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More Than A Room and Three Guineas: Understanding Virginia Woolf's Social Thought

By Brigitte Bechtold¹

To feminist social thinkers and activists, Virginia Woolf's writings offer early and rich insight into the socioeconomic processes of occupational segregation, wage discrimination, imposition of separate spheres, social exclusion and trickle-down patriarchy. Her implied views on distributive justice permeate her novels and diaries, and show remarkable insight into recent work by feminists on female tasks related to provisioning, and also to a long tradition of work specifically dealing with considerations of social welfare and a critique of utilitarianism. In shaping her views, Woolf often found herself dealing with her immediate personal surroundings, sometimes in an overt manner and at other times influenced by these surroundings in a rather more subconscious manner. As they took shape, her socioeconomic ideas were interwoven with the fiction of the novels and the stuff of essays. Moreover, the voluminous diaries of Virginia Woolf provide many reflections on servants, friends, acquaintances and family members that provided role models for the more formal discussions of socioeconomic theories. More importantly, as I demonstrate in this paper, the fiction and diaries help readers locate in Woolf's socioeconomic thought both a decidedly feminist theory of value, and an underlying philosophy of social justice that transcends gender boundaries.

This paper begins with a brief survey the basic arguments of interest to feminist social thinkers and activists that are found explicitly in *Room of One's Own* (1929), *Three Guineas* (1938) and other essays. It then turns to insights provided by Woolf's fiction, which helps us understand, illustrate and generalize the themes of the essays. The following part outlines the usefulness of Woolf's diaries, which both provide a rich database of personal acquaintances and experiences that have become the content of her thinking. The diaries are helpful in developing our understanding that Woolf's socioeconomic thought does not merely attack male patriarchy in favor of gender equality. They contain important examples showing that Woolf despised social elitism among women as among men, and that some of the role models for women in her essays and novels were actually played by men in her life, notably young men who became emotionally and physically damaged in war. Moreover, in her diaries, which span the period 1915-1941 (Bell 1997), Woolf demonstrates adherence to a theory of value rooted in provisioning, which differs from classical, neoclassical and Marxist theories. I conclude in the final section that we can only gain a thorough understanding of the importance of Virginia Woolf's social thought if our study incorporates her fiction and diaries.

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Ten Years and Two Treatises

In addition to numerous essays², Virginia Woolf authored two well-known book-length works that became known as sources for her socioeconomic thought. These are *Three Guineas* (1938) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The main themes elaborated on in these two works also permeate the settings of several of her novels, in particular *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931). As we begin to understand Woolf's concern with the valuation of paid and unpaid work done by women in a patriarchal society, we also gain understanding of the role of the soldier, paid a fairly low wage to fight other people's wars, in a patriarchal society.

Although *Three Guineas* follows *Room of One's Own* chronologically and is more developed in many ways, taking its ideas to greater societal implications, Woolf takes a major step in *Room* that can be seen as a continuation of a theme pursued in *Three Guineas*. Indeed, in the chronologically earlier work, she moves beyond the valuation of unpaid labor and into the realm of "potential" labor. In *Three Guineas*, the focus is more on the valuation of work done by women versus women's paid work. Look, for example at the well known quote from *Three Guineas*: "The work of an archbishop is worth £15,000 to the state ... but wives and mothers and daughters who work all day and every day, without whose work the state would collapse ... are paid nothing whatsoever..." (Woolf 1938:54). Woolf's work suggests that more is necessary than the mere appreciation of work done, and we thus find that she concerns herself with issues similar to those occupying the minds of feminist economists today. I propose, accordingly, that *Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are best read side by side rather than sequentially, because the more recent work is not a mere continuation and improvement upon the earlier work. In considering people's potential work and not merely the work they actually perform, *Room of One's Own* goes beyond *Three Guineas* and invites more radical interpretations for distributive social justice. Let us consider in some detail the specific arguments made in the two essays, and draw inferences only to the extent allowed by the essays themselves and by reference to social philosophies preceding Woolf's.

