

# Virginia Woolf's "Escapade" in *Three Guineas*

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**Synopsis:** "Escapade" represents Virginia Woolf's lifelong commitment to the social and political conditions of her time as well as her personal pursuit of fun and adventure. Its ultimate goal consisted not in running away from the reality but in overturning the existing limitations and boundaries based on a unilateral relationship between genres and genders. Accordingly, *Three Guineas* challenges the masculine definition of the genre of war in Britain during the late 1930s. The writer betrays the British Establishment as the abusive tyrant who has long excluded a woman from society, politics and "his" country. Examining Woolf's pacifist beliefs and her idea of Outsider's Society in the text allows us to trace the writer's escapade during the war and where it is headed.

## Introduction

*Three Guineas* (1938) can be read as another case of Virginia Woolf's "escapades." It was her lifelong interest to disengage herself from the ideological confinement which shut you up "because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion" (*TG* 228) as well as from the tradition of hierarchal literary genres which excluded female writers. Written at the time when the news of Nazi's rearmament shook the nation and former Cos were turning to fight for their country, *Three Guineas* aimed at dismantling the beautiful veil of patriotism upholstered by the British government. Woolf pointed out the Establishment's pathetic self-contradiction in criticizing the tyranny of fascism abroad. For Woolf, the British patriarchy was no less the abusive tyrant than Nazism in that the former had long excluded women from such privileges as education and profession because of sex. Even war was long considered a realm inaccessible to women. Always an outsider, Woolf felt perplexed not knowing how she was supposed to feel for a country of which she was never fully granted a part.

This paper focuses on Woolf's escapade during the late 1930s and discusses how the writer managed to overcome the masculine definitions of genres, genders and language.

## 1. Virginia Woolf's "Escapades"

Escapade, or flight, constitutes the keystone of Virginia Woolf's life and works. Many will recall her major accomplishment as a writer was in depicting the fleeing "moments of being." It was her belief that our being was by nature forever elusive, as it continued to waver and flicker, remaining always in flux. Hence, she believed that it was a writer's obligation to not block the flow of being, but depict its dynamism in flight. During her career as a Modernist writer, novelist, essayist, biographer and private playwright, Virginia Woolf published the following three books that she would deliberately refer to as "escapades": *Orlando* (1928), *Flush* (1933) and *Between the Acts* (1941).<sup>1</sup> Both *Orlando* and *Flush* were at once biography and novel; *Between the Acts* was written as an experiment in "a new kind of play" (*D.* iii. 128). Woolf had challenged the established definition of each literary genre by deliberately trespassing different generic boundaries.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf had propounded a question, "why more women wrote novels than poetry?" Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar dutifully responded by explaining the gender inequality in the tradition of literary genres as follows:

. . . while the woman novelist may evade or exorcise her authorship anxieties by writing *about* madwomen and other demonic doubles, it appears that the woman poet must literary *become* a madwoman, enact the diabolical role, and lie melodramatically dead at the crossroads of tradition and genre, society and art. (545; emphasis critics')

Mikhail Bakhtin also pointed out there long existed a hierarchal relationship in literary genres, among which the novel genre by convention was placed at the lowest rung. It should then come as no surprise if a novel was considered the lowest genre, and therefore a "natural" choice for women writers. Besides, without any formal education or training, it was almost impossible for women to write poetry; "all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion" (RO 67). Gilbert and Gubar designate that the literary history of female writers was indeed that of escape; they were locked in a suffocating double bind. If a woman writer wrote at all, she would have to choose "lesser" and "feminine" subjects which became her inferior nature. On the other hand, if she dared to write as good as a man, like Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of New Castle, she would immediately be stigmatized as mad and monstrous. Such an authoress was eventually made into "a bogey to frighten clever girls with" (RO 63).

