

Virginia Woolf and Victorian Earnestness: The Influence of Thomas Carlyle on *The Voyage Out*

Misako Yora (与良美紗子)

Introduction

Lytton Strachey enthusiastically complimented Virginia Woolf on the modernity of her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), in his letter to her on 25th February 1916:

For instance, *The Voyage Out*—! You know how I adore that book. I read it with breathless pleasure, the minute it came out . . . I love, too, the feeling reigning throughout—perhaps the most important part of any book—the secular sense of it all—18th century in its absence of folly, but with the colour and amusement of modern life as well. Oh, it's very, very unvictorian! . . . I won't say any more now, we must meet soon, and talk about it. But oh! the Chapel scene!—That I think is the best morceau of all.—And the Dalloways—oh!— (*Letters* 55-56)

His encomium for *The Voyage Out* culminated in his glorification of its “unvictorian” aspect. The mention of “the chapel scene” and “the Dalloways” suggests that he attributed the progressiveness of the novel particularly to those parts. Indeed, in the novel, Woolf fiercely attacks the hypocrisy of the priest, and strikes a highly satirical tone while delineating the loquacious speech of Clarissa and Richard Dalloway, who, unlike their counterparts in her later masterpiece, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), almost merely personify middle-class snobbery. In this respect, the novel is, perhaps, highly “unvictorian.”

Against Strachey's view, many critics on Woolf, notably including Steve Ellis (2007), have challenged the conventional statement that she sought to entirely sever her connection with Victorian culture over the past decade.¹ They, however, hardly discuss *The Voyage Out* in their attempt to highlight her ambivalence toward so-called Victorianism. For instance, Ellis, who influentially names her less as a modernist than as a “Post-Victorian” to “approach the blend

of conservatism and radicalism that informed her outlook,” only offers relatively terse commentary on this novel (9). Deploying her second novel, *Night and Day* (1919), as his starting point, he notes that “‘the Victorian’ had not fully realised itself in Woolf’s thinking” (35) before around 1916 in the sense that she had not classified “the Victorian as a cultural and historical entity” (13). Accordingly, for him, unlike *Night and Day*, *The Voyage Out* is of interest for “showing how little at this stage ‘the Victorian’, and with it the Victorian-modern comparison, had yet to become explicit in Woolf’s thinking” (14).²

The aim of the present essay is not to dispute this view. It attempts to demonstrate, however, that *The Voyage Out* richly professes Woolf’s ambivalence toward the moral legacy of Thomas Carlyle, one of the writers most commonly cited as Victorian sages, even though she may not have extended it to “the Victorian” age as a whole. As some critics have observed, Carlyle continued to preoccupy her, particularly because of his personal connection with her father, who has also Scottish origin. Whereas some of her later works include direct references to Carlyle, *The Voyage Out* precludes, almost peculiarly, any explicit comment on him, despite its references to a wide range of British novelists, poets, and historians. However, this essay will argue that the novel is dense with oblique allusions to Carlyle, especially his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). As I hope to suggest, the majority of the British are no longer able to assimilate the moral principles the Carlylean characters endorse under the name of earnestness or seriousness, and the apparently rebellious protagonist, Rachel Vinrace, gives voice to their discontent. However, her attitude toward the Carlylean morality will be shown to be more complicated; she envisages a revolutionary ideal of what she calls “life,” not by entirely repudiating his views, but by remarkably resonating with his quest for truth, through which he expresses the demand for earnestness.

1. Carlyle, Stephen, and Woolf

For Woolf, Carlyle bore early significance mainly because of her paternal family’s tie with him. She visited his house on 29th January 1897 with her father, on 29th March 1898 with her sister and Hester Ritchie, and again on 23rd February 1909, after which she wrote a brief essay titled “Carlyle’s House” (Bradshaw 25). Moreover, as Hermione Lee writes in her biography of Woolf

that her “adult description of herself” is that she had been “formed by two incompatible inheritances: the cold, law-making, rational, depressive Stephens, originating from Scottish Calvinists, and the creative, decorative, intuitive, emotional Pattles, descended from French aristocracy” (56), her patrilineal relations held a Protestant background comparable to that of Carlyle, who came from a Scottish Presbyterian family. She continued to associate him with her father, Leslie Stephen, for whom, despite her ambivalence, she expressed great admiration; Stephen had been the Chairman of the Carlyle’s House Purchase Fund Committee in 1894 and 1895; after the death of his wife, Julia Stephen, Leslie displayed anxiety about his conduct toward her, comparing it with Carlyle’s notorious treatment of his own spouse (Bradshaw 27). Whereas Stephen was repelled by some aspects of Carlyle’s perspective, including his refusal of democracy, pessimistic views on social advancement, and imperious remarks, Carlyle generally enticed Stephen by his literary brilliance, leading the latter to consider himself as his disciple (Laniel 120-21). Stephen thus encouraged his daughters to study Carlyle, and accordingly, Woolf immersed herself in his writings in her adolescence, even causing her to take pride in “acquiring a taste for Carlyle” (Lee 142).³

