

## Writing was her fighting: *Three Guineas* as a Pacifist Response to Total War

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“Thinking is my fighting,” Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary in May of 1940 (D 5 285). This was just a little over a year after the Spanish Republican Government lost to fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and while the Second World War was underway throughout Europe. An adamant pacifist who envisioned a program for world peace based on a platform of transnational feminism and socialism, which she outlines in the radical experimental text *Three Guineas*, Woolf saw thinking, writing, and criticism as a necessary form of protest and intervention in a popular culture invested in war-making. Reflecting on her nephew Julian Bell, who was killed by a fascist bombing during the battle of Brunete, she admits to not understanding his urge to enlist (though as Peter Stansky points out, to appease the fears of his pacifist mother he volunteered to drive an ambulance instead) on the side of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, for “tho’ I understand that this is a ‘cause,’ can be called the cause of liberty & so on, still my natural reaction is to fight intellectually” (*Julian Bell* 278, 263; *Platform* 28).<sup>1</sup> She continues on to say, “if I were any use, I should write against it: I should evolve some plan for fighting English tyranny,” a plan which she did evolve and mapped out in her peace pamphlet, *Three Guineas* (28).

Woolf may have proclaimed “*thinking*” as her “fighting” (emphasis mine), but it was in *writing* her thoughts down and publishing them that Woolf “made manifest” her attack on the patriarchal structures and inequalities that led to war (“Thoughts” 217).<sup>2</sup> Writing and the creation of art was, for Woolf and many other pacifists during the violent

turmoil of Europe throughout the 1930s and '40s, a form of political activism that sought to alter society radically and shape the consciousness of the public by imagining and creating the kind of world in which peace could last. In the aftermath of the unprecedented scale of violence unleashed in the First World War, pacifism spread throughout Europe. The 1930s ushered in an era of political unrest and burgeoning international tensions, which culminated in the Spanish Civil War and its subsequent movement into The Second World War. The Spanish Civil War was not only the world's first widely technologized total war that ruthlessly used large-scale aerial bombardment in the attempted "obliteration," to use Ian Patterson's language, of civilian populations, it was also the first war photographed from the front lines.<sup>3</sup> As such, the violent images and stories flowing from Spain inspired many who had once been pacifists to decide that the only way to answer the ethical call that total war sounds is with military might.<sup>4</sup>

At a time when the cultural climate mobilized towards force, however, Virginia Woolf, in her peace pamphlet *Three Guineas*, illuminates an alternate, feminist, non-military response to total war. Through an examination of *Three Guineas* and the supplementary scrapbooks Woolf kept, it becomes clear that Woolf intervenes in an ongoing cultural conversation taking place in the news media and political spheres while envisioning the conditions for a world that can sustain peace based on social justice and economic equality. *Three Guineas* is Virginia Woolf's "fight with the mind" ("Thoughts on Peace" 216). Woolf's writing, as this essay argues, mobilizes a global feminism in order to issue a pacifist response to the ethical problem total war in Spain poses. This essay shows how artistic projects during the modernist era act as radical pacifist interventions and illuminates the connections, both conceptual and actual, between

artistic and activist networks during the Spanish Civil War. Thinkers, writers, and activists use the techniques of modernist art and literature to bear witness to the necessity of an absolutist pacifist stance in times of total war and attempt to change the consciousness of the public at large.<sup>5</sup> In order to “make ideas effective,” writes Woolf, “we must be able to fire them off” (216). Writing is Woolf’s way of putting her pacifist ideas “into action” (216). Through writing, Woolf performs what Jean Mills and Grace Brockington would each call “positive peace,” by “promoting social, political and cultural reform to eradicate the causes of war” (*Battlefield 2*).