Intended as "a sequel" to *A Room of One's Own* (D. iv. 6), *Three Guineas* takes up this subject of inequality between the sexes. According to Woolf, the sexual disparities could be observed not only in the literary scenes but also in the field of politics. There were too insignificant a number of professional women at the hub of the nation or in the position to have any say in the war-making decisions. Even with the Representation of the People Act in 1928, which ensured that every woman over 21 had the right to vote on equal terms as men, women remained shut out from politics. Here the same dilemma awaited a woman to enter the world of politics as the one which hindered female writers from writing poetry. Because it was still considered a man's job to run the country, there persisted an unspoken agreement that a woman could not and should not interfere with it. Even if she did interfere, it was more likely that her comments would be ignored as being irrelevant and silly. If she dared disagree with a man, she risked being put away invariably labeled as a "mad" woman.

That many women have been barred from entering politics is a matter of great importance since Virginia Woolf's escapade is often treated in connection with her "apolitical-ness." Her "lack" of interest and inappropriate knowledge of politics have long received a sharp reproach as a mark of the writer's escapism. In 1935, she wrote "politics are best avoided. And in any case my views are likely to be inaccurate and perhaps partial – all politics be damned" (*L.* v.436). However, just because she wrote *all politics be damned* does not necessarily mean she was indifferent to, much less ignorant of politics. In this, I agree with Hermione Lee in relating Woolf's disguised "apolitical-ness" to her relationship with her husband. Leonard Woolf had played a crucial role in the Labour Party on International Affairs, and his contribution to the League of Nations would certainly make him a significant figure in the political scene. As such, he did not share his wife's pacifist ideal. On the contrary, he would refer to pacifism as "either a doctrine of despair or just silliness."<sup>3</sup> Lee notes in her biography that Leonard and Virginia gradually became "intellectually isolated from each other" and consequently came up with "different responses to what was happening" in the world (671). He would often laugh at his wife's "silly" ideas and inadequate knowledge of the politics. In his eyes, Virginia appeared "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the description" (*Downhill All the Way* 27). Such view of his has supplemented, if not inaugurated, the persistent myth about Virginia Woolf being apolitical. Today, that myth has rightly been challenged by many scholars like Jane Marcus and Naomi Black. Black points out that dismissing Woolf as apolitical "seems related to a more general dismissal of women because they are not much involved in the few activities which men are prepared to recognize as politics."<sup>4</sup> Treating Woolf's attitude or view toward war as unimportant and irrelevant simply because it was different from the opinion of the British people, or because politics was *his* and not *her* line, appears unjust, not to mention, exploitative. The widely held view of Woolf as "an elitist dweller in an ivory tower" wrongly sup-

presses many aspects of the writer and confines her into the old patriarchal tradition of the madwoman's attic.

Paradoxically, escapades would become the central theme in the study of Virginia Woolf not only because they were the ultimate goal in the writer's literary career but also because they were often the grounds for censure. Woolf's evasive attitude toward her own life and work as well as her apparently half-hearted involvement in the social and national affairs has received reproachful accusations. Many critics have observed in Woolf, as Mark Hussey notes, "an aloof and exquisite stylist, spinning gossamer fictions about the transparent envelope of consciousness" ("I' Rejected; 'We' Substituted" 243). One of her contemporaries, F. R. Leavis was considerably outspoken in his criticism against Woolfian literature. He mocked her style of writing. Deliberately quoting a line from Woolf's essay, he stated that it carried "no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest, or catastrophe in the accepted style" ("Modern Fiction" *CE*. ii. 106). Reviewing *Between the Acts*, Leavis insisted that the book hardly represented "a case for critical analysis" as it consisted of nothing but "extraordinary vacancy and pointlessness." Such "weakness," as Leavis termed it, was unique to modern artists, and it lacked moral concern and interest in action, thereby giving the effect of "sophisticated aestheticism" (180).

