, where their normal lives have been temporarily suspended and their life in London is a preserved fantasy.

As the English vacation in this location, exotic to them, there are hints of condescension and the remnants of colonist ideas in the English hotel patrons. Mr. and Mrs. Flushing, for example, treat the local culture as a strange and exotic curiosity. They marvel at the civilization of the locals, as if surprised that this group of people could have their own culture. "I had no notion that the peasants were so artistic," says Mrs. Flushing (242). Later, Hirst is incensed over the accusation of a local woman that she is a prostitute. She is dismissed from the hotel because of Mr. Thornbury and Mr. Elliot's suspicions, and Hirst wonders why they were not questioned (What was Mr. Elliot doing loitering in the lobby when he saw her walk by in her nightgown? Why is his word taken against hers?). Woolf is critical of these condescending attitudes and gestures at colonial attitudes. Though this particular area is not a British colony, the English come to this foreign land and act as if they own it, recreating London society within the hotel and for the most part only interacting with other English people.

The forest

A lot of the important emotional actions of the novel take place in the cover of the forest. Symbolically, the forest represents physical love and desire, as well as a break from social constraints. Being in the forest alone, Hewet and Rachel are finally able to confess their feelings for one another. When they are in the company of others, they are afraid to so much as touch one another, but here they embrace and kiss each other, making emotional declarations. Woolf's descriptions, as well, turn more vague and dreamy as Rachel and Hewet fall to the ground and roll on the grass, entranced by the discovery of their love for each other. Later, when the Flushings, Helen, and Hirst return, and the party journeys on to the village, Rachel and Hewet are more cautious under the watchful eye of society, particularly until their engagement is officially known.



Richmond

Richmond represents Rachel's sheltered past life with her aunts. She describes her day to day routine to Hewet and how meaningful and real this daily life was to her aunts. Hewet and Rachel bond over this shared knowledge of Rachel's past life. Hewet is fascinated by the quiet, domestic lives of women, and listens raptly as Rachel recounts her former life. It represents the stagnation of Rachel's life before this voyage. Still, Richmond is not depicted in a negative light, but rather a sort of waiting period before Rachel really began experiencing life for herself.

Richmond is also interesting because it represents (apart from occasional visits from Willoughby) an entirely female space. Rachel's aunts are spinsters and occupy their time running a quiet household and paying social calls. Rachel spends her days taking long walks and practicing the piano. Rachel alternates between depicting this life as quiet contentment and agonizing stagnation. Still, the women have their own life and are not beholden to a spouse or children, apart from Rachel. Though confined mostly to domestic pursuits, these aunts represent the life that is possible without men or marriage, and that it is possible to live such a life and be content and self-sufficient. This is yet another incarnation of Woolf's figure of the strong woman.



Themes and Motifs

Miscommunication/Inadequacy of Language

Woolf uses miscommunication between her characters to examine the limits of language and human communication. Many of the characters in this novel have trouble relating to or communicating with each other. Rachel in particular is shy and has difficulty expressing herself and articulating her feelings. This often leads to her frustration. In one instance, Hirst reacts to Rachel's dislike of Gibbon, a historian whose book he lent her: "'I give you up in despair,' he said. He meant it lightly, but she took it seriously, and believed that her value as a human being was lessened because she did not know how to admire the style of Gibbon" (247). Rachel takes what was meant as a joke very personally and lashes out at Hirst.

Woolf inhabits many perspectives in great depth, showing to what extent the characters misinterpret each other's intent. Later, following this incident with Gibbon, Hirst asks Helen if she likes him, insecure about how unlikeable he is. He has difficulty interacting with people, just as Rachel does, and he is frustrated at how often his best intentions are misinterpreted.

This theme is taken further, to the point of characters often literally not understanding or hearing correctly what was said:

"'I was just saying how people are so like their boots,' said Miss Allan. Mrs. Paley did not hear. She repeated it more loudly still. Mrs. Paley did not hear. She repeated it a third time. Mrs. Paley heard, but she did not understand. She was apparently about to repeat it for the fourth time, when Rachel suddenly said something inarticulate, and disappeared down the corridor. This misunderstanding, which involved a complete block in the passage, seemed to her unbearable" (325).

Mrs. Paley's near-deafness frustrates Rachel because it is an explicit performance (brought out by Mrs. Paley's physical inability to hear) of what Rachel has been struggling with the whole novel: the impossibility of making oneself fully understood. She is repeatedly filled with intense frustration that it is so difficult to transfer meaning from one person to another.

