"No More Horses"
Virginia Woolf on Art and Propaganda

“If we use art to propagate political opinions,” wrote Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*, “we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered; and there will be no more horses.”

If art is a splendid and noble horse and propaganda a baser beast of burden, a donkey, their coupling is implied in sexual terms but also in class terms. The mule which is produced is a stubborn creature, and sterile to boot, with the dash and daring of one parent and the patience and persistence of the other. When propaganda propagates with art as its partner, Woolf warned in 1938 (after England had seen almost a decade of political poetry, painting, and prose), then artists may degenerate into mute, brute mules. The gentle brays of the donkeys, the high whinnies of the horses will be lost to history.

The argument is, I think, historical. Woolf means that if the artist sacrifices his freedom for the momentary historical cause, he will be doing a disservice to the past and future history of art. Once “indifference,” “disinterestedness,” “impersonality,” those qualities she valued so highly, are given up, then art loses its fertility.

Worried as she was over the health of poetry and its younger practitioners in the thirties, one wonders how she would have felt about Auden’s later change of heart, his praise of Yeats, his assertion that “poetry makes nothing happen.” And what do we think now of the poetry of Auden and his fellows in the anti-fascist thirties? Was their collective voice mulish? Woolf objected to the “enterprising book-fed brains” of the young poets, and to their “uni-sexual bodies,” and she captures the 1930s poet’s egotism brilliantly in his appearance at the last party in *The Years.*
But Virginia Woolf was no more certain of what the proper relations between art and propaganda should be than she was ready to dictate what exact proportions of “truth of fact” and “truth of fiction” would make a good biography. A case in point occurs in the note I have just quoted. *Three Guineas* is itself an extremely polemical work, and the point in the note comes as an afterthought about a rather interesting propagandistic act. Woolf has been comparing Mrs. Pankhurst, leader of the English suffragette movement, to Antigone. She goes on to apply the comparison to Frau Pommer, the wife of a Prussian mines official at Essen who was to be tried (it was 1938) for the act of slandering the state and the Nazi movement by saying, “The thorn of hatred has been driven deep enough into the people by the religious conflicts, and it is high time that the men of today disappeared” (*TG*, p. 169). Virginia Woolf argues here that *Antigone* could be made “into anti-Fascist propaganda,” that Creon, tyrant and patriarch, resembles Hitler and Mussolini—even though Sophocles in the end is such a great artist that he makes us sympathize “even with Creon himself.” The plot and the “buried alive” theme of *Antigone* form the mythology and structure of *The Years*, and as a novelist Woolf makes her reader sympathize with her English Creons. It is only as a “pamphleteer” that she chooses between good and evil.

Why does she then describe the coupling of art and propaganda as “mutilation,” having just done rather a good job of coupling them in her own note and in *Three Guineas* as a whole? Perhaps there are good mules and bad mules, some less mutilated than others? We know that Woolf believed that women and the working class would produce great works of art when their historical identity and continuity were once accomplished, and that several generations of women and workers had laid claims to their own history and their own literature. She also believed that each individual work of art was the product of collective historical consciousness, that the writing of women and workers would improve through the ages. “For masterpieces are not single and solitary births,” she wrote in *A Room of One’s Own* (68–69), “they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the
mass is behind the single voice." She was by no means uncritical of
the individual artist, nonetheless, and felt that any woman writer
would have difficulty "flying" free, with the "shoddy fetters of class
on her feet" as well as the socially determined limitations on any open
discussion of sexuality. Working-class writers, she felt, had an unfor­
tunate habit of imitating the mincing speech of the middle class rather
than celebrating the traditional rich vitality of their own culture.

The mule who stops the fertile flow of literary history is suspiciously
like the "middlebrow," neither upper class nor working class, who
writes and teaches for money and fame. The mule is suspiciously like
the "uni-sexual" and egoistical young poets who take up "the masses"
as a cause in poems which their subjects cannot read, ignoring what
Woolf felt was their real mission, to persuade men of their own class
to give up their privileges.

That Virginia Woolf used her own art for propagandistic purposes
is a fact. *Three Guineas* is a socialist, pacifist, and feminist polemic.
Perhaps she felt that, because her cause was just and her point of
view unheard in the daily press, the book did not fall into her own
category. Or perhaps that Fascism had already had such a pernicious
effect on art and artists that she was justified in producing another
mule for her side (since she did very vociferously take sides), hoping
that a few well-placed kicks from its sterile body would serve the
cause of political justice and intellectual freedom.