A Room of One's Own

This work is essentially a lengthy essay, which is "based upon two papers read to the Arts Society at Newnham and at Girton in October 1928" (Woolf 1929:1). Woolf explains that she was requested to deliver a lecture on "women and fiction." The two papers resulting from the request were combined, and the institutions renamed "Oxbridge," a transparent contraction of the names Oxford and Cambridge. Each chapter brings home one particular point. To begin with: is the assignment for the lecture one where we are asked to deal with (1) women who write fiction, (2) women and what they are like in general, or (3) the way women are portrayed in fiction (Woolf 1929:3)? The first point is that all three of these ways of looking at the subject are interrelated. The second is that the interesting question to address is this one: what kind of environment and situation are the necessary conditions for a woman to be able to write fiction, or stated differently, what are the economics of "women writing fiction?"

² See Lewis (1975) for an overview.

The first chapter of *Room* deals with trespassing. A woman trespassing on the grass of Oxbridge will be shooed away by a beadle.³ Only Fellows and Scholars are allowed on the grass.⁴ Yet, Oxbridge has been financed with money that comes from women as well as from men. Still, their money is not placed to use for them. In *Guineas*, Woolf develops this idea further and describes “Arthur’s Education Fund,” the AEF, to which every one must contribute, including the female siblings. The AEF provided not only an education, but also several years worth of spendable income beyond college, to get the young men started in life.

The money issue leads Woolf to compare meals eaten in male societies and those eaten in female societies: sumptuousness vs. Drabness.⁵ Chapter 2 delves further into the question “why are women poor?” which leads into the attitudes and opinions of men relative to women. The views of the “professors” or “patriarchs” are described. In Woolf’s view, these terms are synonymous for university professors: they were all male in her time and all considered women deficient in some way. They also represented power, money and influence. It’s a chapter filled with great sentences one wishes to quote, but let me get to the essence quicker than Woolf does.

The essential point is that a woman, in order to be able to write fiction, needs an allowance of at least £500 a year as well as a room of her own, i.e., the freedom of being unencumbered by demanding family members. This is something few women in the world possess, even today. Moreover, Woolf also suggests that many a poem signed by the name “Anonymous” was often written by a woman. In a well-known metaphor, Woolf describes what would have been the likely scenario if Shakespeare were to have had a sister, as talented as himself. Upon the completion of a great work, she might have tried to get a theater producer interested in having it performed. Alas, during this endeavor, she would very likely have been raped in the alley behind the theater, would have become pregnant, abandoned, and be condemned to a life of destitution.

The conclusion to be drawn from *Room of One’s Own* is that people, women in particular, are endowed with all kinds of potential, some of which will be expressed and much never to be expressed. Yet, those whose potential cannot be expressed are just as valuable socially or maybe more so than the fortunate ones. Hence, social justice requires that people should be valued for their potential, be it realized or not, in addition to being valued (mainly via wages) for work they have actually performed.

Woolf’s intense aversion to war fits in with her views of people’s unrealized potential. Several of her novels are centered around the injustices and deaths (unrealized potentials) caused by it. Here, Woolf shows herself to espouse views similar to the young Keynes, who brought this aversion and fear of a continuation of the Great War to the talks at Versailles. Although Keynes certainly never came to favor war, his later opposition has been characterized as equivocating (Lee 1997:340), while Woolf remained unequivocally true to her original views and protesting fascism and war till the end.

³ A name used to designate a low-level parish officer, who is charged with the task of maintaining order in the Church of England.

⁴ It becomes immediately clear that the grass is metaphorical for hallowed ground, not to be used for common purposes, as that surrounding a church, hence the choice of the term beadle.

⁵ To this middle-class American college professor who eats on the run, even the drab meal described by Woolf seems rather sumptuous, though exhibiting a preference for low-fiber foods.

While one of the possible implications of the valuation of labor by its potential may be that wages should be the same for every one and that society should become egalitarian and, therefore also diversified, Woolf did not go this far. Lee (1997: 556, 566) comments in detail on the contradictions in Woolf's character, which at various times expressed cruelty and compassion, condescension and open mindedness. Her extremely prejudiced views of the disabled and members of nonwhite populations strengthen this conclusion.

