



## Three Guineas

*Virginia Woolf*

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The author received three separate requests for a gift of one guinea—one for a women's college building fund, one for a society promoting the employment of professional women, and one to help prevent war and "protect culture, and intellectual liberty." This book is a threefold answer to these requests—and a statement of feminine purpose.

## Three Guineas Details

Date : Published 1966 by Harcourt (first published 1938)

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Author : Virginia Woolf

Format : Paperback 188 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Classics, Writing, Essays

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## From Reader Review Three Guineas for online ebook

### Jamie says

This is not, at least in my understanding, typical Woolf. Argumentatively speaking, it definitely strikes one as a companion to *A Room of One's Own* (though in her diaries, VW mentioned that she thought 3Gs to be a great deal better argued than Room), but stylistically, it's different from any other Woolf I've read. Usually you're able to pick up easily on Woolf's satire, her gentle mocking tone; here, the parody is so subtle that at times you find yourself re-reading a sentence to make sure she doesn't actually HATE WOMEN (tm). But alas, I don't believe she does.

The premise of it is this: a man writes a letter to VW asking her how the daughters of educated men, having won the vote and the right to enter the professions, might help to prevent war. The book is split into three chapters--one for each of the guineas Woolf will dole out in the effort to prevent war. As in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf often speaks to the lacunae of history--the women who were unable to pursue 'paid-for' education, yet who aided their brothers' going to school; women who could only support themselves through marriage and so were subsumed beneath the economic and political positions of their husbands; & co. Woolf questions how, after only 60 years of opportunity, an educated man can possibly ask women to make up for centuries of silence and step confidently into a position that enables them to provide economic and political support to preventing the oncoming war.

Woolf seems in some ways to have done everything first (or if not first, maybe just did them best). Prior to the feminist and post-structuralist debates from the 70s on concerning biological essentialism, VW makes pointed allusions to the 'difference' between men and women, but suggests (provocatively, I think) that we "see from behind different eyes" because we have been compelled to develop that particular visual disparity for so damn long. Even the potential 'psychological difference' between the sexes, a question rising in the post-Freudian era, Woolf suggests, could easily be an effect rather than a cause of gendered culture. Moreover, her beautiful defense of resistance against cultural prostitution and intellectual slavery (problematic as these metaphors may be) strikes me as both simple and incredibly intricate and inspiring at once.

There are of course problems. Besides the snobbish metaphors of prostitution and slavery, Woolf also \*loves\* using servants and housemaids and such as little ideological scapegoats. There's Crosby, the butler, becoming the conduit for a shift in conversation; there's the shriek of the housemaid that must be 'translated' into intellectual speech. And though VW makes certain to clarify that her common subjects are the "daughters of educated men," her inability to conceive of women who have no choice but to work seems to me at times a grave oversight. (Evidently, others agree--Alison Light's recent book '*Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*' picks up on these inconsistencies in Woolf's oeuvre--which is probably why it seemed so glaring to me as I read this and re-read *Between the Acts*.)

In any case, it's definitely definitely worth your while. If it's dated at moments, at others, it remains profoundly urgent--I think notably in this historical moment of reactionary U.S. conservatism, particular to the ideal of the nuclear family. See also Woolf's incredibly persuasive linkage between the patriarchal household and the tyranny of the dictatorships rising to power in Germany and Italy at the time Woolf was writing--sleeping with the enemy, indeed. Great text.

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## **Kusaimamekirai says**

"What can **we** do to prevent war?"

Having that question posed to her, we are off. Or more accurately, Woolf is off with the most eloquent, indignant and intelligent response possible.

First and foremost she posits that since men are the ones who throughout history have been the killers of men as well as animals, the premise that men and women have come to this point in human history somehow equally to blame is flawed to say the least.

That being said, she does lay out three solutions.

The first essentially being to stop equating manhood and virility with killing things and wearing flashy military uniforms.

Second, if you seriously want women to be a part of the solution, stop preventing them from educating themselves.

Third, after education it follows that access to professions outside the home is a basic human freedom as well.

I particularly liked her examples of how a father was aghast at the idea of their daughter taking a part time teaching job. Not the job itself, but taking money for it. If she insists on taking the job, he offers to pay her salary out of his own pocket rather than have another man pay her.

