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Mental Health and The Voyage Out: Rachel Vinrace as a Representation of Virginia Woolf

Bachelor's thesis in English

Supervisor: Hanna Musiol

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between Rachel Vinrace from *The Voyage Out*, Virginia Woolf, and their mental health. The analysis point to similarities between their experience with abuse and neglect as well as their family background. The analysis also points to connections between the sexuality of Virginia Woolf and the Characters Rachel Vinrace, Helen Ambrose and St. John Hirst, which was discussed based on Jorm et. Al (2002) `s study that points to there being a correlation between sexuality and mental health (p. 423). The main sources that this thesis uses are Caramagno (1992), Dalsimer (2001) and Swanson (1996).

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Introduction

The main focus of this thesis will be on analyzing how and if Virginia Woolf's well-known mental struggles are represented in *The Voyage Out*, while at the same time not making judgments or diagnosing someone. This will mostly be done through the character Rachel Vinrace, who I argue is comparable to Virginia Woolf. For example, they are both motherless (Dalsimer 2001, p. 131), and according to Swanson, in their experience with neglect and abuse (1996 p. 296). I argue that the possibility of Virginia Woolf's sexuality having been affected, in any way, by her sexuality has sometimes been ignored or forgotten, as illustrated by Smith (2014, p. 539). Smith (2014) does not even mention the possibility of Virginia Woolf's sexuality having affected her mental health when quoting a letter from Virginia to her later husband where Virginia declared that she had no sexual feelings or desires for him. She even went as far as to say that kissing him made her feel like a rock (Smith, 2014, 539) Despite psychology scholars pointing to a correlation between mental health and sexuality, and despite him discussing her mental health in his paper (Jorm et. Al., 2002, p. 423 and Smith, 2014). Therefore, I argue that it would be reasonable to consider this when analyzing Virginia Woolf's mental health. Thus, representations of sexuality in *The Voyage Out* will be considered in my analysis, however, it will not be the main focus. In addition to *The Voyage Out*, I use Virginia Woolf's short story "Hyde Park Gate" and the poem "Sapphics" by Algernon C. Swinburne as additional primary sources. I will use a combination of historical and psychological criticism in my analysis. Research and analysis of mental health and literature that thematizes mental health is important because it contributes to counteracting the stigma that surrounds mental health and mental illness. Therefore, this project is important. My thesis statement is: Rachel Vinrace from *The Voyage Out* reflects Virginia Woolf in terms of their family history, being victims of sexual abuse, their sexuality, and how all these elements might have affected their mental health.

My leading secondary sources are Caramagno (1992), Swanson (1996), Dalsimer (2001), Smith (2014), and Harker (2011). Caramagno (1992) is a book called *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness*, published by the University of California Press. I will use chapters two, four, and seven of this book in my thesis, but mostly chapter seven. Chapter Two is about the symptoms of manic-depressive illness, or bipolar disorder, and how Caramagno argues Virginia experienced these symptoms. I will not diagnose anyone in my thesis; however, this chapter is still relevant because it describes the symptoms of Virginia Woolf's mental illness. Therefore, I will use this chapter to compare

Virginia's symptoms to Rachel's symptoms, without the usage of the diagnosis in which Caramagno uses. Chapter four in this book is about Virginia Woolf's family history of mental illness, which Caramagno argues is one of the main causes of Virginia Woolf's mental struggles (1992, p. 112-113). Chapter seven is about *The Voyage Out*. In this chapter, one of his main arguments is that the whole point of Rachel Vinrace's death is the pointlessness and that it reflects Virginia's feelings when losing her family members, especially her sister Stella Duckworth. This is relevant to my argument because it can be tied to the mental health of both Virginia Woolf and Rachel Vinrace. One of his other main arguments in this chapter is that Rachel, who similarly to Virginia is motherless, and seeks nurture from Clarissa Dalloway, Helen Ambrose, and Terence Hewet. Furthermore, he argues that Virginia Woolf did the same, but from her sisters Stella and Vanessa as well as her husband Leonard (Caramagno, 1992, p. 158).

Swanson (1996) focuses her argument on Virginia Woolf's mental health and how we find reflections and representations of her mental struggles and trauma in *The Voyage Out*. One of Swanson's main arguments is that Virginia Woolf used *The Voyage Out* as a way of processing her trauma of childhood abuse and neglect (Swanson, 1996, p. 304). Another of her main arguments is that Mr. Dalloway's kiss represents sexual abuse and rape (Swanson, 1996, p. 295). This relates to Dalsimer (2001), in that according to her, the kiss has a wide range of repercussions. The biggest of which is that Rachel realizes that women are the object of men's lust (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 138). Later in the book Terence kisses Rachel, which results in her having a violent hallucination connected to what Dalsimer points out happened at the same time that the first symptom of her deadly illness starts (2001, p. 157 and p. 164). Furthermore, Dalsimer argues that the onset of Rachel's illness mimics the onset of Woolf's episodes of psychosis (2001, p.162).