Woolf’s concern with Carlyle was not short-lived. She wrote a review of *The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh* (1909), while, in “Mr Symons’s Essay” (1916) she places Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Carlyle as “the greatest writers of [her] time” (*Essays* 2 70). In her diary entry of 3rd December 1918, she commented: “What odd stray of knowledge makes me think that this is Carlyle’s birthday? Perhaps because I’m reading about Froude;—I go on to wonder whether any one else is thinking of Carlyle’s birthday, & if so whether it gives him any pleasure” (*Diary* 1 223). This suggests that Woolf was obsessed with Carlyle long after he and her father had died. Likewise, she observed on 15th April 1921: “I have been lying recumbent all day reading Carlyle, & now Macaulay, first to see if Carlyle wrote better than Lytton, then to see if Macaulay sells better. Carlyle (reminiscences) is more colloquial & scrappy than I remembered, but he has his merits. —much more punch in his phrase than in Lytton’s” (*Diary* 2 110). Here, she estimated Carlyle even higher than her comrade, Strachey, in some dimensions. As those commentaries indicate, she continuously thought of him and appreciated his writing even in her middle age.

Critics have uncovered Woolf’s profound ambivalence toward Carlyle. On

the one hand, she does cast a critical eye on him. Suzana Zink, for instance, speculates that *Night and Day* “offers an early critique of Victorian biography and the ideological underpinnings of greatness and ‘ancestor worship,’” contrasting Carlyle’s delineations of “great men” in *Heroes* with Katharine Hilbery’s way of writing the biography of her grandfather, whom she considers as “a great man” (88).⁴ On the other hand, however, Michael H. Whitworth suggests that, although Woolf obviated “the pompous, the sage-like and the patriarchal in [the] writing [of Carlyle and Ruskin],” she was inspired by them in terms of their “nonlinearity and their fragmentariness,” and, owing to their works, conceived of “the possibility of an ‘impassioned prose’” and the “distinction between mechanical and rhythmical forms of thought,” which repeatedly appears in her works (114). Similarly, observing that “Woolf could hardly *not* be influenced by Carlyle” (260), C. Anita Tarr speculates that “Woolf’s frequent use of the lighthouse through so many of her works represents Carlyle, who was the genius in the watchtower” (262), juxtaposing *To the Lighthouse* (1927) with Carlyle’s writings, including *Sartor Resartus* (1836).⁵ As those critics have documented, while Woolf critiques Carlyle in some respects, he simultaneously haunted her while she wrote her own literary works.

2. “The Great Man” in *The Voyage Out*: Earnestness as an Indomitable Value

Despite the recurrent debates over British historians and literary authors, including Milton, Gibbons, Austen, Keats, Kingsley, Brontë, and Arnold, there is no mention of Carlyle in *The Voyage Out*. Emma Sutton, however, identifies Ridley Ambrose’s study with “Carlyle’s famous soundproofed study that attempted to block out the noise of London” (“Silence” 46). As Sutton notes, in his house in Chelsea, Carlyle was famously aiming to shut out sound from his room as much as possible so that he could concentrate on “internal noise” (Kaplan 367). In addition, Ridley and St John Hirst serve as the predecessors of Mr Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse*, whom Tarr labels as “a portrait of Leslie Stephen as a *failed Carlyle*” (265) in that he bears a striking resemblance to Carlyle in his dyspeptic temper and possession of devotees, and yet contrasts with Carlyle in his sense of failure. Like Mr Ramsey and Carlyle, Ridley and Hirst are also pedantic and bilious. However, like Mr Ramsey, Ridley confesses that he has “a weakness for people who can’t begin” (*VO* 11) speaking of books he has yet to

publish. Similarly, in contrast to Carlyle's handsomeness, the narrator underlines Hirst's frailty, by writing that "[w]hen naked of all but his shirt, and bent over the basin, Mr Hirst no longer impressed one with the majesty of his intellect, but with the pathos of his young yet ugly body, for he stooped, and he was so thin that there were dark lines between the different bones of his neck and shoulders" (117).

Whereas Ridley and Hirst hardly achieve a comparable level of professional success and prestige, the latter's linkage with Carlyle is further intensified by his moral inclination.⁶ Terence Hewet vindicates Hirst from Rachel's deprecation of his superciliousness at the dance party: "He wants a cosy, smoky, masculine place, where he can stretch his legs out, and only speak when he's got something to say. For myself, I find it rather dreary. But I do respect it. They're all so much in earnest. They do take the serious things very seriously" (174-75). Here, though partly mocking Hirst, Hewet does defend his friend by underscoring his earnestness and seriousness, both of which signal a moral orientation that governed the Victorian period. As Christopher S. Nassaar speculates, "the Victorians, more than any other group or generation, were noted for their extreme earnestness" and "a high seriousness, a sense of responsibility, and a puritanical, ascetic attitude towards life rarely known before," which had driven Oscar Wilde to famously ridicule this virtue in *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the turn of the century (99-100).⁷ Carlyle was one of the vindicators of this moral imperative, as he ardently writes in the first lecture in *Heroes*: "Not sport but earnest is what we should require. It is a most earnest thing to be alive in this world; to die is not sport for a man. Man's life never was a sport to him; it was a stern reality, altogether a serious matter to be alive!" (*Heroes* 7). The heroes he discusses are all exemplars of earnest men; he celebrates Dante for his "rigour, earnestness and depth" (81); "with all his drawbacks" Rousseau is "a Hero" because "he is heartily *in earnest*" (159). Furthermore, Carlyle himself was considered as a paragon in Victorian society. Dean Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, for instance, panegyricized him for "the earnestness, the seriousness with which he approached the great problems of all human life" at his funeral sermon held in London, on his death in 1881, seeing "the very word [earnestness]" as "almost his own" (518). By being earnest, then, Hirst strengthens his association with Carlyle.

