The Intersecting Realities and Fictions of Virginia Woolf and Colette

Southworth, Helen

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QUESTIONS OF the daughter writer’s relationship to a tradition of writing initially appear to put Colette and Virginia Woolf in different camps. Colette was the daughter of a patriarchal tradition. Devotee of nineteenth-century French literary great Honoré de Balzac, she wrote in the absence of a tradition of middle-class women writers in France. By contrast, Woolf was heir to a strong matriarchal tradition; she is famously the originator of the call to “think back through our mothers” and, in *A Room of One’s Own*, writer of a history of women’s writing that includes Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontë sisters.

However, an examination of the writers’ own comments on the issue of literary inheritance suggests that both realized the indispensability to the text of a matriarchal and a patriarchal tradition. Both acknowledged, as Woolf put it herself in *A Room*, that a text—and here she refers specifically to poetry—must have “a mother as well as a father” (103). However, while in the work of Colette these two strains, the paternal and maternal, reached a comfortable equilibrium—in her own words, “lyrisme paternel” and “humour, spontanéité maternels” (“father’s lyricism” and “mother’s humor and spontaneity”) are mingled and superimposed in her work (*Sido* 37)—in the work of Woolf the two sit uncomfortably together. According to her nephew and biographer Quentin Bell, Woolf “believed that she was the heiress to two very different and in fact opposed traditions [and] that these two rival streams dashed together and flowed confused but not harmonised in her blood” (18). While her father’s family, the Stephens, “were all writers; they all had some gift, some pleasure in the use of the English language [. . . ] wrote like men who are used to presenting an argument [. . . ] seeing
in literature a means rather than an end,” her mother’s kin, the Pattles, were “an altogether less intellectual race than the Stephens [ . . . ] chiefly remembered for their faces” (Bell 19). Bell labels the two sides (albeit, he says, unsatisfactorily) paternal and maternal, “sense and sensibility, prose and poetry, literature and art, or, more simply, masculine and feminine” (20).

This chapter treats Woolf’s first novel *The Voyage Out* and the series of four books that mark Colette’s debut as a writer, the *Claudine* novels, in the light of these two opposed conceptions of or reactions to literary inheritance, the one harmonious, the other conflictual. Via an analysis of the female protagonist’s negotiation of familial relationships and her reading choices, I trace the daughter writer’s engagement with a tradition of writing and her efforts to define herself in terms of it. I follow in each case the daughter writer’s efforts to come to terms with a predominantly patriarchal tradition, the matriarchal all but absent, and I chart her success in establishing a place for herself there. Contrary to standard readings of the father in *The Voyage Out* and the *Claudines*, which cast him as menacing and threatening in the first and insignificant in the second, I read the father as an at least temporarily constructive figure, one who provides the daughter with access to a tradition otherwise closed to her.

In their capacity as first fictions, Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* and Colette’s *Claudine* series are novels of apprenticeship in a double sense. Not only do they follow the maturation of the protagonists, but they also represent the authors’ first published attempts at writing. In both cases, critics have characterized these first novels as flawed and chaotic, the work of an as yet untrained mind. Thus, David Daiches suggests that “[t]here is a hesitancy, even a clumsiness, in *The Voyage Out*, which denotes the writer who has not yet found her proper medium. Again and again we find Virginia Woolf hovering over her subject, undecided where to pounce, until the chapter is filled up with a miscellaneous collection of descriptions and digressions which do not seem to lead anywhere” (10). And Elaine Marks argues that “the mastery of style in [Colette’s] *La naissance du jour*—a certain sense of ‘distance’ which Colette observes while relating her intimate feelings; the psychological subtleties of *Chéri, Le blé en herbe* and *Le pur et l’impur*; the poetry of *La maison de Claudine* and *Sido* are not present or, if present, are not sustained in the *Claudine* series” (Colette 74). “Between *Claudine* and *Naissance du jour*,” suggests Simone de Beauvoir, “the amateur became a professional, and that transition brilliantly demonstrates the benefits of a severe period of training” (The Second Sex 784).
These were views that both authors shared. Rereading her first novel in 1920, Woolf describes *The Voyage Out* as “a harlequinade,” at certain moments strong and at others simpering:

> The mornings from 12 to 1 I spend reading *The Voyage Out*. I’ve not read it since July 1913. And if you ask me what I think I must reply that I don’t know—such a harlequinade as it is—such an assortment of patches—here simple & severe—here frivolous & shallow—here like God’s truth—here strong & free flowing as I could wish. What to make of it, Heaven knows. The failures are ghastly enough to make my cheeks burn—and then a sentence, a direct look ahead of me, makes them burn in a different way. On the whole I like the young woman’s mind considerably. How gallantly she takes her fences—and my word, what a gift for pen & ink! I can do little to amend; & must go down to posterity as the author of cheap witticisms, smart satires & even, I find, vulgarisms—crudities rather—that will never cease to rankle in the grave. (February 1920, Diary 2: 17)

In her *Mes apprentissages*, Colette regrets the immaturity of her early works and the submissiveness it reveals:

> Time has not changed my opinion, and my judgement on all the *Clau
dines* is still severe. They frisk and frolic and play the giddy girl altogether too freely. The work reveals, indeed, an irrepressible youthfulness, if only in its lack of technique. But I do not like to rediscover, glancing through these very old books, the suppleness of mood that understood so well what was required of it, the submission to every hint and the already deft manner of avoiding difficulties. (60)

While not an automatic choice for a comparative analysis, several details about these two works, both first fictions, both semi-autobiographical, suggest connections and intersections. Both are books about books, and about reading, specifically the daughter’s reading. Both are *bildungsromane*, albeit unusual ones, stories of the daughter’s education and stories of voyages, real and metaphorical, as their titles suggest. Claudine of the *Claudine* series leaves her *pays natal*, Montigny, in the Burgundy region of France, a double for Colette’s own *pays natal*, Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, also in Burgundy, for Paris; Rachel Vinrace of *The Voyage Out* leaves England for the Amazon aboard her father’s ship. Rachel never returns home; Claudine does so only for a brief visit. The father, present at the beginning of the voyage in each case, retreats and
is replaced by a husband/lover figure: for Rachel, Terence Hewet, and for Claudine, Renaud. In each case the biological mother of the heroine is absent, as are, for the most part, mothers in general.