This inability to articulate emotion and thought also manifests itself in the ability of the characters to define their own thoughts and feelings. Hewet struggles to define his feelings for Rachel, knowing that society would determine he is in love with her and should want to marry her. He ultimately acquiesces to this expectation, but it is after much internal struggle. Even while he and Rachel are finally speaking in the woods, outside of the restraint of company, there is a question behind their declaration of love, a need for confirmation from the other person: "'We love each other,' Terence said. 'We love each other,' Rachel repeated" (343).



They crave this sense of definition, but rarely do their thoughts and feelings match up neatly with what they say or do. In editing their language to make their emotions seem less confusing and better aligned with society and with each other, it is as if they are performing life as it should be.

Men vs. Women

Woolf uses the filter of the dialogue to examine the perceptions of masculinity and femininity at this time, by different individual characters and in different contexts.

Throughout the novel, several men try to explain to the female characters the innate differences between men and women. Richard Dalloway explains how his wife preserves his ideals because she stays at home in the safe, domestic sphere, and that her nurturing is the only way he is able to continue to do political battle. Even idealistic Hewet, who often champions the rights of women, expresses the idea that women would not do anything with the right to vote:

"The respect that women, even well-educated, very able women, have for men' he went on. 'I believe we must have the sort of power over you that we're said to have over horses. They see us three times as big as we are or they'd never obey us. For that very reason, I'm inclined to doubt that you'll ever do anything when you have the vote.'" (261).

Rather than explicitly characterize men or women as superior to the other, they instead attribute women's societal roles to natural, ingrained characteristics, despite society enforcing these roles on them. The men take agency away from the women, by claiming they are innately ill-suited to civic participation or otherwise powerful roles, but they also take agency away from themselves. They claim these differences are due to nature, rather than socially-imposed roles which they, as members of society, contribute to, effectively removing the guilt of disenfranchising women from their own consciences. Therefore, the status quo is preserved, their power is not threatened by women, and it is still not their fault.

The strong female character is a hallmark of Woolf's work. She depicts many different versions of independence in women, some more revolutionary than others. Helen, for example, is stubborn and intellectual. In her marriage, she seems to be the one who makes the major decisions while Ridley is more focused on his academic pursuits, holed up in his study translating Greek. Clarissa Dalloway, on the other hand, is an independent woman, though she dotes on her husband and seems domestic by nature. Woolf shows domesticity is not mutually exclusive with having intellectual opinions, being well-read and knowing her own mind. Yet another version of this theme is Evelyn Murgatroyd, a guest at the Santa Marina hotel who is preoccupied with, abstractly, doing something that matters. She is the master of her own sexuality, receiving but rejecting many proposals of marriage, instead deciding toward the end of the novel to go to Moscow and aid in the revolution against the Russian government. She is restless



and determined, and she resists domesticity and marriage as limits to what she can accomplish.

In having males repeatedly explain the differences in supposedly innate feminine and masculine traits, Woolf instead displays a characteristic of men in this society and this context: they infantilize women, and feel the need to educate them about themselves. In these interactions, the predominant masculine tone is condescending and that the females generally acquiesce or make concessions to male dominance, depicting a slanted power dynamic which both men and women contribute to. Woolf points out, in a gentle but obvious way, the manner in which men talk down to women even while, in some instances, praising them.

Self-knowledge

Woolf depicts the confusion of self-definition and the discrepancies between self-image and how people are viewed from the outside in an effort to resist simple characterization. Modernism is the evolution of multiple selves refracted over different contexts and was the start of the acknowledgement in literature that humans are contradictory and complex, rather than consistent and with clear, distinct character traits. Woolf and her contemporaries work to critique how characterization was done in the previous literary period by the Victorians, in which characters were most often defined by distinct traits which consistently explained their actions.

One of Woolf's chief strengths in creating realistic characters is the attention she pays to contradiction and complexity in people's thoughts and actions. Her characters struggle with their identity and refuse to fit easy archetypes. The fact that they are not entirely sure what they think or how they feel in a given moment contributes to a very relatable rendering of humanity. Humans are never fully self-aware, and they are full of contradictions and complex motivations. Woolf's characters are marked by a deep uncertainty and indecision.