Elaine Showalter is another critic who spoke against Woolf's escapades. In *A Literature of Their Own*, she criticized the writer's "escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness" (289). Showalter is skeptical of Woolf's utopian ideals of androgyny, stating that it appears to be "the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (264). Expropriating Woolf's imagery, Showalter claims that for mid-twentieth century novelists, the Angel in the House that must be done away with is none other than Virginia Woolf herself.<sup>5</sup> Further, Showalter condemns the tone Woolf uses in *A Room of One's Own* for the deceitful techniques, impersonality and complete whim. Teasingly,

slyly and elusively, Woolf is merely “playing” with her audience, and thus Showalter discredits Woolf’s serious intentions (283). Showalter warns readers that we should not confuse “flight” with “liberation.” Woolf’s androgyny is, according to Showalter, a “symbol of psychic withdrawal, an escape from the demands of other people” (286).

In this manner, Woolf’s escapades have long been reprimanded as a mark of the writer’s elitism, weakness and even insensitivity to other people’s needs. However, just as the word “escapade” suggests a duplicitous process (getting oneself *out* of a confined space and at the same time trying to get oneself *into* the world beyond), so Woolf’s escapades are comprised of contradicting forces: the centrifugal (or extroverted) and the centripetal (or introverted). On the one hand, one tries to liberate oneself from the network of relations by placing one’s body away from the center, while on the other, one ventures to bring forth a revolution or change in the administration of the network, at times, risking one’s own life by getting extremely close to the center. In *Three Guineas*, she wrote “To be passive is to be active; those also serve who remain outside” (*TG* 245). Far from yielding to “passive acquiescence” (*D.* v. 329), her escapades aimed at overturning the unequivocal relationship between genres and genders. That the working titles for *Three Guineas* were “Opening the Door” and “A Knock on the Door,” only underscores the critical message in the text.

## 2. Outsider’s Society

Especially during the war, Woolf was harshly criticized, and at times ridiculed, for her lack of knowledge concerning the national and international affairs. The public disregarded her books because they appeared completely devoid of any political significance; to them, Woolf’s work was merely a tasteless joke in the midst of crises. However, as we shall see, it would be more appropriate to state that *Three Guineas* received the severest of such rebukes of escapism and insensitivity be-

cause it went *against the grain* with the general sentiment at the time of its publication. It specifically declared the writer's position as a pacifist, whose idea was then considered to be the height of madness. Woolf was rebuked for her failure to confront the suffering of the people, and for not contributing to the welfare of the future generation. All the while, her personal writings as well as her essays and novels offer evidence to the contrary. There we find a woman deeply concerned and struggling to somehow prevent the war. Being married to a Jew, the outcome of the war was necessarily a life-and-death matter for her.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, the relationship between Virginia Woolf and war appears more problematic for the prevalence of escapades in her works. In particular, her self-asserted position of pacifism during the Second World War met with sharp reprimands, particularly from socialist critics, as a sign of bourgeois aloofness. Dimitri Mirsky, for one, mocked her argument in *Three Guineas* that education would eventually bring forth a more enlightened society with no wars. He joked about Woolf's idea of having "one's own room" in which one can escape from the outer world and its racket" (385). Mirsky believed that Woolf was far from being a democrat; in fact, he stated that her sufferings and concerns were those of "the parasitic cream of the bourgeoisie" (386).

*Three Guineas* was disregarded as incoherent babblings of "the ailing maiden queen of the snobbish Bloomsbury Group" (Black, xlvii). *Time and Tide* (25 June 1938) illustrated the divided responses to the book:

On the one hand there is Mrs. Woolf's position in literature: not to praise her work would be a solecism no reviewer could possibly afford to make. On the other hand there is her theme, which is not merely disturbing to nine out of ten reviewers but revolting. (rpt. in Lee 698).

A *Scrutiny* critic, Q. D. Leavis sharply condemned Woolf for her elitism,

which ignored the real condition of women of the working class, referring to the book as “silly and ill-formed” and “highly undesirable” (204). She even called the writer “a social parasite” (208). A professional teacher of literature, Q. D. Leavis found Woolf’s work to be a definite mark of the latter’s obnoxious class-conscious mentality based on pathetic bourgeois indulgence. Q. D. Leavis strongly stated that *Three Guineas* consisted of nothing but “irresponsible” babblings by one of the “five-hundred-a-year-by-right-of-birth-as-daughters-of-the-ruling-classes” women (211).