In both *The Voyage Out* and the *Claudine* series, the protagonist’s relationship with tradition can be traced both via her choice of reading material and in terms of her family history. Thus, the absence of the mother from both works—Rachel’s mother, Theresa Vinrace, has been dead for some ten years, and the absence of Claudine’s “bien désagréable” (“remarkably unpleasant”) mother (*Claudine à Paris* 207/338) is never explained—suggests the absence of a tradition of women’s writing. The centrality of the father in both novels (both open their worlds to their daughters) and their preoccupations—Willoughby Vinrace leaves his daughter with her aunt and uncle while he pursues his business interests, and Claudine’s father, Claude, is too engrossed in his study of slugs to supervise his daughter in any meaningful way—can be understood in the first case as a gesture that excludes the daughter writer from a patriarchal tradition she desires to be part of and in the latter case one that frees the daughter from a tradition to which she considers she does not belong.

**Real Parents: The Stephens and the Colettes**

As suggested above, both novels might be read autobiographically. Real fathers inform the portraits of fictional fathers in both *The Voyage Out* and the *Claudine* series. Both writers emphasize the instrumental role played by the real father in the process of their coming to writing. In *Le Képi* and *Sido*, for example, Colette traces her love of the tools, the materials of writing, back to her father; in her late memoir “A Sketch of the Past” (*Moments of Being*, 1939), Woolf credits her father with the breadth of her literary education. However, in each case the father poses a significant obstacle to the daughter’s accession to writing; the father-daughter relationship is marked by a rift or absence.

Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, was descended from a long line of literary people. A prolific writer, he was author of some sixty-three volumes of literary biography and other literary historical work. He educated his daughters, paying particular attention to Virginia, whom he ultimately provided, critics suggest, with as good an education as the one she might have received at either Oxford or Cambridge, which she, as a woman, was unable to attend at the time (Hill 351).
However, Leslie Stephen also bullied and intimidated his daughter. According to Quentin Bell, Woolf felt that the volumes of her father’s extensive *Dictionary of National Biography* had “crushed and cramped” her and her younger brother Adrian in the womb (38–39). The father’s work threatened to silence the daughter. In 1928 she wrote of her father in her diary:

Father’s birthday. He would have been [here she does a short calculation] 96, yes, today; & could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. No writing; no books;—inconceivable. I used to think of him & mother daily; but writing The Lighthouse, laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently [. . .] He comes back now more as a contemporary. (*Diary* 3: 208)

Colette’s father, Jules Colette, by contrast, is an *auteur manqué*, whose love of the trappings of writing—the pens, the paper, the bindings, the titles and dedications—so preoccupied him that he never made
it beyond page one. “My father, a born writer, left few pages behind him. At the actual moment of writing, he dissipated his desire in material arrangements, setting out all the objects a writer needs and a number of superfluous ones as well” (The Tender Shoot 302). Thus, in contrast to Woolf’s weighty legacy, Colette’s heritage is an “immaterial” one (Sido 56). In the semi-autobiographical novel Sido, when, subsequent to his death, his children take down the volumes of his work, bound and titled, from a shelf in his office, they discover only blank pages. The father’s work is an illusion, an imaginary work, the mirage of a writer’s career: “Une œuvre imaginaire, le mirage d’une carrière d’écrivain” (Sido 55). His legacy is a blank slate, hundreds and hundreds of blank pages: “des centaines et des centaines de pages blanches” (Sido 55).

In terms of writing, the mother’s engagement is less clear. Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen, wrote children’s stories, as well as unpublished tracts on “the morality and work ethic of ‘agnostic women’ and on the current debate on domestic service” (Lee 83). Although Julia Stephen certainly played a role in her daughter’s education, her death when Woolf was just thirteen limited her impact on her daughter’s life. Colette’s mother, Sidonie Colette, corresponded by letter intensively with her daughter at certain periods of her daughter’s life. In this sense, Sido was a much-valued reader of and commentator on the daughter’s work, rather than a writer in her own capacity. Sido represents an interlocutor to whom Colette turned as a muse of sorts.9

Thirty, then, and a most unusual dearth of feminine companions, of feminine complicity and support. The ideal accomplice, the true helper, I had them both in “Sido,” in “Sido” so far away and yet so near. Every week I wrote her two or three long letters, full of news of things that had happened, or not happened, of descriptions, of boasting, of myself, of her. She died in 1912. Still, now, twenty-three years later, I sit down at my table, or at a hotel writing-desk if I’m travelling, and pull off my gloves, and ask for picture postcards with ‘views of the neighborhood,’ which were the sort that she liked best . . . And why should I stop writing to her? Why be checked by such a futile, vainly questioned obstacle as death? (My Apprenticeships 103–4)10

While the nature of the paternal literary legacy sets Woolf and Colette apart—Woolf’s literary patrimony is ample, Colette’s nonexistent—it also brings the two writers together. The juxtaposition of these two family stories highlights the complications of both. When one considers the freedom afforded Colette due to the absence of a literary
legacy, one is led to question the privilege enjoyed by Woolf as a result of her eminent ancestors. Conversely, when one considers the wealth of Woolf’s education, one begins to understand Colette’s lack of literary forebears as a handicap rather than an advantage.

Both writers recognized these contradictions. Colette repeatedly laments and celebrates her absence of vocation:

Vocation, holy signs, childhood poetry, predestination? . . . I can find nothing of the sort in my recollections [. . . ] No, I did not wish to write. When one can enter the enchanted kingdom of reading, why write? [. . . ] But in my youth, I never, never wanted to write. No, I did not get up at night in secret to write verses in pencil on the lid of a shoe-box! No, I did not get nineteen or twenty for style in an exercise between the ages of twelve and fifteen! For I felt, more so every day, I felt that I was made precisely not to write. (*Looking Backwards* 15–16)\(^\text{11}\)

Her genesis as a writer, she suggested when being honored at the Académie royale belge de langue et de littérature françaises, was purely accidental.
I became a writer without noticing, and without anyone suspecting I would. Exiting from an anonymous shadow, author of several books, some of which carried my name, I was still surprised when people called me a writer [ . . . ] and I attributed these recurring coincidences to indulgent chance, chance that from landing to landing, from meeting to marvel, led me here. (My translation)\textsuperscript{12}

In a similar way, Woolf interrogated her privilege with a certain degree of irony:

Who was I then? Adeline Virginia Stephen, the second daughter of Leslie and Julia Prinsep Stephen, born on 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1882, descended from a great many people, some famous, others obscure; born into a large connection, born not of rich parents, but of well-to-do parents, born into a very communicative, literate, letter writing, visiting, articulate, late nineteenth century world; so that I could if I liked to take the trouble, write a great deal here not only about my mother and father but about uncles and aunts, cousins and friends. (Moments of Being 65)