In "Middlebrow" Woolf defined the highbrow as "the man or woman
of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across
country in pursuit of an idea," and a lowbrow as "a man or woman
of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at
a gallop across life." As for middlebrows, they are not capable of riding
at all, and the sight of them on horseback is ridiculous. Horses represent
both art and sexuality, but the middlebrow is a prostitute in both
areas: "How can you let the middlebrows teach you how to write?"
she asks the lowbrows, "you, who write so beautifully when you
write naturally, that I would give both my hands to write as you
do—for which reason I never attempt it, but do my best to learn the
art of writing as a highbrow should." "What will become of us," Woolf
asked, her mind mating class conflicts with artistic conflicts, “men and women, if Middlebrow has his way with us, and there is only a middle sex but no husbands or wives?” The androgyny she approves is in the artist’s mind, not his body. High and lowbrow horses obviously can stomp out the middlebrow, for in the last line of the essay, he is reduced to a “half-crushed worm.”

The figure of the horse and the mule continued to work in Virginia Woolf’s mind as she wrote *Three Guineas*, her great book on woman as the scapegoat of history. She described in her diary two kinds of writing, “donkey-work” and “galloping,” as earlier she had described “stonebreaking” and “flying”; writing was to her always divided into two categories, one of hard work and one of speed and release. “After a most dismal hacking got into a little canter,” she wrote in February 1937, and later, “Once I get into the canter over *Three Guineas* I think I shall see only the flash of the white rails and pound along to the goal.”

It is interesting that Virginia Woolf imaginatively divides herself into artist and pamphleteer, horse and donkey (in a new metaphor for the androgynous mind of the artist), yet at the same time criticizes the union of art and propaganda, even in *Three Guineas* itself, for sterile progeny. In the course of composition she noted that we really need two separate languages, one for fact and one for fiction, for words, like artists, need privacy. “Why?” she asked, and answered herself in sexual terms: “For their embraces, to continue the race” (*AWD*, p. 268). But in *Three Guineas* she urges not the fertility of language but the purging of obsolete words like “feminism,” which is dramatically burned in her book. And she wishes for the day when words like “tyrant” and “dictator” may also be purged from the language.

“Feminism,” by the way, is obsolete because the only freedom and equality that matter, the economic, have been achieved. (This was rather premature and optimistic.) Quentin Bell asserts that Virginia
Woolf was "amazed" at his "socialist" analysis of the world crisis as economic. Now it is true that Virginia Woolf was not in the habit of using the rhetoric of vulgar Marxists. But any reader of her political essays and pamphlets knows full well that the weight of the argument always rests on economics. Women's oppression is economic, she argues in *A Room of One's Own*, and art is determined by the class origins of the artist, she argues in "The Niece of an Earl." Art is part of the superstructure, she maintains in "The Artist and Politics"; its flourishing and failure depend most certainly on the economic and political conditions of the state. All through her own writings she identified herself as artist and worker, and defined the necessity of the artist's involvement in politics (not to write at the dictates of the politician but to be politically active to ensure personal survival and that of art). "Art is the first luxury to be discarded in times of stress; the artist is the first of the workers to suffer." "The rose and the apple have no political views," she states in the same essay. But the artist who contemplates them must be both economically and politically free to work. She does not call for political bias in the work of art but in the artist. This essay was written for the *Daily Worker* in order to explain why artists in the thirties were forming political organizations. Just as Leonard Woolf (in an impulse of whitewash?) forgot to tell the reader the essay's source when he compiled the *Collected Essays*, the editors of the *Daily Worker* had been anxious to tell their readers that they did not agree with her views.

Virginia Woolf was truly an outsider, for this is a complex position she expounds, although her lack of rhetoric makes her sound uncommitted. She took her leftist politics very seriously. She was very upset by the criticism of her politics by Wyndham Lewis, a serious rightist, but not in the least upset by the scurrilous personal attack of Queenie Leavis on *Three Guineas* in *Scrutiny*. For she realized that the "scrutineers," as she called them, had no serious political ideas at all and did not understand hers.

Modern readers have been led to believe that Virginia Woolf's acute sex and class consciousness derived from a Victorian virginal and "ladylike" misunderstanding of politics (Leavis, Forster, Bell) or, more
recently, were part of her "madness." But Woolf's socialism and feminism were very much a response to nineteenth- and twentieth-century experience. It was the timing of her publication of polemical views that disturbed the critics. What was the use of being a feminist after women had the vote, they asked in 1929? What was the point of being a pacifist in the face of Hitler and Mussolini, they asked in 1939? Woolf had a particularly acute sense of history and an internationalist distrust of local patriotism; these large ideological attitudes produced her self-definition as "outsider." She had seen the suffragettes under Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel turned into warmongers overnight. She knew that one could be female and fascist, despite the contradictions. She knew that the vote had not been "won" by women after more than fifty years of agitation but had been granted, along with full manhood suffrage, when the government could no longer deny the claims of returning soldiers and sailors. Ever since the 1832 Reform Bill had first deprived women of what citizens' rights they had, women had fought bits and pieces of battles with patchwork ideologies to fit local and particular fights. Virginia Woolf, like her heroine Mary Datchet, flew her feminist and pacifist colors under the banner of international socialism. Only Wollstonecraft, Olive Schreiner, and Sylvia Pankhurst, as her literary feminist forebears, held such clear and consistent convictions.

