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THE WEeping WOMAN AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S CALL OF CONSCIENCE: RADICAL PACIFIST POLITICS IN *THREE GUINEAS*

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Three Guineas (1938) is a palimpsest text. Latent images silhouetted beneath the words are revealed if read in a certain light. Constructed from notebooks, propaganda leaflets, letters, scrapbooks, diaries, biographies, political pamphlets, photographs and news articles, *Three Guineas* forms what Jane Marcus calls 'part of a major documentary project',¹ underwritten by its extensive archive of media influences and political thought. Composed between 1936 and 1938, in response to the Spanish Civil War² and the death of Woolf's nephew Julian Bell in 1937,³ the layers encrypted within the text reveal sources and influences from the war. For every explicit statement that *Three Guineas* makes, much goes unsaid. For every verbal and printed picture that it shows us, there are photographs and visual images withheld. Commenting on Woolf's *oeuvre*, Julia Briggs observes: 'In terms of Woolf's art, absence takes on a range of forms.'⁴ This absence in *Three Guineas* is particularly striking in Woolf's refusal to show us photographs from the Spanish Civil War. These are images that the Spanish Government sends 'with patient pertinacity about twice a week' (*TG* 14) of 'dead bodies and ruined houses' (*TG* 42) that Woolf describes, but then in a narrative twist she prints other, more domestic, more condemning photographs of the men in power who are responsible for war.⁵

The photographs that Woolf refuses to show us gesture towards the absent individuals that we cannot know, whom we can imagine as three generic figures of war: the weeping woman, the fallen soldier, and the dead child. As Briggs avers, 'Loss and absence lie at the heart of Woolf's art' (*R/W* 1). Historically classical stock characters of war, these figures were made into icons of the Spanish Civil War (and subsequently of war resistance in general), in Picasso's studies for and painting of *Guernica* (1937), and his subsequent *Weeping Woman* portraiture series (1937).⁶ In all of his paintings and sketches of the motif, the

¹*Three Guineas*, ed. Jane Marcus (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006 [hereafter *TG* in the text]), Introduction, xlv.

²Often called the dress rehearsal for the Second World War, the Spanish Civil War was fought between 1936 and 1939. Many saw it as the last stand against Fascism. As Paul Preston outlines in his *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), the pressure zones between a progressive push into the future (the factions of the left) and the conservative pull towards tradition (the Falange, Church, land owners) erupted on 17–18 July 1936, when the military rebelled under the leadership of a group of generals including Francisco Franco and attempted to overthrow the Spanish Republican Government on a far-right political platform. Their use of total-war tactics made it difficult for many pacifists to maintain their war-resistance, and the British intellectual left generally pledged their support for the Republic in Spain. The pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (London: Left Review, 1937), to which a number of Woolf's friends and acquaintances contributed, comes out overwhelmingly in favour of the Republic.

³In her chapter, 'Pacifying Bloomsbury: Virginia Woolf, Julian Bell, and the Spanish Civil War', Emily Robins Sharpe argues that '*Three Guineas* responds both to the Spanish Civil War, and to Bell's written justifications for volunteering in an effort to stop the spread of European fascism' (*The Theme of Peace and War in Virginia Woolf's War Writings: Essays on her Political Philosophy*, ed. Jane M. Wood [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010], 155).

⁴Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh UP, 2006 [hereafter *R/W* in the text]), 2.

⁵Many scholars have discussed the significance of Woolf's absent photographs juxtaposed with the photographs she did choose. Emily Delgarno in *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* highlights the ideology behind photographs and argues that 'Woolf's method was to make ideology visible by creating a new and unfamiliar context for the news photograph. In effect she deconstructs the relationship of image to text when she represents the functions of institutions not as generals, judges, and professors, but as decorations and costumes. The unprinted war photographs in comparison are the photographs of those without institutional clothing, the bodies whose images ideology rarely conceals from sight' (CUP, 2001, 171). Jessica Berman, in *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism*, claims that Woolf's omission of the photographs is a 'gesture of refusal' of the 'inevitable mobilization within an immoderate, emotional, and, in many ways, unethical propaganda argument' (Columbia UP, 2011, 68). In other words, Woolf's refusal to show the photographs is a product of her pacifism: not wanting to incite others to war, she withholds printing propaganda. Berman here is in alignment with Marcus, who claims that Woolf 'notes disapprovingly that the Madrid bombing photographs incite one to anger. She will not print them, lest they incite more volunteers to go off to war' (*TG* lxi).