Hewet asks Hirst, when he is puzzling over his wish to see and talk with Rachel, how you know what you feel. Rachel wonders aloud to herself while walking what being in love means. The two of them realizing they want to be together is not a flash of inspiration or burst of feeling where they just know - it is complicated and they are not completely sure what they want or what to do once they know they care about each other. They are unsure about defining their relationship by engagement or marriage, but since it has been defined as the measure of love by society, they decide it is a step they should take. Hirst also struggles: does he want to practice law? Should he remain at Cambridge? Why is it that he cannot connect to other people? Woolf consciously depicts these insecurities in Hirst to undermine the ironclad figure of the successful, respected Cambridge man. Woolf takes issue with societal paradigms for personal identity and deconstructs them through breaking down the certainty and consistency in which such characters operate in other literary representations. She is realistic in her depiction of life as something that is messy, complex, and contradictory.



In her play with multiple perspectives, Woolf also contrasts how characters think of themselves with how other characters perceive them and their actions. By providing many angles through which to examine a character, Woolf resists the idea of a single, homogenous, concretely defined self.

Colonization

The power dynamics between the local residents of Santa Marina and the English visitors reflect England's history of colonization throughout the world. Though not in its explicit form of violent coercion, colonial dynamics are a strong force in this novel. The depictions of native people in this novel are one-dimensional and exoticized, despite being outwardly sympathetic. The English see themselves as the benevolent superiors. Mrs. Flushing, for example, makes money collecting the artifacts of the locals at bargain prices, selling them off to people in England for cheaper and profiting off the backs of Santa Marina locals. She comments that she had "no idea" the "peasants were so artistic" (242) in a patronizing display of impressed surprise that somewhere this remote would still have a distinct and developed culture.

The hotel symbolizes the imposition of English society onto the landscape of other societies. While they travel to Santa Marina to enjoy the tropical weather, they only associate intimately with other English people and enjoy the simulation of their familiar society and customs through the hotel which caters to English tourists on the island. This mimics the way in which, even at the time of this novel, English society was imposed in India and Kenya, among many others. Rather than adjust themselves to their new environment, they bend the local culture to fit what is familiar to them. The hotel guests generate a tourist industry which relies on English society being recreated by indigenous labor. This is a depiction, in miniature, of the whole history of the British empire and of the classic historical figure of the European colonist going, in their view, to 'civilize' native territories and impose their more sophisticated culture. Woolf satirizes characters like Mrs. Flushing, who are ignorant of the fact that England is not synonymous with civilization and that culture does not exclusively exist in Europe.

If anything, the absence of local characters, aside from those mentioned in passing as performing a service or briefly greeting a more central character, is the most poignant evidence that this novel has deep roots in British Imperialism. The entire novel takes place in Santa Marina yet all of the major characters (and there is a very large cast of characters in this novel) are English, along with most of the minor characters as well. The colonial gaze defines the novel as well as being satirically depicted in characters of that novel.

Intellectualism

Woolf's work is critical of the intellectual bubbles of English society and the condescension that is equated with mental superiority and sophistication. The frustrated

intellectual is a common theme in modernism. In addition to Woolf, this theme is notably explored in the work of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and E. M. Forster.

St. John Hirst is probably the most poignant example of the revered but abrasive intellectual who is socially inept and emotionally crippled. He repeatedly informs other characters of how distinguished he is at Cambridge and constantly imposes sophisticated literary and philosophical conversations on other characters in order to demonstrate his intellect. However, he is constantly frustrated when trying to interact socially, finding Rachel difficult to talk to at the dance and finding it hard to hide his exasperation when she is unfamiliar with many of the books he considers to be essential reading. His behavior makes him feel isolated and later comes to the conclusion that love and relationships are the only thing that can truly be meaningful. When he is alone with Helen, he asks her if she likes him and reacts with immense relief when she says she does, without reservation. Woolf uses his emotional crisis to criticize intellectual culture and its elitism. Hirst is lonely and dissatisfied despite his accomplishments, leading him to realize that one cannot survive of knowledge alone.