As a thinker violently opposed to totalitarianism Virginia Woolf would, at least in an intellectual sense, be driven to reflect on the opposite side of the spectrum from totalitarianism, i.e., egalitarianism. Whenever Woolf's most recent biographer, Hermione Lee, finds herself engaged in a conversation about her subject, she points out that she is inevitably asked one or several of the same four questions, one of which is "Wasn't she the most terrible snob?" (Lee 1997:3).⁶ Even if the answer to this question is affirmative, this does not provide an entirely adequate answer to our own query. While Woolf was obviously a member of a privileged social class, "... 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..." (Lee 1997:51), she was an outsider to that class in more ways than one. Despite the literary background of her family, she herself did not attend any schools, belonged to no public institution, rarely appeared in front of an audience and had bouts with mental illness (Lee 1997:16).

For Woolf's social theories to be of value to present day scholars and activists, it does not really matter whether she herself made the inference from the valuation of human potential over work performed to an egalitarian society. The inference is there for readers to make in a very non-egalitarian society at the turn of the millennium. Woolf's work has an effect that is similar to that of Mencius (372-289 BCE), Plato (428-348 BCE), Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and, more recently, Shakespeare and Marx.⁷ Their work is always ready for interpretations appropriate to the society the reader lives in. Thus, Mencius' views have been described as early socialist, while Plato's description of the scene in the cave could be viewed as foretelling the effect of motion pictures. Lee (1997:3) writes that "... like Shakespeare, she is a writer who lends herself to infinitely various interpretations. In all, the reality that Woolf's work spawns debates about what she did or did not imply shows that she gets her readers to think beyond the simple text and to make inferences from that text. In Lee's words (1997:4), "... the full, immense extent of her life's work has only revealed itself gradually."

Three Guineas

Virginia Woolf elaborates on her views about the valuation of women's labor in a second "economics" book, *Three Guineas* (1938), a work that supposedly resulted from three separate requests for financial support made to her. The first was for a women's

⁶ The other three inevitable questions relate to Woolf's madness, sexual abuse as a child, and whether or not Leonard Woolf was a good husband.

⁷ The theories of Plato and Aristotle are easily accessible in their respective works *The Republic* and *Politics*. Mencius' writings about social justice are quoted in de Bary et al. (1960: 100-1 and 197 and their meaning within the history of ideas related to social justice is evaluated in Bechtold (1996: 57-58).

college building fund, the second for a society providing employment for professional women, and the third from a society to prevent war.

The structure of *Three Guineas* is similar to *Room of One's Own*. It starts with the author pondering for two years over a letter that needs answering. The question implied by the letter is: "How, in your opinion, are we to prevent war?" (Woolf 1938:3) She plans to attempt to answer, knowing full well it is an attempt "doomed to failure," since "when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?" Both she and the letter writer are members of the educated class and both earn a living (Woolf 1938:5). Thus, superficially they look the same. Yet, there are immense differences. Once again, Woolf resorts to "stand-ins" such as the characters from biographies of Mary Kingsley and others, and proceeds from there to craft her arguments.

First, much more money is spent on men's than on women's education. She alludes to the term "Arthur's education fund" or AEF, to which Arthur's sisters contributed as well. Men have been educated at universities for 600; women for 60 years (Woolf 1938:17). Yet, that sex which has had the least money spent for its education, has been the most peaceful: "scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle," (p. 6) while the majority of men today again favor war (Woolf 1938:8), in spite of being educated. This leads to the question "what sort of education will teach the young to hate war?" (p. 22, emphasis added). Unfortunately (Woolf 1938: 29), education of the young has focused on teaching them how to use rather than how to abhor the use of force. Since all the money has been going primarily to men's colleges, maybe it's time to support women's colleges, but only if they are rebuilt versions of men's colleges (Woolf 1938:39), i.e. college education must be altered. This alteration is where Woolf declares her first guinea will be spent.

The second guinea supposedly will go to educate the daughters (of educated men) and to help them earn a living (Woolf 1938:84).⁸ In this way, they may be endowed with "an independent and disinterested influence with which to prevent war" (Woolf 1938:84).