“Full fathom five thy father lies”: The Voyage Out

Woolf completed The Voyage Out ten years after the death of her father in 1904. According to DeSalvo, Woolf suffered considerably at the loss of her father. Indeed, Woolf wrote to Violet Dickinson shortly after her father’s death of a desire to resurrect him and to make amends: “I cant believe our life with Father is over and he dead. If one could only tell him how one cared, as I dreamt I did last night” (March 1904, Letters 1: 133). While this regret resulted in part from her guilt at having alternately loved and hated her father during his lifetime, it stemmed in large part from the more general problem identified by DeSalvo, citing Woolf herself, as “the ‘emotions and complications’ of her family history” (303).\textsuperscript{13} As Lee contends, concurring with DeSalvo: “When [Woolf] looked back on her family life she thought of it not as a single thing but marked by dramatic splits. Lines of division criss-cross her memoirs. Childhood was cut in two between Cornwall and London. An end to childhood came with the violent division made by her mother’s death. The household was fragmented” (55). The Voyage Out, which Woolf dedicated to the man who would in some senses replace her father, her
husband Leonard Woolf, represents an initial attempt to address these emotions and complications.

_The Voyage Out_ traces the maturation of the central character, twenty-four-year-old Rachel Vinrace, over the course of a voyage from London to the Amazon aboard the _Euphrosyne_, the ship captained by her father, Willoughby Vinrace. When her fellow travelers, her maternal uncle Ridley Ambrose and his wife Helen, stop off in Santa Marina, Rachel remains with them while her father goes on. In Santa Marina, Rachel and her aunt join up with a group of English tourists, among them Rachel’s fiancé-to-be, Terence Hewet. After one of several excursions up the river, Rachel falls ill and eventually dies.

The setting of the novel at sea, aboard a ship in which, Helen Ambrose notes, “the whole course of their lives was now put out of order” (61), sets the stage for Rachel’s attempts to come to terms with the disorder of her family. As Lucio Ruotolo has suggested in terms of _The Voyage Out_: “Sea voyages are by their nature parenthetical. Between the acts of departure and arrival, accustomed roles and routines seem often implausible if not unreal” (20). Rachel’s mother having died when Rachel was eleven (recalling Woolf’s own loss at age thirteen), her father frequently absent on business, the young woman is being raised by her father’s sisters. Rachel’s early education is described as having been somewhat slapdash. In the care of her paternal aunts, she has received a bit of information here and a bit there: “[k]indly doctors and gentle old professors had taught her the rudiments of about ten different branches of knowledge [. . . ] But there was no subject in the world which she knew accurately. Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man’s in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth” (26). While Rachel has not learned anything very useful, neither has she learned anything that will hamper her. In this sense, Rachel’s relationship with her father, like that which Claudine shares with hers in Colette’s first novels, is not characterized as limiting to the daughter in any fashion, although Rachel’s lack of knowledge about men and women is viewed by her aunt Helen as potentially very dangerous. “‘She’s been brought up practically in a nunnery. Her father’s too absurd,’” Helen Ambrose tells St John Hirst (149).

Willoughby Vinrace is an ambiguous character. He is both businessman and scholar. His rather rough-and-ready countenance—“[h]e is big and burly, and has a great booming voice, and a fist and a will of his own,” (17) according to Helen Ambrose—appears to hide a softer side. While his voice is the voice of authority at the London home of Rachel’s
aunts, his sisters and daughter run the house in an altogether different fashion, in their own way. “He was a great dim force in the house, by means of which they held on to the great world which is represented every morning in the *Times*. But the real life of the house was something quite different from this. It went on independently of Mr Vinrace, and tended to hide itself from him” (201). Helen Ambrose suspects that Willoughby may have bullied his wife and his daughter. Indeed, she believes him guilty “of nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter, as indeed she had always suspected him of bullying his wife” (17)—a moment in the text that many read as a reference to sexual abuse. However, she recognizes that he has a real affection for his daughter. Likewise, the daughter has a real affection for the father. She admires her father, a little too much for her aunt’s liking: “Rachel seemed to get on very well with her father—much better, Helen thought, than she ought to” (25). The strength of the tie between daughter and father is emphasized by the fact that Rachel is initially reluctant when Helen suggests that the girl should break her trip and remain with her and her husband, Ridley, in Santa Marina.

*The Voyage Out* contains a number of other father figures, figures who double and complicate the father-daughter relations in the work. As well as Willoughby Vinrace, we find Ridley Ambrose, Rachel’s maternal uncle, who resembles Woolf’s real father, Leslie Stephen, in his capacity as a classical scholar—he edits Pindar. Like Leslie Stephen, Ridley also likes to read aloud. A brief fellow traveler aboard the *Euphrosyne*, Richard Dalloway plays an ambiguous paternal role, shifting from father to lover, almost without warning, when he fumbles an embrace with Rachel, perhaps in this way anticipating Hewet’s replacement of Willoughby Vinrace (66–67). Both St John Hirst and Terence Hewet, in their capacity as educators for Rachel, a role cast for them by Helen, and in their resemblance—mentally and physically—to the older generation of men in the text, are also fathers of a kind.

Much of what Rachel reads in *The Voyage Out* involves parent-child relations and suggests her efforts to understand who she is and how she fits into the family structure. Reading recommendations can be divided along gender lines, with Rachel taking more seriously the recommendations made by the men in the text. Rachel’s father gives her *Cowper’s Letters*—perhaps suggesting an attempt to maintain a correspondence with his daughter—however, she finds them “dull” (49), although she does have a positive response, “entering into ‘communion’ with ‘the spirit of poor William Cowper there at Olney,’” as Beverley Ann Schlack has noted in her thorough analysis of literary allusion in the works of
Woolf (17). Cowper, who lost his mother at the age of six, struggled with mental illness for most of his life, again suggesting a tie with Woolf herself and perhaps anticipating Rachel’s demise at the close of *The Voyage Out*. (The fact that it is Rachel’s father’s choice of text that is tied to madness supports my later contention that it is his withdrawal that leads to Rachel’s demise.) Many of the other texts suggested involve the rise and fall of empire, conquest and revolution; most, like *Cowper’s Letters*, are nonfiction. The historical nature of many of these texts might reflect the choices of Woolf’s own historian father, Leslie Stephen. For example, Richard Dalloway is indecisive as to whether Rachel might gain more from reading Edmund Burke’s speech on the French Revolution or his speech on the American rebellion (66). Hirst recommends she read Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (141). She tries but cannot bring herself to enjoy it (“it goes round, round, round, like a roll of oilcloth” [184]). Ridley Ambrose suggests a French novel, Honoré de Balzac’s *Cousine Bette*, as an alternative (157–58).14

