# Free Talk, Taboos and Concealed Fears: Existential crisis portrayed by Virginia Woolf in Rachel Vinrace

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The problem of 'difficulty' encountered while reading Virgina Woolf's novels arises from the alluringly simple quotidian life of placid existence that she presents in her novels. The angel in the house governed by the taboos of the well-meant patriarch may not venture beyond, because temptation comes easily, revealing the demoniac underside of the protector-patriarch. Languishing from desires that have no name, she casts the women in her books, not a shade more fair than they are, no aphrodisiac glamour, no romantic gaiety, no witty quips, only the Mrs. Brown always occupying just a corner of the world's space, hovering liked an audible murmur in the man's world of high talk and aggressive self-assertion. Virginia Woolf's quarrel with Mr Bennet, who has forever ignored Mrs. Brown, takes on a special appeal because she has been always battered by society and by the gentleman who represents the society at large. Mrs. Brown may not speak but the burden of utterance rests on Virginia Woolf the author. Virginia Woolf's life, now too well documented, is also the story of Mrs. Brown who would lay huddled in her patriarchal home. If the waoman writer was to find a voice and the Victorian mother had to be sidelined, it was even more important that the father be cast out. But liberation for Mrs. Brown is not easy; it cannot come in a day, it may not come for generations together. That is why her harpings on helpless mothers has an undertone of bitterness-they have mismanaged things beyond repair. That is why Mrs. Brown, with all her grit to withstand the glowering gentleman may not leave her corner. Portraying variously this Mrs. Brown, Virginia Woolf, in her novels tries to map out in an exquisitely sensitive way the memories, thoughts and desires that flicker throughout their lives, trying to present that elusive and fluid thought which constitutes the major portion of women's existence. The characterisation of Mrs. Brown in Woolf's later novels like Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Light House* have their own justification for keeping to their little corner, although

there are traces of emptiness and unhappiness that sometimes tend to crush them and their constant attempts to keep delicately afloat on the undulating surface of life. Brooding deeply is always disastrous. So Septimus Smith dies and so does Rhoda in her later novel *The Waves*. Significantly, the central character in her first novel, Miss Rachel Vinrace also dies. The young Mrs. Brown (read Rachel Vinrace), under the tutelage of her well-meaning but constricting aunts and an exemplary patriarch, still unmarried, still a virgin, skimming her way through an uncharted life, purposeless and without any clear destination, finds it difficult to accept the double standards of the patriarchal society. Scholarly works on Virginia Woolf have seldom dealt with her first novel *The Voyage Out*. The character of Miss Rachel Vinrace is, however, a strong comment on the condition of young girls in the Victorian set up and the apathy of society towards the female sex.

Virginia Woolf's statement on life that can be gathered from her novels has an overpowering sense of sadness, temporality of things and death. The rhythmic pattern of waves reinforces, among many other things, the trepidation of life that constitutes human existence where every individual either fares badly or favourably according to his/ her sensitiveness to perception. Like the six petals of the red carnation that Bernard holds forth in summing up the individual strands of life, what emerges is not "stories" or a "neat design of life" but "what is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense". (1992:187) Thus Percival's death, like Rachel's, in *The Voyage Out* seems terribly unreasonable. What matters in life is the "Fight" which, for women in patriarchal society, becomes a more intensified struggle and while the likes of Katharine and Clarissa continue the struggle, a hypersensitive soul like Rhoda commits suicide and the helpless and guileless Rachel succumbs to death. The myth of a continued state of innocence that is upheld by patriarchy, restricting growth and maturity in young girls, is a deleterious situation marked by unreality. As Rachel Vinrace grows in maturity, she comes to realize more deeply women's circumscription and their place within patriarchal society.