Evelyn also reacts against this sort of intellectualism, favoring action and humanism. While talking about her friend who runs a house for 'inebriate' women, she says, "'My notion's to think of the human beings first and let the abstract ideas take care of themselves. What's wrong with Lillah - if there is anything wrong - is that she thinks of Temperance first and the women afterwards. Now there's one thing I'll say to my credit,' she continued; 'I'm not intellectual or artistic or anything of that sort, but I'm jolly human'" (314-315). Evelyn distinguishes the world of ideas from the world of humans. With Woolf's modernist themes of detachment and isolation, she shows how abstract ideas can shift the focus away from humanity. Evelyn's friend, as described, is very devoted to the betterment of society, but when it comes to the actual women whose lives she is attempting to better, she is not as present.

A part of the Bloomsbury Group, a literary circle in the Bloomsbury neighborhood in London, Woolf had firsthand knowledge of these intellectual types (and admitted to being one herself). The *Euphrosyne*, the name of the ship Rachel, the Ambroses, and the Dalloways sail abroad on, is named after a book of poetry published by members of the group. In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf is poking fun at the self-important intellectual circles dominant in London at this time.

Styles

Point of View

Woolf constantly plays with perspective throughout the novel. For this reason, it is difficult to definitively name a main character. At times, it seems like it is Rachel, but at other moments, it seems as though the focus is more on Helen. The book ends with the peace Hirst feels as he watches life continue after the ordeal of Rachel's illness and death, and we follow with interest his character's shift in priorities, from career and intellectualism to love and meaningful relationships. Even beyond the shifts Woolf makes between major characters, she also takes the time to examine the inner life of marginal characters, showing scenes from their perspective to perhaps reveal some truths unavailable to the main character. This comes from Woolf's belief that everyone has a story and a complexity that could be overlooked through purely focusing on characters central to the novel's plot.

This allows the reader to get a more comprehensive picture of characters and relationships. It also brings to light certain misconceptions characters have about each other or about how others view them, as well as discrepancies between what characters' thoughts versus their actions and statements. This helps give a fuller map of character motivations and brings to light certain ironies. It also serves to bolster the major theme of miscommunication. Characters are constantly worried about being misunderstood and are constantly being misunderstood or mischaracterized by each other. This deepens the sense of realism in the text, as this more closely resembles how life works. We never really know what people are thinking and often do not communicate what we are thinking clearly. Miscommunication and lack of clear identity are inevitable consequences of people each having their own separate consciousness and way of processing in the imperfect human means of language.

Woolf's use of so many perspectives also demonstrates her belief that even the most minor character has a complex consciousness and their own internal life. While most of the hotel guests in Santa Marina are decidedly peripheral, Woolf still takes the time to occasionally delve into their perspective and write scenes from their point of view. Miss Allan, for example, is a middle-aged woman who never married and is writing an academic volume about English writers. She contributes virtually nothing to the action of the story but is present for a large part of it. Still, Woolf takes the time to have Rachel visit her hotel room and examine her belongings - we, as readers, are privy to her loneliness but satisfaction with her independent life. Woolf's style is an acknowledgement of the fact that, in reality, life is full of minor characters, and action is not confined to plot-moving main characters.



Language and Meaning

Woolf writes in a very soft way regarding physicality. Her language is impressionistic and ambiguous. This creates a kind of surreal image as we imagine the actions of the characters. For example, in the scene where Helen comes across Hewet and Rachel embracing in the woods, you can barely tell what is happening. Some critics have even gone so far as to suggest the couple was having sex before they were discovered - the exact nature of the physicality in the scene is ambiguous, though likely not explicitly sexual.

A lot of the important, revelatory moments in the text come from conversations the characters have with each other. Woolf favors direct character revelations through dialogue rather than implying her characterization through their actions or expressions. Instead of having the reader infer the deeper thoughts of characters, they instead have direct conversations about their deep thoughts. They discuss literature, life, love - their perspectives are revealed in the stances they take in lively debates and intimate conversations between characters. For this reason, Woolf is more direct about her meaning while indirect about the direct physical manifestations of meaning.

Woolf's dialogue-centric characterization also bolsters her theme that her characters are starved for meaningful connection and self-knowledge. They try, in the course of many seemingly interminable conversations about life and themselves, to determine who they are and what their significance is. Rachel struggles with defining her religious convictions and literary tastes. Hirst constantly debates his future career. Evelyn tries to figure out what it will take to really "do something." This explicit searching and dialogue about meaning lays bare the lack of certainty the characters are feeling in themselves and their place in the world.