⁶For *Guernica* (1937) in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, see: www.jkrweb.com/art/images/guernica.jpg [accessed 21 December 2012]. For Picasso's *Weeping Woman* (1937) in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, see: www.ngv.vic.gov.au/Spanish_Ed/artwork_files/pdfs/artsheet_picasso_LR_FINAL.pdf [accessed 21 December 2012]. For Picasso's *Mother with Dead Child (III)* (1937) in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, see: www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/madre-nino-muerto-iii-dibujo-preparatorio-guernica-mother-dead-child-iii-sketch

Weeping Woman becomes the extreme figure of loss and absence—a woman in mourning, her body marks the presence of an absence. In subverting this signifier of loss, a signifier that has the ability either to mobilise or to condemn war, Woolf finds the potential for a radicalised pacifist politics. *Three Guineas* unfolds a pacifist politics reliant upon a global feminism and socialism, and predicated upon women's position outside the structures of power. *Three Guineas* proposes that, when women cease to weep and instead unite against war, when they choose to disengage from the war-making system, peace becomes possible. The Weeping Woman's cry of mourning mutates into the mother's cry of rage while burning the universities to the ground: 'Let it Blaze! Let it blaze! For we have done with this "education"!' (TG 45).

Written in an epistolary form, the text 'connects the private house with the world of public life' (TG 23). Vera Neverow, in her talk at the International Virginia Woolf Conference 2013 in Vancouver, B.C., puts *Three Guineas* in dialogue with Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and shows how in both 'the reader is positioned as a witness, not as a passive observer without any ethical obligations.' Quoting from *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory, and Visual Culture*, Neverow continues: 'Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas... assert intriguingly that when a story is told... "the listener [or reader] assumes responsibility to perpetuate the imperative to bear witness to the historical trauma for the sake of collective memory"' (11).⁷ One of the traumas that *Three Guineas*, and therefore the 'we' as readers, bears witness to is the large-scale employment of total war during the Spanish Civil War, where civilians became military targets. The 'pictures of dead bodies and ruined houses' (TG 42) that appears as a refrain throughout *Three Guineas* speak to civilian deaths, bombings of civilian houses, where the lives of women and children are on the line. The famous passage in *Three Guineas* that describes the photographs in such heartbreaking detail—'They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house' (TG 14)—documents the ethical impossibility presented to the narrator and reader alike by the first fully technologised total war. Collapsing the distinctions between inside and outside the text, Woolf allies herself with the female specifically reader, the daughters of educated men, in speaking to the addressee of the first letter: 'We echo your words. War ... is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped' (TG 14). Picasso's *Guernica* and *Weeping Woman* series compel a similar outrage and emotional reflex and beg the question: How does one respond ethically to the employment of total war?

Woolf's images of Madrid under siege are informed by French journalist Louis Delaprée's obscure political pamphlet, *The Martyrdom of Madrid*, which Woolf pasted into her reading notebooks⁸ and cites in her footnotes (n. 15 to Part III). Delaprée, interesting to note, according to Martin Minchom, also inspires Picasso's imaginary space for the painting of *Guernica*.⁹ The journalist, the experimental modernist, and the painter each grapple with the representation of and protest against total war during the Spanish Civil War. These representations all invoke the figure of the Weeping Woman. Let us imagine, for a moment, that the dead baby of *Guernica* is the child in the photographs that assail Woolf, the basement bomb shelter in Picasso's painting is the imaginary 'ruined house' of *Three Guineas*, and that these images are inspired by Delaprée's newspaper article, 'Bombs over Madrid',¹⁰ and the pamphlet, *The Martyrdom of Madrid*. The Weeping Woman appears in all these works as a strong condemnation of war. The triangle of Woolf, Delaprée and Picasso surrounds the Weeping Woman; each offers another dimension to a classic character of war: Delaprée gives the weeping woman a story; Picasso gives her a face; Woolf radicalises her by encouraging her to dry her eyes and wail in indignation, not sadness. In the process, Woolf gives her a

[accessed 30 July 2013].