By contrast, the reading recommendations made by the women in the text are for the most part dismissed by the daughter. Clarissa Dalloway recommends that Rachel read Jane Austen. However, Rachel says she does not like Jane Austen, judging her work to be “like a tight plait” (49). While Helen Ambrose wishes that Rachel would read Maupassant, Defoe, or “some spacious chronicle of family life,” her niece instead chooses modern texts with shiny covers, such as Ibsen’s *Three Sisters* or a novel “whose purpose [according to Helen Ambrose] was to distribute the guilt of a woman’s downfall upon the right shoulders,” which she reads, suggests Helen, with “the curious literalness of one to whom written sentences are unfamiliar” (113). As a challenge to Rachel’s dismissal of the mother’s texts, two other texts appear in the novel, both associated with Clarissa Dalloway, and both of which deal with a rupture in paternal-filial relations. Thus, Clarissa Dalloway mentions a staging of *Antigone,* an archetypal tale about the daughter’s defiance of the father’s will (37), one that appears frequently in Woolf’s work, and Mr Grice reads to Clarissa Dalloway from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, a text in many ways central to *The Voyage Out*—specifically, Ariel’s false words to Ferdinand regarding his father’s whereabouts: “Full fathom five thy father lies” (Act I, scene 2, 78). This line is part of Ariel’s song: “Full fathom five thy father lies, / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes; / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange, / Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell: / (Burden) Ding dong. / Hark! Now I hear them—Ding-dong bell.”
Echoing Rachel’s resistance to the maternal text, the maternal relationship is not dwelt upon at any length in this novel. Jane Novak explains this omission, pointing out the fact that as Woolf revised *The Voyage Out* (originally called *Melymbrosia*) she deleted references to Rachel’s dead mother, Theresa, and her power over Rachel’s life. Novak suggests that Woolf removed the references to the mother because

to arouse compassion publicly for Rachel’s orphaned state might have seemed to Virginia Woolf ‘obviously not good manners.’ It might also have dangerously touched the deep spring of her own grief for the mother who died suddenly when Virginia Stephen was thirteen. Although she dealt triumphantly with these memories in *To the Lighthouse*, their inclusion in *The Voyage Out* was perhaps not possible for her. (81)

Rachel appears to know very little about her mother, whose portrait hangs over her father’s desk. Theresa Vinrace is portrayed as a spirited woman who, while revered by her husband, cannot quite get him to engage with her: “the head of an individual and interesting woman, who would no doubt have turned her head and laughed at [her husband] if she could have caught his eye” (76). Willoughby thinks of his business as an offering to his deceased wife and tries to educate his daughter as his wife would have wished him to. “[A]lthough he had not been particularly kind to her while she lived, as Helen thought, he now believed that she watched him from heaven, and inspired what was good in him” (76). Helen Ambrose characterizes Willoughby’s relationship with his wife as somewhat ambiguous. In the course of the novel we learn, via Helen (who is perhaps attempting to present a positive maternal image to her niece), that Theresa Vinrace was not treated particularly well by either her husband or his sisters during her lifetime. Helen characterizes Rachel’s mother as possessing a special kind of power that drew people to her—more men were in love with her than with any other woman Helen Ambrose knew (171). Helen also provides Theresa Vinrace with an emotional past, a life independent of Willoughby Vinrace, in an engagement to a man named Maurice Fielding prior to her marriage to Rachel’s father. This first love ties Theresa Vinrace to Julia Stephen, who had been married to Herbert Duckworth prior to her marriage to Woolf’s father.16

Although both Helen and Clarissa are mothers (the book opens with Helen’s lament over having to leave her children in England;
Clarissa expresses her regret at being without her children when aboard the *Euphrosyne*), when we meet them they are without their children. While Helen is, in some senses, a mother substitute for Rachel—it is she who chaperones Rachel and who writes to Willoughby to get his consent for Rachel’s engagement to Terence Hewet—she takes on that role only reluctantly. She asks that Rachel not call her “Aunt”—“‘Aunt’s’ a horrid name; I never liked my Aunts’” (74). She also later acknowledges that she is not the motivating force behind Rachel’s maturation. As David Daiches has suggested, Helen’s figure, having been developed to a degree where we expect her to be central to the work, ultimately fades into the background (11).

The disagreement in the text over Rachel’s resemblance to her mother, Theresa, again suggests that the daughter’s relationship with her mother is unclear. While Rachel’s father Willoughby and her aunt Helen see a resemblance between mother and daughter, perhaps demonstrating their desire to make Rachel part of the family text (echoing Helen’s desire that Rachel read spacious family chronicles) and to see her follow in her mother’s footsteps (Willoughby hopes Helen will make an accomplished hostess of his daughter during her stay in Santa Marina), Rachel herself and Theresa’s brother Ridley, Rachel’s uncle, disagree. While Willoughby tells himself “‘There is a likeness?’” (the question mark, however, suggesting uncertainty) (76) and Helen thinks “She was like her mother, as the image in a pool on a still summer’s day is like the vivid flushed face that hangs over it” (18), when Clarissa Dal- loway asks Rachel: “‘Are you like your mother?’” Rachel responds forcefully: “‘No; she was different’” (52). When Ridley expresses his opinion of the lack of likeness between mother and daughter in the daughter’s presence (“‘Ah! she’s not like her mother’”), Helen tries to drown out his comment by thumping her tumbler on the table (8).