Structure

The book is structured around the lives of English academics and members of the leisure class while they are on what is essentially a vacation to the South American coastal town of Santa Marina. For this reason, a lot of the characters spend their time on an English schedule (breakfast, some "lively" form of exercise, luncheon, reading, tea, whiling away the time until dinner, then dinner, then bridge, smoking, and conversation until it is time to go to bed and do it all over again.) Social events like engagements, dances, excursions, are the major points to mark the passage of time and incite plot-movement, while the rest of the time is usually conversation. There is a decidedly "elite" bent to the conversations, discussing either specific intellectual points or gossip about each other (who is getting married, etc).

The rest of the time is structured around intellectual and philosophical conversations through which characters attempt to dissect the important questions of life, and particularly of literature and culture. This search for meaning seems more poignant because none of them, aside from Miss Allan writing her book on literature, seem to

really be doing anything of potential consequence. With their relatively leisurely life, they strive to define that life's purpose.



Quotes

From a distance the Euphrosyne looked very small...Mr. Pepper with all his learning had been mistaken for a cormorant, and then, as unjustly, transformed into a cow. At night, indeed, when the waltzes were swinging in the saloon, and gifted passengers reciting, the little ship - shrunk to a few beads of light out among the dark waves, and one high in air upon the mast-head - seemed something mysterious and impressive to heated partners resting from the dance. She became a ship passing in the night- an emblem of the loneliness of human life, an occasion for queer confidences and sudden appeals for sympathy."

-- Narrator (chapter 7)

Importance: This passage exemplifies Woolf's style of alternating between the minute details of individual characters and the grand scale of the world. The characters whom we have been observing up to this point (the Vinraces, the Dalloways, the Ambroses) are shown to be small, their lives just specks in the distance to the people on the shores of the South American village they will be staying in. Woolf shifts between elevating the day to day concerns of the passengers on the ship to the focus of the novel, delving into each of their innermost thoughts in turn, and exploring their relationships, but then shows them in context: these are just a few people on a single ship in the vast ocean. It is also interesting in the context of English colonialism and the dismissive/dehumanizing way the English often depict the locals of foreign places. Here, instead of being depicted as distant and less human, the people in the South American village observe the people on the ship as animals. This flips the standard colonial mindset, in that the English are the animals and the people who they see are foreign are depicted as the primary humans. This minimization of the English people on the ship marks a shift and show the people on board, who are so absorbed in the minutia of their lives and who think themselves important, may as well be cattle to the people on shore.

Cows,' he reflected, 'draw together in a field; ships in a calm; and we're just the same when we've nothing else to do. But why do we do it? - is it to prevent ourselves from seeing to the bottom of things? ...making cities and mountains and whole universes out of nothing, or do we really love each other, or do we, on the other hand, live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, knowing nothing, leaping from moment to moment as from world to world? - which is, on the whole, the view I incline to.

-- Terence Hewet (chapter 10)

Importance: Hewet contemplates what drove him to gather all of the people in the hotel for an expedition and, in general, what drives people to congregate. He surmises that humans lend significance to what goes on around them by the relating to others. He concludes that it is not purely just love of each other's company that causes people to group together, but that we need to feel that what we see, and what happens to us, is significant, and we can only create that through common experience and societal constructions. This quest for significance is characteristic of this novel, as characters are constantly questioning what they should be doing in order to feel fulfilled. Hirst



wonders what he should do with his career and sees it as the utmost question of his life, Evelyn M. wants to "do something" and talks about it in the abstract constantly, and side characters like Arthur Venning and Susan Warrington see fulfillment as the completion of social milestones, like marriage and children.

Why was it that relations between different people were so unsatisfactory, so fragmentary, so hazardous, and words so dangerous that the instinct to sympathise with another human being was an instinct to be examined carefully and probably crushed? What had Evelyn really wished to say to him? What was she feeling left alone in the empty hall? The mystery of life and the unreality even of one's own sensations overcame him as he walked down the corridor which led to his room.
-- Terence Hewet (chapter 14)

Importance: This quote comes after Evelyn M. confides in Hewet about the proposals she has received from two different men during her stay at the hotel. Hewet is tired and annoyed with Evelyn, who seems to find her proposals of the utmost importance. Hewet detects she is probably trying to flirt with him or in some way make herself attractive to him, and he is frustrated with how disingenuous he sees her as being. He questions the "unreality even of one's own sensations" - what does he really feel, what was Evelyn actually trying to say during that interaction (238). The impossibility of finding an objective, singular motive or feeling frustrates him. Questioning what is real, even in your own mind and your own thoughts, is a major theme of *The Voyage Out*. Woolf does not idealize the relationships between people, leaving room for constant misunderstandings and the natural confusion people have about what they actually feel or think. She resists depicting people as completely confident in their identities, realizing that people are more complex than to have singular focuses, motivations, and opinions. People are rarely completely certain of themselves and often contradict themselves even in their own personal thoughts.