The timing of the publication of *A Room of One's Own* is a case in point. In 1928 women could vote, and feminism was unfashionable. In that essay Virginia Woolf braced herself against what Rebecca West called "an invisible literary wind." West called the book "an uncompromising piece of feminist propaganda," "the ablest yet written," and remarked on the courage which "defied a prevalent fashion among the intelligentsia, which is particularly marked in the case of her admirers." The argument is inflexible and "all the more courageous because antifeminism is so strikingly the fashion of the day among intellectuals," she explained. "Before the war conditions were different. The man in the street was antifeminist, but the writers of quality were pro-suffrage." She explained the change as "due to the rising tide of effeminacy which has been so noticeable since the war. The men who
despised us for our specifically female organs chastised us with whips; but those to whom they are a matter for envy chastise us with scorpions." West saw Woolf's honesty to be as remarkable as her sensibility, because she was willing to risk losing by expressing her politics to those who most admired her art.

"It is a fact," Woolf explained, "that the practice of art, far from making the artist out of touch with his kind, rather increases his sensibility. It breeds in him a feeling for the passions and needs of mankind in the mass which the citizen whose duty it is to work for a particular country or a particular party has no time and perhaps no need to cultivate" (Essays, 3:231–32). The artist is a worker; as such he must defend his position economically and politically. But his product, which is limited enough by his class and determined by his origins, must be consciously free from the desire to preach and teach. As she told the young poets, "then you become a biting and scratching little animal whose work is not of the slightest value or importance to anybody" (Essays, 3:184).

I think the complexity of this carefully worked out theory about art and politics was a little difficult for some her critics to follow. Much to the annoyance of Quentin Bell, and, one thinks, Leonard Woolf, she defended her pacifist position in 1936, allying herself with Aldous Huxley, even though her husband—and most active socialists—were forming a united front against fascism.

"But were we then to scuttle," protested Bell, "like frightened spinsters before the Fascist thugs?" He tried to account for her advocacy of peace, when for him the only thinkable stand was for war, by arguing that she was out of touch. "She belonged, inescapably, to the Victorian world of Empire, Class and Privilege. Her gift was for the pursuit of shadows, for the ghostly whispers of the mind and for Pythian incomprehensibility, when what was needed was the swift and lucid phrase that could reach the ears of unemployed working men or Trades Union Officials."6

Quentin Bell seems to have felt that while he was trying to do something "urgent, vital and important," his aunt was only interested in gossip. She happened in truth to have spent some of her formative years
teaching working men at Morley College; she knew them well enough to be aware that they could write their own manifestos—furthermore that they despised meddling missionaries. She had led meetings of her local branch of the Women’s Co-operative Guild for years and was, at the time Mr. Bell wanted to pass his “United Front” resolution, secretary of the Rodmell Labour Party—scarcely a shadowy voice of Empire and Privilege. Did he quite fail to realize that her “gossip” was something hardly to be dismissed as feminine silliness—that it might have been a conscious political maneuver by a committed pacifist?

The pacifism of *Three Guineas* is probably the most difficult position for modern readers to accept, even for those who appreciate the socialism, feminism, and antifascism of the essay. The origins of her abhorrence of violence, I suspect, can be found in the ethics of her ancestors, in the Clapham Sect and her Quaker aunt. Christopher Caudwell saw pacifism as the strongest of the liberal bourgeois illusions because it pretends that violence is an ethical rather than a political problem and thus allows the pacifist to avoid the idea of the revolutionary attack on private property. Woolf knew that wars were fought essentially over property, but she could not quite bring herself to urge women and workers to any violence stronger than that of “trespassing” on the property of patriarchal culture.

Were Bell’s allusions to sex and class intentionally diversionary? “Spinster” and “Victorian” make her not only older than she was and more upper class, but frigid. When Quentin Bell disapproves of his aunt’s politics, he attacks her womanhood and her birth. Virginia Woolf may have been more sexually serious and active, more politically serious and active, than any nephew can ever conceive in his aunt.