The instability and confusion resulting from parent-child relationships is everywhere in this novel. There are, in fact, very few characters who do not have some unpleasant family secret to reveal. Terence Hewet’s description of his father’s death suggests an emotional disconnection between father and son: “‘My father was a fox-hunting squire. He died when I was ten in the hunting field. I can remember his body coming home, on a shutter I suppose, just as I was going down to tea, and noticing there was jam for tea, and wondering whether I should be allowed—’” (131). This recalls Delia’s reaction to her mother’s death in *The Years*—dinner would be ruined—and Woolf’s own impulse to laugh at her mother’s funeral, described in “A Sketch of the Past.” Hewet blames his mother for his failure to play a musical instrument. Music was
not manly enough for his mother; “she wanted me to kill rats and birds,” he tells Rachel (207). Hewet’s friend, St. John Hirst, a character based on fellow Bloomsbury writer Lytton Strachey, is the son of the Reverend Sidney Hirst, who, along with his wife, the son laments (half comically, we presume), is still living: “Parents both alive (alas)” (131–32). When Helen asks Hirst whether his relationship with his family is strained, he describes it as “intolerable” (147); they want him to be a peer and a privy councillor. Of his mother, Hirst adds, “there’s something to be said for my mother, though she is in many ways deplorable” (148). Further, Richard Dalloway confesses to Rachel: “I didn’t get on well with my father [ . . . ] He was a very able man, but hard. Well—it makes one determined not to sin in that way oneself. Children never forget injustice” (59). Again this is a comment echoed in later novels. In To the Lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay’s youngest son, James, will never forget his father’s repeated refusal of the trip to the lighthouse. Children never forget such things, says Mrs Ramsay. Another visitor in Santa Marina, Arthur Venning, is waiting for the death of his widowed mother (she is “of strong character” [127]) so that he can quit his job as a barrister and take up flying (despite the suspicion that Venning’s marriage to Susan Warrington might once again hold up his aeronautical aspirations) (108). Another minor character, Raymond Oliver, another hotel guest, is not treated well at home, having been forced into the mining trade by his parents (173).

Daughters fare equally poorly in The Voyage Out. Evelyn Murgatroyd, a flirtatious and confused young Englishwoman whom Rachel meets in Santa Marina, expresses her regret at not having had the opportunity to get to know her own father (her parents did not marry). Evelyn resembles her father, not her mother, according to Rachel after contemplating photographs of both parents (237):

‘I’m the daughter of a mother and no father [ . . . ] It’s not a very nice thing to be. It’s what often happens in the country. She was a farmer’s daughter, and he was rather a swell—the young man up at the great house. He never made things straight—never married her—though he allowed us quite a lot of money. His people wouldn’t let him. Poor father! I can’t help liking him. Mother wasn’t the sort of woman who could keep him straight, anyhow. He was killed in the war. I believe his men worshipped him. They say great big troopers broke down and cried over his body on the battlefield. I wish I’d known him. Mother had all the life crushed out of her [ . . . ]’ (174–75)
The husband of another English tourist in Santa Marina, Alice Flushing, describes his wife’s upbringing as “very unnatural—unusual”: “They had no mother [ . . . ] and a father—he was a delightful man, I’ve no doubt, but he cared only for racehorses and Greek statues” (260). Mrs Flushing goes on to describe forced bathing in icy winters in a stable-yard (which some of her twelve brothers and sisters survived and others did not), a practice Mrs Flushing claims she would repeat had she children of her own (260). Helen Ambrose gives only a brief description of her family, mentioning only the father and omitting the mother: “[H]er father had been a solicitor in the city who had gone bankrupt, for which reason she had never had much education—they lived in one place after another—but an elder brother used to lend her books” (131). Miss Allan, the literary scholar, is concerned about her brother; she has her father’s watch—suggesting perhaps that she keeps order in the place of her father (104).

While Rachel initially flourishes in the absence of her father—she and Helen join up with the English in Santa Marina, where Rachel falls in love with Terence Hewet—I want to suggest that it is the realization of the permanence of the father’s absence, because she will marry Hewet and live away from the father, that results in Rachel’s illness. Rachel’s fever and subsequent death occur rather suddenly in the novel. Having returned from an excursion of several days, Rachel develops a headache while listening to Hewet read an extract from John Milton’s masque Comus: “There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,” he read, “That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream. / Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure; / Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine, / That had the sceptre from his father Brute” (308). The lines he reads involve fathers and daughters, a short genealogy, suggesting that it is Rachel’s memory of her father’s absence that sets the illness in motion.

The words, in spite of what Terence had said, seemed to be laden with meaning, and perhaps it was for this reason that it was painful to listen to them; they sounded strange; they meant different things from what they usually meant. Rachel at any rate could not keep her attention fixed upon them, but went off upon curious trains of thought suggested by words such as ‘curb’ and ‘Locrine’ and ‘Brute,’ which brought unpleasant sights before her eyes, independently of their meaning. (308)

Indeed, Rachel locks onto three words from the extract, the latter two of which are fathers’ names (one of these Brute, or brute, suggesting
ambivalence toward the father figure; Brute might also suggest nostalgia for home [as might the mention of the river Severn, as Brut is the name of British chronicle histories]; the first word, “curb,” suggests a change of direction or, in another sense, a prohibition.  

Woolf had mixed feelings about Milton. In 1918 in her diary she writes of the “sublime aloofness and impersonality of the emotion” of *Paradise Lost*. While she admires the “wonderful, beautiful and masterly descriptions of angel’s bodies, battles, flights, dwelling places,” the poem, she feels, sheds no light on “one’s own joys and sorrows.” Milton’s epic poem offers her no help, she asserts, in “judging life” (Writer’s Diary 5). While Hewet significantly does *not* choose *Paradise Lost*, as Lisa Low demonstrates in her reevaluation of the significance of this passage, I want to argue that Rachel’s reaction to Milton’s poetry is similar to that which we see in Woolf’s diary and supports my contention that these lines remind Rachel of her father, who, while he introduced her as a child to much great literature, left her to fend for herself in the real world.  

In support of this assertion, one might also note the tie between Milton’s *Comus* and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, cited earlier in *The Voyage Out*. The lines Woolf chose from *The Tempest*, a text on which Milton modeled *Comus*, involving Ferdinand’s loss of his father, can be read as prefiguring the later text. The inclusion of these lines then connotes regret, and confusion perhaps, rather than fear.

The suggestion that Rachel falls ill in part due to the father’s absence is supported by Rachel’s unexplained repeated exclamation during her illness: “‘Why doesn’t he come?’ ‘Why doesn’t he come?’” (320). Willoughby Vinrace is not referred to during Rachel’s illness. Indeed, he is not mentioned until after Rachel’s death when Mrs Thornbury asks, “‘Has the father arrived? Could one go and see?’” (338). Rachel’s words recall an earlier moment in the novel when Helen Ambrose worries about her sanctioning of Rachel’s engagement to Terence. She asks herself what might Rachel have done if she “had been left to explore the world under her father’s guidance. The result, she was honest enough to own, might have been better—who knows?” (287).