He ran his mind over the things they had said, the random, unnecessary things which had eddied round and round and used up all the time, and drawn them so close together and flung them so far apart, and left him in the end unsatisfied, ignorant still of what she felt and of what she was like. What was the use of talking, talking, merely talking?
-- Narrator (chapter 16)

Importance: This novel stresses the gap between words and feelings, as well as the gap between what we feel and how we interpret what we feel. In this passage, Hewet has spent hours talking to Rachel, asking her about her family and about her opinions on people and things, the area where she grew up, etc. But even after this extended conversation, he still feels as though he has yet to really understand her as a person. He is frustrated by the indirectness of language and the inability to understand his own feelings, let alone find suitable language to convey them to others.

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



after another, vast and hard and cold, appeared to her the churches all over the world where this blundering effort and misunderstanding were perpetually going on, great buildings, filled with innumerable men and women, not seeing clearly, who finally gave up the effort to see, and relapsed tamely into praise and acquiescence, half-shutting their eyes and pursing their lips.”

-- Narrator (chapter 17)

Importance: At an early moment in Hirst, Hewet, Helen, and Rachel's friendship, Rachel calls herself a Christian. The other three, who presumably have long renounced their faith, are scandalized as intellectuals. They are all secular and see religion as an intellectual handicap. In this passage, Rachel attends church for Easter Sunday with most of the hotel group. Strangely, though, as she finds herself paying more attention to the words of the preacher, she finds the words empty instead of fulfilling spiritually. She gets increasingly frustrated, feeling as though all this time she had been deceived by the church. After this service, Rachel resents religion and is very bitter toward it. Hirst, on the other hand, seems to experience a softening during this service. While he is still detached from it, he appreciates it more on an emotional level, rather than a theory to be proven.

The landscape outside, because she had seen nothing but print for the space of two hours, now appeared amazingly solid and clear, but although there were men on the hill washing the trunks of olive trees with a white liquid, for the moment she herself was the most vivid thing in it - an heroic statue in the middle of the foreground, dominating the view. Ibsen's plays always left her in that condition. She acted them for days at a time, greatly to Helen's amusement; and then it would be Meredith's turn and she became Diana of the Crossways. But Helen was aware that it was not all acting, and that some sort of change was taking place in the human being.”

-- Narrator (chapter 10)

Importance: Books and education are a big focus in this novel. When we are first introduced to Rachel, she has not read much and is attempting to piece together an education for herself. Under Helen's guidance, with the benefit now of her own room to read and reflect in solitude, Rachel realizes the transformative power of reading. Rachel is enraptured with what she reads and finally, with her own room and books, she is able to better explore her own mind. This results in Rachel's confidence growing, as she develops her opinions and view of the world.

The respect that women, even well-educated, very able women, have for men" he went on. "I believe we must have the sort of power over you that we're said to have over horses. They see us three times as big as we are or they'd never obey us. For that very reason, I'm inclined to doubt that you'll ever do anything when you have the vote.

-- Terence Hewet (chapter 16)

Importance: This goes to show the innate sexism and ideas about male-female relations that even someone like Hewet, who often champions women and finds men ridiculous in their presumptive superiority, can say something like this. This section shows Rachel agreeing with Hewet as well, which speaks to the way sexism and



misguided ideas about the differences between males and females are ingrained in society even among well-meaning individuals.

Her friendship with St. John was established, for although she fluctuated between irritation and interest in a way that did credit to the candour of her disposition, she liked his company on the whole. He took her outside this little world of love and emotion. He had a grasp of facts."

-- Narrator (chapter 23)

Importance: The relationship between Helen and Hirst interestingly contrasts that of Hewet and Rachel. While Helen and Hirst are not romantically involved, they have a deep respect for one another. In many ways, this relationship seems more founded on an understanding of who the other person is. Because Helen sees Hirst's faults clearly and acknowledges them, her praise of him and respect for him feels more honest. On the other hand, Hewet and Rachel tend to idealize their relationship more (although they are not as naive as some of the other young people). The idealization in Hewet and Rachel's engagement is reflected when he thinks, upon realizing she is dead, that at least this way their future together can remain untainted by the reality of it. Without having to reconcile their relationship with reality, it can remain an ideal forever.