Bell could not accept the connection between feminism and antifascism in *Three Guineas*. He wanted a simple description of what should be done: “True criticism of *Three Guineas* came from events; for the events of 1938 did not turn upon the Rights of Women but upon the Rights of Nations” (Bell, *Biography*, 2:205). Quentin Bell, I think, disliked the antipatriotic tone of *Three Guineas*, its international outsider’s stance. Virginia Woolf did, of course, offer a course of action: fight English tyranny and chauvinism at home.
But it was to "daughters of educated men," women of her own class and profession that she addressed the pamphlet. Hence its title. Only luxuries are sold in guineas; the words and the coin have a ring of obsolescence and gentility whose effect is carefully calculated; the reader thinks the writer can afford the "luxury" of antipatriotic views. (Who would read a book entitled Three Pounds?) Her "Outsiders' Society" would "consist of educated men's daughters working in their own class—how indeed can they work in any other?—and by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace" (76, p. 106), because "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (109). These women are to reform themselves first:

The glamour of the working class and the emotional relief afforded by adopting its cause, are today as irresistible to the middle class as the glamour of the aristocracy was twenty years ago (see A La Recherche du Temps Perdu). Meanwhile it would be interesting to know what the trueborn working man or woman thinks of the playboys and playgirls of the educated class who adopt the working-class cause without sacrificing middle-class capital, or sharing working-class experience. [177]

Woolf directs her reader to Margaret Llewelyn Davies' Life As We Have Known It and to The Life of Joseph Wright for firsthand accounts of working-class life not seen through "pro-proletarian spectacles." Readers objected then and still object to the exclusiveness of her audience, but Woolf's logic is inescapable. "Our ideology is so inveterately anthropocentric," she asserted, "that it has been necessary to coin this clumsy term—educated man's daughter. . . . Obviously, if the term 'bourgeois' fits her brother, it is grossly incorrect to use it of one who differs so profoundly in the two prime characteristics of the bourgeoisie—capital and environment" (146).

The revolutionary artist is revolutionary in form, wrote Christopher Caudwell. We are by now well aware of Virginia Woolf's formal rebellions in the shape and design of her novels. Her political works can
be considered even more revolutionary by these same standards because they are radical in both form and content.

"Oh it pleased me," she wrote in her diary after *Three Guineas* was published, "that the *Lit. Sup.* says I'm the most brilliant pamphleteer in England" (*AWD*, p. 284). It may well be argued that *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are in the first rank of English literature in their mode. The Milton of *Areopagitica* and the Swift of *A Modest Proposal* were her models, and her essays rank with theirs as passionate polemic enhanced by innovative technical genius. *A Room of One's Own* argues that women artists need time, money, and privacy, as well as an establishment of alternate female institutions of power, in order to produce great works of art. The analysis combines Marxist economics with Freudian psychological insights and Wollstonecraft's revolutionary feminism. What marks the essay as a work of genius, aside from the avoidance of the rhetoric of her distinguished forebears, is a fictional narrative technique which demands open sisterhood as the stance of the reader. This technique not only puts the male reader on guard and makes him feel "other," alien; it reminds him quite forcibly how "other," how alien, women must feel while reading most of literature. The female reader, while she delights in being so directly addressed, realizes how often she has been excluded and alienated. The conversational intimacy of the tone, the invented narrator and fictional characters, the sharing of specific insults and pleasures, and the sharpness of the intellectual assault on patriarchal institutions, are audacious in their breaking of the formal conditions of the essay.

Although we read *Three Guineas* for what it says, its extraordinary use of form assures its place on the shelf of English literature in the satiric mode. The stance of "daughter of an educated man" responding by letter to requests for donations to Good Causes is itself a radical reflection of women's powerlessness. The writing of letters had been, after all, the approved and often the only means of expression for middle-class women. That Woolf should choose the epistolary mode almost two centuries after *Clarissa* was a matter of deliberate strategy. Her anger and hostility at the exclusiveness of male institutions are
all the more effective because “cabin’d and cribb’d” in limited and limiting letters. Like prison journals and letters read while we know the author is in jail, they serve their cause not only by what they say but by their very form.

In its original edition *Three Guineas* included several photographs of men in patriarchal garb. Beribboned, bemedaled, begowned, and bewigged, they exhibit the author’s sharp eye for how the powerful assert their power. The message is very clear, as clear as the photograph of white men leering at the hanging bodies of blacks with which the South African feminist Olive Schreiner introduced her brilliant anti-Boer War pamphlet, *Trooper Peter Halkett*. Women, as Woolf noted, have a good eye for the obvious.

“I strike the eye,” she wrote in 1920, after the publication of *Night and Day*, “and elderly gentlemen in particular get annoyed” (*AWD*, p. 25). *Three Guineas*’ antifascist theme is derived from photographs of dead children and ruined houses in Spain. What is the connection she was trying to make? She refers several times to these photographs of fascist atrocities, but the photographs before us as readers are of men in their garb of power. We are meant to put the patriarchal horse before the fascist cart. It is a very clever device.