It is widely known that Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury members had claimed themselves to be conscientious objectors during the Great War. Then, around Cambridge and Bloomsbury, intellectuals and artists gathered in objection to the war: Virginia Woolf, Lowes Dickinson, the Stracheys, Keynes, Duncan Grant, the Huxleys, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Middleton Murry, Kathleen Mansfield, the Lawrences and the Hon. Bertrand Russell. The Bloomsbury, it is said, was “reunited” in the face of their common peril; they all “reacted against the chauvinism and the hysteria of the home front” (Bell II.30). It is not difficult to imagine that their disengagement appeared to the public as a sign of bourgeois snobbishness. Their stance was, in Martin Ceadel’s words, that of “elitist quasi-pacifism” in the sense that most of them “believed that their entitlement to be recognized as C. O.s depended on their higher personal obligation, as creative artists, to Beauty and Truth.”<sup>7</sup> The Bloomsbury’s elitism turned the public against them; it was considered even more revolting than their former scandalous liaisons and controversial exhibitions.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1930s, however, it was becoming more and more difficult and even dangerous to remain uninvolved, and the former Bloomsbury were also leaving to serve the cause. Although there had already been a fierce opposition against pacifism during the First World War, non-involvement during the late 1930s was becoming almost impossible. Pacifism in its purest form of rejecting any kind of war gradually be-



came associated with "anarchism" (Ceadel 170). There was inexorable pressure against pacifism. *The Left Review* in June 1937 insisted as follows: "It is impossible any longer to take no side . . . the equivocal attitude, the Ivory Tower, the paradoxical, the ironic detachment, will no longer do" (qtd. in Lee 676). At the 1935 Labour Party conference, Woolf witnessed the pacifist position brutally battered. After she listened to the pacifist George Lansbury being attacked, she recorded that she was more than ever convinced that "non-resistance . . . should be our view" (*D.* iv. 345–6). Apparently, nothing dented Virginia Woolf's belief in pacifism. Nevertheless, much to her dismay, it was not long before she saw, using Lee's expression, a "split" in the Bloomsbury bondage (678). Julian Bell enlisted and was killed in the Spanish Civil War. Other former members, including Leonard Woolf and Kingsley Martin, strongly denounced pacifism as unthinkable for a responsible citizen and emphasized the need for rearmament; Clive Bell, T. S. Eliot and Saxon Sydney-Turner lamented over the end of the civilization. Only Aldous Huxley remained a pure "pacifist" to the end. He was convinced that "all war was always wrong" (Ceadel 3). He believed as follows:

. . . the pacifist does not dream of saying that he will have nothing to do with evil. His policy is to be a realist and to deal with evil in the only way that is effective. To deal with it by means of more evil is demonstrably unpractical. ("Notes on the Way" 208)

Virginia Woolf shared Huxley's belief. Only remaining outside, she believed, would allow her to confront with the reality of war.

Meaningfully, the charges against pacifists were in most cases gender-related. Not only was political non-involvement regarded as elitist, bourgeois escapism, it was regarded as effeminate or sissy, particularly when observed in a man. The works by pacifist writers, such as Beverley Nichols, were often condemned for being irrational and emotional, which characteristics are often used in association with feminin-

ity. The following review by the *Spectator* on Nichols' *Cry Havoc!* (1933) allows us to see the significant parallelism between the public response to pacifism and that to feminism:

He often uses *the language of hysteria*; almost every sentence is in implied italics, and might be appropriately ended by a mark of exclamation. This is not so much a book as a scream. . . . (qtd. in Ceadel 140; emphasis mine)

In associating the book with neurosis, allegedly considered a “female illness,” we can see how pacifism in a man was articulated in a strong allusion to his gender/sexual deviation. By thus deliberately designating the pacifist tendency as a mark of effeminacy, the English language effectively manipulated the people’s anxiety over sexual identity and compelled them to make what was deduced to be a “natural” choice. Surely, we recall that a similar scheme had long been in effect to suppress strong, independent women. “Masculinity” in women was considered to be perverse, and thus it was used as a discursive tool to repress New Women. Now, men were feeling threatened that they would be regarded perverts if they did not partake in the manly cause. Showalter, in *The Female Malady*, points out that the Great War witnessed a similar kind of “a crisis of masculinity and a trial of the Victorian masculine ideal” (171). Shell-shocked soldiers were often treated as cowards, and were labeled as the opposite sex. In this way, during the war, the cross-bordering of genders was not only a sign of rebellious spirit, but was also used as a means of punishment. As a result, more and more people would come to take heed to conform to the specified category within their own gender.