Thus, Rachel’s reaction to Hewet’s reading of *Comus* and Helen Ambrose’s rhetorical question encapsulate a central theme of Woolf’s first novel, that is, the ambiguous role played by the father in the daughter’s literary apprenticeship. Helen asks: What role does the father, or more generally patriarchy, play in the process of the female writer’s coming to writing? How does he help, and how does he hinder, the daughter’s accession to the realm of language and literature? This question of what might be called “the temporary efficacy [ . . . ] of patriarchal par-
adigms,” to borrow Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s phrase from her study of two lesser-known nineteenth-century writers, Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, suggests interesting insights into Colette’s Claudine series (13). Woolf’s The Voyage Out asks in what sense is an identification with the father a step indispensable to the process of the daughter’s differentiation from the mother and from the negatives associated with her role. Further, it asks how identification with the father, as Kowaleski-Wallace suggests, might provide the daughter access to a literary tradition not available via the mother.

“Une Jolie Instruction”: Colette’s Claudine Series

The four novels of Colette’s Claudine series (1900–1904) consist of the diaries of Claudine, who has just turned fifteen as the first novel opens. For the purpose of this comparative analysis I will treat the Claudine novels as four parts of a single project. All of the novels are written in the first person. In the first three in the series, Claudine is the narrator; in the last in the series, Claudine s’en va (Claudine Takes Off), a second narrator, Annie, is introduced. These novels trace the somewhat unconventional education and maturation of the young motherless Claudine, from the freedom of the woods surrounding her hometown, Montigny, in the Burgundy region of France, into the drawing rooms of literate turn-of-the-century Parisian society. These novels also trace the evolution of the writer-reader Claudine/Colette and her relation to the father’s text.

The Claudine series is an appropriate place in which to locate a study of paternity, in part because it was itself the subject of a paternity suit. Colette began the Claudines in collaboration with her first husband, Henry Gauthier-Villars, better known as Willy, in the late 1800s. She was one of a number of writers who ghostwrote for Willy in his literary factory. There has been much debate over the degree of involvement of Willy and Colette in the composition of the Claudines, which appeared first under Willy’s name, then under both of their names. After the death of Willy, Colette went to court and had Willy’s name removed from the Claudines. After Colette died, Jacques Gauthier-Villars, Willy’s son from a liaison prior to his marriage to Colette, sued for the right to have his father’s name restored to the book alongside Colette’s and won (Thurman 106–7).

Although Colette does not use real names as she does elsewhere in her fiction (in La naissance du jour, for example), the semi-autobiographical
nature of the *Claudines* is apparent even at a superficial level. Like Colette, the young Claudine leaves the provinces for Paris and sets up in the capital with an older man—Willy was Colette’s senior by fourteen years. Like Jules Colette, Claude, the father of Claudine, a scholar, struggles with his writing; however, whereas Jules Colette could not start, Claude cannot finish. Like Colette and Willy, Claudine and her husband, Renaud, become rivals in the course of the third novel in the series: in the former case, rivals in literary matters, and in the latter, rivals in love. Claudine is named for her father, Claude (*Claudine à Paris* 40), as Colette is named for her father, Jules Colette. The autobiographical nature of these novels makes the mother’s absence all the more striking. While Jules Colette died shortly after the appearance of the last *Claudine* novel in 1905, Colette’s mother, Sido, was very much alive when the *Claudines* appeared. She died in 1912. Claude Abastado explains Sido’s absence by suggesting that Colette refused to “travestir” (“misrepresent”) her mother; “elle a voulu, de son enfance, préserver la part la plus pure” (32) (“she wanted, from her childhood, to preserve the purest part”). Marks argues that “it is not too difficult to imagine why Colette excluded from these novels Sido, the person she most loved. Sido was still alive in the opening years of the twentieth century and Colette obviously did not wish to associate her mother with the scandalous antics of her other characters” (Colette [1960] 76).

Like Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, Colette’s *Claudine* series presents a young woman in the process of maturation, in the absence of parental supervision. When we first meet Claudine in *Claudine à l’école* (*Claudine at School*), she is at play in the woods of her hometown, and at school among the daughters of local farmers, grocers, and policemen. Her father, so buried in his own scholarship, so out of touch with cultural and social norms, is unable to see the inappropriateness of the situation—these other girls are of a social status inferior to that of Claudine. While a mother would have known better and would not have allowed her daughter to remain in Montigny, Claudine suggests, Colette has conveniently written her out of the novels.

If I had a Mamma, I know very well that she would not have let me stay here twenty-four hours. But Papa—*he* doesn’t notice anything and doesn’t bother about me. He is entirely wrapped up in his work and it never occurs to him that I might be more suitably brought up in a convent or in some Lycée or other. There’s no danger of my opening his eyes! (*The Complete Claudines* [hereafter CC] 4)
Juliette Rogers argues that “Colette uses the teachers’ (Mlles Sergent and Lanthenay) relations in Claudine à l’école to dismiss the traditional maternal role model from her fictional provincial school; she replaces it,” argues Rogers, “with a different ideal—a lesbian role model” (50).

Just as Willoughby Vinrace sanctions Rachel’s stay in Santa Marina with her aunt and uncle, where he believes she might learn something useful from her aunt Helen, so Claudine’s father unwittingly sanctions Claudine’s love relationship with her young instructor, Aimée Lanthenay, allowing Claudine to use his library for extra English lessons with Aimée, the girl’s pretext for spending more time with the object of her affections (Claudine à l’école 39). Indeed, throughout Claudine à l’école, Claudine invokes her father’s authority as a foil to the objections of her schoolmistresses.

Like Rachel in The Voyage Out, Claudine learns to read in her father’s library. “I’m a book-worm in Papa’s library” (CC 146), asserts Claudine.32 As Marie-Françoise Berthu-Courtivron suggests: “This room appears from the start as the privileged space of all transgressions” (my translation).33 Claudine reads within the parameters set by the father, but at her own will and discretion, “à [sa] guise.” She is a self-confessed book maniac, suffering from “[une] bibliomanie” (Claudine à Paris 101). She reads the books and articles that her father does not have time to read for himself, in his library, which numbers 2,307 volumes (Claudine à l’école 39/CC 28). Unlike Rachel of The Voyage Out, however, Claudine reads inside and outside the canon: “I read, I read, I read. Everything. Anything.”34 When questioned on her reading habits, and on challenging the canon and defying authority, by the shady District School Superintendent, Monsieur Dutertre (who is sleeping with one of her teachers)—he asks: “‘What do you read? Everything you can lay your hands on? Everything in your father’s library?’” (17)35—Claudine responds that she does not read those things that bore her.