Although Woolf’s nearest literary ancestor is Swift, given the difference in political attitudes she might prefer to be compared to Swift’s spiritual heir on the opposing side, the witty Sydney Smith. In April 1940, she wrote to the composer Dame Ethel Smyth, “I’m reading Sydney Smith—his life—with only one wish in the world: that I’d married him. Isn’t it odd when the rumble tume of time turns up some entirely loveable man?” Sydney Smith’s causes were the emancipation of slaves and of Catholics, but he preached them with humor, wit, and style and with a lack of that egotistic patronizing tone, the smug holier-than-thou Puritanism, which Virginia Woolf felt characterized reformers of her own and Victorian times. Smith’s gay, elegant eighteenth-century detachment, so effective in propaganda, did not prevent him from being the kind of man who put antlers on his donkeys’ heads to please a lady visitor who complained that he had no deer. Virginia Woolf, “brilliant pamphleteer,” was not above renting
READING PRACTICE II

a donkey’s head to take her bows for her play *Freshwater*, to show
that she considered it to be “donkey-work.”

After hearing Annie Besant lecture at the 1917 Club, Virginia Woolf
wrote: “The only honest people are the artists . . . these social refor-
mers and philanthropists get so out of hand and harbour so many
discreditable desires under the disguise of loving their kind . . . But
if I were one of them?” (*AWD*, p. 17). Of course the men of her circle
did think she was one of them. One makes worse enemies out of
one’s colleagues who share *some* of one’s views than out of those
on the opposite side.

“Art is being rid of all preaching,” she wrote later (*AWD*, p. 183).
The preacher’s tone was wrong, she felt, not only for fiction but for
pamphlets. *Three Guineas* gestated for six years as *On Being Despised*,
a draft inspired by personal insults—salt in her wounds—from Yeats,
Huxley, E. M. Forster, and others. But all of the personal lamentation
and the preaching were removed to make the essay grow into *Three
Guineas* as we have it, from what she called in her diary “this little
piece of rant” (*AWD*, p. 236). “Truth is only to be spoken by those
women whose fathers were pork butchers and left them a share of
the pig factory” (an example of the rant that did not survive her final
test [*AWD*, p. 236]). (This may refer both to Arabella’s familiarity
with the “pig’s pizzle” in *Jude the Obscure* and to Jane Austen’s letter
about pork while the battle of Waterloo was being fought.)

In commenting on the chips on Ethel Smyth’s shoulders in her
published memoirs, Virginia Woolf wrote in 1933: “I hate personal
snippets more and more. And the mention of ‘I’ is so potent—such
a drug, such a deep violet stain—that one in a page is enough to
colour a chapter” (St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, p. 228). Woolf explained
that she was often tempted to do the same thing but was restrained
by the large, ugly “I”:

I didn’t write “A Room” without considerable feeling even you
will admit; I’m not cool in the subject. And I forced myself to
keep my own figure fictitious, legendary. If I had said, “Look
here, I am uneducated because my brothers used all the family
funds”—which is the fact—“Well,” they’d have said, “she has
an axe to grind"; and no one would have taken me seriously, though I agree I should have had more of the wrong kind of reader, who will read you and go away and rejoice in the personalities, not because they are lively and easy reading; but because they prove once more how vain, how personal, so they will say, rubbing their hands with glee, women always are; I can hear them as I write. [229, 230]

Virginia Woolf did of course grind her own axe in *Three Guineas*, so much that she feared criticism of its autobiographical stance. Her mental life was so much a part of her identity that she did not realize that the exposure of her intellectual self was not considered "autobiographical" by others. She need not have feared exposure. What is interesting is that while Woolf chastised Ethel Smyth for complaining as a feminist at actual injustices and prejudices against her as a woman composer, she wanted a fuller and more honest account of Dame Ethel's bisexuality:

I was thinking the other night that there's never been a woman's autobiography. Nothing to compare with Rousseau. Chastity and modesty I suppose has been the reason. Now why shouldn't you be not only the first woman to write an opera, but equally the first to tell the truth about herself? But the great artist is the only person to tell the truth. I should like an analysis of your sex life as Rousseau did his. More introspection. More intimacy. [St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, pp. 232–33]