Dalsimer also argues that Woolf inserts herself into the book by referring to a poem read by St. John Hirst which in *The Voyage Out* is referred to as "Sappho. The One Swinburne did – the best thing that's ever been written." (Dalsimer 2001, p. 155 and Woolf, 2019a, p. 215). Dalsimer argues that this refers to a poem called "Sapphics" and in this poem, Aphrodite calls for Sappho to turn to her, however she instead turns to the lesbian women (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 154). This happened during the same time that Rachel and Terence fall in love. Also, Dalsimer argues that based on earlier versions of *The Voyage*

Out Rachel's Aunt, Helen is expressing strong sexual affections towards Rachel, and demanding that she "Beg my pardon, and say that you worship me!" (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 170).

Smith's (2014) arguments mostly connect to Virginia Woolf's attempted suicide in 1913 and the events surrounding that, as well as Virginia and Leonard Woolf's trip to Greece in 1932 and their connection to Helen and Roger Fry (p. 538). The first of which is the most relevant for my thesis, as this attempted suicide happened while she was writing *The Voyage Out*. Harker (2011) on the other hand connects his arguments to the frequent misperceptions that occur in Virginia Woolf's fiction, using examples from her writing. One of his more specific arguments, which connects to *The Voyage Out* is that birds cause perceptual and conceptual errors for the characters in Woolf's fictional literature (Harker, 2011, p. 9).

In the main body of my thesis, there will first be a brief introduction to Virginia Woolf's literature with a focus on *Mrs. Dalloway*. Because the characters Mr. and Mrs. Dalloway is significant to my analysis and appears in both of these books. Then there will be a discussion of how and if Rachel was neglected, and whether it relates to Virginia Woolf, building on Swanson's (1996) arguments. Here I will be using Friedman & Billick (2014) as an additional source on neglect. Friedman & Billick (2014) is a literature review and observational study on unintentional child neglect. After this there will be a discussion of loneliness in *The Voyage Out* through the character Rachel Vinrace, and whether it reflects Virginia Woolf, building on Swanson (1996) and Caramagno (1992). Then there will be a discussion of how and if Rachel's abuse represents that of Virginia Woolf, focusing on Swanson's (1996), Dalsimer's (2001), and Caramagno's (1992) arguments concerning the symbolization of Mr. Dalloway kissing Rachel, as well as the dream and dissociation that follows the kiss. In connection to this, there will also be a discussion of Rachel's hallucination as a result of Terence kissing her, as argued by Dalsimer (2001). Then there will be a discussion of sexuality in *The Voyage Out*, specifically connected to the characters St. John Hirst, Helen Ambrose, and Rachel Vinrace. This will mostly build on Dalsimer's arguments as well as my argument on St. John Hirst, which I base on a quote from *The Voyage Out*. When discussing Rachel's sexuality I will also base my analysis on a poem called "Sapphics" by Algernon C. Swinburne. Then there will be a discussion of the similarities between Rachel and Virginia Woolf's family histories, connected to their parents and mostly building on Swanson (1996) but also on Caramagno (1992) and Dalsimer (2001). Then, there will be a discussion of Caramagno (1992), Swanson (1996), and Dalsimer's (2001) different interpretations of Rachel's Death. Lastly, there will be a conclusion

Main Body - Chapter 1

During her life, Virginia Woolf authored several books and short stories, and I would argue that out of Virginia Woolf's other novels the one that relates the most to *The Voyage Out* is *Mrs. Dalloway*. First of all, the characters Mr., and Mrs. Dalloway both appear as characters in both books. However, they are much more central in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as depicted by the title of the book. One of the other main characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Septimus, he suffers from what we now call post-traumatic stress syndrome, which he got as a result of his experiences as a soldier in World War I (Rasmussen, 2016, p. 55). As James (2019) points out, Virginia sees the importance of expanding the vocabulary connected to illness, both physical and mental, and of improving the treatments of patients (p.3). This I would argue is visible in *Mrs. Dalloway* through her focus on Septimus's PTSD and suicide, the last of which makes Mrs. Dalloway think that she had "never been so happy" (Woolf, 2019b, p. 203). I would argue that this feeling might have been caused by her struggle with mental health and that she admired him for being able to end his own life. Thus, mental health is also central in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Sexuality is also an important theme in both books. For example, Dalsimer (2001) argues that Helen Ambrose in *The Voyage Out* is sexually interested in Rachel (p. 168-170), and Swanson (1996) argues that Helen, at one point, is jealous of Mrs. Dalloway because of her interaction with Rachel (p. 292). And in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mrs. Dalloway says that kissing Sally was "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" (Woolf, 2019b, p. 38), and at one point she realizes that her feelings for women were the same as men felt for women (Woolf, 2019b, p. 34). Before writing *The Voyage Out* Virginia Woolf had written some short stories, one of them she titled "Hyde Park Gate 22", which was the address of her family home. I would argue that this short story is highly relevant to Virginia's mental health, especially because she at the end of it describes one of the times when her brother, George, sexually assaulted her (Woolf, 2017, p. 91). Some of her other books include *Orlando*, *To the Light House*, and *Jacob's Room*.