Since Mark Hussey’s groundbreaking collected volume *Virginia Woolf and War*, much great criticism has explicated the relationship between Woolf and war and explored the relationship between Woolf’s feminism and her pacifism, remaining indebted to Hussey’s claim that

*all of Woolf’s work is deeply concerned with war; that it helps redefine our understanding of the nature of war; and from her earliest to her final work she sought to explore and make clear the connections between private and public violence, between the domestic and the civic effects of patriarchal society, between male supremacy and the absence of peace, and between ethics and aesthetics. (3)*

The 2006 Harcourt edition of *Three Guineas*, introduced and annotated by Jane Marcus, makes a contemporary analysis of *Three Guineas* possible, and Marcus’s collection of essays in *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race* exposes the progressive politics juxtaposed with the antimonies, tensions, and contradictions inherent in radical modernist works concerning race, empire, imperialism, and anti-fascism.

Grace Brockington's *Above the Battlefield* starts the work of emphasizing pacifism as a form of activism with her study that concentrates on the First World War. Jane M. Wood's collection of articles in *The Theme of Peace and War in Virginia Woolf's Writings* contributes substantially to thinking about Woolf's pacifist philosophy. Jean Mills's *Virginia Woolf, Jane Ellen Harrison, and the Spirit of Modernist Classicism* introduces the influences of classical anthropology on Woolf by offering a "transpersonal" (3) reading of the relationship between Woolf's work and the scholar Jane Ellen Harrison, tracing the interplay between the pacifist and feminist threads of the two women writers' oeuvres. Christine Froula's analysis of *Three Guineas* in *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* shows that it is "the very irrationality of the subconscious hostility to women's freedom that leads Woolf to project a future in which men and women might speak freely together, an emancipatory history that belongs to the Enlightenment project for the 'rights of all'" (278).

Indeed, it is with the aim of establishing the feminist and egalitarian "rights of all" that Woolf imagines under what circumstances the "dream of peace, the dream of freedom" can be actualized (*Three* 121, 169). Written in an experimental hybrid-genre that combines the formal elements of an essay, a political pamphlet, and a letter, *Three Guineas*, Woolf's "socialist, pacifist, and feminist polemic," is a reply to a series of letters asking for various funds that all, ultimately, support the cause for peace ("No More Horses" 267).<sup>6</sup> In the duration of the book, the narrator donates three guineas (a form of currency amounting to one pound one shilling. Guineas signify wealth; the actual coinage was obsolete, and therefore only people with bank accounts could spend guineas.) to three funds; one to support the women's college, one to "help the daughters of

uneducated women enter the professions,” and one to a society “whose aim it is to preserve peace” all the while trying to answer the question posed at the beginning of the text: “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?” (100-101, 102, 5). Through her meditations on this question, Woolf deconstructs the relationship between patriarchy and fascism, women’s oppression and male aggression, financial inequality and war-making, and the public and private realm. Woolf invents a pacifist philosophy deeply rooted in feminist and socialist egalitarianism that turns women’s traditional position of “outsiders,” as those who have historically been excluded from the structures of power, into a source of regenerative change and revolution.

Woolf’s pacifist philosophy is built upon the socially stratified differences between men and women, differences that have been reinforced through “centuries of tradition and education” (127). Writing from the “point of view of an educated man’s daughter”, Woolf uses women’s historical position as other and outsider as her point of departure, for men and women “think differently according as we are born differently” (13). Kept on the periphery to both military and educational institutions, women have not had the “fighting instinct” bred into them, nor have they historically been able to obtain the kind of power or wealth whose preservation encourages war (210). Because women have been on the outside, they can critique the war-making structures and work “in their own class... and by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace,” in a secret and omnipresent group Woolf names the “Outsiders’ Society” (210, 126).