*The Voyage Out*, has baffled critics, especially the illness and death of Rachel. Rachel's death has been described as "abrupt". As Hermione Lee says,

> It does not seem convincing to treat the illness as the "outcome" of Rachel's emotional experiences as a flight from sex or from the unsatisfactoriness of love. It is not the fault of her attitude to life that she falls ill. At the level of plot and character development, the death is arbitrary.

> At the more abstract level below the plot, the death feels conclusive, as being the furthest point of the voyage. Yet it has a baffling and paradoxical effect. Rachel's death allows her to achieve an ultimately remote perspective on the world. But that absolute impersonality, mysteriously and momentarily, creates a sense of unification. (Lee 1973:51)

Much of the language here is abstract. The terms "At the level of plot and character development, the death is arbitrary" are contradictory to Virginia Woolf's ideas of writing novels.[2] Explanations like "At the more abstract level below the plot..." and "Rachel's death allows her to achieve an ultimately remote perspective on the world" are vague and express merely Lee's uneasiness in accepting Rachel's death, while at the same time trying to find a hazy justification for Virginia Woolf's treatment of her heroine. Although one can detect a definite story-line in *The Voyage Out*, the life of the heroine is not arbitrarily maneouvred to end abruptly in her death, but rather her death gives a sense of the inconclusiveness of life. Rachel dies but life goes on very much as usual and after the gloom and darkness at Ambroses Villa, St. John Hirst welcomes the familiar sight of the English tourists at the hotel reposing in little groups after their dinner. Expressions like "ultimately remote perspective on the world" make one wonder whether Rachel is to muse on life after her death, or is Lee suggesting that Rachel's voyage beyond life is a privileged vantage from which she can reflect on life—from another perspective that opens only after death. In which case Rachel's death is not death, but a voyage to another life! Virginia Woolf does not profess to philosophize on death, or situate Rachel on a different plane of privileged existence, or make the literal and metaphorical 'Voyage' a metaphysical one. Rachel's death causally follows from her upbringing.

It is nowhere overtly stated by the author, but as the novel progresses it becomes clear that Rachel's puerility and her withdrawn nature do not enable her to cope with some of the functions of adult life. The fact that Rachel, at the age of twenty four, is still a novice is predominantly made clear by the omniscient narrator's description of her mental state, by Rachel's innocent admissions and by her aunt Helen's reflections about the niece whom she willingly takes under her tutelage.

Rachel's induction into the society takes place firstly on board the "Euphrosyne" and later on among the English tourists at Santa Marina. Till then, she has been brought up in something short of a nunnery.

Rachel is introduced in the first chapter of *The Voyage Out* waiting in her father's ship to receive the Ambroses, and trying to do justice to her role as her "father's daughter". But Rachel actually shrinks from her role imposed by her father and tries hard to maintain a veneer of

cordiality to veil her actual discomfort. Rachel's uneasiness at the prospect of meeting strangers is the result of the unnatural circumstances of her upbringing. Helen Ambrose is quick to notice this diffidence in Rachel's behaviour:

> Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than normally incompetent for her years. (20)

By giving a brief sketch of Rachel's past what the omniscient narrator tries to highlight is the vast space of nothingness that has dulled the faculties of Rachel. Rachel, however, is just one among "the majority of well-to-do girls in the last part of the nineteenth century" who have been given an education that has encouraged a torpid condition of mind and body. As a result, Rachel lived in a blissful state of ignorance possessing a kind of child-like credulity in all matters of practical life, being denied even the most elementary knowledge of modern life. She was brought up by her aunts with "excessive care" firstly for her health, secondly and more importantly to guard her morals, and thirdly, because intimacy with friends would lead her to be inquisitive of the "censorship which was exercised first by her aunts, later by her father". (34) Richmond, for its air and its parks, thus suited Rachel's aunts and her father as the right place to bring up Rachel ideally. The only girl Rachel was well acquainted to or more correctly, permitted to know, was a religious zealot. Living a tightly fenced-in life, however did not generate in Rachel's mind any genuine attachment for her aunts, and she was never moved by their verbose show of affection. Not having been able to establish any degree of intimacy with her aunts, Rachel considered genuine communication among human beings impossible. Her preference for solitude was thus early based on her own understanding of the world. "To feel anything strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly perhaps but differently".(36) Thus forced by circumstances and later grown into custom, she cherished loneliness. This habitual seclusion wrought upon her mind a peculiar sense of detachment. She regarded the people around her as symbols "featureless but dignified ... often as people upon the stage are beautiful." (36) This aloofness, or rather, a habit of keeping herself apart from all that went around her was her way of surviving in the world which she felt had no need of her. Reality was not something to which she was a part; it was "something superficially strange" and a mere spectacle to be seen from a distance. Maimed in thoughts as well as in words, "she accepted her lot very complacently, blazing into