Thus, Claudine—an “after-school” reader, to borrow Rogers’ term (58)—reads contemporary texts (many written by friends and acquaintances of Colette and Willy) that she selects herself.36 The focus of a number of them on the sexual maturation of a female protagonist suggests that they have an educational function for Colette’s precocious protagonist. She reads the lightly erotic work of Pierre Louïs, Aphrodite (1896)37—the story of Chrysis, an ambitious courtesan—and La femme et le pantin (1898), experimental novelist Paul Adam’s L’année de Clarisse,38 Léon Daudet’s Suzanne (1897) (Claudine à l’école 64), and La carrière d’André Tourette by Lucien Muhlfeld (Claudine à Paris
100). When the school inspector appears in the classroom in Claudine à l’école, Claudine’s friend Anaïs hides her magazine, Gil Blas illustré, between the pages of her Histoire de France, and Claudine covers up her copy of the “marvelously told animal stories” of Rudyard Kipling (“en voilà un qui connaît les animaux!” [116]). Claudine also reads Michelet’s Histoire de France: “la folle Histoire de France de Michelet, écrite en alexandrins” (Claudine à l’école 130). In Claudine à Paris (Claudine in Paris) she declares Voltaire’s Dictionnaire philosophique boring—she learns only about nasty, shocking things from Voltaire (25–26). A dog-eared copy of Honoré de Balzac, Colette’s favorite, full of crumbs from a snack of another day, provides Claudine consolation on a rainy day (103).39 Claudine’s father does not understand his Molière as his daughter does, according to his daughter. Claudine is not fond of the work of Zola: “Your Zola just doesn’t understand the first thing about the country. I don’t much care for his work in general” (CC 247).40 In Claudine à Paris, Marcel finds a copy of Henri de Régnier’s La double maîtresse (1900), the story of the seduction of the boy Nicolas de Galandot by his cousin Julie, on Claudine’s desk and threatens to tell her father (Claudine à Paris 64).41 Claudine responds with the assertion that her father would not give a damn. (It is unclear whether Colette procured these texts from her father’s library or from elsewhere.) While the men in Colette’s work make no recommendations, all, with the exception of Claudine’s father, express shock and surprise at Claudine’s taste.

The disjunction between father and daughter that we find in the Claudine series is similar to that of The Voyage Out. Like Rachel, Claudine is an only child. Both Willoughby Vinrace and Claudine’s father, Claude, are benevolent figures (Claude perhaps more so than Willoughby); however, both are so engrossed in their work that they have little or no time for their daughters. Claude is an absent-minded man, with a red and white beard, busy at work on an interminable study of an obscure topic, the molluscs (“la malacologie”) and in particular the slugs (“les limaces”) of the Fresnois region of France. “‘You haven’t read [his study],' exclaims Claudine, ‘because it’ll never be finished’” (19).42 So immersed is Claude in his work, he does not have time for paternal affection:

How could you expect that the budding hope of such discoveries would leave a passionate malacologist any paternal sentiment between seven in the morning and nine at night? He’s the best and kindest of men—between two orgies of slugs. (CC 20)
The father’s absence that results from his preoccupation with his work is not, however, perceived as a lack but rather as an advantage for the daughter. The father of Colette’s *Claudine à l’école* opens his library, literally and metaphorically, to the daughter. His love of scholarship fuels Claudine’s imagination, although in a very nonprescriptive fashion. In his silence, in his failure to police his daughter’s reading, he is complicit with his daughter.

Neither Claudine nor Rachel has a mother to fill the space left open by the father; the absence of Claudine’s mother, “an unpleasant woman” according to her father, remains unexplained (207/338). There are mother surrogates in the *Claudines*, as there are in *The Voyage Out*, such as Mélie, a housekeeper and Claudine’s wet nurse from Montigny, and Tante Cœur, Claudine’s aunt, who is raising her grandson Marcel, in *Claudine à Paris*; however, no attempt is made to suggest that these figures fill in for the real mother in any significant way.

In both *The Voyage Out* and the *Claudine* series, then, the father, by initially stepping aside, frees the daughter to develop as a reader and a writer. Just as Willoughby Vinrace accompanies Rachel on the first part of her journey in *The Voyage Out*—they travel to Santa Marina on his ship—so Claude takes his daughter to Paris at the beginning of the second novel in the series, *Claudine à Paris*. The father’s desire to work on his interminable manuscript is the motivating force behind the move.

While Claudine’s reaction to her move from her *pays natal* is initially a negative one—she falls ill and remains in the apartment, and she stops writing—she later embraces the change of scene. The father’s complicity in this change is hinted at in the third novel, when Claudine suggests that her father has unwittingly done the work of destiny. “Papa is a force of Nature; he serves the obscure designs of Fate. Without knowing it, he came here in order that I might meet Renaud; he is going away, having fulfilled his mission of irresponsible father” (*CC 412*). Indeed, having absolved himself of further responsibility, in the latter part of *Claudine à Paris*, the father hands his daughter over to the husband, a father surrogate of sorts, and heads back to the provinces.

The increase in family size—Claudine’s discovery of an aunt, a nephew, and a “cousin Uncle,” Renaud—that occurs in *Claudine à Paris* parallels the expansion of Rachel Vinrace’s familial and social circle, first aboard the *Euphrosyne* and then in Santa Marina in Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*. As in *The Voyage Out*, the dysfunctional family—or in Colette’s words the “complicated family” (Renaud tells Maugis that theirs is “une famille compliquée” [*Claudine à Paris* 115])—predominate.
The *Claudines*, like *The Voyage Out*, are full of unconventional families. The mother of Mlle Sergent, the headmistress of Claudine’s school in Montigny, lurks in the background in *Claudine à l’école*, complicit in her daughter’s irregular activities. Also in *Claudine à l’école*, Claudine’s young teacher Aimée and her sister Luce suffer with their parents. While the former finds refuge in the arms of Mlle Sergent, in *Claudine à Paris* the younger sister Luce allows herself to be exploited and kept by her uncle (a parallel to Claudine’s story). Mélie functions as a surrogate mother in *Claudine à Paris* and the subsequent *Claudines*, forming an odd pair with Claudine’s eccentric father. Marcel and his father Renaud share a strained relationship in *Claudine à Paris*. Marcel’s mother, “la pauvre Ida,” died young, and Marcel feels that his father fails to treat him as a son. In the absence of his father, Marcel is being raised by his grandmother, Aunt Wilhelmine. Annie of *Claudine s’en va* has a grandfather, a grandmother, and a father, but, like Claudine, she has no mother. Annie’s relationship with the paternal Alain is similar to that of Rézi and her husband in *Claudine en ménage* (*Claudine Married*). Alain’s sister Marthe mothers her novelist husband, Léon. Their relationship, according to Annie, is “un ménage contre nature” (*Claudine s’en va* 13). In a reversal of Colette’s real-life relationship with her husband Willy, Annie’s sister-in-law, Marthe, has her husband (who writes novels about adulteresses, suicides, and bankruptcies) writing a fixed number of pages a day so that she can pay her bills and cheat on him (Marthe calls his study the torture chamber [CC 536]). This family disorder sets the stage for Claudine’s unusual alliance with her uncle Renaud in the course of the second novel.