Finally, the third guinea must go to protect culture and intellectual liberty (Woolf 1938:100), but Woolf cautions that we must not go so far as to join their society. There is a link between culture and intellectual liberty on the one hand and the deaths and ruins of war on the other (Woolf 1938:97). How to prevent war? Somehow the right of all people must be asserted, men and women alike, and justice and liberty achieved. This again invites consideration of a more egalitarian society, similar to the conclusion just drawn from *Room of One's Own*.

Insights from Woolf's Fiction and Diaries

While the two basic treatises described above can be summarized and analyzed in their own right, supplementing their reading with the fiction and diaries of Virginia Woolf enables us to make additional inferences about more general underlying themes, to identify persons in Woolf's personal surroundings who served as role models, including some who transcend traditional gender roles, and to distill the elements of a decidedly feminist theory of value, which rooted in the human task of provisioning, and which stands in contrast to the classical and neoclassical theories of value adhered to by most

⁸ This is one of many ways in which Woolf demonstrates a stubborn adherence to upper-class morality. She does not generalize the need for education to all women, regardless of social standing of their parents.

social scientists to this day. Interestingly, both the novels of most interest in this context and the diaries represent writings that were completed at a fast pace and thus can be seen as expressing spontaneous thoughts fostered by elements in Virginia Woolf's upbringing and immediate surroundings.⁹ At one stage, she herself commented on the speed of her writing: "I'm letting my pen fling itself on paper like a leopard starved for blood..." (Diaries, Vol. II, 6/28/23, p. 250).

Four distinct themes emerge in the fiction and diaries, which illustrate, supplement and complete the socioeconomic ideas presented directly in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*: parallels between women and soldiers; an implicit theory of value based on viewing human tasks as rooted in provisioning; a sense of distributive justice which nevertheless remains upper class; and blueprints for characters in the two social treatises that are sometimes surprising and occasionally even cross gender lines. These four elements are considered in turn below.

Soldiers and Women: Similarities

Virginia Woolf wrote novels picturing soldiers long before she addressed the issue of war in *Three Guineas*. There are strong parallels between the characters of the soldiers depicted in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and the women of *Three Guineas*. In *Three Guineas*, as well as in *The Years* (1937), these parallels also appear in the subtext. Soldiers and women are similar when it comes to their lack of choice, their being forced to work for the benefit of others than themselves, and their inability to control the events of history, despite obvious "contributions" or "work" performed. Like soldiers, women suffer physically as they work for the benefit of others.¹⁰ In *Three Guineas*, Woolf reflects on the characteristic weight loss of low-wage female workers, which can be likened to the soldier's emaciation after a lengthy stay in the trenches. Most of all, just like the women, soldiers have unrealized wasted potential. Each of these four characteristics of the soldier are prominent in the above-mentioned novels. Below are a few examples from *Jacob's Room*, followed by a few quotes from *The Years*, which show the interconnectedness between male decision making, especially in war, education and the vantage point of the woman. This triangle mirrors that of *Three Guineas*.

With respect to lack of personal choice, we read (Woolf 1922:26) that "Jacob was the only one of her sons who never obeyed [his mother]." Jacob senses that he has unfulfilled potential: " 'I am what I am, and intend to be it,' for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one himself" (Woolf 1922:36). Yet he obeys the call to become a soldier in the Great War, and his life is taken, maybe during the battle that sent faint echoes of a few dull thuds of canon fire to Jacob's mother. The wasted

⁹ The main novels referred for this purpose are *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Years*. While the writing diaries obviously spanned the period 1915-1941, the diary entries were themselves generally written in a hurried and unrehearsed pen. The novel *Orlando: A Biography* is also important because it helped Virginia Woolf to express crossovers of gender lines and to generalize her thought beyond strict female and male roles.