indignation perhaps once a fortnight" and then subsiding again and content to pass her days in "a dreamy confusion". (37) Rachel's indolence, her disinterestedness in almost everything except music, the lack of any serious pursuit or tenacious thinking of any personal point of view, showed the unnaturalness of the way in which upper middle class girls were brought up. Asleep Rachel had the look of a "victim dropped from the claws bird of prey" and to Helen viewing her thus, "the sight gave rise to reflections".(37) In short, the circumstances of her upbringing had done much damage to Rachel's personality, making her a hapless victim of the Victorian patriarchal society whose pillars were people like Willloughby Vinrace and Richard Dalloway.

Rachel makes Helen understand, as much as she made Mrs. Dalloway understand how innocent she was in matters relating to the attraction of the opposite sexes. Very innocently and thoughtfully, as if it were some philosophy that lay unsorted before her, she asks Mrs. Dalloway: "why do people marry" (60) She determines not to marry even before she knows what marriage is and what drives people to seek partners and marry. Helen, who had at the first introduction thought her to be an "unlicked girl" (23), feels aghast at the extent of Rachel's ignorance. Helen inwardly deplores the conditions under which Rachel has been brought up and she has to restrain herself from shooting forth a tirade against Willoughby Vinrace "who brought up his daughter so that at the age of twenty four she scarcely knew that men desired women and was terrified by a kiss." (80-81). The very character of Rachel, the circumstances in which she grew up, and her inadequacy in dealing with the mature experiences of a grown up girl, is Virginia Woolf's silent comment on the deplorable state of induced ignorance that was encouraged among the young girls in the nineteenth century.

The description of Richard Dalloway placed side by side with Virginia Woolf's image of the Führer in *Three Guineas* shows the despotism of the male line that Virginia Woolf as a thinker and writer detested so much. Rachel is immensely carried away by the sophisticated matter-of-fact attitude of Richard Dalloway whose presence and talk seen like the gateway to a nobler and richer life than she had ever imagined. Wrapped in all her credulity, Rachel readily believes everything that Richard Dalloway says. What to Richard Dalloway is actually an ambitious career, "To be a leader of men. It's a fine career. My God-what a career" (50) is presented to Rachel in the semblance of an immense sacrifice and she sympathizes with him and to her eyes he has the look of a "battered martyr". (65) While the more sagacious Helen rounds him off as "Pompous and sentimental.", (80)

Rachel, unable to reconcile the profundity of his person whom she reverences with the kisses that terrify her, is veritably a product of the system that brings up their daughters and wives protectively and ignorantly and prides in showing them off as their possession. Willoughby Vinrace dreams of making Rachel a perfect hostess to promote his political ambitions. Clarissa Dalloway is Richard Dalloway's ideal of a wife who never contradicts her husband but profers to flatter his vanity. People like Richard Dalloway are Virginia Woolf's example of the patriarch who staunchly advocate ideas about women functioning as a coolant to the aggressive man. Thus, Richard Dalloway explains to Rachel:

> It is impossible for human beings, constituted as they are, both to fight and to have ideals. If I have preserved mine, as I am thankful to say that in great measure I have, it is 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, playing with the children, domestic duties—what you will. She gives me the courage to go on. (65)

Placed besides Virginia Woolf's unscathing words in Three Guineas, Richard Dalloway becomes the representative image of the political man that she so strongly denigrates who, for their own benefit, have set limits to the desires and ambitions of women.

