"this curious silent unrepresented life": Representation and Lesbian Sexuality in Woolf's The Voyage Out

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf's first novel The Voyage Out features a character named Terence Hewet, a putative author whose aesthetic project is to write a novel called and about "Silence—the Things People don't say." Terence outlines his interest in the lives of ordinary women and his distaste for the manner in which women are represented in patriarchal discourse. As several critics of The Voyage Out have noted Hewet's comments offer a first glimpse of some of the issues which were to evolve into major preoccupations in Woolf's work. Indeed over a period of thirteen years Hewet's voice develops until in A Room of One's Own—or in the fashion of the maturing process of Room's parallel text Orlando—it becomes that of a woman writer: "all the great women of fiction" we are told in Room "were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of women's life is that." The types of women who are referred to by Terence—older, single and working women—were to become important figures in Woolf's writing, and The Voyage Out itself seems to illustrate Terence's project.

Woolf's fascination with the Conradian conflation of riot and restraint in the image of the big trees corresponds to Rachel's violent swings between rebellion and anxious acquiescence, and their conjunction is repeatedly marked by moments of vision. The most detailed of these epiphanies is also the most revealing. Just before she stops to read Gibbon, Rachel, wandering aimlessly, is filled with "one of those unreasonable exultations which start generally from an unknown cause": So she might have walked until she had lost all knowledge of her way, had it not been for the int Woolf's lesbian signatures, messages, and strategies were shaped by the brooding presence of the censor, for no lesbian writer in 1928 was immune from the perils of censorship. … She lampoons the censors and censorship trials in her outrageous mock masque trial and sex change at the centerpiece of Orlando. … Placing Woolf's strategies in Orlando within the censoring climate of her day reveals the text as both an accommodation to censorship and a profoundly witty and powerful critique of censorship. In a strange and wonderful way, Orlando plays with possible realities and challenges social impo TI: 'This Curious Silent Unrepresented Life': Representation and Lesbian Sexuality in Woolf's The Voyage Out. AU: Hunn,-Deborah. SO: LINQ 1993, 20:2, 53-67. AN: 94061204. -- Record 10 of 56 - MLA Bibliography 1981-2/97. TI: Female Intimacies and the Lesbian Continuum; Sel. Papers from 2nd Annual Conf. on Virginia Woolf, Southern Connecticut State Univ., New Haven, June 11-14, 1992. AU: Tvardi,-Jessica.