Both the great artist and the pork-butcher's daughter tell the truth; perhaps Virginia Woolf felt she was neither. But she tried. The simultaneous "truth of fiction" and "truth of fact" about women of her own generation and her own class in *The Years* and *Three Guineas* ("one book," she called them) made her feel that she had spoken as plainly as possible on all the subjects which concerned her most—feminism (and sexual relations), pacifism (and antifascism), and socialism (the importance of recognition of the class struggle, the role of the female intellectual in the class struggle). "One can't propagate at the same time as write fiction," Virginia Woolf admonished herself in the *Diary,*
“and as this fiction is dangerously near propaganda, I must keep my hands clear.” As *The Years* and *Three Guineas* show us, she could and did, but only at the expense of a terrific struggle. The *Diary* records that Leonard felt that art and politics should not be mixed, but it also provides evidence that Woolf was uncertain about this. The early manuscript of *The Years* shows us that she had alternated each chapter, at the beginning, with an historical essay; had she dared to publish these we might have had one of the first modern documentary novels. Ironically, *The Years* has seemed to be the least experimental in form of her novels and consequently is not beloved by modern critics. It was a bold plan; one wishes that Leonard Woolf had had the taste and lack of timidity to encourage its boldness.9

But *Three Guineas* is not the same kind of propaganda as *A Room of One's Own*. In fact, I think one might make a distinction here between the propaganda of hope and the propaganda of despair. *Three Guineas* is not in the least amusing. Her friends who did not share her views could not single out passages of wit and fine writing while ignoring or depreciating her arguments, as E. M. Forster had done with *A Room of One's Own*. She herself felt that *Three Guineas* was better written because it had less of the “egotistic flaunting” of *A Room of One's Own* (*AWD*, p. 279). “The more complex a vision the less it lends itself to satire,” Woolf told herself; “the more it understands the less it is able to sum up and make linear” (256). *Three Guineas* documents this more complex vision; the feminism-and-art problem of *A Room of One's Own* is only part of the serious intellectual grasp of the political problems of the twentieth century. *Three Guineas* was her last work, as civilization destroyed itself; it was “a moth over a bonfire” (*AWD*, p. 282). “For having spat it out, my mind is made up. I need never recur or repeat, I am an outsider” (282).

*Three Guineas* is for modern readers neither as indigestible as the second figure suggests nor as frail as the first. Aply named, it is about the relation between money and property and conflicts between the sexes, the classes, and the nations. The essay “tunnels” back, as Woolf's novels do, to first causes. Fascism is derived from patriarchy; patriarchy is defined as power chasing itself in vicious circles around
"the mulberry tree of property." Woolf demanded that women crush shoots of incipient fascism in all the men around them, the "caterpillars of the commonwealth." She met with a reply even angrier than she expected, led by Queenie Leavis, who called for the uniting of those very caterpillars in the name of real wife and motherhood.

How many professional women, writers, and teachers—for it is to us that Virginia Woolf speaks here—have been able to meet her rigorous demands? We are the guardians of culture and its future promise, if we do not join the professions on the same terms as men, but remain in poverty, intellectual chastity, and "freedom from unreal loyalties." The terms are hard: do not teach literature to middle-class students; do not lecture, write, or speak for money on any subject you do not believe in; do not allow any publicity which capitalizes on your personal charm; do not have anything to do with "the pimps and panders of the brain-selling trade." Woolf insists: "Do all in your power to break the ring, the vicious circle, the dance round and round the mulberry tree, the poison tree of intellectual harlotry." What would happen if women followed her advice?

Slaves who are now kept hard at work piling words into books, piling words into articles, as the old slaves piled stones into pyramids, would shake the manacles from their wrists and give up their loathsome labour. And "culture," that amorphous bundle, swaddled up as she now is in insincerity, emitting half truths from her timid lips, sweetening and diluting her message with whatever sugar or water serves to swell the writer's fame or his master's purse, would regain her shape and become . . . muscular, adventurous, free. [76, p. 99]

Three Guineas is a final declaration of independence from patriarchal values pushed to the extreme, which Woolf believed had produced fascism. It is a long, agonized, rational argument, unemotional and impersonal, defining the role of the outsider—with Coleridge, "to find a form of society according to which each one uniting with the whole shall yet obey himself only and remain as free as before"—and with Walt Whitman, "of Equality—as if it harm'd me, giving others the
same chances and rights as myself—as if it were not indispensable to my own rights that others possess the same." These are not the words of an elitist or a snob or a "fragile middle-aged poetess, a sexless Sappho—a distressed gentlewoman caught in a tempest and making little effort either to fight against it or to sail before it," as Quentin Bell judges. He continues: "She made far less of an attempt than did Forster to contribute something to the debates of the time, or rather, when she did, it was so idiosyncratic a contribution that it could serve no useful purpose" (Biography, 2:185).

E. M. Forster asserted that Virginia Woolf was not a great writer because she had "no great cause at heart." He meant that he did not share her cause, the brilliant and sustained attack on private property as the foundation of corrupt capitalist England that she makes in Three Guineas; the devastating rationality of the argument that fascism is simply a natural result of an extremely patriarchal value system; the impassioned cry to women to remain indifferent to war and war-makers and the capitalist greed which would begin to corrupt them as they entered the professions on equal terms with men.