¹⁰ In addition to parallels in the traditional gender roles of soldiers and women, Virginia Woolf occasionally saw actual examples of women used as soldiers. Her diary entry for 6/7/18 (p. 153) reads, in part: AL. Was told the other day that the raids were carried out by women. Women's bodies were found in the wrecked aeroplanes. They are smaller and lighter, and thus leave more room for bombs.

potential of Jacob's unfulfilled life is painfully clear on the last page of the book, when Mrs. Plumer enters her son's undisturbed student room to pack up his belongings. Her own lack of choice and her work for the benefit of helping others enters her thoughts when she remembers her deceased husband, George: "... once begotten, how could she do other than grow up cheese-paring, ambitious, with an instinctively accurate notion of the rungs of the ladder and an ant-like assiduity in pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder? What was at the top of the ladder? A sense that all the rungs were beneath one apparently" (Woolf 1922:34). We also get a foretelling of the main theme of *Room of One's Own* when we read (Woolf 1922:91) "... the unpublished works of women, written by the fireside in pale profusion, dried by the flame, for the blotting paper's worn to holes and the nib cleft and clotted."

The Years was begun in 1932 and finished in 1934, after Hitler's rise to power. In this novel, Woolf is once again the "outsider" that was portrayed in *Room of One's Own*, and bitterly lashes out at the "male-dominated, imperialist, warmongering, and class-ridden society" (Lee 1997:664). As did Woolf herself in *Three Guineas*, the main protagonists of this novel, Eleanor and Elvira/Sara, "diagnose from the vantage point of women outsiders, the links in the masculine domain between education, government and war making" (Lee 1997:664). More flamboyantly than in *Guineas*, Woolf describes "agents of tyranny" in *Years*, i.e., men who "always say I, I, I," and are "loudspeakers, searchlights, hectoring voices at Speakers' Corner; lawgivers in the low courts; the national anthem; ... Creon's law against Antigone; bombs interrupting conversation" (Lee 1997:664). Men who are "bullies" in wars (Lee 1997:666) are similar to the loud men who oppress women in the civilian sector. In *Years*, Woolf also shows that her anti-totalitarianism goes hand in hand with the wish for a different, more egalitarian world. She writes (Lee 1997:665): "In inarticulate bits and pieces, the idea of resistance to force, laws that "fit," reeducation, some better form of communication, makes itself felt, summed up in the phrase from Dante which Eleanor reads: 'For by so many more there are who say ours, so much the more of good doth each possess.' " This is consistent with conclusions reached in *Three Guineas*. The novels and books where specific socioeconomic treatises of Woolf may be found thus form a whole, with recurring themes that become stronger and progressively better analyzed as Woolf reached the end of her published life.

A Theory of Value Rooted in Provisioning

The diaries span the impressively long period of 1915-1941, a period that encompassed two world wars, the great depression and the Spanish Civil War.¹¹ Throughout good years and bad, Virginia Woolf displayed in her entries a near obsessive preoccupation with provisioning. Every check to be received for an essay or book, every honorarium, was tediously placed in the context of long-run predicted household expenses. For example, in her diary entry for 2/28/28 (*Diaries*, Vol. III, p. 175), she wrote

¹¹ Few scholars are willing to face the daunting task of studying Woolf's diaries. The five volumes each exceed 300 pages, including footnotes and comments by the editor. They often cover tediously petty material that awaits evaluation relative to other more relevant entries. For example, the incessant complaints about a loan Virginia Woolf made to a friend whose spending habits she disapproved of are annoying at best, until they are placed in the context of Woolf's concern with women's tasks of provisioning.

“Out of my £60 I have bought a Heal bed, a cupboard, ... & now a strip of carpet for the hall” and on 1/3/36 (Diaries, Vol. V, p. 3): “L. says I have not made enough to pay my share of the house, & have to find £70 out of my hoard. This is now reduced to £700, & I must fill it up.” While her own provisioning concerns usually dealt with purchases other food, she was also well aware of the constant quest for income by people needing to feed their family, as in “How tremendous a pull a very little money has in the world!” (Entry for 6/14/25, Diaries III, p. 29). While a preoccupation with provisioning does not directly translate into a ready theory of value, linking this preoccupation in the diaries with more direct descriptions of feminine acts of provisioning in *Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* permits to suggest that Woolf sensed that there was a problem in the perceived concept of value in mainstream social philosophy of her time. Indeed, classical and neoclassical theories of value were rooted in utilitarianism and classical economics. In these theories, which are also utilitarian, material goods and services derive value from the fact that they foster utility, which is considered the main pursuit of human activity. To obtain goods and services, one must purchase them in markets, hence the need for income, be it inherited or obtained through offering one’s labor services in return for a wage. The scarcer is a good or service, the higher its value. While Marx continued the classical tradition of utilitarianism, he emphasized a labor theory of value, in which surplus labor (the portion of the price of goods in excess the wage paid to the worker) leads to profits and wealth of the owners of the means of production, he did not recognize the role played by unpaid women’s work in relation to provisioning in the household. Taking account of the importance of the role of provisioning is a necessary requirement, however, to obtain a comprehensive theory of value. In their gendered roles, females do not command a wage, neither do they produce many goods sold in markets. Their provisioning tasks include a range of activities such as growing and preparing food, making and maintaining clothes, and furnishing the home. Woolf recognized these tasks, and a thorough investigation of the extent to which she contributed to a feminist theory of value is facilitated by a careful reading of the diaries.