With her radical feminism, Woolf not only constructs a fierce positive peace based on equality and freedom, she also takes down the ideals of nationalism and patriotism, two of the sources for war. The Outsiders’ Society members must decline to

“fight with arms” and “refuse in the event of war to make munitions or nurse the wounded” (126). The “daughter of an educated man” as an outsider,

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 claue 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. (17, 129)

Women, who have been kept outside of the power structure, do not enjoy the privileges and benefits of the nationalism to which patriotism ascribes. Denied the right to vote for centuries, denied the right to a bank account and the right to own property, denied the right to work, denied the right to be educated, women have been historically relegated to the position of a “slave,” a position that disallows them full citizenship, as it has prohibited their place within the superstructure (128). This is why Woolf vehemently proclaims, in a rhetorical gesture that, as Marcus has pointed out, shares solidarity with Marxist logic to unite the outsiders of the world, “in fact, as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (129). It is with a global feminist-pacifist perspective that Woolf addresses her historical moment, the war in Spain, and the looming world war.

Written during the Spanish Civil War, between the years of 1936-1938, *Three Guineas* is a powerful pacifist feminist response to the advent of total war in Spain. On July 18, 1936, 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. With Hitler and Mussolini involved in support of the fascists,

and Russia on the side of the Republic, the conflict in Spain quickly became an international cause, now often called a “dress rehearsal” for the Second World War. The fascist army exercised “total war” techniques, targeting civilians in the attempted “obliteration,” and destruction of non-military targets and populations.<sup>7</sup> Bombings of cities such as Guernica and Madrid led to an international outcry. Despite Britain, the United States, and France’s non-intervention clause, propaganda, photographs, and news from Spain inspired thousands of international volunteers to join the cause against fascism and enlist in grass-roots militias that fought on the front lines. The long, bloody war lasted almost three years, ending in March 1939 with a fascist victory.

The war in Spain invaded Woolf’s home in England in the form of photographs—photographs she will describe, but declined to reprint in her book. Sent as propaganda from the Spanish Republic, these photographs document the atrocities the fascist army committed and are intended to rally support for the Republican government. Woolf describes them as “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” (*Three* 14). The “dead bodies” invoked here speak to horrors that demand intervention, but they also mark the necessity of an absolutist pacifist stance. Going to war will only create more war, but maintaining neutrality is most certainly to ignore the call of the other. This is the philosophical enigma presented to pacifism during the Spanish Civil War—the slaughter of civilians renders an absolutist pacifism morally impossible and simultaneously calls into being its philosophical, ethical, and ontological necessity.

In an experimental gesture, one that contributes to *Three Guineas*' modernist aesthetics, Woolf invokes the pictures from the Spanish Civil War so that her readers conjure mental images while reading the text, and yet she refuses to print the violent pictures of "dead bodies and ruined houses" (42). In a radical feminist maneuver, she instead publishes photographs of men in power, men who would have perpetuated the war-making system.<sup>8</sup> *Three Guineas* demonstrates, through a series of examples taken from "history, biography, and from the daily paper" that the "public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (154, 168). Patriarchy at home leads to fascism in politics. The tyrant in England is the same as the dictator in Germany or Italy. It is all "subconscious Hitlerism," which is defined as "aggressiveness, tyranny, the insane love of power made manifest" ("Thoughts" 217). As Jean Mills notes, the "dialectical tension between the photos and the word pictures on the page are crucial to Woolf's argument linking patriarchy to fascism and war" (142). Printing the men in power as opposed to the mutilated corpses is one of Woolf's activist interventions into cultural practice as a committed pacifist, a highly political and active pacifism.<sup>9</sup>

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf draws a connection between the "rather abstract words," "culture and intellectual liberty," and "these very positive photographs—the photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses" (102). The revolution of culture and intellectual liberty to include the daughters of educated men—which Woolf redefines as the "disinterested pursuit of reading and writing" and "the right to say or write what you think in your own words, and in your own way"—can help to prevent war (109, 110). Here we see reading and writing as an essential component of Woolf's pacifism; it is through writing, writing



freely and unfettered, stripped of all “money motive, power motive, advertisement motive, publicity motive, vanity motive, and so on” that our poets and artists can illuminate the many truths of existence, truths about life and death, war and peace:

Is it not possible that if we knew the truth about war, the glory of war would be scotched and crushed where it lies curled up in the rotten cabbage leaves of our prostituted fact-purveyors; and if we knew the truth about art instead of shuffling and shambling through the smeared and dejected pages of those who must live by prostituting culture, the enjoyment and practice of art would become so desirable that by comparison the pursuit of war would be a tedious game for elderly dilettantes... ? (115)

Through not only writing, but also writing with honesty, writing in good faith, the metanarratives of a culture obsessed with the glory of war making could be counteracted and the truth of war revealed. It is the same truth embodied in the “dead bodies and ruined houses” of the Spanish photographs: the truth that “war is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped” (14).