For Virginia Woolf, remaining aloof during the war did not necessarily mean non-involvement. By designating war as a “preposterous masculine fiction” (*L.* ii. 76), she refused to become assimilated. Instead, Woolf disclosed yet another case of confinement in which a woman had

been treated as an outsider. War was generally associated with a man's battle for honor and it was his prerogative to fight in the war. Woolf stated as follows: "to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. . . . [T]here is for you [men] some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which we [women] have never felt or enjoyed" (*TG* 120–1). During wartimes, however, British society was met with the necessity of recruiting more women to join the field of battle. If not physically participating in the war, they were expected to keep the domestic production high and to support the soldiers with munitions, foods, clothing and other necessities. The 1930s saw a dramatic expansion of female employment, mainly to fill in for the male workers who had joined the armed forces. It is recorded that women accounted for "four out of five new workers" in the wartime labor market.<sup>9</sup>

Pointing to the fact that women have long been excluded from the genre of war regardless of their will, Woolf does not hesitate to turn down the request to take any part in it. In short, *Three Guineas* is about a woman's refusal to invest her time and money in the cause she does not believe in. After all, she explains, "it is difficult to judge what we do not share" (*TG* 120–1). It is written in an epistolary style; a woman writing in response to a series of letters sent by a barrister, a man, organizing a society for the preservation of peace. The man has written to her for donation in the interest of "protecting culture and intellectual liberty" (*TG* 210). At its request, the female narrator-character decides to donate three guineas, but not to the addressee's society. She instead decides to found a society of her own, and to use each guinea for rebuilding a women's college and founding an organization for women in professions. By educating more women and providing more opportunities for them to go out into the world, she believes she can contribute to the same cause:

*Different* we are, as facts have proved, both in sex and in education. And it is from that *difference*, as we have already said, that our

help can come, if help we can, to protect liberty, to prevent war.  
(*TG* 229; emphasis mine)

Woolf's proposition of founding the Outsiders' Society, then, consists in taking advantage of her position as an outsider, being confined and excluded from all that have been open to men: tradition, education, profession and war. Despite such limitations:

. . . the Society of Outsiders has the same ends as your society [mainly composed of men of power]-freedom, equality, peace; but . . . it seeks to achieve them by the means that a *different* sex, a *different* tradition, a *different* education, and the *different* values which result from those *differences* have placed within our reach.  
(*TG* 239; emphasis mine)

Woolf's proposition effectively confirmed how private, lop-sided and exclusive the English society and its opinion had become, debarring all those who have different sex, tradition, education and values. In this aspect, the British society was no better than the Fascist state.

Although *Three Guineas* sold well particularly in North America, where the feminist movement was becoming active and the people found the feminist message in it to be illuminating, a tendency of classifying the author as an apolitical aesthete continued in England until as late as the end of the twentieth century. It is interesting to observe that there still remains to this day "a large gap" between the receptions and interpretations of Woolf's political significance in her own country and abroad, especially the United States, where she has been apotheosized into a political icon for feminists. This "gap" in the text's receptions could perhaps be attributed to the fact that Woolf originally sought to "attack Hitler in England" (*D.* v. 142). She was challenging the British Establishment while the others were fighting the enemies abroad. Indeed, Woolf clearly expressed that her intention was to "fight intellectu-

ally . . . [the] English tyranny" (Bell II. 258–9).