This moral bent still holds sway in British society in Woolf's 1915 novel.

As Walter E. Houghton observes in *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870*, Victorians viewed “work” as “a supreme virtue” considering that “the full meaning of a life of work was identical in outward action (apart from the internal discipline of the character) with a life of moral earnestness” (243); therefore being earnest and serious almost equals being assiduous in terms of one’s external activities.⁸ Consequently, the sanctification of work entails the “scorn of idleness” (243), and compels them to sacrifice “immediate pleasure” (Altick 169). Hirst and Ridley reprove the other characters’ devotedness to dancing at the party from this viewpoint. Hirst belittles the dancers’ zeal: “The whole thing makes me sick” (*VO* 179). Likewise, Ridley, who did not attend the party, disparages its partakers, considering dancing as “meaningless and idiotic” and himself has a preference for “reasonable conditions” (193). The other characters internalize their judgements. Being a captivating dancer, Helen nevertheless speculates that she “ought to be ashamed of [herself]” (178). Likewise, when the dancers become aware of their disheveled appearances at dawn, “the elder ladies” are intimidated by their feeling as if “a cold eye that had been turned upon them” (187). Their disquietude reflects Woolf’s own fear about openly expressing joy. She states in her childhood memoir “A Sketch of the Past” that, for all her craving for pleasure in her own beauty, the doctrine of “shame” derived from her patrilineal ancestors’ “streak of the Puritan, of the Clapham Sect” deterred her from revelling nonchalantly (*MB* 68).

In *The Voyage Out*, the indomitability of the value of earnestness is symbolized by the repression of childhood elation. Woolf sends the British to the fictitious South America island, Santa Marina. Mark Wollaeger compares the British confrontation with the native women in the Amazon village to representations in postcards that circulated in interwar England as well as the author’s own encounter with them in international exhibitions (“Postcards” 65-68). As his postcolonial argument suggests, the native women Woolf depicts shun any possibility of interaction with the British, as if they were merely on display.⁹ Consequently, their voyage urges them to face the harsh realization that they can thrive only inside civilization.¹⁰ Concurrently, a sense of lost childhood, another uncultured region, represents the British imprisonment in civilization. In the opening pages, before reaching the turf, the little boys direct “their sharp eye” at the Ambroses and chant “Bluebeard!” toward Ridley, and subsequently Helen dismally ponders on the son and daughter she left behind, before boarding

on *Euphrosyne* (VO 4). Here, the narrator emphasizes the moment of rupture between Helen and children: “Mournfully Helen regarded [the sailor], who was putting water between her and her children” (8). Their displacement from infancy is consummated in Rachel’s death in the ending. At this point, this novel becomes “the failed bildungsroman of Rachel Vinrace” (Esty 137), who hardly hints at any sign of growth after Helen regarded her niece as if she were “six years old” (VO 21), which coincides with the age of her own son, at the beginning of the trip.¹¹ Her symbolic death, then, figuratively signals that those who reject maturity are ostracized from their civilized world. This British exile from childhood serves as a metaphor for the repression of pleasure. In the novel, the adults’ sobriety runs counter to the ebullience of infancy. Helen thinks of her six-year old son, who cavorted around with his finger soaked with butter, “merely for the fun of the thing” (17). *The Voyage Out* underlines the loss of such liberation of childhood.

The absence of Rachel’s mother, Theresa Vinrace, also highlights that Carlylean ethics still wield power. As noted in the previous section, Woolf has maternal ancestors, who contrasted with Stephen’s Puritanical grimness. She remembered her mother, Julia, a Pre-Raphaelite model, renowned for her beauty, as the central figure of the gaiety of her girlhood, as opposed to the austerity of her father’s relations. In “A Sketch,” for instance, she links her enjoyable adolescent memories to her mother: “I hear jokes; laughter; the clatter of voices; I am teased; I say something funny; she laughs; I am pleased (*MB* 84). For her, her mother was “the creator of that crowded merry world which spun so gaily in the centre of [her] childhood” (84). Those images of Julia echo Helen’s description of Theresa: “She had that power—she enjoyed things. She wasn’t beautiful, but—I was thinking of her last night at the dance. She got on with every kind of person, and then she made it all so amazingly—funny” (VO 209). Except for her lack of beauty, Theresa, who resurrects herself at the dance, resembles Julia, in sharp contrast with Ridley and Hirst, who ascetically disparage its festivity. Her overall absence from *The Voyage Out* thus undergirds the impregnability of the ethical values the Carlylean figures advocate.