Basically in a society where women weren't even allowed to leave the home alone, how can they be expected with any seriousness to respond to a question about preventing war?

It all comes back to this point.

A short but vastly interesting and at times savagely funny read.

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## **Cathy says**

Phenomenal. Virginia Woolf at her best. It's too bad so much of the content is still relevant!

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## **Michael says**

A three-part answer to the question of how women might prevent war and protect intellectual freedom, *Three Guineas* features Woolf at her most impassioned: the essayist insists upon women's right to establish and determine the course of their own institutions, in addition to critiquing the links between the patriarchal household, patriotism, and fascism. The book, then, deals with politics, education, and the material conditions of everyday life in ways that the writer's other book-length essay, *A Room of One's Own*, only hints at. So, too, does Woolf here in part acknowledge the specific social position from which she writes, making the work read as more honest and complex than *A Room of One's Own*. The fast pace at which Woolf moves, as well as her uncharacteristically candid language, betrays the desperation she must have felt as she watched Europe inch ever closer to another world war.

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## **Aubrey says**

*...it matters not just because women win. It matters because it means we have a seat at the*

*table. And everybody in this room knows the basic rule, if you don't have a seat at the table, you are probably on the menu.*

—Senator Elizabeth Warren

This is my seventh Woolf. I own ten more. It is not often that I unconsciously commit myself so thoroughly to a single author, for when I was young and did not have recourse to Goodreads for purposes of planning out further successful reads, I followed each and every success to the end of their composers' bibliography, and that never, ever, ended well. Now here I sit, seven out of seventeen for read and soon to be reviewed of not seventeen, not even seven, but one. One single author. Her qualities I aspire to, her flaws are my own, and as much as I praise empathy and its Amnesty International heights of power, as much as I parse out my reading amongst the multifarious accordingly, the canon is a lie; representation, as a white daughter of educated men, is not.

*So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape.*

I said A Room of One's Own is a good entry to feminism. The danger, then, of its popularity and persistent blocking out of this other works' attributes is its all too often status as both start and finish, beginning and end. That is the act of learning not speech, nor a quote, not even the alphabet, but a single letter by which one reads. If one wants to be even more explicit, scrub out "letter" and replace it with "character", for the former brings to mind the English 26 of two significant digits while the latter speaks of the 5000+ entried language of Chinese, a culture-crossing comparison that speaks not only to our fear of multitudes of thousands but our fear of other and, in short, does well to describe the mentality with which we all should approach Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own'. Feminism is not a light switch; it is a lifetime. To the Lighthouse, anyone?

*We shall find there not only the reason why the pay of the professional woman is still so small, but something more dangerous, something which, if it spreads, may poison both sexes equally. There, in those quotations, is the egg of the very same worm that we know under other names in other countries. There we have in embryo the creature, Dictator as we call him when he is Italian or German, who believes he has the right, given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do.*

When I think of feminism, I think of destroying the patriarchy, and when I think of the patriarchy, I think of all. If The Second Sex was a room, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism a window, Three Guineas is a barometer, for a storm comes upon us through myriad physical and chemical means, and it will not spare us its wrath due to the fact of our ignorance of its methods. We are all bound by the patriarchy, but do not take that as a reason to forgo feminism for humanism. There is a history behind me of those who were of my gender, those who due to the fact of our shared gender were isolated with impunity, forced into labor with impunity, raped with impunity and murdered with impunity. To forgo feminism for humanism is to obliterate the resistance birthed by that history with impunity. To forgo feminism for humanism is to imply that the millenia of centuries do not matter, we have not really come very far at all with our ability to not only survive but propagate, to not only propagate but to control, to not only control but to enhance, to not only enhance to progress, due to the fact that this movement is for the sake of women and women, as we all know, are the half of the population of humanity that is composed of objects. To put it plainly, I for the simple fact of being a woman have a lot more to lose a lot more easily, and if you refuse to take that into respectful account, what good is your status as a human being for?