Therefore, it is important that we understand Virginia Woolf's pacifism on two different levels. It is true that she supported Huxley's non-violent, against-all-war stance during the Second World War. At the same time, I must point out that the "outsiderism," which she equated with pacifism, had been her lifelong goal long before the rise of Hitler. Pacifism was, in a way, a natural alternative to an Outsider's Society for Woolf. She was a pacifist, not because it was considered "feminine" alternative to the "masculine" war, but because she defied such genre/gender classifications. Throughout her life, she stood unflinchingly loyal to her original plan of never yielding to hierarchal differences. Instead, she deliberately produced works that cross-bordered different genres and genders, refusing to be stamped as a specific category.

### 3. Woman and War

Another aspect of war as a masculine genre could be found in the fact that war generally became an aggressive exploiter of female body. Since the time of Homer, as Hussey observes, the "cultural notions of manhood and masculinity" have always been in association with the "social institution of war, the ideals of valor and honor" ("Living in a War Zone" 2). In reality, however, historical data inform us that many women have been involved, voluntarily or not, in the national and international crises. While war has long been considered to be a man's realm, women are also forced to become involved usually by becoming victims. Ill treatment of women, including rape and hard labor, frequently take place during war. There underlies an unquestionable causality between war and sexual exploitation when the Pankhursts described the German invasion of Belgium in 1914 as the "sexual outrage (the rape of Belgium<sup>10</sup>)." Physically as well as metaphorically, men are the ones who act as the aggressor, and women are the exploited. The mortification the English men must suffer was nothing less than "what

[their] mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women” (*TG* 228). Woolf continued as follows:

Now you [men] are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion. It is not a photograph that you look upon any longer; . . . The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England, or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain is now apparent to you. (*TG* 228)

If Hitler was threatening the nation with enforced submission and exploitation of freedom, women had already gone through all that under the English patriarchy.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf inserts an episode of such violence of war in an otherwise peaceful atmosphere of a London suburb. Isa picks up the *Times* and reads:

‘A horse with a green tail . . .’ which was fantastic. Next, ‘The guard at Whitehall . . .’ which was romantic, and then, building word upon word, she read: ‘The troopers told her the horse had a green tail; but she found it was just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face . . .’ (*BA* 15)

Here Woolf was referring to the actual case of rape reported to have occurred on 27 April 1938. Unfortunately, this incident had a further consequence: the girl got pregnant. A renowned gynecologist Aleck Bourne had performed the abortion. Although abortion was then illegal, the doctor was acquitted on grounds that he had saved the mother’s life by relieving her of the disastrous pregnancy. The problem here regarding a

woman's body is graver than one would assume from the objective tone used in the passage above, particularly when we take into account that "three guineas," chosen for the title of Woolf's anti-war book, was actually the amount of money required for an abortion at the time (Lee 330–1). Patricia Ondek Laurence's reading is therefore well-supported when she wrote that the "domestic rape reported in the newspaper serves as counterpoint of the political rape of lands by Hitler" (241).

The title *Three Guineas* carries yet another implication that the exploitation takes place explicitly of money. In the text, Woolf compares the money spent on education between sons and daughters. Referring to Arthur's Education Fund in Thackeray's *Pendennis*, she gives such cases as where more household money was spent on sons than on daughters. Many a daughter of educated men was forced to put up with little, so that their brothers could receive higher education. In the case of Mary Kingsley (1862–1900), a travel writer, for an example, it is recorded that the sum of 2000 pounds was spend on her brother alone, whereas only 20 or 30 on Mary. Woolf explained in "Professions for Women" that writing was the "cheapest" profession, requiring only a pen and writing paper, and so it was much easier for a woman to take up writing than other professions. Likewise, novel must have been the "cheapest" genre needing no education, which partly explains why there were more female novelists than poetesses. Woolf's escapade was aimed at escaping from such confinement, which kept women away from the privileges and opportunities conferred only on men.