3. Rachel’s Pursuit of the Meaning of Life: The Echo of Carlyle in Rachel

Being modelled on Clive Bell, a Bloomsbury art critic and the husband of

Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell, Hewet displays less conservativeness than Hirst.¹² His declaration to "write a novel about Silence . . . the things people don't say" (*VO* 249), however, implies that Carlyle is notwithstanding ingrained in him. On the one hand, his interest in "a novel about Silence" prefigures the author's own engagement with this theme in her later works, which Patricia Oudek Laurence places in the tradition of female writers, such as Austen and Brontë.¹³ On the other hand, the masculinity he occasionally exposes simultaneously aligns him less with these female predecessors than with male authors, including Carlyle, whose Diogenes Teufelsdröckh extols the value of silence in "Symbols" in *Sartor Resartus*: "SILENCE and SECRECY! Altars might still be raised to them (were this an altar-building time) for universal worship. Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together" (*Sartor* 165).

Hewet also foregrounds his indebtedness by conforming to Carlyle's endorsement of earnest heroes. In her conversation with him, Rachel contrasts the hardness of the world and the ephemerality of humans: "'Does it ever seem to you, Terence, that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter, and that we're nothing but patches of light—' she looked at the soft spots of sun wavering over the carpet and up the wall—'like that?'" (*VO* 341). Hewet refutes her enfeebled image of self, replying that he feels himself "immensely solid" (341). While they convey their view on themselves in this scene, their dialogue is the pretext for Woolf's persistent questioning of whether life is solid or fugacious. For instance, she wrote on 4th January 1929: "Now is life very solid, or very shifting?" (*Diary* 3 218). Tracing such meditations, C. Ruth Miller notes that "life in its 'shifting' aspect is often conflated with the present moment" (8), while it occasionally acquires solidity "through its association with 'reality,' 'truth,' and 'fact'" (5). In *The Voyage Out*, then, Rachel has already documented the former element of selfhood, whereas Hewet upholds the latter trait. As Franco Moretti sees a dimension of Victorian seriousness as "to face facts: all facts, including—and in fact, especially—unpleasant ones," naming this as the most fundamental "Reality principle" in *Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (2013), the solid aspects of life are approved by Victorian ethics (86). Indeed, Carlyle champions this principle, describing the courage of confronting "the awful presence of this Reality" (*Heroes* 40) as a requirement for earnest heroes, and paying homage to Mahomed, "an altogether solid, brotherly, genuine man" (46), and John Knox, "one of the solidest of men" (129). Hewet's belief in

the solidity of self, therefore, may originate in those heroes' practicality.

Ironically, however, Hewet himself discards the ideal of solidity, falling into the state Carlyle would precisely admonish. After objecting to Rachel's notion of life, he instantaneously falters: "But at Cambridge, I can remember, there were times when one fell into ridiculous states of semi-coma about five o'clock in the morning" (*VO* 341). One of those "ridiculous states" resurrects itself while he is wandering alone on his way home from the dance party:

After standing still for a minute or two he turned and began to walk towards the gate. With the movement of his body, the excitement, the romance and the richness of life crowded into his brain. He shouted out a line of poetry, but the words escaped him, and he stumbled among lines and fragments of lines which had no meaning at all except for the beauty of the words. He shut the gate, and ran swinging from side to side down the hill, shouting any nonsense that came into his head. 'Here am I,' he cried rhythmically, as his feet pounded to the left and to the right, 'plunging along, like an elephant in the jungle, stripping the branches as I go (he snatched at the twigs of a bush at the roadside), 'roaring innumerable words, lovely words about innumerable things, running downhill and talking nonsense aloud to myself about roads and leaves and lights and women coming out into the darkness—about women—about Rachel, about Rachel.' He stopped and drew a deep breath. The night seemed immense and hospitable, and although so dark there seemed to be things moving down there in the harbour and movement out at sea. He gazed until the darkness numbed him, and then he walked on quickly, still murmuring to himself. 'And I ought to be in bed, snoring and dreaming, dreaming, dreaming. Dreams and realities, dreams and realities, dreams and realities,' he repeated all the way up the avenue, scarcely knowing what he said, until he reached the front door. Here he paused for a second, and collected himself before he opened the door. (210-11)

He becomes beside himself, crying out sheer nonsense, rhythmically swinging and comparing himself to "an elephant in the jungle," before the hard materiality of the door revives a sense of reality. The repetition of the phrase "dreams and realities" suggests that the boundary between the two is momentarily blurred. Although Carlyle does appreciate imagination and fancy themselves, considering them as "but different figures of the same Power of Insight"

(*Heroes* 90), in contrast to Coleridge's famous differentiation between the two, he states that allegory would be "a *sportful* shadow, a mere play of the Fancy, in comparison with that awful Fact and scientific certainty, which it poetically strives to emblem" if "the Faith" follows "the Allegory" (7). In other words, "the Allegory" should not precede "the Faith" because "[t]he Allegory is the product of the certainty, not the producer of it" (7). This statement suggests that he upbraids "a mere play of fancy," as an antithesis to the acknowledgement of "facts." By illustrating Hewet's indulgence to be no more than "a mere play of the Fancy," Woolf subverts the ideal of the earnest heroes he eulogizes.