The Spanish Civil War marks a turning point in pacifism, modernism, and modernity. The ethical conundrum aided the modernist shift of the peace movement into an activist pacifism that emphasized not only non-conscription and war resistance, but additionally stressed humanitarian and social justice issues, vigorously working to construct a world in which peace could last.<sup>10</sup> The turmoil in Spain, the advent of total war, and the increased technological advancement of weaponry together compelled the Spanish Civil War to become a cause around which modernist artists and writers rallied.

The fact that the same networks writing pamphlets, raising funds, and rallying to alleviate civilian trauma in Spain were the writers and artists producing modernist works is both emblematic of the fervor of the era and the political embeddedness of the collapse of life into art and art into life.

Virginia Woolf, along with many other famous modernists including W. H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, E. M. Forster, H. G. Wells, and Rebecca West, are all listed on the program as having attended an Aid Spain rally called *Spain & Culture* at the Royal Albert Hall on June 24, 1937. This gathering illuminates the relationship between artistry, activism, and the political fervor of the era. Paul Robeson sang, and Pablo Picasso donated a sketch of his studies from the great pacifist documentary project *Guernica*.<sup>11</sup> The sketch was both reproduced on the cover of the program and auctioned to raise money for the Basque refugee children.<sup>12</sup> Paul Robeson's speech, "The Artist Must Take Sides," best captures the atmosphere of the era and powerfully imparts the stakes of the conflict in Spain.<sup>13</sup> He explains, "Every artist, every scientist, must decide NOW where he stands. He has no alternative. There is no standing above the conflict on Olympian heights. . . . The battlefield is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear" (118). Here Robeson situates the artist and the intellectual as key players battling for the "cause of humanity" (118). The artist and the intellectual, torn from their ivory towers and situated as active beings within-the-world, play an essential role in preserving and evolving, what Woolf in *Three Guineas*, echoing and interrogating Robeson's sentiments, calls "culture and intellectual liberty" (*Three* 102).

"Culture and intellectual liberty," the argument goes, could not exist without literature and art and the institutions that preserve them (and as Woolf points out, it is

important to note, these institutions have historically excluded the daughters of educated men), which could not exist without the freedom of expression and social supports that make the arts possible. Woolf, in “Why Art Today Follows Politics,” discusses the convergence between art and politics during the time of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>14</sup> She wrote this short piece for the Artists International Association, of which her nephew Quentin Bell was a member. In this 1936 essay, Woolf picks up on similar concerns as Robeson, pointing out that the artist is a highly sensitized member of the community, and that “art is part of the superstructure” (“No More Horses” 269). Woolf ends the essay averring the importance of organizations like the Artists International Association, stating that, “[The artist] is forced to take part in politics: he must form himself into societies like the Artists International Association./ Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival: the other is the survival of his art” (215).