Upper-class Distributive Justice

The prolonged traumatic experience Virginia Woolf endured with a longtime servant (Nelly Boxall), described in her diaries, demonstrates a distinctly upper-class sense of distributive justice. Underneath the complaints about Nelly we discover a concern for providing long-term income security and health care for this servant. When Nelly fell ill and required surgery, the procedure was paid for by the Woolfs without hesitation. Occasionally, though not usually, Woolf senses that the privileges of her class are unjust. On 12/10/29, she wrote in her diary “What right, I said to myself, have we to sit here & see those poor fellows carrying bricks? Oh their lives – carrying bricks to the roof in this gale – & I sitting here (in pink hotel bedroom).” (Diaries, Vol. III, p. 271). On other occasions, however, we notice blatant disregard of the underprivileged, especially the nonwhite or disabled.¹² It would thus be wrong to conclude that Virginia Woolf’s social philosophy was truly egalitarian.

¹² See, for example, the entry made on 1/9/15: On the towpath we met & had to pass a long line of imbeciles ... It was perfectly horrible. They should certainly be killed. @ (Diaries, Vol. I, p. 13). Similarly, on 5/17/25 she wrote: A...passing a nigger gentleman, perfectly fitted out in swallow tail & bowler & gold

Blueprints for Characters in the Social Treatises

Reading the Diaries are filled with references to episodes and persons close to Virginia Woolf who became blueprints for characters in the novels and in the social treatises. As in the analysis of the similarities between women and soldiers, we see occasional crossovers of gender boundaries here as well.

First, while everyone expects Keynes to emerge as an example of the elitist patriarch in *Three Guineas*, the reader sees many other examples, one of them a woman friend Ethel Smyth who tended to be overly impressed with her own achievements and always sought higher recognition than was her fair due. Most examples of patriarchy and its privileges, of course, come from male acquaintances. In reviewing relevant entries, we also notice that Woolf did not aspire to extend similar privileges to women. She despised the system too much for that. He was fond of describing pompous patriarchs as “doing their little owl,”¹³ and when she was given the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of her famous father, Leslie Stephens, and deliver a university lecture series, she actually declined because she did not want to take that much time away from her writing. This helps us formulate the extent of Woolf’s social egalitarianism: she did not criticize patriarchal elitism in *Three Guineas* because she wanted similar accolades to be available for women. Rather, she wanted to demonstrate that other things are important, for both men and women, such as free time to explore intellectual pursuit, and gearing those pursuits to social goals like education and the end of human aggression.

Second, Virginia’s brother Adrian emerge as a composite of the characters of Arthur (the recipient of the AEF) as well as both the bungling psychiatrist and his victim in *Mrs. Dalloway*¹⁴, Adrian Leslie Stephens (1883-1948) was Virginia’s younger brother, who lived with her in 1907 after the marriage of their sister Vanessa,¹⁵ and again in 1911. Adrian studied law at Trinity College (helped no doubt by his AEF) but did not enter a profession until five years after his own marriage. He then enrolled to become a medical student. During the war, he declared himself to be a conscientious objector and shirked the obligatory alternative assignment of farm work by obtaining a physician’s determination that he was not “robust” and the work “strained his heart” (See Vol. I, p. 67). Virginia Woolf estimated that it would take five years for Adrian to take up a practice in psychiatry, at age 41. Did he inspire the analyst who was indirectly responsible for the death of Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)?