> There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes that he has the right given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do. Let us quote again: "Homes are the real places of the women...." Place beside it another quotation: "There are two worlds in the life of the nation, the world of men and the world of women. Nature has done well to entrust the man with the care of his family, and the nation. The women's world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home." One is written in English, the other in German. But where is the difference? Are they not both saying the same thing? Are they not both the voices of Dictators, whether they speak English or German, and are we not all agreed that the Dictator when we meet him abroad is a very dangerous as well as a very ugly animal? And he is here among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison, small still, curled up like a caterpillar on a leaf, but in the heart of England. (Woolf 1938: 165-166)

A Woman's entry into this man's world is vehemently discouraged and Rachel who has been brought up to abide by these standards and judgements, finds nothing to protest against or contradict when Richard Dalloway pronounces "no woman has what I may call the political instinct." (67)

It does not occur to Rachel that there is something glaringly

commonplace about people like Richard Dalloway who align the greatness of the nation with the greatness of the English men and who expect it to be chimed in tune by women like Clarissa Dalloway. Any deviation from this, like the poor suffragist, ought to be crushed, feel Richard Dalloway and Willoughby Vinrace, and Richard Dalloway opines that he would rather die than see male rights bestowed legally on the women too. The mystique of male superiority is perpetuated by the men themselves. That is why the spectacle of the Englishmen with their crosier serving the nation fills Richard Dalloway with pride and he loves to envision himself somewhere in this long procession of illustrious nation-builders. The women are to be patronized for the men's own benefit, and Rachel's modesty tempts him to kiss her. Dumbfounded by this cataclysmic end to an acquaintanceship which she had looked forward to cherishing, Rachel cannot even harbour hard feelings for this elderly man who has taken advantage of her innocence; and the reason for this is that she has not been taught to reason anything strongly or protest against such an act of cowardice which has been an outrage to her person. Instead of condemning Richard Dalloway, Rachel is besieged with an unknown terror which chills her sexually and leads her to dream an odious dream of lust, sex and bestiality.

Helen, here is Virginia Woolf's mouthpiece, voicing her criticism of the Victorian society that has reduced women to the status of a mindless being. Helen's letter to Bernard, describing Rachel is a telling example of this English hypocrisy:

If they (women) were properly educated I don't see why they shouldn't be much the same as men—as satisfactory I mean; though, of course, very different. The question is, how should one educate them! The present method seems to me abominable. This girl, though twenty-four, had never heard that men desired women, and, until I explained it, did not know how children were born. Her ignorance upon other matters as important was complete. It seems to me not merely foolish but criminal to bring people up like that. Let alone the suffering to them, it explains why people are what they are Keeping them ignorant, of course, defeats its own object, and when they begin to understand, they take it all much too seriously. (96-97)

The last line is a significant pointer towards the way Rachel will react to the experiences that she will gather on her way towards growth and maturity. The first of the many experiences that put to test, Rachel's vulnerability are the kisses that she receives from Richard Dalloway which upset her so much that she cannot treat them lightly or eliminate them from her mind. This undue importance given to a freak experience