Swanson (1996) argues that Rachel's formal and emotional education "seems designed to make her unfit for survival." (p. 291). I would argue that Swanson (1996) is pointing out a case of emotional and educational neglect, based on Freedman and Billick (2014)'s argument that emotional neglect is not always visible at first sight, one might not notice it until the child has gotten older (p. 253). Emotional neglect is not as easily detectable as other kinds of abuse because it is not caused by an action, but by the lack of action, and it can often be unintentional (Ibid). I would also argue that Rachel receiving

education, but that education being inadequate is a sign of neglect. This can be illustrated by the following quote.

“But this system of education had one great advantage. It did not teach anything, but it put no obstacle in the way of any real talent that the pupil might chance to have. Rachel, being musical, was allowed to learn nothing but music; she became a fanatic about music. (...) Finding her teachers inadequate, she had practically taught herself.” (Woolf, 2019a, p. 23).

This passage illustrates Swanson (1996) `s point about Rachel`s formal education being inadequate, as “It did not teach [her] anything”. According to this passage from *The Voyage Out*, she instead had to take her education into her own hands. What is the point of taking an education if it learns you “nothing about how the world works or how to survive in it” (Swanson, 1996, p. 291)? Thus, I argue that in *The Voyage Out* Rachel is a fictional character whose education has been neglected. Furthermore, Dalsimer (2001) argues that “Woolf gave Rachel the sort of haphazard education she felt herself to have had” (p. 340). Based on this I argue that Rachel`s educational neglect might reflect Virginia Woolf`s neglect. However, Swanson did not only mention Rachel`s formal education, but also her emotional education which I argue also points to emotional neglect.

In *The Voyage Out* it is frequently mentioned that Rachel who was raised by two of her aunts, did not receive adequate emotional support and attention in her upbringing, I would therefore argue that her aunts played a significant role in her neglect (Swanson, 1996, p. 291 and Dalsimer, 2001, p. 141). Swanson (1996) for example says that Rachel`s aunts have taught her “not to feel anything strongly, certainly not to try to express or communicate strong feelings” (P. 291). This is highly relevant to emotional neglect because it is common for people who have been emotionally neglected to have difficulties with understanding or being aware of their own emotions (Webb & Musello, 2012, p.72). On the other hand, emotional neglect is different for everyone who has experienced it. However, there are common traits in the effects it might have as explained according to Webb and Musello, among which is having difficulties with understanding or being aware of their emotions (2012, p. 72). Furthermore, Swanson (1996) not only argued that this is a signal of childhood abuse but of sexual abuse (p.291-292). She makes this point stronger with a quote where Helen says that Rachel looked like a “victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey” (1996, p. 292).

In addition to this, there is one occasion in the book which remains important throughout the book: Mr. Dalloway kissing Rachel. Both Caramagno (1992), Swanson (1996), and Dalsimer (2001) argue for the importance of this kiss. Caramagno argues that the kiss is Rachel's "First lesson in a male's desire and in depression" (Caramagno, 1992, p. 157). Helen's response to hearing about the kiss supports this, she says that it is "the most natural thing in the world" (Woolf, 2019a, p. 70). This I argue highlights the depressive or pessimistic mood in this situation, because Helen, in other words, says that Mr. Dalloway did nothing wrong by kissing Rachel without her permission and that it was her fault for not anticipating it, because Mr. Dalloway is a man after all (Ibid). Helen's words also make Rachel realize why she cannot walk alone (Woolf, 2019a, p. 70). Which Swanson argues to be her discovery of "the reality of male sexual violence and female victimization" (1996, p. 293). Which I would argue supports Caramagno's claim that Rachel had a lesson in male desire (1992, p. 157). However, Swanson (1996) does not mention depression in connection to this.