Forster obviously felt that feminism was a social disease. "There are spots of it all over her work," he says, hardly concealing his distaste. But distaste is different from dishonesty, in a critic and a friend. Class was a touchier subject than sex, and here Forster declares to posterity that Virginia Woolf was a snob, a lady, and was detached from "the working class and Labour." He must have known better. He dedicated the Rede Lecture to Leonard Woolf, which suggests that Leonard Woolf certainly knew better.

Snobbery, elitism, hatred or distrust of the working class—not true. What her enemies have in common is that they are liberals, that they mistake Woolf's honesty about the working class for snobbery. Because they dislike the rationality, the inescapable logic of Three Guineas, they declare it frivolous. The liberal imagination is infuriated with her logic; in the person of Queenie Leavis they call her "silly," "ill-informed," "emotional," and "dangerous." They accuse her of lacking "mind," when it is her rational argument which so disturbs them. The
liberal likes to be first in the cause of freedom; often enemies to the
left can be put down by attacking their class or sex or by declaring
that they are not really democratic socialists at all.\textsuperscript{12}

Unfortunately this has been the fate of Virginia Woolf’s political
ideas. And Leonard Woolf has contributed to this vision of her. In
1927 Leonard Woolf wrote:

In classes the mentality at the top—i.e. in Royalty & the upper-
most aristocracy—is exactly what it is at the bottom—i.e. in
the basement. . . . My theory is that the minds of a Duke and
butler, of a Countess & a kitchen maid, have a natural affinity,
and at certain periods of the world’s history become indistin-
guishable. Whether the Duke becomes more like the butler, or
the butler more like the Duke, is a nice question; probably the
influence is reciprocal. But whenever in history the moment
comes at which the mentality of the Duke and Countess is
absolutely indistinguishable from that of the butler and the
kitchen maid, there is an elementary catastrophe—not indeed
a conflagration of the earth, but a revolution. \textit{[Essays on Liter-
ature, History, and Politics, p. 229]}

Now Leonard Woolf’s words do not betray a particularly socialist
sympathy for the working class, and this is certainly not a serious
Marxist’s view of the making of a revolution. Some critics of Virginia
Woolf have felt that while they do not share Forster’s view of her
complete lack of political sense, they will allow the influence of
Leonard’s politics. Frankly, it seems to be the other way round. She
was often considerably to the left of Leonard, and remained a pacifist
despite his arguments that art and politics should never be mixed.\textsuperscript{13}
Clearly her views upset him enough to cause him to leave out, for
example, the fact that she had written some of her essays for the
\textit{Daily Worker} and, in his selection of texts for the \textit{Collected Essays},
to remove some of her views altogether.

The most pronounced editorial bias appears in his choice of the text
of her essay on the Women’s Co-operative Guild. It concerns a meeting
held in June 1913, but it was heavily revised for publication in 1931
as the introduction to Margaret Llewelyn Davies' *Life As We Have Known It, By Cooperative Working Women*, a book the Woolfs printed at the Hogarth Press. Most of Virginia Woolf’s revisions were of a political nature and were meant to clarify her opinions about the relation of class to art. She printed the original in the *Yale Review* in 1930 but revised it with the help of Margaret Llewelyn Davies and the working women writers themselves for publication in England; in choosing the unrevised first draft for the *Collected Essays* Leonard Woolf was acting politically.

In the revised essay Virginia Woolf changed the meeting place from Manchester to Newcastle and included a photograph of the cooperative women’s conference in session. She brought her original fictional characters, Miss Wick and Miss Erskine, out of the parsonage and down to earth, giving them back their real names, Miss Kidd and Miss Harris. Lilian Harris is brought to life with an actual photograph, next to one of Margaret Llewelyn Davies herself.

Originally Virginia Woolf had written of the agitation at the conference that their reforms “would not matter to me a single jot.” In the book she changed this to read, “If every reform they demand was granted this instant it would not touch one hair of my capitalistic head.” The earlier essay contains a passage which describes what seems to be rather frivolous and pointless housekeeping on the part of the women. She revised it to show both their collective consciousness and their politics: “The world was to be reformed, from top to bottom, in a variety of ways . . . after seeing Cooperative jams bottled and Cooperative biscuits made.” The added “Cooperative” transubstantiates the biscuits and the jam.