shows her puerility, because thinking again and again cannot transmute the chilling experience into something ordinary and quotidian. Perhaps the more she thinks, the more she repulses such an experience and the more deep-seated becomes her need to withdraw herself from men. In this context, Rachel's earlier exclamation "...men are brutes! I hate men!" (82) assumes another dimension. Her ability to distance herself even while enjoying the company of Hewet "to be able to cut herself adrift from him [Hewet] and to pass away to unknown places where she had no need of him" (302) is a tactic she falls back upon to fortify herself against too much male intimacy. Rachel, brought up in total seclusion, finds communication with human beings frightful and unnerving. Rachel is formal with her father and aunts, she has been molested by Richard Dalloway, she feels incensed in the company of St. John Hirst, feels disturbed at the thought of a physical intimacy that marriage entails with Hewet, and feels safe and protected in the company of Helen. Helen who willingly takes Rachel under her charge encourages Rachel to expand herself and "be a person on your own account." (84) While her father, solicitous about her morals, had not introduced her to anything beyond Cowper's Letters, Helen introduces her to authors like Ibsen and Meredith and at other times urges her to talk. In what sounds almost like the Bloomsbury ideal of free discussion, Helen proposes for Rachel, free talk uninhibited by differences of sex, or age to educate her. "Talk was the medicine she [Helen] trusted to, talk about everything, talk that was free, unguarded, and as candid as a habit of talking to men made natural in her own case." (124) Helen's method proves to be greatly beneficial for Rachel in the sense that she outgrows her diffidence, shyness and ignorance and seems to be more confident in her bearing.

Rachel, for whom Santa Marina is the first outdoor experience of the world, is jolted by every incident that lays claim on her privacy. She does not yet have any clear cut understanding of her own needs. She finds it difficult to admit the schism between day-dreams and real life. That is why her problems pursue her within her unconscious thoughts and her dreams terrify her as real. In the dream that follows the kiss from Richard Dalloway, the terror persists even after the nightmare is over,

> she felt herself pursued... All night long barbarian men harassed the ship, they came scuffling down the passage and stopped to snuffle at her door. She could not sleep again.(77)

Her immediate response to any situation producing anxiety about her self is to alienate herself from the present. Annoyed with St. John Hirst

at the dance, she immediately reacts by weaving a dream like situation around her, imagining herself to be a

> Persian princess far from civilization, riding her horse, far from all this from the strife and men and women. (155)

Such mental maneouvres are Rachel's way of escaping from facing real situations, her way of fortifying her vulnerability. They are, says Mitchell A. Leaska, "figuratively her instrument of self- preservation". Thus she can transform herself into a Persian princess, or she can swim away like a mermaid, she can lock herself in the hospitable arms of Helen, always adopting subterfuges to ward off the imminent threat of sexual intimacy with Hewet.

Rachel's illness and finally death are certainly not self-willed, although Mitchell A. Leaska interprets it so. According to Leaska,

> Her [Rachel's] only recourse then, on a level far below awareness, is to protect herself; and protection in Rachel's sequestered world in synonymous with withdrawal.
>
> But her withdrawal is extreme: for the mysterious principle of psychic alchemy dictates how the fires will burn in the crucible of her fevered mind before the transformation is complete. Thus her death is consciously unresisted, unconsciously sought; it is a self-willed death. For just as one escapes a life too threatening to tolerate through periods of unconsciousness or insanity, so too can one withdraw from life, assured of greater permanence, through death. (Leaska 1977:28)

If death could be self-willed, if death were so easy a phenomenon and occurred according to an individual's own desire, death could have been a pleasant option for most people assailed by their miseries. Rachel does not commit suicide like Rhoda in *The Waves*. She is not endowed with mystical powers, that by mere contemplation she can bring about her death. One even doubts whether death for her was a better option for that "permanence" which she could not achieve by living. Rachel's sickness, culminating in her death, is caused by her extreme naivety in matters and experiences related to adult life. Like Rhoda, Rachel is extremely sensitive about her body, but while Rhoda feels that she has been destined to carry the "weight of centuries" (Woolf 1992:79) which she cannot dislodge, Rachel's consciousness as the consciousness of a single individual isolated within herself and confused about her own demands of feminity. Rachel's inability to outgrow what Elizabeth Abel would label as the pre-oedipal stage, brings complications into her life. Hewet, whom she loves and Helen whom she unconsciously considers her possession, both become an indispensable part of her life. She fears sexuality which marriage to Hewet must entail, and she fears