Swanson (1996) on the other hand argues that the kiss is a synecdoche for sexual assault of women in general and not just a lesson aimed at Rachel (p. 295). She claims that Rachel as well as Virginia Woolf is a victim of sexual abuse, and she suggests that Rachel's abuser might have been her father, Willoughby Vinrace. Swanson argues that Rachel has repressed the abuse but that Mr. Dalloway's kiss makes her fear and pain connected to the abuse return (Swanson, 1996, p. 295). Furthermore, following the kiss Rachel has a case of dissociation as well as a nightmare. According to Swanson, the dream is suggestive of sexual abuse (1996, p. 296). Dalsimer however, argues that the dream is suggestive of female sexuality and that it shows that Rachel dislikes being "the object of men's lust" (2001, p. 138). The dissociation also connects to Harker (2011)'s argument that birds cause conceptual errors in the characters of Virginia Woolf's fiction (p. 9). After the kiss, Rachel is leaning over the railing of the boat, looking at birds that are flying over the sea. It is then that she starts to dissociate, feeling as if she was floating over the sea with the birds. Based on Harker's (2011, p. 9) and Swanson (1996, p. 295)'s argument I argue that the birds and the sea function as a distraction from the kiss and the possible trauma that is resurfacing in her mind.

Furthermore, Dalsimer (2001) argues that because of his pompous behavior Mr. Dalloway is the type of man that Virginia Woolf disliked (p.137). This I argue becomes evident when considering the dream Rachel had after the kiss, as this dream is remarkably similar to a dream Virginia had had, and which she had described in a letter to Ethel Smyth (Swanson, 1996, p. 296). In Virginia Woolf's version of the dream, she connects parts of it to George Duckworth, who had sexually assaulted her when she was 6-22 years old (Berner, 2019, p. 5). Because of this she strongly disliked him, and by replacing George with Mr. Dalloway in the dream and connecting him to sexual assault it becomes evident that she disliked the character or wanted the readers to dislike him. This is made even more evident by how Virginia talked about her brother: "If you looked at him closely you noticed... that though he had the curls of a God and the ears of a faun he had unmistakably the eyes of a pig" (Woolf, 2017, p. 84). In this quote, Virginia describes George as having the "eyes of a pig" which is a negative description, because the word pig is used to describe someone you dislike (Collins dictionary). Furthermore, I argue that kisses in general function as a synecdoche for rape and Rachel's feeling of sexual vulnerability in *The Voyage Out* as argued by Swanson (1996, p. 295) and Dalsimer (2001, p. 138).

Another instance in *The Voyage Out* which supports the argument that kisses function as a synecdoche for sexual assault and Rachel's feeling of sexual vulnerability is her reaction to Terrence, her fiancé, kissing her when she is ill at the end of the book. After which the dream she had following Mr. Dalloway's kiss is repeated. At the exact time that she first becomes ill she witnesses a violent scene, which Dalsimer also argues to be a sign that she is vulnerable to the view of violence (2001, p. 157). When she later is ill and Terrence kisses her, she starts hallucinating, and in her hallucination, she sees a woman using a knife to cut off the head of a man (Woolf, 2019a, p. 518). I would argue that this supports Swanson's claim that kisses function as a synecdoche for rape and female subjectivity (1996, 303). Because, just as Rachel dissociates and thus distracts herself from her argued trauma after Mr. Dalloway's kiss, her mind drifts off when Terrence kisses her, but here to a violent scene, she distracts herself when Terrence kisses her (Woolf, 2019a, p. 65 & p. 518). Thus, she cannot face the suppressed trauma which Swanson argues is aggravated by the act of kissing (1996, p. 303). However, after the first kiss, her dissociation can be said to be peaceful while after Terrence's kiss she is distracted by the thought of violence, which is quite the opposite of peaceful.

There are several ways in which Rachel Vinrace from *The Voyage Out* can be said to reflect Virginia Woolf. I would argue that one of these ways is their loneliness. One of my reasons for arguing that Virginia Woolf herself was lonely is that she often wrote about loneliness and solitude as if it was a positive thing with which she was remarkably familiar. For example, in *To The Light House* she said that “For now she need not think of anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of – to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone.” (Woolf, 2016, p. 58). Here the character wants to be alone and enjoy being alone. Thus, loneliness is depicted as a feeling that can be positive and desirable. In the following quote, Virginia describes how Rachel Vinrace feels at a moment in the second chapter of *The Voyage Out*. The following quote also includes a description of Rachel Vinrace as a lonely person, here however I argue that loneliness is a neutral feeling, while in the preceding quote it is depicted as something that is directly positive.

“But, on the other hand, an immense dignity had descended upon her; she was an inhabitant of the great world, which has so few inhabitants, travelling all day across an empty universe, with veils drawn before her and behind. She was more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert; she was infinitely more mysterious, moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources. 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, for as a ship she had a life of her own.” (Woolf, 2019a, p. 23)

Based on these quotes I argue that Rachel’s feelings of loneliness could be a representation of Virginia Woolf’s feelings. According to Caramagno (1992) Rachel’s aunt, Helen Ambrose attempts at educating Rachel through “cool, iconic, detached observation” resulting in Rachel becoming isolated and disillusioned (Caramagno, 1992, p. 157).