Particularly, Woolf appears to bear in mind "Lecture III: The Hero as Poet" in *Heroes*. In this lecture, Carlyle views "[a] *musical* thought" as "one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing," arguing that "[a]ll inmost things, we may say, are melodious; naturally utter themselves in Song" (*Heroes* 71). He then praises "[p]oetry," regarding it as a form of "musical *Thought*" (72). His blessing of poetry, however, does not lead to his appreciation of all sorts of music. For him, thought should be the prerequisite for poetry: "The Poet is he who *thinks* in that manner. At bottom, it turns still on power of intellect" (72). Consequently, he grants the "right to rhyme and sing" (78) to poets with deep thoughts, regarding them as "the Heroic of Speakers." In contrast, he warns against merely revelling in rhyming:

. . . to an earnest reader, I doubt, it is for most part a very melancholy, not to say an insupportable business, that of reading rhyme! Rhyme that had no inward necessity to be rhymed:—it ought to have told us plainly, without any jingle, what it was aiming at. I would advise all men who *can* speak their thought, not to sing it; to understand that, in a serious time, among serious men, there is no vocation in them for singing it. Precisely as we love the true song, and are charmed by it as by something divine, so shall we hate the false song, and account it a mere wooden noise, a thing hollow, superfluous, altogether an insincere and offensive thing. (78)

Carlyle reproves those who delight in "rhyme" and "jingle" that encompass no "inward necessity," considering this as "false," "hollow," "superfluous," "insincere," to sum up, something inappropriate for "a serious man" in "a serious time." In the passage from *The Voyage Out* I extracted above, while Hewet cites a line of poetry, the narrator emphasizes the fact that the sounds and rhythm themselves mesmerize him. In this way, Woolf's narrator mockingly depicts him

in the condition that reverses the features of Carlyle's models of earnest heroes.

Although, as argued in the previous section, the Carlylean moral direction is steadfast in British society, *The Voyage Out* simultaneously depicts how, like Hewet, most of the figures are incapable of conforming to this orientation any longer. In her later essay "Lewis Carroll" (1939), Woolf maintains that "[w]isps of childhood persist when the boy or girl is a grown man and woman" (*Essays* 6 210). Drawing on this essay, Helen Tyson argues that like psychoanalysts, Woolf destabilizes "the very idea of maturity as a pathway out of an infancy that might be left behind, banished safely to the past" (1439). *The Voyage Out* foreshadows such a view on adulthood. Again in "Lewis Carroll," like Romantic Poets, Woolf describes childhood as "the world of dreams" (*Essays* 6 210). This recognition of childhood has been already recorded in *The Voyage Out*, in which Rachel considers her girlhood as a region of fantasy: "Flowers and even pebbles in the earth had their own life and disposition, and brought back the feelings of a child to whom they were companions" (*VO* 195-96).¹⁴ As we have seen, despite his apparent maturity, Hewet momentarily returns to the fantasies of childhood. In addition, Miss Allan's comment that she "was thinking of [her] imaginary uncle" encourages the other figures to imagine "vaguely of the things they wanted" (433). They are similarly liable to reverie. As those scenes indicate, most of the figures disclose their predilection to lose the solidity of life, intermittently reverting to fancy-ridden childhood.

Rachel thus articulates the feeling of the other British characters by repudiating Hewet's authoritarian notions. As noted, in contrast to his acclamation of solidity, she parallels herself not with the firmness of the world, but with an ephemeral shaft of wavering light. Her fleeting concept of self is foregrounded in a scene in which, precisely like Hewet, she falls into a trance-like state. Like Hewet, she revitalizes the vehemence of the dance party on her way home, being overcome by "one of those unreasonable exultations which start generally from an unknown cause" (194). Temporarily, reality escapes her: "The night was encroaching upon the day" (195). While skipping, she is "singing," "saying things over again," "saying things differently," and "inventing things that might have been said" (195). The exuberance of passion is ultimately quenched by "the interruption of a tree" (195), which makes her feel as if branches are actually stroking in the face. The reemergence of solid materiality here suggests the ecstatic duration she has undergone before that is conflated

with her ephemeral image of herself. By visualizing self in this way, she reshapes the conventional moral principle that marginalizes the exultation derived from the temporary retreat from reality. Whereas critics have underscored her contemporaneity in terms of her resistance to patriarchy, including the refusal of matrimony and motherhood, and of her unorthodox way of playing the piano, she is revolutionary also in her eccentric notion of life.¹⁵