Virginia’s presence at the *Spain & Culture* rally, where she and Leonard sat on the platform behind the speakers simply scratches the surface of her political commitments (D 5 19). In addition to instructing women at Morley College pro bono from 1905-1906, Woolf was active in both the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the Rodmell Labour Party (see *Modernist Classicism* 17, “Politics and Her Mystical Vision” 284). She also assisted the fundraising effort during the Spanish Civil War by giving manuscript pages to the Spanish cause for refugees, and helped to bring Picasso’s pacifist, anti-fascist masterpiece *Guernica* to England in 1938, where it was displayed at the Burlington Gallery (Introduction *li*, *New Spain* 148). Gayle Rogers outlines Virginia and Leonard’s political activity in *Modernism and the New Spain*, showing that their activism centered around pedagogy, writing, and publishing, using their own press, Hogarth, as a

resource to comment on current affairs and the situation in Spain, publishing a Day-to-Day pamphlet series.<sup>15</sup>

The larger scope of Woolf's activism lies in her writing and its potential to influence and shape the world, which amounts to possibly the most powerful argument that can be made for the artist's involvement in politics. One week after the start of the Spanish Civil War, Woolf pasted a typed out excerpt listed as "War and Writers" in her second scrapbook dated July 25, 1936, that likewise addresses the interconnection between writing and political activism. Woolf's *Three Guineas* scrapbooks (also referred to as "reading notebooks"), compiled between the years 1931-1937, contain letters, news clippings, and typed passages from a variety of sources that Woolf copied and indexed. This particular excerpt, which Brenda Silver identifies as the Manifesto of the International Peace Campaign (an accompanying letter from which Woolf pastes into the following page of her scrapbook, asking her to sign their manifesto), illuminates the fraught and complicated relationship between literature and war, culture and the arts (284). "Modern war and preparations for war are hostile to the arts, and most of all to writing," the piece opens. It continues on to distinguish from wars of the past and modern wars, concluding that even if wars of the past were fertile, productive sources for art, modern war would sterilize any fertile seed that past war has sown. It foreshadows the development and employment of total war, prophesizing, "It is on civilians that war will in future have its most lethal effect." It continues on to assert that

the time has come for all those who care for the well-being of our civilization to take resolute action for peace. . . . [Writers] can try to undermine the war mentality and spread the spirit of peace. They can

refuse to be intimidated by the threats of war-mongers. They can do much to restrain national and racial passions. By seeking to understand and interpret the conflicting temperaments and ideals of potential national enemies, they can help all peoples to feel their underlying kinship. Above all they can help men to know themselves, to be aware of their own motives, to feel and think sincerely, and so to fortify themselves against the insidious passions of the mob and the hypnotic influence of mob-leaders. (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 2 (Sussex), 28)

Writing, as the modernists demonstrate and as propagandists exploit, has the potential to shape perception and therefore the world. In attempting to “spread the spirit of peace,” the artists and writers working alongside activists and relief workers addressing the Spanish Civil War, therefore, unfold an alternative response to the ethical call of total war.

Woolf’s radical writing in *Three Guineas* responds to total war in Spain by attempting to “think peace into existence,” offering several strategies that not only deconstruct the causes of war, but also work to build a society that can sustain peace (“Thoughts” 216). Through her multifaceted ideas that span many areas of both public and private relations, Woolf gives us strategies and visions for non-violent interventions in the use of military force. In addition to education and the ability to undertake creative endeavors, financial, social, and gendered equality comprise the foundational values for Woolf’s vision. As we have already seen, Woolf proposes the creation of the Outsiders’ Society, where women refuse to take part in the war-making process. She also radically builds an argument for the state to turn child-rearing into a paid profession, akin to the clergy, so that women will be compensated for labor that has historically remained

unfunded. Women's right to work and to earn equal wages for their employment is a central concern of *Three Guineas*.

Woolf's scrapbooks reflect her concern with women's labor, and *Three Guineas* picks up this thread as an essential component for Woolf's pacifist vision. Her scrapbooks include a newspaper letter to the editor called "Should Women Work?" (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 2 (Sussex) 6), which argues that women were suitable substitutes for men while they were at war, but employers are making a mistake by continuing to employ them in the post-WWI climate. Woolf quotes this article in a series of excerpts that she features in *Three Guineas* to interrogate the accusations leveled by men like C. M. Joad and H. G. Wells that women, since entering the public sphere, have had the opportunity to help prevent war and the rise of fascism, and they have failed. Woolf explores why women have failed to turn the tides on war, and she discovers it is because working women have no money; they may be employed, but they are too poor to support anything but their own survival. Though women may be legally allowed to find work, the "atmosphere" around women's employment is quite fraught, amounting to low wages and a failure to thrive (*Three* 64).