In contrast to Rachel, Claudine is explicit about her desire to find a father substitute. “It was a father like that that I missed and needed. Oh, I don’t want to speak ill of mine; it isn’t his fault if he’s a little peculiar” (CC 285); “Because of that noble, almost lunatic father of mine, I needed a Papa, I needed a friend, I needed a lover” (CC 351). She calls Renaud “Renaud-amant” and “Renaud-papa” (*Claudine en ménage* 65) (“Renaud-the-lover” and “Papa-Renaud” [CC 404]), as well as “cher grand ami paternel” (*Claudine en ménage* 64) (“great fatherly friend” [CC 404]). Unlike her father’s text, his thesis on molluscs, which is interminably in process, unfinished, Renaud’s story is a little more complex, his past a mystery to Claudine (the inaccessibility of Renaud’s life story recalls Terence Hewet’s proposed novel entitled “Silence” in *The Voyage Out* [204]). Renaud is a journalist. He writes about foreign politics for the *Diplomatic Review*, a job Claudine characterizes as “frightfully boring [. . . ] I mean those are awfully serious articles” (CC 285).
Claudine is not sure what she wants from him, liberty or subjugation, a father or a lover: “My liberty oppressed me, my independence exhausted me; what I had been searching for for months—for far longer—I knew, with absolute clarity, was a master. Free women are not women at all” (CC 352–53) Like Max of Colette’s later novel La vagabonde (1914), Renaud is repeatedly portrayed as more feminine than Claudine herself: “il est plus femme que moi” (Claudine en ménage 59) (“But how much more feminine he is than I am” [CC 400]), “d’esprit plus femme que moi” (Claudine en ménage 66) (“much more feminine and house proud than myself” [CC 405]). This unresolved question regarding Renaud’s purpose affects Claudine’s reading and writing. As Claudine embarks on her romantic relationship with Renaud in Claudine en ménage, her reading—which Renaud, like the District School Superintendent of Claudine à l’école and Marcel in Claudine à Paris, questions (Renaud picks up a copy of Lucien Muhlfeld’s La carrière d’André Tourette in Claudine’s room and exclaims “Sapristi. [ . . . ] Quelle drôle d’idée!” [100])—drops off, as does her journal writing. “A big gap in my diary. I have not put down a daily account of my impressions and I am sure I should get them wrong on a general summing-up” (CC 424).49

The love relationship in the Claudines functions as does the relationship of Rachel and Terence and other male figures in The Voyage Out, as a place in which the female protagonist is able to play with or raise questions about her relationship to patriarchy. While in Rachel’s case Terence reproduces the father to some extent (his novel will be entitled “Silence,” suggesting complicity with patriarchy), Renaud presents Claudine with more of a challenge. His sanctioning of Claudine’s lesbian relationship with Rézi and his provision of space for them (an apartment where the two women can meet in secret and in private) can be compared to the father’s provision of the library in which Claudine woos Aimée in Claudine à l’école. In this sense, both father and husband offer Claudine a blank page on which she is free to compose her own story. However, in contrast to the father (at least explicitly) Renaud intervenes in Claudine’s story. Claudine discovers toward the end of Claudine en ménage that Renaud has embarked on an affair with her lover, Rézi, in the very same apartment he has procured for her use. At this point in the narrative Claudine packs her bags, leaves her husband, and returns to her father and her pays natal, Montigny. The father welcomes his daughter back without question. This contrasts sharply with Rachel’s reaction in The Voyage Out. On realizing that the support of the anchoring paternal text has been withdrawn, Rachel
becomes disoriented and falls into a delirium. She reaches out for her father ("Why doesn’t he come? ‘Why doesn’t he come?’") but he is not there.

Both bildungsromane end with a resumption of business as usual. In the last chapter of The Voyage Out, subsequent to Rachel’s death, we return to the hotel lobby in Santa Marina, where life goes on as usual. The failure of Rachel’s death to change the scene suggests that her question has not been answered in any satisfactory fashion, and that it remains as an unresolved query that will resurface in Woolf’s later work. Indeed, as Woolf’s friend and mentor, Lytton Strachey (incidentally called “papa” by Woolf), suggests, Woolf raised “an enormous quantity” of questions in her first novel, many of which remained unanswered: “There seemed such an enormous quantity of things in [The Voyage Out] that I couldn’t help wanting still more,” he wrote to Woolf. “At the end I felt as if it was really only the beginning of an enormous novel, which had been—almost accidentally—cut short by the death of Rachel” (Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey 56).

In the last novel in the Claudine series, Claudine s’en va (literally Claudine Takes Off, translated as Claudine and Annie), Renaud and Claudine are reunited. Renaud has resumed his paternal-facilitator role. He resembles the father, “ce mari aux cheveux blancs” (28) (“that white-haired husband of hers” [CC 527]); he remains in the background, “indulgent à toutes ses folies” (48) (“indulgent to all [his wife’s] crazy ways” [CC 540]). While it appears that order has been restored, there is a suggestion of compromise: “Voilà, nous nous suivons . . . sans nous ressembler” (130) (“We follow each other . . . without being like each other” [CC 592]). They are “married lovers”; theirs is “[un] ménage réellement trop fantaisiste” (9) (they are “too fantastically unconventional a couple” [515]). The introduction of a different narrator, Annie, in this last novel suggests a maturation on the part of the protagonist Claudine and the author Colette. Claudine becomes a character in the novel advising the younger narrator, a younger self, in affairs of the heart. The doubling of Claudine in Annie, and Annie’s choice to escape (“[elle] s’évade”) from her unfaithful and domineering husband, Alain, while Claudine “s’en va,” goes away (the two phrases are balanced, the first at the end of the book, the second at the end of the penultimate chapter), back to Renaud, suggests that Claudine has achieved compromise in her negotiation with patriarchy, where Rachel has been defeated by it.