losing Helen who has "mothered" her through the stages of her mental development, but basically it is the intimacy of physical relationship with men that she abhors. Her feelings are ambivalent; she likes Helen's company but desists being ruled by her, Hewet's friendship excites her but leaves her sexually cold, and although subconsciously she longs to be physically close to Helen outwardly she has distanced herself from her. Like Rhoda who admits that she feared embraces, the taboo on sexuality practiced for a stretch of twenty four years hangs like a dark curtain in Rachel's mind confusing love with lust and its concomitant ugliness and filth. Her love for Hewet and the desire for his company does not instill full faith in him. The Sabrina part of Rachel's character, inviolable and chaste, desists every attempt, even imaginary attempt at sexual union. Hewet's reading of Comus makes her mind begin to eanact the fear of virginity being violated and the terror of being pursued and desired by gross animalistic instincts common to men. Rachel, completely displacing the Sabrina of the book, ultimately precipitates her illness from which she does not recover. The omniscient narrator says.

> All sights were something of an effort, but the sight of Terence was the greatest effort, because he forced her to join mind and body in the desire to remember something it troubled her when people tried to disturb her loneliness; she wished to be alone. (347)

Unable to translate the chaotic order of her mind into the discourse of a rational man, she urgently feels the need to protect herself from being "isolated alone with her body". (330) The images that keep recurring and troubling her mind are a woman in the "cavern" playing cards and having "very cold hands". Some time later it becomes a "tunnel under the river" and again "a tunnel under the Thames" (331) with deformed women playing cards. Gilbert and Gubar explain that Freud regarded the cave to symbolize "a female space, a womb shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred" (Gilbert 1979: 93). But the enclosure can also be defined as a prison within which a virgin like Rachel feels herself immured, because the images that occur in her dream are an expression of horror and ugliness and she wishes, but is unable to escape from those entrapped female figures of the cavern. The recurring images of cavern and tunnel in Rachel's case thus carry no suggestions of home, but only a refuge as "immanence with no hope of transcendence, nature seduced and betrayed by culture, enclosure without any possibility of escape". (Gilbert 1979: 94) Like Sabrina of Comus, Rachel seeks refuge in the subterranean regions and "while all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not

dead, but curled at the bottom of the sea" (341). "Her own body", the "sensations" that her body felt and the idea that her body must be protected, become the chief concern throughout the course of her illness.

Rachel's attempts to liberate her mind from the oppressive rules of the past are futile, because in mentally fighting away the ghosts in the form of taboos, she exhausts herself and becomes a victim of neurosis.

Although Helen's influence upon Rachel has been to a certain extent positive, it has also engendered unknowingly, a habit of dependence on her, so that although Rachel becomes engaged to Hewet and there is a distancing in her relationship with Helen, it is only superficially so. Helen in the first place had taken an interest in Rachel to dispel her loneliness because her husband led a sequestered life among his books. During the river expedition, Rachel's closeness to Hewet disturbs Helen and inwardly she was a prey to an uneasy mood not readily to be ascribed to any one cause. She did not like to feel herself the victim of unclassified emotions. (277)