⁷Vera Neverow, 'Documenting Fascism in *Three Guineas* and *The Handmaid's Tale*: An Examination of Woolf's Textual Notes and Atwood's "Historical Notes"', *Virginia Woolf and the Common(wealth) Reader: The Twenty-Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, Vancouver, B.C. 6–9 June 2013. Neverow quotes the Introduction to Frances Guerin's and Roger Hallas's, *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory, and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 1–22).

⁸See Brenda R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton UP, 1983), LX, B33, p. 305.

⁹See Minchom's articles in the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade's *The Volunteer*:

'Picasso, Louis Delaprée and the Bombing of Civilians', 4 March 2011; www.albavolunteer.org/2011/03/from-madrid-to-guernica-picasso-louis-delapree-and-the-bombing-of-civilians [accessed 30 July 2013].

'Picasso and Delaprée: New Discoveries', 20 April 2011; <http://www.albavolunteer.org/2011/04/picasso-and-delapree-new-discoveries> [accessed 30 July 2013].

'The Truth about Guernica: Picasso and the Lying Press' 9 March 2012; www.albavolunteer.org/2012/03/the-truth-about-guernica-picasso-and-the-lying-press [accessed 30 July 2013].

¹⁰Louis Delaprée, 'Bombs over Madrid' (1936), transl. Martin Minchom, *The Volunteer*, 23 November 2010; www.albavolunteer.org/2010/11/bombs-over-madrid [accessed 30 July 2013].

voice and a politics. Woolf subverts the passivity of the Weeping Woman in Picasso and Delaprée and writes her a different role, one that offers the possibility of peace through her engagement in politics.

A classical icon of mourning from the days of the Greeks, the Weeping Woman has many vestiges and forms. Historically, she stands in as the one who bears witness to death. Sometimes she weeps, sometimes she wails.¹¹ Sometimes she is a passive victim, sometimes she is an active agent in her own torment.¹² Sometimes she is childless, sometimes she mourns dry-eyed over her child.¹³ She always, however, marks tragedy and death; this figure has trans-historically and-culturally come to represent the injustices of the universe generally, and more specifically, of war. Jodi Freeman explains that the Weeping Woman motif was not employed solely by Picasso at the Spanish Pavilion of the World's Exhibition in Paris 1937, but by several of the artists who also showed work (*PWW* 85). She concludes: 'Clearly Picasso's preoccupation with the weeping woman motif was shared by other Spanish artists; the reverence for women, particular mothers, in devoutly Catholic Spain, made them a particularly sympathetic motif, in a forum, like the pavilion, designed to sway viewer's passions' (85).

Used both to incite potential soldiers to fight and as rhetoric for the pacifist cause, the motif is often mythicised: the feminisation of the victim means that the victim cannot share in the blame of the war-making game. In other words, the Weeping Woman can be nothing other than tragic. Unlike the fallen soldier, there is no poetic hero's death for the Weeping Woman; there is no immortality in the songs and epics of the bard. She is both pathetic and ostensibly blameless. And she is the last one standing. The Weeping Woman will be left to register the trauma of survival and the trauma of guilt. The Weeping Woman will be the one who remembers the absence of the living, whose presence marks the presence of death. She is the floating signifier of tragedy and her wail is the wail that resounds through our art.

Delaprée intuited the emotional impact of the Weeping Woman and used her in both his pamphlet and his newspaper article (which Minchom argues Picasso read) to garner support for the Republic. He proffers a string of horrific images, documenting the atrocities of a technologised, total war. When one reads Delaprée's descriptions of war in 'Bombs over Madrid', one can see Picasso's *Weeping Woman with a Handkerchief*¹⁴ anticipated in the image: 'The trampling of people as they escape, the sirens of ambulances transporting the wounded, the sobbing of women beside you as they bury their heads in their scarves, the to-and-fro of men who click their heels to convince themselves that they are not afraid'. Here we see the Weeping Women hiding from the bombings under scarves, highlighting the brutality and injustice of war. Delaprée pulls his reader's heartstrings, evoking sympathy for the Spanish people.