Women's labor is essential to creating the kind of world that can sustain peace—a world in which men and women are equal, and feminine values offset the male habit to fight. Women's financial independence means that women can join together for their own causes, and live independently from old institutional systems and constraints. Woolf argues, "For to help women earn their livings in the professions is to help them to possess that weapon of independent opinion which is still their most powerful weapon. It is to help them to have a mind of their own and a will of their own with which to help you

prevent war” (*Three* 71). The possibility for peace lies in the power of the outside, indeed the power of the outsider, influencing, pulling against, and challenging the center.

In thinking through and envisioning ways to manifest a world in which war is overcome by peace, Woolf turns to education reform. We go to war, not only because we are taught that war is manly and virtuous, by social discourse, but also because the universities encourage competition, capitalist values, and ideals consistent with military force, such as jealousy and the urge to preserve their own “‘grandeur and power’ of which the poet speaks” (*Three* 38). Military research funds scientific innovation. Looking to history and biography, Woolf asks, “Do they not prove that education, the finest education in the world, does not teach people to hate force, but to use it?” (38). Woolf is tempted to donate a guinea “‘earmarked ‘Rags. Petrol. Matches,’” accompanied by a note that says:

Take this guinea and with it burn the college to the ground. Set fire to the old hypocrisies. Let the light of the burning building scare the nightingales and incarnadine the willows. And let the daughters of educated men dance round the fire and heap armful upon armful of dead leaves upon the flames. And let their mothers lean from the upper windows and cry, ‘Let it blaze! Let it blaze! For we have done with this ‘education’! (45)

Despite the temptation to send such an inflammatory note, she decides against attaching conditions to her guinea. She chooses to support the cause for women’s education, donating a guinea to the women’s college, because it is the only way to include them in the superstructure, the only way to enable the daughters of educated men to join the work force, ultimately helping them to fight for the cause of peace.

Through imagining what kind of college would produce an environment that could maintain peace, Woolf invents a “new college, the poor college” (43). The poor college, the college dedicated to education and not war,

must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practiced by poor people; such as medicine, mathematics, music, painting and literature. It should teach the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people’s lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. The aim of the new college, the cheap college, should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It should explore the ways in which mind and body can be made to co-operate; discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life. (43)

Here, in encouraging people to undertake studies that they love, studies that allow for empathy and integration, Woolf challenges the competitive, capitalist values of the rich universities. These “poor” skills are the skills of artists, not world conquerors, corporate enterprises, or rulers. These are skills that typically do not earn or create a great deal of capital. The poor college includes studies of feminist values, values that counter a masculinist war-making culture and emphasize human connection; values that teach people how to work together in collaboration and co-operation. The poor college, the new college, in other words, would encourage people to create for the love of it, would educate the entire person, would cultivate all parts of the self and would instill the values of cooperation and wholeness, not competition and strife. It would teach daily life in addition to grand historical events; it would show that there is more to human history and



biography than the battles won and lost and the glory of the guns. It might even teach people to write the truth about war and the truth about peace.

The universities, for Woolf, are one place where a new form of education and change can happen. It is significant that she aligns women at the end of *Three Guineas* in solidarity with men: “a common interest united us; it is one world, one life” (168). From the image of the mothers burning down the old universities, we are left with a highly active, political task to resist the discourses of the past and establish a new education, one built on equality and learning, not on competition and war-making, to establish new ways of entering the work force, not compliantly and silently joining the structures that be.