Helen's uneasiness actually crops up for having lost her hold over Rachel. The description of a brief hallucination that Rachel undergoes during the river trip is a sharp evidence of Helen's growing jealousy of Rachel's independence. In the unpublished versions of this episode, the descriptions make the fact more obvious. Helen follows Rachel and Hewet and unable to contain her jealousy forcefully stops Rachel, and in the physical struggle that follows rendered by Virginia Woolf in the language of hallucinatory vision, Rachel succumbs before the greater strength of Helen. The language is full of erotic suggestions: "happiness swelling and breaking in one vast wave." (284) Rachel desires a platonic relationship with Hewet. She loves him immensely, feels upset by his long absences, experiences excitement in his presence, but the foreboding sense of the inevitable, if their marriage is to be consummated, chills her body. For her physical need of solace she wants Helen, as much as for companionship she seeks Hewet with the result that with the passage of time, this confusion in her mind gets aggravated. The invocation of Sabrina in Comus destroys her power to give a rational shape to the problems welling up in her mind, and in a way precipitates the oncoming illness. If Helen, instead of asserting her importance and dominance over Rachel, had assisted her to understand her feelings for Hewet with its accompanying commitments—the role that Mrs. Hilbery plays in Katharine's life, Rachel might have been saved. Like a normal human being she wants to be loved, but wants to hold herself inviolable, transferring her fidelity both towards Hewet and Helen, which finally tends her towards neurosis.

She does not consciously desire death, but an oblivion, that can put her out of reach of men's lust, and her deteriorating physical and mental condition causes her death.

Coupled with her conservative upbringing is the classical text of Comus read to her by a man whose sexuality she must not disapprove, and to her imagination already clouded with doubts, misapprehensions and vacillations, Rachel unconsciously identifies herself with the heroine of the text who is pursued by male lust, and thereafter she enacts and becomes Sabrina.

Rachel has to contend with her mental wranglings alone, and in silence. Silence, incommunicability, the ineffaceable preoccupation with chastity and purity burden her throughout her illness. She has to defy alone, the premises imbued in her from her cradle which consequently take their on her mental balance and make her paranoid. Rhoda, a deeply contemplative soul, communicates her anguishes repeatedly to herself, whereas Rachel is never shown to be a self-introspective being. While the exterior world appears to Rhoda in the terrifying image of leaping tigers, Rachel always withholds herself from confronting the dichotomous truth of reality which is peopled with elements like pleasure-pain, good-bad, freedom-interdependence, spirituality-physicality, love-lust and the divine-sordid. Rachel does not even own to herself her own vulnerability. Rhoda, extremely sensitive about her body, knows her vulnerability. She feels "pierced", "exposed", "whipped", "ridiculed" and "terrorized" by the spectre of daily existence, always invoking nature to aid her in hiding herself. "What face can I summon to lay cool upon this heat?" (Woolf 1992: 79) might have been uttered by Rachel too, but neither the face of Helen nor Hewet, nor the nurse can provide her with a strategy that can help her to cope with the demands of a social life. Thus burdened with the insuperable and undefined problematics of life, Rachel gradually sinks towards death.

What would have approximated to "and lived happily ever after" kind of marital life for Hewet and Rachel is rudely devastated by Rachel's death. One wonders whether Rachel's death might have been averted if she were in England instead of Santa Marina. But the truth is that in England, at Richmond, Rachel's voyage towards maturity would never have taken place. Just like Clarissa Dalloway's sister Sylvia who met her death at her father's hands, Rachel's life would have been completely suffocated by her father. Like Justin Parry who was never good towards Clarrissa's suitors, Rachel's father would have absolutely disallowed her induction into men's society. Unlike Katharine, whose mother steers her away from her father's wrath, (Woolf 2002: 481-

482) Rachel would either have been silenced like Sylvia by an over possessive father; or silenced to play the role of a Tory hostess, Willoughby Vinrace would have only prolonged her death. Rather than being silenced in life like Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway, Rachel's confrontations with her experiences silence her in death.

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## NOTES

1. All references to Mrs. Brown are made from Virginia Woolf's famous essay "Mr. Bennet and Mrs Brown" published in *The Captain's Death Bed and other Essays* (1981), London: The Hogarth Press.
2. Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction", *The Virginia Woolf Reader* (1984), Ed. Mitchell A. Leaska. USA: A Harvest / HBJ Book.
3. Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915. However all the references made to this novel here are taken from the 1948 edition published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, USA. Since references to this novel are frequently made in the text, only the page number is cited within parenthesis in the text itself.