Picasso's 'Mother and Dead Child' of *Guernica* and the studies for *Guernica*, with her mouth upturned, wailing at the loss of her child, echoes Delaprée's images: 'Women pressing against their breasts little babies wrapped within a blanket drag behind their skirts unhappy children, with dry eyes, with trembling chins' (*MOM* 14). Delaprée describes a dead woman and child crushed on the corridor of a bombed-out building. A relief worker spots them: 'He notices the child's corpse, which on the causeway risks to be crushed for the second time. His hands adroitly remove the broken glass, take the little corpse and place it on the woman's heart, close to her right breast intact. A last flash of the torch shows us the little childish head on this motherly heart, and everything falls into the night again' (*MOM* 23–4). This vision of the Madonna is a petrified version of Picasso's *Mother with Dead Child (III)*, a variation on the Weeping Woman, about which Robin Greeley remarks, 'There is a pointed kind of homage being paid to the profundity of such grief, in which Picasso seeks not to assuage it but to recognize it, honor it, give it dignity

¹¹Sir James Frazer describes the Ritual of Adonis of ancient times: 'At the festivals of Adonis, which were held in Western Asia and in Greek lands, the death of the god was annually mourned, with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women ... In the great Phoenician sanctuary of Astarte at Byblus the death of Adonis was annually mourned, to the shrill wailing notes of the flute, with weeping, lamentation, and beating of the breast' (*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Abridged Edition, 1922; Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions, 1993, 335).

¹²See the Spanish childhood fairy tale of *La Llorona* (the Weeping Woman); *La Llorona* kills her children in a jealous rage and is condemned to haunt the village, weeping over the loss of her family. See Joe Hays, *The Day It Snowed Tortillas: Folktales Told in Spanish and English* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2003), 'The Weeping Woman' and 'La Llorona'.

¹³See Richardo Boix Oviedo's *Dream of the Sadness of Spain*, a stone sculpture of a woman and child, which 'used the emblem of a mother tightly clutching her child to symbolize the Spanish tragedy, much as Picasso had done', in Jodi Freeman's *Picasso and the Weeping Woman* (CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art / NY: Rizzoli International Publications, 1994 [Hereafter *PWW* in the text]), 85.

¹⁴See Tate Gallery, London: www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-weeping-woman-t05010/text-catalogue-entry [accessed 30 July 2013].

through the empathetic touch of his brush'.¹⁵ In this study of *Mother with Dead Child*, Picasso has added an orange streak of tears, so that it looks as if she is crying blood. Picasso and Delaprée both use the Weeping Woman figure to illuminate the effects of total war. With the tragedy of today comes Delaprée's question: 'WHAT WILL IT BE TOMORROW?' (MOM 15).

It is in thinking of tomorrow that Woolf constructs her pacifism reliant upon a transnational feminism and socialism that compels the Weeping Woman to dry her eyes and cry out in a different way. Woolf's Weeping Women, encountered in Betty Flanders writing a letter at the opening of *Jacob's Room* (1922) mourning her husband next to the seashore, and in the character of Poll of 'A Society' (1921),¹⁶ has a hum that accompanies her to the rhythm of Charles Kingsley's poem 'Three Fishers'.¹⁷ Marcus has observed that *Three Guineas* is 'part of a series beginning with "A Society"':

In all cases [Woolf] asserted, 'Women Must Weep.' From the tears of the little girl who is elected president of the women's 'Society' of the future in her early piece ('A Society' 136) to the character from Charles Kingsley's poem invoked in the *Atlantic Monthly* to the imagined complaints of the assembled characters of *Three Guineas*, the weeping female chorus asserts women's right to work. (TG lxv)

This right to work, however, is accompanied by responsibility; Woolf attaches conditions to women's work at 'this moment of transition' where women are 'trapesing along somewhere in the rear' (TG 84) of the procession of power. The conditions of maintaining 'poverty, chastity, derision' (TG 94) are intended to answer the question of 'how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human being, that is, who wish to prevent war?' (TG 91).