Furthermore, I would argue that this quote might be seen as an example of how Virginia Woolf’s mental struggles might have affected her writing (Woolf, 2019a, p.23). Caramagno (1992) argues that her mental struggles were caused by bipolar disorder and thus I will use that as a lens of comparison here (p. 100), however by doing this I do not intend to diagnose anyone whether fictional or not. I just intend to use the symptoms of bipolar disorder that Virginia was said to have had, to compare elements of their mental health. Rachel’s emotions jump back and forth between positive and negative emotions, making

her emotions seem chaotic. However, I would also argue that the chaoticness of her emotions makes them seem realistic, as no brain is entirely free of chaoticness. On the other hand, that does not mean that this could not be the thought pattern of someone with a mood disorder, for example bipolar. (Caramagno, 1992, p. 39-41), And towards the end of the quote, she even has thoughts of suicide (Woolf, 2019a, p. 23). First, she feels dignified, then lonely as she travels across the “empty universe.” Then she goes on to describe how the sea might give her “death or some unexampled Joy” and that “none would know of it.” I analyze this as Rachel thinking that if she killed herself by jumping out into the sea, everything would be good, and no one would notice that she had killed herself. Furthermore, she treats the suicidal thought as if it were nothing out of the ordinary, which suggests that this could be a regular thought or emotion for Rachel.

As mentioned in the introduction, Smith (2014) quotes a letter from Virginia Woolf to the man that she later married. In this quote, she declares that she has no sexual feelings for him and that kissing him makes her feel like a rock (Smith, 2014, p. 539). Despite this, Smith fails to mention how Virginia Woolf’s sexuality might have affected her mental health. That, however, makes room for a discussion on this, as it is accepted within the field of psychology that there is a connection between one’s sexuality and one’s mental health (Jorm et. Al., 2002, p. 423). And although I agree that the most likely causes for her mental struggles are her genetics and her sexual trauma, I find it to be important to acknowledge that Virginia Woolf’s sexuality might in some ways have affected her psychological health. Especially if one considers the fact that Virginia Woolf is well known for having had a female lover, Vita Sackville-West (Green, 2007, p. 196). It has also been suggested that the character Rachel Vinrace might have been queer (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 169-170).

In addition to Rachel Vinrace, there are other characters worth analyzing in comparison to Virginia Woolf, one of them being St. John Hirst. One reason for this is his close relationship with Rachel Vinrace. The components of St. John Hirst and his personality that I argue to be comparable to that of Virginia Woolf are his strong feelings of loneliness and a statement of his that might suggest that he is gay. He says: “‘What I abhor most of all,’ he concluded, ‘is the female breast (...) They’re gross, they’re absurd, they’re utterly intolerable!’” (Woolf, 2019a, p. 167). Although one cannot be certain of his sexuality, I argue that his strong hate for “the female breast” points to him being gay. That makes him relatable to Virginia Woolf because she is known to have been queer and to have had a female lover

(Green, 2007, 196). When it comes to St. John's loneliness Caramagno (1992) argues that he is isolated, critical of himself, miserable, and misogynistic (Caramagno, 1992, p. 158). This also functions as a point of comparison between him and Virginia Woolf, as her loneliness has been discussed earlier.

Dalsimer (2001) discusses Helen Ambrose's sexuality in great detail. However, as she does this, she uses older drafts of *The Voyage Out* where Helen is more vocal about her sexual desires, and specifically her desires for Rachel Vinrace (p. 168-170). Dalsimer quotes a passage from several earlier versions of *The Voyage Out* and says that it is "a passage of fierce eroticism between two women." Two examples of these quotes are "Beg my pardon, and say that you worship me" (2001, p. 170) and "Helen was upon her. (...) At last she lay still, all the grasses shaken around her and before her by her panting."

(Dalsimer, 2001, p. 168). Based on this, Helen is sexually interested in Rachel who not only is a woman, but also her niece. It would technically not be incest because they are not related, as Helen's husband is the brother of Rachel's mother. However, as she is Rachel's aunt I would argue that it is reasonable to associate this with incest and to think that it is unnatural for a person to be sexually interested in their niece. Therefore, I would argue that this could be a representation of Virginia's own experience with incestual assault from her half-brothers and that she tries to express it subtly. According to Dalsimer (2001) the passage also "suggests a fantasy of rape by another woman" (p. 170). All of this explains why Virginia made this passage "dreamlike and difficult to follow" in the published version of *The Voyage Out* (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 168); she did not want it to be easily recognizable that she had written about sexual relationships between two women who in addition to being of the same gender was of the same family.