Eerily, we sometimes also see that Virginia Woolf reports tragedies in her diary that are reminiscent of scenes she had already described in books published several years

headed cane; & what were his thoughts? Of the degradation stamped on him, every time he raised his hand & saw it black as a monkey’s outside, tinged with flesh colour within. (Diaries, Vol. III, p. 23).

¹³ n the well known children’s story, little owl sits on a tree branch playing the grownup and saying to himself: Here sits Little Owl, guardian of the forest, keeper of the trees

¹⁴ The relevant portions of the diaries are: Volume I, p. xvi, fn. 48 p. 18, p. 20, p. 68, p. 183 and p. 282; Volume II, p. 242); Vol. 3, p. 141 and Vol. 4, p. 234. As an example, see Vol. II, p. 242: Adrian is altogether broken up by psychoanalysis... His soul rent in pieces with a view to reconstruction.

¹⁵ Vanessa was the mother of Quentin Bell, whose wife Anne Olivier Bell took on the enormous task of editing and annotating the diaries.

earlier. A prime example of this type of entry is the senseless death of Julian Bell in the Spanish Civil War, which echoes that of the fictional Jacob in the Great War. That there are several such entries shows that Woolf's work withstands the test of time.

Conclusion

There is much in Woolf about obvious factors used in social exclusion, in denial of social justice and valuation of human beings, subjects definitely of interest to feminist thinkers and activists today. The main purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate that readers can gather a more complete understanding of Woolf's socioeconomic theories if they do not confine their study to the two major treatises, but extend it to include the fictional works and the diaries.

This paper also invites suggestions for further research. The first is that, if literary authors with a keen eye on the society surrounding them could analyze what it is that deprives some humans from the choices available to others, why are political economists, sociologists and other scholars whose advice is influential in public policy not routinely engaged in this study? They possess not necessarily more powerful tools of analysis than did Virginia Woolf, but certainly they at least possess additional tools. It also becomes increasingly obvious that economics, the discipline which concerns itself with the mechanisms by which well-being is distributed among the members of society, can ill afford to remain isolated from other social sciences and the humanities. Even mainstream social scientists, many of whom are members of the "regaled class" so despised by Woolf, must constantly study the world around them in both a direct fashion and, indirectly, via the literature, arts, and religions practiced in this world.

For feminist political economists, who in their own mainstream views have (only) stressed the need to value unpaid work, Virginia Woolf offers possible exploration of another frontier, i.e. the valuation of people for their potential, regardless of whether this potential is realized in the form of a recognized position in society. The value of unpaid work and unpaid human potential cannot be expressed in terms of material units, such as money income or property. By implication, political economists and social thinkers must place reduced emphasis on material property. On the one hand, material property is unjustly distributed, not only because of imposed gender roles, but also because of other social injustices that are amply addressed in the writings of social philosophers from St. John Chrysostom to P.-J. Proudhon). On the other hand, utilitarianism and the pursuit of material property in a society tends to make that society more aggressive and war prone. The central message of *Three Guineas* was the interconnectedness between male patriarchy, education and war. If society stresses compassion and nonaggression in the education it provides to its children, and if this education translates into advice given to political leaders, aggression and wars over the acquisition of property may lessen and a more peaceful coexistence of humans as equals will result. It is encouraging to see that both Germany and Japan, two nations that have experienced the devastating consequences of their own aggression in World War II, elementary school education now emphasizes appreciation of human diversity, including race and social class, while simultaneously discouraging competition and individualism (Smith 1994).

Finally, for both political economists and environmentalists, Woolf's work offers ways to explore paths to sustainable development and preservation of the world's natural environment. The deterioration of the natural and human environment has very much

been the result of the pursuit of profits, property and material well-being by capitalist nations. The elements of sustainable development include stress on education, in particular education of women, and appreciation of the importance of provisioning within the family as the main human activity. While Woolf never mentioned the environment herself, her social thought was consistent with policy advice underlying sustainable development and environmental preservation.

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