Thus, for Woolf, "sexism at home and fascism abroad were the same thing" (Black xxviii). Consequently, the central purpose of *Three Guineas* lies in laying out the parallelism between "the political processes of fascism" abroad and "the political exclusions of petty patriarchalism" at home. It was openly meant as a questioning of the masculine domains of education, profession and above all, war-making. Michèle Barrett keenly observes that the book "has now found its time" when "equation between masculinism and war" does not appear so bizarre a topic as it

did back then (ix). At the time of publication, the book was met with hostile audience. It was even rejected by her own circle of friends. For Quentin Bell, the “failure” of the book seemed to lie in the writer’s “attempt to involve a discussion of women’s rights with the far more agitating and immediate questions of . . . Fascism and war.” In his view, the “connection” between the two questions appeared “wholly inadequate” (Bell II.205).

Consequently, although Woolf would refer to *Three Guineas* as her “war book” (*D.* iv. 361), she was all the while criticized for not dealing with the terrible reality of war, or at least *not properly*. The key here is not properly. Because she did not treat war in a way that the majority of the public expected her to, that is, in favor of the cause of the protection of the British “culture and intellectual liberty,” the book was brushed off as being insignificant, inappropriate and “wholly inadequate.” Today, notwithstanding the adverse reaction of Woolf’s contemporaries, more and more people have come to recognize the political significance of the text. Many agree that “the battle for women’s suffrage, the battle for modern art, and the battle in the trenches” are all “inextricably intertwined.”<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Woolf had spent several years collecting material relevant to the problem of war and woman also supports our view that the writer was far from unconcerned. As Barrett notes, the writer’s scrapbooks are extremely interesting to look at because they provide not only the materiality of the writer’s arguments but “the extraordinary connection that she made between items, by simple juxtaposition.” In general, two cuttings have been arranged side by side, and the juxtaposition of what may appear to be irrelevant articles effectively “make[s] a point.” Barrett summarizes as follows: “There is a dry and ironic spirit at work in these arrangements, as well as a woman angered by a frightening increase in dictatorship.”<sup>14</sup> For instance, on one side of the page there appears an article by the British War Committee considering a new “walking out” uniform for soldiers, partly for the purpose of successful recruit-



ing by improving the smartness in appearance and bearing; in contrast, the other article treats a more "serious" subject, focusing on the difficult life and condition of the German women under the Nazi regime. In fact, it seems to have been the common pattern that "men's desire for smart and hierarchically differentiated dress is put alongside a debate of a major issue for women's independence" (Barrett appendix, *TG* 346). According to Laurence, such peculiar juxtaposition of public and private accounts was Woolf's method of bringing about a dialogue between men's and women's points of view. This is especially true when we recall that *Three Guineas* takes the style of a letter addressed from a woman to a man.

Hence, *Three Guineas* is as much a "feminist" text as it is a "pacifist" pamphlet. Naomi Black insists that it must not be read "as just a war book or merely a polemical pamphlet. Instead we must relate it to its author's lifelong contacts with feminists and feminist organizations, her over-arching feminist beliefs and her other explicitly feminist writing" (xxxix). Although I am somewhat reluctant to call the book "feminist," given the writer's rejection of the term as being "an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete" (*TG* 227), I agree that the book has played a vital role in liberating women from their secluded attic room and in restoring her as the rightful member of the society. At the same time, although this is extremely ironical, we understand that its message is "feminist" precisely because the book and its author were treated with contemptuous disdain.

Many a door had been closed upon *Three Guineas* and its author. However, the narrator-character in the book ends not by pleading to be let in, but by choosing, of her own will, to remain outside; in other words, to stay detached from the masculine genre of war. Woolf thus concludes that "we can best help you prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods" (*TG* 272). Subsequently, pacifism was Woolf's means

of an escapade, which allowed her to subvert the genre of war as well as to overthrow the limitations imposed upon her gender.