But it could be seen from a glance at their faces that most of the others, the men in particular, felt the inconvenience of the sudden intrusion of this old savage. They looked more secular and critical as they listened to the ravings of the old black man with a cloth round his loins cursing with vehement gesture by a camp-fire in the desert...While Christ spoke they made another effort to fit his interpretation of life upon the lives they lived, but as they were all very different, some practical, some ambitious, some stupid, some wild and experimental, some in love, and others long past any feeling except a feeling of comfort, they did very different things with the words of Christ."

-- Narrator (chapter 17)

Importance: At the Easter service, the hotel guests are disconcerted by the preacher, who is a Santa Marina local and their idea of a primitive native. Their attitude shift based on the ethnicity and appearance of their preacher, Mr. Bax, and their inability to trust his interpretation of Christianity, speaks to a colonialist feeling of superiority. It also indicates a lack of understanding of the Christian faith - when the source is different, when the person delivering the words of Christ (the same words they've heard before) is different, they change their views and instead are left feeling "secular". They find it difficult to reconcile their differences in life and experience once they are confronted with them, and they suddenly find the familiar words of their native religion unrecognizable. Woolf, in the closing lines of this quote, also seems to point to how, while religion is supposed to be unifying, actually religion pulls into view major differences between people, and how they interpret the words of Christ to fit their circumstances.

All these voices sounded gratefully in St. John's ears as he lay half-asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him. Across his eyes passed a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work-baskets, and passing him one after another on their way to



bed."

-- Narrator (chapter 27)

Importance: This is the final line of the novel. St. John is finally able to rest after the ordeal of Rachel's illness and feels relief that it is finally over. He is at peace with Rachel's death, and around him, life goes on in the hotel as people go about their routine and eventually shuffle off to bed. This moment is calm and peaceful, and despite the tragedy of Rachel's death, the rest of the world goes on. It is a surprisingly comforting moment in the book.

Rachel agreed. So it would go on for ever and ever, she said, those women sitting under the trees, the trees and the river. They turned away and began to walk through the trees, leaning, without fear of discovery, upon each other's arms. They had not gone far before they began to assure each other once more that they were in love, were happy, were content; but why was it so painful being in love, why was there so much pain in happiness?

-- Narrator (chapter 21)

Importance: Rachel and Hewet walk through the woods in the glow of their new emotional declarations. Even after they have decided that they are engaged, they still feel as though they need to prove that they are happy to one another. In some ways, this feels like Woolf satirizing their sentimentality, that they constantly feel the need to reassert that they are in love. But from another angle, it seems as though in reassuring each other, they are reassuring themselves that the abstract feeling they are experiencing can be defined as love and justifies joining themselves in marriage. Over the course of the novel, characters wrestle with categorizing their unique feelings with the boxes provided for them by society. For Rachel and Hewet, it might just be a passing phase (Hirst and Helen seem inclined to think so at times), but they cannot tell for sure. Emotions are complex and ambiguous, but Rachel and Hewet expect them to be clear. When they are not, they have to assert, for their own peace of mind, that their definitions and subsequent actions are correct.

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

-- Narrator (chapter 21)

Importance: This moment, while probably not a literal depiction of Hewet and Rachel having sexual intercourse, is still a strange moment physically. Why is Rachel on the ground? Did Helen startle her into falling? Were she and Hewet embracing? There is a strange dream-like quality to this scene and its ambiguity which contributes to the sense of the woods as a suspension of the real world, a place where one is more governed by emotion and fantasy than social constraints and logic. Within the plot, this passage is critical, as it marks Rachel and Hewet agreeing to become engaged and is also the moment when Helen first learns of Hewet and Rachel's relationship. This marks the



beginning of Helen slowly relinquishing Rachel to Hewet, as Rachel has grown up and prepares to leave the care of her aunt for a future with her husband. Helen seems sad but resigned about this. However, as Rachel falls ill, Helen resumes care of Rachel and in the end, because of Rachel's tragic and untimely death, in a sense never has to give her away to Hewet.