My main argument concerning Rachel's sexuality connects to Dalsimer (2001)'s argument about the poem referred to as "Sappho. The one Swinburne did – the best thing that's ever been written." (Woolf, 2019a, p. 215), which St. John Hirst read while being in church. First of all, Sappho refers to a Greek poet who lived on the island of Lesbos and who is commonly known as "the lesbian poet" (Waxman, 2017, p. 1). Dalsimer (2001) argues that the poem in question is "Sapphics". This poem is significant because it is about choosing between the love of men and women (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 154). It is also about what consequences Sappho faces by "turning to the lesbian women" (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 155). The reason why I argue that this connects to Rachel, even though she is not the one reading the poem, is that, as Dalsimer (2001) argues; Virginia inserts herself into the book to warn Rachel and the readers of what

would happen if one were to choose the love of “the lesbian women” over the love of men. Furthermore, this happens right around the time that Rachel and Terrence fall in love and eventually get engaged. I would also argue that the poem points to Virginia herself being afraid of what would happen if she were to choose the love of women over the love of men. I base this on the fact that Virginia herself got engaged and then married during the time in which she wrote *The Voyage Out* (Smith, 2014, p. 539). Furthermore, it is well known that she later had a female lover, Vita Sackville-West, proving that she was not straight. Also, by suggesting that Rachel has to choose between the love of men or women, Virginia also suggests that Rachel is queer, as she otherwise would not have to make such a choice. Lastly, Dalsimer argues that marriage would force Rachel to make this choice, but that there at the time was no real choice, at least not one that would be accepted by society at that time (2001, p. 162).

I would argue that it is useful to analyze parts of the poem “Sapphics”, in addition to the passage from *The Voyage Out* where it according to Dalsimer is mentioned (2001, p. 154). Because it illustrates the importance of Rachel and Virginia’s choice between men or women more clearly than by just analyzing one of the two. However, the poem is quite long, twenty verses to be exact, and thus I choose to focus on verse eleven, thirteen, and nineteen which I would argue is the most important verses of the poem in relation to *The Voyage Out*. In verse eleven Aphrodite is saying, “Turn to me, O my Sappho” (Swinburne, n. d., Line 41). Then, however, Sappho turned her face away instead of toward Aphrodite, and I would argue that it is this that Dalsimer bases her assessment that Sappho turned toward the lesbians instead of Aphrodite on. However, there is no explicit mention of her turning to the lesbians, instead, the next mention of any lesbians is in verse thirteen “Saw the lesbians kissing across their smitten / Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings, / mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen, /fairer than all men;” (Swinburne, n.d., Line 49-52). I would argue that this verse is important because it shows how graphic it is for a poem that was written around 1880 and that it is very obvious that the poem is about women who like other women.

However, as Dalsimer argues this is not just a poem that conveys a positive message about lesbians, instead it focuses on the consequences of Sappho’s choice to turn to the lesbian women (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 154). In verse nineteen these consequences are discussed; “Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight, / Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting” (Swinburne, n.d., Line 74-75). First of all, this verse uses several negatively charged words and phrases, for example, “unbeloved” “unseen” and “Ghost of

outcast” (ibid). These give a sense of how miserably Sappho is because she chose the love of the lesbians. In this quote, Sappho has been outcasted from society and I would argue that this serves as a warning, or at least that Virginia understood it to be a warning not to act on one`s feelings for the same gender. This also illustrates Dalsimer`s point that Rachel did not really have a choice even though she was put in the position to make one, because she, according to this poem, would have been outcasted had she chosen to be open about her love for women.

Both Virginia and Rachel were motherless and had lost their mothers relatively early. However, Rachel lost hers earlier, and she had no sisters who could step in to take care of her. Instead, she was placed under the care of two of her aunts, who as I discussed earlier failed to take care of her emotional needs, resulting in what I argue is emotional neglect. Furthermore, the loss of their mothers makes them seek nurturing from other people, Rachel seeks it from Helen, Mrs. Dalloway, and Terence, while Virginia seeks it from her sisters Stella and Vanessa as well as her husband Leonard (Caramagno, 1992, p. 158). This relates to the earlier points made about emotional neglect, because having difficulties connected to nurturing oneself or other people is a common effect of childhood emotional neglect (Webb & Musello, 2012, p.72). In addition to this, it is worth noting that Dalsimer (2001) compares Terrence to Rachel`s mother, Teresa (p. 167). She makes this comparison not only based on their similar names but on a passage from an earlier version of *The Voyage Out*. In this passage, there is a conversation between Rachel and Terrence about her mother that makes her want to be held in his arms for comfort (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 167). In addition to this, it is interesting to note that in *The Voyage Out* Rachel read *Persuasion* by Jane Austen. In this novel, the main character lost her mother at the age of thirteen, which was the same age at which Virginia lost her mother (Dalsimer 2001, p. 132). Rachel`s father on the other hand was still alive, while Virginia lost her father at the age of twenty-two, causing another mental breakdown (Dalsimer, 2001, p. xiii.)