Her earlier musing in the seclusion of her own room foreshadows her revolt against the Carlylean moral tendency. Listening to “the small noises of midday,” she almost loses “consciousness of her own existence,” and becomes overwhelmed by “the unspeakable queerness of the fact that she should be sitting in an armchair, in the morning, in the middle of the world” (138). De Gay notes that Woolf stages her female characters’ private rooms less as “a place of withdrawal, exile or imprisonment in the private sphere” than as “a space through which women could enter into public life”, tracing the narrator’s portrayal of these in Woolf’s later works (*Christian* 152). Here, Rachel’s room anticipates such locations. She involves herself with the ebbs and flows of the world, responding to sounds and lights outside. In this respect, she diverges from Carlyle, who, as noted in the previous section, was exasperated by disruptions and thus sequestered himself in his soundproof study. The dissimilitude between Carlyle and Rachel prefigures the anomalous outcome of the latter’s rumination. Rachel poses a question: “And life, what was that?” (*VO* 138). Then, in contrast to the hardness of furniture, she imagines “life” as “only a light passing over the surface and vanishing,” which is, as we have seen, a type of imagery that revives later in this novel (138). In the end, she becomes “overcome with awe that things should exist at all” (138-39). As the ephemerality of sunlight represents, Rachel presents the central aspect of life not as facing reality but as transient withdrawal from it. By this, she defies Carlylean moral injunctions.

It should be noted, however, that Rachel’s attitude toward the Carlylean figure continues to waver. At one point she claims that their son “should be taught to laugh at great men, that is, at distinguished successful men, at men who wore ribands and rose to the tops of their trees” and “should in no way resemble . . . St John Hirst” (343). Here, she counters Hewet, who displays “the greatest admiration for St John Hirst” and apprehends the world “without him and his like” (343). He insists that Rachel will never be attentive to “the pursuit of truth” because of her inadequate “respect for facts,” regarding her as “essentially

feminine” (343-44). Significantly, however, despite such hostility to “great men” as Hirst embodies, she herself at times worships him. As quoted in the previous section, Hewet takes sides with Hirst when Rachel tried to deride him. However, his “description of Hirst’s way of life” captivates Rachel so that she regains “respect” for him, “almost [forgetting] her private grudge against him” (175). Her impersonal admiration for Hirst suggests her own appreciation of what Carlyle personified.

Rachel’s own tie with Carlyle becomes salient at the very moment when she professes an alternative view on life. In the contemplation scene, whereas, unlike Carlyle, she allows the sound of the stirring outside to flow into her room, a sense of seclusion is intensified; she meditates in “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” (136). Here her privacy resonates with that Carlyle sought for. Furthermore, while Rachel ponders on the nature of “life,” Carlyle also poses a very similar question in “Lecture II: the Hero as Prophet” in *Heroes*: “What am I? What is this unfathomable Thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is Life; what is Death! What am I to believe? What am I to do?” (*Heroes* 47). As noted earlier in this paper, Dean Stanley stated that Carlyle strove to resolve “the great problem of all human lives” with earnestness and seriousness. Indeed, citing the passage in *Heroes* extracted above as a paragon of earnestness, Houghton maintains that “[t]o be in earnest *intellectually* is to have or to seek to have genuine beliefs about the most fundamental questions in life” (220). If so, despite her defiance against the existing moral direction in this scene, she notwithstanding interiorizes his quest for the meaning of life, which is viewed also as a facet of Carlyle’s earnestness. Hewet is thus incorrect in his estimation that Rachel will never seek truth. On the contrary, she explores it in a very Carlylean manner, and yet yields a different outcome.

Although, as noted in my introduction, Woolf may not have set out in her first novel to conceptualize “the Victorian,” I would suggest that *The Voyage Out* has already features the question of how to cope with Carlyle’s moral heritage. As we have seen, Woolf is dissatisfied with a certain dimension of Carlylean earnestness, or seriousness, which rigorously prohibits any euphoric escape from reality. At the same time, however, she incorporates Carlyle’s sincere pursuit for the meaning of life, which also characterizes his earnestness, into Rachel’s attempt to subvert existing ethical values. To put it another way, Rachel revolts

against the admonishment of ecstatic withdrawals from reality by relying on his moral framework rather than entirely distancing herself from it. Woolf's complicated use of Carlylean imagery suggests that she had already sensed her indissolubility with some aspects of the morality there, even though she may think of this less as a problem of "the Victorian" era than as that specifically of Carlyle. In her engagement with his ethical orientation, I hope to suggest, *The Voyage Out* is not simply "unvictorian," as Strachey has commented, but can be seen as Woolf's springboard from which her concern with "the Victorian" develops.