For Woolf, women are both complicit in perpetuating and entirely dependent upon the war-making system. However, no matter how women have participated through their sins of omission in allowing their sons to go to war and in keeping the war-making structures in place, because of their lack of equality and utter disenfranchisement having been kept outside of the institutions, they have the potential to effect change upon a system of which they are not a submersed part. Because they are outside the system, women are not the ones to go to war. Men must work and women must weep. This, then, is how Woolf's feminism is at the service of her pacifism: women, banded together in an 'Outsider's Society' (TG 126), can effect change from outside the power structure. In this society:

She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstrations; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any claque or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose 'our' civilization or 'our' dominion upon other people. (TG 129)

Her 'indifference' (TG 129) to war will be her protest; her refusal to take part in the war-making game will be its demise. For, if mothers refuse to raise their sons to go to war, if lovers refuse to be seduced by fancy uniforms and silly decorations, if workers refuse to make munitions and charitable souls refuse to

¹⁵Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (Yale UP, 2006), 165. I have found only consensus among art historians that the *Guernica* female figures, the *Weeping Woman* series of portraits, and the *Mother with Dead Child* studies are inextricably linked and part of the same motif, usually classified under 'Weeping Woman'. Greeley, in writing about the *Mother with Dead Child* study, does so under the umbrella 'motif' of Weeping Woman. Freeman states that the 'concept of all three women [in *Guernica*] originated in Picasso's earlier sketches for the mother with dead child' (PWW 40).

¹⁶Virginia Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf: Second Edition*, edited by Susan Dick, (Orlando: Harcourt, 1989, 124-136).

¹⁷Here is part of Kingsley's 'The Three Fishers':

Three fishers went sailing away to the West,
Away to the West as the sun went down;
Each thought on the woman who loved him the best;
And the children stood watching them out of the town;
For men must work, and women must weep,
And there's little to earn, and many to keep ...

Three corpses lay out on the shining sands
In the morning gleam as the tide went down,
And the women are weeping and wringing their hands
For those who will never come home to the town;
For men must work, and women must weep ...

http://ebooks.gutenberg.us/poetry_collection/kings01.html [accessed 30 July 2013].

darn socks and knit blankets, it would be a great deal more difficult for men to actually make war. The conditions upon which Woolf gives her guinea to support the professions of women are that they

use it, not to burn the house down, but to make its windows blaze. And let the daughters of uneducated women dance round the new house ... and let them sing, 'We have done with war! We have done with tyranny!' And their mothers will laugh from their graves, 'It was for this that we suffered obloquy and contempt! Light up the windows of the new house, daughters! Let them blaze!' (100)

With fires purging the old institutions and old habits, a new kind of wail emerges—one signalling transformation and change, a destruction of the old ways. Woolf gives us a choice in *Three Guineas*, evidenced by the title of her first, American, truncated version: 'Women Must Weep—or Unite Against War'.¹⁸ The sketch of mothers and daughters burning down the universities, making the windows blaze, offers us a new portrait of a transformed Weeping Woman who has united against war.

The Weeping Woman, then, put forth by the three war artists forces us to reconcile our daily complicity and involvement in war. It makes our position as readers, who are witnesses with an ethical obligation (as Neverow has taught us), apparent. The dead baby of *Guernica* is the child in the photographs that traumatise Woolf. The basement bomb-shelter in Picasso's painting is the imaginary house of *Three Guineas*. And the woman holding her dead child is the mother who wails as her husband and sons go to war—for it is well known that men must work and women must weep. What Woolf shows us is that, as long as women weep silently and behind closed doors, we are all condemned to a cultural repetition of tragedy and violence. Her cry, out loud and public, contains the possibility for peace, because it is in this cry we can find dissent from a system designed to perpetuate itself. The Weeping Woman is more than just an iconic figure of war that carries the ambivalence of a photograph; she is an ethical cry, a call to action, and an impetus for change.

¹⁸See 'Women Must Weep' in the *Atlantic Monthly*, April and June 1938, reprinted in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. VI, ed. Stuart N. Clarke (Hogarth Press, 2009), 133–63. It is possible that the sub-title was omitted in error from the first instalment: see *The Essays*, 163, n. 1. For a discussion of Kingsley's line 'in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century feminist rhetoric', see Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca: Cornell UP), 2004, 134–5.