Woolf had at first created a rather sinister and bored figure in Miss Erskine, who smoked a pipe and read detective stories. The revision shows the sure hand of the novelist and more sympathy than cynicism. Here Miss Harris, “whether it was due to her dress which was coffee coloured or to her smile which was severe or to the ashtray in which many cigarettes had come amiably to an end, seemed the image of detachment and equanimity.” The first essay said it was “bad manners” for working women to imitate the mincing speech of ladies; the revision
called it “foolish.” The first essay had described all working people as servants, “those who touch their foreheads with their fingers.” Her revision recognized the proletariat as well: “And they remain equally deprived,” she wrote. “For we have as much to give them as they to give us—wit and detachment, learning and poetry, and all the good gifts which those who have never answered bells or minded machines enjoy by right.” Most important, she removed the offending sentence, “it is not from the ranks of working-class women that the next great poet or novelist will be drawn.” Her revision reads:

The writing, a literary critic might say, lacks detachment and imaginative breadth, even as the women themselves lacked variety and play of feature. Here are no reflections, he might object, no view of life as a whole, and no attempt to enter into the lives of other people. . . . And yet, since writing is a complex art, much infected by life, these pages have some qualities even as literature that the literate and instructed might envy.

These qualifications are important ones for those still troubled about the relations between class, sex, and art.

The most significant change Woolf made was in tone. The Yale Review essay is narrated in the voice of an “irritable” middle-class visitor. She is annoyed by what seems to be a waste of all that working-class energy, suspicious of full-time organizers of the cooperative women, and confident that the scraps of writing are not literature. While Woolf remains as scrupulous as ever in the new essay, the cynicism is gone. She has become both more politically committed to the cooperative cause and more artistically Woolfian. She names names in the new essay, recording the reality of the “lives of the obscure.” And her storyteller's art rejects the earlier cynical adjective “squat” for “sombre,” as in the end she describes her character's reason for dedication to the cause. Woolf respectfully records the secretary's dry and reserved tale of her rape by "a gentlemen," "At eighteen, I was a mother." What Virginia Woolf did in her revised essay was to make another contribution to the propaganda of hope.15

Virginia Woolf's editor16 and her biographer have, it seems to me,
for whatever reasons of their own, wished her to appear as a thoroughbred horse. They have attempted to remove for posterity the donkey of hard work and of fun from her own image of herself. They were also, it seems, quite seriously troubled by Virginia Woolf's confirmed pacifism during the last years of her life, as many of her readers are. The image of someone silly and apolitical is less threatening than the image of someone as sure of her intellectual position as the Virginia Woolf who wrote *Three Guineas*. It is easy to see why *Three Guineas* makes people uncomfortable. One can hardly argue with its logic or its morality. Pacifism is to me an ethical luxury, a self-indulgence at some historical moments, but in Woolf it is understandable. Her pacifism and feminism are more moral than political and are directly inherited from the Clapham Sect reformers in her family and, more important, from the Quaker pacifism of her aunt, Caroline Emelia Stephen.

The declaration that "There will be no more horses" was not so much a criticism of the coupling of art and propaganda in the age of fascism as a facing of the facts. Her novels were as thoroughbred a stable as any noble Englishwoman could wish. But Woolf could see the necessity for donkeys and "donkey work" as well. In *Three Guineas* she produced her own mule. Perhaps it was sterile, but it did kick and it did bite.

She repeated, in August 1940, her advice to women in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid." A "mind-hornet," this advice is called, meant to sting her sisters into consciousness: "We must create more honorable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun" (*The Death of the Moth*, p. 247). But it would not be much use for women and workers, outsiders all, to beat the dead horse of society as the poets of the thirties had done. If "commoners and outsiders like ourselves," she said to the Workers' Educational Association in May 1940, are to be the artists of the future, they must take advantage of the war to prepare themselves for the task. "Let us trespass at once," she demanded, on the grounds of English Literature as patriarchal private property. "Literature is no one's private ground;
literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves.”

Virginia Woolf declared herself an “outsider” in *Three Guineas*. The official guardians of her image, it seems, preferred a view of Virginia Woolf as another kind of outsider, a class snob and an artist alienated from ordinary people. Any bourgeois husband, one feels, would be disturbed if he felt he had treated his wife as a sensitive, blueblooded, elegant racehorse only to find that she saw part of herself as a hard-working donkey. Woolf, on the other hand, saw part of herself as Miss LaTrobe, the lonely artist, preserver of culture, allied with the people who keep history and art alive while the upper classes ignore or destroy civilization. In *Between the Acts*, Miss LaTrobe leaves her bits of property at the big house, where they care about such things, but she takes her lonely, misunderstood, awkward, visionary self down to the local pub. This view of the alienated artist allied with ordinary people to educate the middle and upper classes is consistent with Woolf’s view of herself as an “outsider,” a feminist, socialist, artist, and worker.