Swanson (1996) argues that Rachel`s father resembles Virginia`s father in that they both failed to protect their daughter from sexual abuse (Swanson, 1996, p. 296). There is no explicit mention of sexual abuse in *The Voyage Out*, however, there is according to Swanson basis for arguing that Rachel had indeed experienced sexual abuse before the plot of the book. She bases this on the dream and dissociation Rachel experienced after the kiss. However, it has been discussed earlier in this thesis, on the other hand, this was not done with attention to the details of those two events, just the significance of them.

When she dissociated, she felt as if she was flying over the sea, away from the boat, and looking down at the sea (Swanson, 1996, p. 296). Later, she dreams that she is being trapped by the walls of a tunnel and by bricks falling on her as she saw a small, deformed man, and according to Swanson this resembles a dream or vision in which Virginia Herself repeatedly had written about having had in a letter to Ethel Smyth. In the letter, Virginia connects this dream to George and Gerald Duckworth, who abused her sexually when she was a child (Swanson, 1996, p. 296). In connection to this, Swanson`s (1996) argument that both of their fathers failed to protect their daughters from abuse is relevant (p. 296), because it describes them both as having done the same mistake. Furthermore, she argues that whether or not Mr. Vinrace abused his daughter, he did neglect her as he failed to fulfill his responsibilities connected to protecting her from sexual abuse and that Virginia`s father also neglected his daughter for the same reasons (Swanson, 1996, p. 296).

Swanson (1996) argues that Rachel`s death signifies an escape from the marriage to a man, Terence, which she would have entered if she did not die (Swanson, 1996, p. 299). She argues that while one cannot know whether Rachel caught the fever that killed her on the boating trip, which she and a group of other people went on prior to her death, we do know that she caught an engagement with Terrence on that trip. Based on that Swanson concludes that it is the engagement, as a part of a patriarchal sexual system, which kills Rachel (Swanson, 1996, p. 299). Because of this, one could argue that this represents a sense of regret in Virginia because she married a man, or that she in her writing wanted to explore how it would be to avoid marriage. I would also argue that she could have been exploring thoughts of death and suicide. On the other hand, Swanson (1996) connects her arguments to her larger argument about Virginia Woolf's writing *The Voyage Out* as a way to respond to and work through her experience with sexual abuse and sexist oppression (Swanson, 1996, p. 304). Which would make sense, especially considering Dalsimer`s (2001) argument that Rachel`s death prefigures Virginia Woolf`s own Suicide, as Virginia Woolf connects Rachel`s death to that of drowning. This, however, will be discussed in grater detail later.

Caramagno (1992) on the other hand, has quite different arguments as to what Rachel`s death represents compared to Swanson (1996). He argues that the point of Rachel`s death is to convey the meaningless and hopeless feelings that Virginia Woolf herself felt when she suddenly lost her oldest sister Stella

Duckworth to a sudden case of peritonitis. In addition to this, Stella was pregnant when she died, so Virginia also lost her unborn niece or nephew (Caramagno, 1992, p.159). Virginia had also lost her mother quite suddenly and at that time Stella Duckworth became the closest thing that Virginia had to a mother figure. Caramagno points out that her sister Stella meant a great deal to Virginia as a result of this, and thus it was even harder to lose her than it otherwise would have been (Caramagno, 1992, p. 158-159). Another thing that illustrates how important Stella was to Virginia is the number of times she is mentioned in Virginia's short story titled "A Sketch of the past", 53 times, which is nine times more than there are pages in that short story (Woolf, 2017, p. 37-82). Furthermore, Caramagno continues his argument by saying that "This is the real subject of *The Voyage Out*: how do we deal with death that threatens us and with a reading that defies even our wish to understand, (...) to impose meaning where we cannot find it" (Caramagno, 1992, p. 161). This illustrates his point, as he goes on to explain it in detail; the intricate and confusing framework of *The Voyage Out* is an expression of Virginia Woolf's supposed bipolar disorder, and in the case of Rachel's death, it is especially an expression of the depressive part of Virginia's argued mood-disorder (Caramagno, 1992, p. 161-162).

Dalsimer (2001)'s argument as to what Rachel's death symbolizes is different from Swanson's (1996) and Caramagno's (1992). She argues that the way the book is written makes the readers think that it will display Rachel's maturation and eventual marriage. She argues that everything supports that assumption until Rachel suddenly dies and people realize that it all leads to her death (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 162). In opposition to Caramagno (1992) however, she does not argue that the death is supposed to convey a feeling of meaninglessness, but that Rachel's death functions as an escape from her impending marriage. Dalsimer uses several arguments concerning Virginia Woolf's views on marriage to support this. She for example says that Virginia Woolf was terrified of losing her individuality when getting married (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 160). Furthermore, she argues that there are signs that suggest that Rachel would be "submerged and absorbed by her husband in marriage" (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 161).