Through these three guineas, one dedicated to the woman’s college, one dedicated to supporting women in the professions, and one dedicated to a male society for peace whose campaign she will support but whose manifesto she will not sign and whose society she will not join, Woolf funds causes which answer the question asked at the beginning of the text, “How in your opinion can we prevent war?” She may not have prevented war in Spain, but with a view towards the future, Woolf outlines a plan for building a society that can sustain peace, and in doing so expands her readers’ imaginative capabilities. She offers many entrances into the discourses around peace and freedom that were contemporaneous to her cultural moment, but are still ongoing and ever-present. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf dreams about women’s potential to revolutionize society and counteracts the socially inscribed rhetoric of “naturalness” or “inevitability” of war that pervades our cultural conversations today. She shows us that real change requires “thinking against the current, not with it” (“Thoughts” 217). In writing *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf performs a pacifist intervention of total war in Spain and

models a vision of peace that puts her in conversations with other activists and pacifists during the Spanish Civil War. Woolf calls upon us all across the years to help prevent war by inviting us on the journey of finding “new words and creating new methods” (*Three* 170). She has gifted us the task of writing new stories and, in doing so, challenges us to “think peace into existence” (“Thoughts” 216).

## Notes

I am grateful to Jane Marcus for the mentorship and ongoing discussions she has provided me with through the years. Her work, teaching, and guidance have contributed substantially to my thought and the development of the ideas in this essay. I would also like to thank Jean Mills for her conversations and support.

1. For further information on Julian Bell’s life, and his death in Spain,, see Stansky and Abrahams.
2. Jane Marcus points out, “publishing was her fighting as well, and we see clearly her commitment to feminism, socialism, pacifism, anti-imperialism, and antifascism (as well as her experimental writing) in her publications at the Hogarth Press” (Introduction *xli*).
3. See Brothers and *The Mexican Suitcase* exhibition catalogue for further discussion of Spanish Civil War photography. One of the most remarkable discoveries in the scholarship to date, *The Mexican Suitcase* exhibit and catalogue, a collection of photojournalists’ Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, and David Seymour (known as Chim), show series of, in Virginia Woolf’s words “dead bodies and ruined houses” (*TG* 14). Three small boxes (which are referred to as the “suitcase”) containing 4,500 negatives were recovered from the effects of General Francisco Aguilar González, a Mexican diplomat to France during the Second World War, in Mexico City in the 1990s and returned to Capa’s brother in 2007. Cornell Capa, who had founded the International Center for Photography (ICP) in New York in 1974, was ready to receive the lost negatives. They contain negatives of pictures that were published in photo-illustrated magazines in France, Great

- Britain, and America, and are the kinds of photos a reader like Virginia Woolf would have encountered. These images were curated and exhibited at the ICP in 2010, and are archived in *The Mexican Suitcase* exhibition catalogue. Some of them can be viewed online at ICP.org.
4. Sarah Cole notes how, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the militaristic evolution of the late 1930s, “the pacifist watches, amidst a dwindling circle of friends, as war engulfs not only the continent but his own political movement” (227).
  5. Modernism, what I define as *an aesthetic encounter with the socio-political that occurred roughly between 1880-1950*, is a highly debated term among scholars that encompasses many definitions and artistic movements. Most generally and broadly speaking, modernism is identified as a literary and artistic movement that emphasizes formal experimentation, a blurring of the boundaries between life and art, lack of cohesive plot or narrative, fragmentation, dissonance, an exploration of psychological phenomena through a introspective turn, a blending of genres, construction and dissolution of the subject, and an interest in the mythological and the “primitive.” Modernism is to be distinguished from, though it is related to, modernity. Modernism can be thought of as encapsulating an artistic movement, aesthetic, or, as Peter Zima points out, a particular set of concerns, whereas modernity can be thought of as a historical movement, era, time period, or a process that is often identified by a concern for the individual subject, the rise of democracy and decline of monarchy, the rise of capitalism, industrialization, expansion of the urban, and an access to travel through innovation and invention. In short, modernism can be considered an artistic reaction to, or encounter with, the set of conditions that are most often associated with the rise of the historical era of modernity. Susan Stanford Friedman, in her article “Definitional Excursions” discusses the relationship and tensions between and within the terms modernism and modernity. For further discussion of modernism and modernity, in addition to Friedman and Zima, see Eksteins and Rosenthal.
  6. For example, in Woolf’s reading notebooks there are pasted letters from the International Peace Campaign (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 2 (Sussex) 29), London and National Society for Women’s Service (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 3 (Sussex) 50), and from Newnham College (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 2 (Sussex) 7), asking for a signature or support in fundraising.