## Conclusion

“What does ‘our country’ mean to me an outsider?” (*TG* 233). This often quoted passage from *Three Guineas* effectually sums up Woolf’s escapades. It shows Woolf’s recognition of herself as an outsider as well as her determination to detach herself from such categories as “our country,” which necessarily implies the presence of those not included “because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion.” Consequently, *Three Guineas* represents Woolf’s escapades on different levels. For one thing, it was meant to be a genre revolution; she meant to intervene with what was supposed to be a masculine genre of politics, and more specifically of war. She had tried to free herself from the limitation imposed upon her because of sex. Then, it was also a means to expose and to rid of the sexual inequality which had long kept women from venturing into certain literary genres and which had unduly deprived them of opportunities to receive education and to have a broader choice of professions. Finally, it was a way to explicate her pacifist position as a sign not of withdrawal but of commitment. Being an outsider, pacifism represents Woolf’s determination of taking neither side but defying the differences between the supposedly opposite counterparts. In Woolf’s view, the difference between the seemingly incompatible can actually be subtle; hence, the distinctions between the fascist dictators abroad and the tyrannical fathers at home are debunked to be criticized.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 1927, Woolf wrote *Orlando* based on “the need of an escapade” (*D.* iii).

131) following her serious experimental novel, *To the Lighthouse*. Later in 1932, after finishing up the lyrical piece, *The Waves*, *Flush* became the source of her escapade, written as a mere "freak" (*D.* iv. 123), "only a joke – done by way of a lark" (*L.* v. 177). *Between the Acts*, a pageant-novel, was written as a stress-reliever, a "relief" (*D.* v. 171), after the pressure of finishing the life of Roger Fry.

<sup>2</sup> Although Bakhtin makes no reference to problem of gender, he discusses in "Epic and Novel" (1941) the existence of the hierarchy among the literary genres. His definition of the novel genre to transcend the distinctions among various literary genres closely resembles Woolf's idea of a "new" novel in "The Narrow Bridge of Art" as a "cannibal" devouring so many genres.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Woolf, *The League of Abyssinia* (London: Hogarth, 1936) 29, qtd. in Huxley, "Notes on the Way," rpt. in *The Hidden Huxley* 208.

<sup>4</sup> Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 14 (Spring 1980): 5–6, qtd. in Hussey "Living in a War Zone," *Virginia Woolf and War* 6.

<sup>5</sup> In a lecture before the Women's Service League in 1931, Woolf stated that the first thing that a female writer must do was to kill the Angel in the House, the Victorian ideal of womanhood. *Three Guineas* was written based on this manuscript, revised and posthumously published as "Professions for Women."

<sup>6</sup> On the "Arrest List" or "Black List" of the Gestapo on invading Great Britain were the names of the Woolfs, alongside other friends and acquaintances.

<sup>7</sup> Ceadel 46, 44. Ceadel distinguished the two essentially different positions: between "the belief that all war is *always wrong* and should never be resorted to, whatever the consequences of abstaining from fighting" and "assumption that war, though *sometimes necessary*, is always an irrational inhuman way to solve disputes, and that its prevention should always be an over-riding political priority" (3; author's emphasis). He refers to the former as "pacifism," and the latter "pacificism."

<sup>8</sup> According to J.B. Bullen, Roger Fry's Post Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries (1910–11) was considered "a threat not just to artistic technique. . . but [it] seemed to undermine the very ontology which had formed the basis of English art" (1). Moreover, the paintings of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cezanne and Matisse were treated "like a poisonous foreign disease, or invasion, infecting the manhood of the English and the purity of their women" (Lee 287).

<sup>9</sup> Howlett 288. It is also recorded that despite the increasing opportunities for female workers, their average earnings amounted to only half the average male earnings. Significantly, participation rate of women in the labor industry did not continue into the postwar years. They were expected to withdraw from the workforce to make way for men returned from the war.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (Lon-

don: SPCK, 1978) 91, qtd. in Usui 158–9.

<sup>11</sup> For details on the rape case, see Gillian Beer's introduction to *Between the Acts* (Penguin) xxi–vii.

<sup>12</sup> In "Notes and References" by the author, *Three Guineas*, 273.

<sup>13</sup> James Longenbach, *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation* (1989), qtd. in Hussey, "Living in a War Zone," 3.

<sup>14</sup> Barrett, "Appendix," *Three Guineas* (Penguin) 335. We can view a part of Woolf's scrapbooks in the appendix, 335–55.

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