Notes

1 In the same vein, Emily Blair reevaluates Woolf's linkage with "nineteenth-century descriptions of femininity" (9) in *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth-century Domestic Novel* (2007), juxtaposing her works with those of Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant. More recently, Christine Reynier discloses "some possible connections between British moral philosophers and Woolf" (129), comparing her essays to writings of Henry Sidgwick, G. E. Moore, and her father, Leslie Stephen. Kate Flint argues in her reading of *Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse* (1927) that "Woolf ensures that we recognize the sway that the Victorian period still has over those who wield power within the early 1920" ("Victorian" 58). Meanwhile, Woolf's connections with her literary antecedents have been also scrutinized. Alison Booth compares Woolf with George Eliot in terms of the idea of "greatness" (3); Jane de Gay delves into the way through which Woolf "engages with the literary past" and "how her reception of that past was conditioned by personal, intellectual and political contexts" (*Past* 17), by focusing on a variety of literary works, including the Greek classics.

2 Ellis suggests that "*Night and Day* can be seen as a riposte to [Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*]" (15) published in 1918. With regard to *The Voyage Out*, he has mentioned Woolf's curtailment of her early draft on Rachel's evaluation of her Victorian home in Richmond (34). "[The] debate over landscape and atmosphere," he argues, "between a new world [Santa Marina] and an old [England] expressed respectively in terms of brightness and dusk, glare and mist, is later transformed in Woolf into that between modern and Victorian, . . . but in *The Voyage Out* it awaits this formation" (37).

3 The closeness between Stephen and the Carlyle family can be traced back to Carlyle's friendship with Woolf's paternal uncle, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen (1829-94), who executed Carlyle's will, and was given his invaluable writing desk after his death (Bradshaw 27-8).

4 Woolf's interest in the history of "great men" is recorded in her other works. The narrator in *Jacob's Room* (1922), for instance, asks "[d]oes History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" (*JR* 48). In the footnotes of the Oxford edition of this novel, Kate Flint identifies this question with a sentence from Carlyle's *Heroes*, in which he writes "[t]he History of the World is but the Biography of great men" (Explanatory Notes 249).

5 *To the Lighthouse* contains direct remarks on Carlyle. Mr Banks laments that "the young don't read Carlyle," considering him as "one of the great teachers of mankind," while Lily Briscoe is "ashamed to say that she [has] not read Carlyle since she was at school" (*TL* 40).

6 In addition, while Rachel ranks Hirst among "the great Man" (*VO* 279), the same image, "great man" (*TL* 21, 96), is bestowed on Mr Ramsey.

7 This has been underscored by many. For instance, Richard Altick expresses a similar view in *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature* (1973), viewing "seriousness" as "a bent of mind often designated by that word in Victorian fiction" (175).

8 Similarly, Altick argues that "[i]ndustry' and 'work' were holy words in the contemporary lexicon, and the moral imperative they embodied was identified with that of faith and elevated into a virtual eleventh commandment by Carlyle" (168).

9 The impregnability of the native women is representatively registered in the way that they cease to pay attention to the British, rendering them feel "insignificant" (*VO* 332).

10 Their encroachment in civilized society may be foreshadowed by the opening scene in *Euphrosyne*: "[Rachel] looked forward to seeing them as civilised people generally look forward to the first sight of civilised people, as though they were of the nature of an approaching physical discomfort, —a tight shoe or a draughty window" (*VO* 8-9).

11 Critics generally agree on Rachel's thwarted growth. In addition to Esty, Joanne S. Frye comments that "Rachel is elusive, almost shapeless" (403). In her postcolonial approach, however, Julia Kuehn has shed light on Rachel's interior change, if not growth in a conventional sense, in her encounter with the native women. Discovering that the gender role persists even in such a remote place, Kuehn argues, "otherness has become internalized and the encountered collapse of self and other causes disorientation for the self, threatening and eventually ending the (nineteenth-century) notion of a stable subjectivity that is distinct from otherness" (145).

12 As for Hewet's linkage with Clive, see Madeline Moore, pp. 84. Hewet is relatively less "unvictorian" in, for instance, his ironic opinion on matrimony (*VO* 280-81).

13 Juxtaposing those three female writers, Laurence argues "they represent

women's silence as rituals of truth developed from an inner stance of self-reliance" (77).

14 For Carroll's influence on *The Voyage Out*, see Juliet Dusinberre, pp. 140. Helen's reminiscence on her childhood, which is also fraught with dreams, suggests that such a fictional world should disperse in their society, as they grow up: "Cant' you remember as a child chopping up hay . . . and pretending it was tea, and getting scolded by the nurses" (*VO* 162).

15 In her feminist reading of *The Voyage Out*, Christine Froula demonstrates how Rachel defies matrimony, motherhood, and other conventional gender roles, by tracing her hostility to Austen's marital plot (71-2). Wollaeger also argues her extemporized performance at the dance "disrupts Austen from within and dramatizes the capacity for emotional release and growth that Woolf sensed in *Persuasion*" ("The Woolfs" 41). Some critics have emphasized the innovativeness of Rachel's musical expression. Emma Sutton compares her "new waltz rhythm" that "stimulates the performer and audience's inventiveness, producing a sense of equitable community" to "the disturbing or ambivalent effects of regular poetic metre and Gibbon's prose" ("Putting" 190); Susan Jones associates Rachel's order to improvise steps with "a contemporary vogue for improvisation in dance" (186).