- Critics have ascertained that the imaginary letters to which the narrator of *Three Guineas* responds is actually a compilation of many letters. Marcus says, “When we say that *Three Guineas* consists of three private letters in response to three public letters, it is clear that both ‘threes’ are general, not specific, and include the speakers’ receipt of and response to hundreds of such appeals from intellectuals and artists on the Left” (lii).
7. For more on total war, aerial bombardment, and the threat of “obliteration,” see Patterson.
  8. The five pictures, all of men in ceremonial dress, are generically listed as: “*A General/ Heralds/ A University Procession/ A Judge/ An archbishop.*” Though a reader now would not recognize them, they are pictures of prominent figures in England in the 1930s, such as General Baden-Powell, who started the boy scouts; Lord Baldwin, who was the Prime Minister until 1937 and the chancellor of Cambridge University in 1938 when *Three Guineas* was published; and William Cosmo Gordon Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Their role in the text is symbolic as well as singular, as each of these pictures represents part of the main governing and cultural institutions in England. For further identification and discussion, see Stavely.
  9. Marcus writes 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” (Introduction lxi). Jessica Berman sees this maneuver as a “gesture of refusal” (68), denying the opportunity to contribute to propaganda concerning the war. Additionally, for further discussion of the photographs, see Rogers and Delgarno.
  10. For further discussion of the development of an activist pacifism that adopted humanitarian social justice concerns, rooted in Quakerism, see Mendelsohn. On the development of a twentieth-century secular peace movement, see Brock and Young.
  11. It should be noted that Woolf writes about Robeson in her diary using language that would be considered culturally insensitive by contemporary readers (D 5: 99). Her usage of troubling language exemplifies one of modernism’s core antimonies: that it contains a progressive appeal for human rights, equality, and social justice while also having internalized the imperialist attitudes of European domination. It is also indicative of modernism’s fascination with, and fetishization of, what is problematically referred to as “primitivism,” summed up by Susan Jones

- as a condition “where the reader/viewer is invited, in his/her encounter with alterity, to experience wonder, awe, erotic desire, but also approbation and fear” (153). Though Woolf is writing in her diary, and therefore not ‘inviting’ her reader to respond in any particular way, she clearly traverses the range of these emotions and encapsulates, in this instance, many of the tensions of the modernist era.
12. Though Picasso was listed on the program and provided the cover image, he never actually attended the rally. See *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*, 70.
  13. The title of Robeson’s speech, “The Artist Must Take Sides” has a similar ring to it as the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*, collected by Nancy Cunard and published by the Left Review, in which Cunard avers, “Above all others, the writer, the intellectual, must take sides.” This pamphlet documents the British intellectual left’s overwhelming support of the Spanish Republic and shows the interconnection between art and politics of the 1930s by recording the responses of authors answering the questions: “**Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?**” Though Leonard responded in support of the Republic, Virginia did not sign. *Three Guineas* makes clear that she sought to find an alternative ethical response to total war, one that was both pacifist and anti-fascist.
  14. “Why Art Today Follows Politics,” published in 1936 in the *Daily Worker*, was republished under the name “The Artist and Politics” in *The Moment and Other Essays*, 1948 (See DeSalvo, 281). It was reprinted under the later title in *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Leonard Woolf, and again under its original title in *Virginia Woolf Selected Essays*. Citations here refer to *Selected Essays*, though Marcus’s comments use the *Collected Essays* title and page numbers.
  15. For a further overview of Woolf’s political activism see *Modernism and the New Spain* (144-151).

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