One example of this can be found on page 280 of *The Voyage Out*, Terrence had been patronizing and provoking her by among other things saying that she had a poor taste in literature, trying to instruct her on what she should read and saying things like "'You're not beautiful,' he began, 'but I like your face.'" And then he goes on to say that "now you look as if you'd like to blow my brains out." (Woolf, 2019a, p. 280). As if it was odd for her to react negatively to him calling her "not beautiful." Furthermore, after

this there is a moment where Rachel thinks positively about suicide; “To be flung into the sea, to be washed hither and thither and driven about the roots of the world – the idea was incoherently delightful.” (Woolf, 2019a, p. 280). Previously Terrence had said things that one could see as feminist, for example: “Think of a railway train: fifteen carriages for men who want to smoke. Doesn’t it make your blood boil? If I were a woman I’d blow some one’s brains out.” (Woolf, 2019, 199). However, now he is the complete opposite, and according to Dalsimer (2001), this change happened when Rachel and Terence declared their love for each other (p. 161-162). Thus “Marriage would destroy Rachel’s individuality” (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 162).

Furthermore, Dalsimer argues that there is a strong connection between the symptoms of Rachel’s illness and Virginia Woolf’s psychotic episodes (2001, p. 162). She argues that Woolf uses her experiences with psychosis to write the “finest sustained writing in the novel” (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 163). What I would argue that she means with this is that it is a very realistic narration of both the experience of having a psychotic episode and the perception of someone else having it (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 163-164). Also, Dalsimer argues that Rachel’s perception of her death prefigures Virginia Woolf’s suicide (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 165). Rachel perceives herself as drowning peacefully in “a deep pool of sticky water” (Dalsimer, 2001, p. 165). And in 1941 Virginia Woolf killed herself by drowning. Rachel did not drown, however, she perceived herself as being at the bottom of the sea; “While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea” (Woolf, 2019a, p. 320). I would argue that there are other parts of the book that also refer to Virginia Woolf’s fantasy about drowning herself or drowning in general, for example, as I discussed in the preceding paragraph, on page 280 of *The Voyage Out* Rachel thinks that it would be “delightful” to be “flung into the sea” (Woolf, 2019a). And on page 23 she says that “The sea might give her death or some unexampled joy, and none would know of it” (Woolf, 2019a), which also was discussed on one of the preceding paragraphs, on loneliness. Based on this I would argue that Virginia might have meant to imply that Rachel took her own life or that she wanted to take her own life despite dying of a fever.

Conclusions

In this thesis, there has been a discussion of how Rachel Vinrace represents Virginia Woolf. First, there was a brief introduction to two of Virginia Woolf's other literary works, relating to my thesis. Then there was a discussion of whether Rachel Vinrace had experienced neglect, and I argue that she was emotionally neglected. For example, based on Swanson (1996)'s statement that her formal and emotional education made her "unfit for survival" (p. 291). After which there was a discussion of signs that Rachel Vinrace was abused and how that relates to Virginia Woolf, focusing on the effects Mr. Dalloway's kiss had on Rachel and how kisses are argued to be a synecdoche of rape in *The Voyage Out* (Swanson, 1996, p. 295). In this case, I argue that there were signs of Rachel having sexual trauma and that they do relate to Virginia Woolf. Especially in terms of Rachel's dream being similar to one of Virginia's dreams, and that she replaced her abusive brother George with Mr. Dalloway in Rachel's dream. After that, there was a discussion of how Virginia Woolf and Rachel Vinrace experienced loneliness, based on an excerpt from *The Voyage Out* as well as Caramagno's (1992) arguments relating to this.

Then there was a discussion of representations of sexuality in *The Voyage Out* through the characters St. John Hirst, Helen Ambrose, and Rachel Vinrace. The first of which is based on an excerpt from *The Voyage Out*, while the other two are based on Dalsimer (2001)'s arguments about their sexuality, and the poem "Sapphics" by Algernon C Swinburne. Then the similarities between Rachel and Virginia's family history were discussed. My first argument about this was about them both being motherless. While the other was about how both of their parents had failed at protecting their daughters from abuse. After that, there was a discussion about how Swanson (1996), Caramagno (1992) and Dalsimer (2001) interpreted the significance and symbolism of Rachel's death. Swanson (1996) argued that Rachel's death symbolized an escape from marrying a man (p. 299) and based on this I argue that it might reflect Virginia's regret as to having married a man herself. Caramagno (1992)'s argument was that it was a representation of the hopelessness and meaninglessness that Virginia Woolf felt when losing her sister Stella (p. 158-159). Dalsimer (2001) on the other hand, argues that the symptoms of Rachel's illness mimic that of Virginia's psychosis (p. 162), and that her death prefigures Virginia Woolf's own suicide. Thus, I conclude that Rachel Vinrace can be seen as a representation of Virginia Woolf in terms of their experience with neglect and abuse, their family history, and their sexuality. In addition to this I argue that St. John Hirst and Helen Ambrose also represent Virginia Woolf in terms of their sexuality.

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