Works Cited

- Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature*. Norton, 1973.
- Blair, Emily. *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth-century Domestic Novel*. State U of New York P, 2007.
- Booth, Alison. *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf*. Cornell UP, 1992.
- Bradshaw, David. "Commentary." *Carlyle's House and Other Sketches*, by Virginia Woolf, Random House, 2003, pp. 25-49.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, introduction by Michael K. Goldberg, U of California P, 1993.
- . *Sartor Resartus*. Edited and with an introduction by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor, Oxford UP, 2008.
- De Gay, Jane. *Virginia Woolf and Christian Culture*. Edinburgh UP, 2018.
- . *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past*. Edinburgh UP, 2007.
- Dusinberre, Juliet. *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Ellis, Steve. *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Esty, Jed. *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*.

- Oxford UP, 2012.
- Flint, Kate. Explanatory Notes. *Jacobs' Room*, by Virginia Woolf, Oxford UP, 2008.
- . “Victorian Roots: The Sense of the Past in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.” *Virginia Woolf*, edited by James Acheson, Palgrave, 2017.
- Froula, Christine. “Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 63-90.
- Frye, Joanne. “*The Voyage Out*: Thematic Tensions and Narrative Techniques.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 26, no.4, Winter 1980, pp. 402-23.
- Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870*. Yale UP, 1957.
- Jones, Susan. “Virginia Woolf and the Dance.” *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2005, pp. 169-200.
- Kaplan, Fred. *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography*. Cornell UP, 1983.
- Kuehn, Julia. “*The Voyage Out* as Voyage in: Exotic Realism, Romance and Modernism.” *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 17, 2011, pp. 126-50.
- Laniel, Marie. “Revisiting a Great Man’s House: Virginia Woolf’s Carlylean Pilgrimages.” *Carlyle Studies Annual*, no. 24, 2008, pp.117-32.
- Laurence, Patricia Ondek. *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford UP, 1991.
- Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. Vintage, 1997.
- Miller, Ruth C. *Virginia Woolf: The Frames of Art and Life*. Macmillan, 1988.
- Moore, Madeline. “Some Female Versions of Pastoral: *The Voyage Out* and *Matriarchal Mythologies*.” *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Jane Marcus, The Macmillan P, 1981, pp. 82-104
- Moretti, Franco. *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*. Verso, 2013.
- Nassaar, Christopher S. “Introduction to *The Victorians: A Major Authors Anthology*.” *The Victorian Novel*, edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House P, 2004, pp. 91-101.
- Reynier, Christine. “Virginia Woolf’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy.” *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 38, no.1, Apr. 2014, pp.128-41.
- Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn. “A Funeral Sermon on Carlyle’s Death.” *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Jules Paul Seigel, Routledge, 1971.
- Sutton, Emma. “‘Putting Words on the Backs of Rhythm’: Woolf, ‘Street Music’, and *The Voyage Out*.” *Paragraph*, vol 33, no. 2, 2010, pp. 176–96.
- . “Silence and Cries: The Exotic Soundscape of *The Voyage Out*.” *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Jessica Berman, Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, pp. 41-54.
- Tarr, C. Anita. “Getting to the Lighthouse: Virginia Woolf and Thomas Carlyle.” *The Midwest Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, Spring 2001.
- Tyson, Helen. “Reading Childishly? Learning to Read Modernism: Reading the Child

- Reader in Modernism and Psychoanalysis.” *Textual Practice*, vol. 31, no. 7, 2017, pp. 1435-57.
- Whitworth, Michael H. “Virginia Woolf, Modernism and Modernity.” *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Sellers, 2nd ed., Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 107-23.
- Wollaeger, Mark. “The Woolfs in the Jungle: Intertextuality, Sexuality, and the Emergence of Female Modernism in *The Voyage Out*, *The Village in the Jungle*, and *Heart of Darkness*.” *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 1, Mar. 2003, pp. 33-69.
- . “Woolf, Postcards, and the Elision of Race: Colonizing Women in *The Voyage Out*.” *Modernism / Modernity*, vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 2001, pp. 43-75.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Jacob’s Room*. Edited and with an introduction by Kate Flint, Oxford UP, 2008.
- . *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. Edited and with an introduction by Jeanne Schulkind. Sussex UP, 1976.
- . *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie. Harcourt Brace and Company, 1977-80. 3 vols.
- . *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Andrew McNeillie, The Hogarth P, 1995-2011. 2 vols.
- . *The Voyage Out*. Edited and with an introduction by Lorna Sage, Oxford UP, 2009.
- . *To the Lighthouse*. Edited and with an introduction by David Bradshaw, Oxford UP, 2008.
- Woolf, Virginia, and Lytton Strachey. *Letters*. Edited by Leonard Woolf and James Strachey, The Hogarth P, 1956.
- Zink, Suzana. *Virginia Woolf’s Rooms and the Spaces of Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.