*And we find, between the lines of their husbands' biographies, so many women practicing—but what are we to call the profession that consists in bringing nine or ten children into the world, the profession which consists in running a house, nursing an invalid, visiting the poor and the sick, tending here an old father, there an old mother?—there is no name and no pay for that profession; but we find so many mothers, sisters and daughters of educated men practicing it in the nineteenth century that we must lump them and their lives together behind their husbands' and brothers', and leave them to deliver their message to those who have the time to extract it and the imagination with which to decipher it.*

Evolution is the survival of the fittest, fittest not in whatever implications of athleticism and superiority have accrued over the years but in the matter of a round block made of wood triumphing over a square block made of diamond because it is able to fit in the round hole. It is no surprise, then, that a patriarchal way of doing things, man as subject and woman as object, has percolated into every vein of social significance and common sense. It is no surprise, then, that we are compromised from the day of birth till the day we drop, so if you think this is a matter of competition or holier-than-thou, kill two birds with one stone and forget it. Not only is that the patriarchal manner of evaluation, survival of the fittest translating to utter erasure of the assumed to be useless but only, of course, after squeezing out every bit of use possible from that long forgotten name, identity, and self. Speech, thought, the way things are and the ways we fear are all geared towards those clubs men, those fashions of the military, those boys who will ever be boys, so it shouldn't surprise us how resistance is not a matter of putting your money behind your mouth but questioning why the mouth is worth so much less than the money.

*If such is the real nature of our influence, and we all recognize the description and have noted the effects, it is either beyond our reach, for many of us are plain, poor and old; or beneath our contempt, for many of us would prefer to call ourselves prostitutes simply and to take our stand openly under the lamps of Piccadilly Circus rather than use it.*

If there are no female philosophers, we shall have to question the definitions of "philosopher" and "philosophy", for if that oh so worthy title cannot be in any way applied to a work such as this, then its worth is very little indeed. What matters is the wide range of that worth applied to the heritage, the fact, the crowd of academia and purveyors of its gates and why is it none of them will come across a work such as this, a fierce 188 pages touching upon the relations between war and freedom and feminine momentum everywhere in between, admittedly suffering from Eurocentric solipsism but that has never stopped the men. This book comes upon a difference in income, a difference in education, a picture of dead bodies, and instead of quick-fix magicking the culprit up in the form of "the economy", "today's generation", "Internet" in the mainland and "terrorism" without, we have facts, we have logic, we have a quick and keen and systematic deconstruction of everything we take for granted in just the patriarchal mix of ethos and pathos and logos we all in the Ancient Greece-informed side of things aspire to, broken down and built up and into a completely new beast of paradigm and ideology that is the only trundler down the path not dictated by the yellow brick roads of the patriarchy, and still we withhold the "philosophy". Is the tag "feminism" supposed to make up for that lack? Considering the placement of its works in the "Sexuality" and "Women's Studies" areas, leaving the "Philosophy" shelves free to take on its bags of dicks, and the respective attracted audiences, I think not.

*You shall swear that you will do all in your power to insist that any woman who enters any profession shall in no way hinder any other human being, whether man or woman, white or black, provided that he or she is qualified to enter that profession, from entering it; but shall do all in her power to help them.*

Perhaps the word "philosophy" cannot contain it, for while survival of the fittest has been outfitted by the

patriarchy accordingly, intersectionalism has not. There is a great deal in this work penned to completion 76 years ago that is all too familiar, and it is that great deal that trumps any talk of "incorrect application" and "breaks the rules" and roots the ideal of feminism firmly in the matter of the individual. Here, Woolf does not speak of a solution, nor does she summarize her main tenants into the great favorite of banking education of easily swallowed and easily vomited, but factors in the passage of time and its endless trials and errors on every scope of human effort into her composition. An weighty task that implies an insurmountable problem, but for all the pain and death and genocidal levels of infighting the human race has undergone, it still persists. Figure out the reason why we don't all just lay down and die, factor in the facts and statistics of gynephobia around the globe, keep at it long enough and find, eventually, a handful of means and a measure of hope to last you on your way.

*The outsiders then would bind themselves not only to earn their own livings, but to earn them so expertly that their refusal to earn them would be a matter of concern to the work master. They would bind themselves to obtain full knowledge of professional practices, and to reveal any instance of tyranny or abuse in their professions...Broadly speaking, the main distinction between us who are outside society and you who are inside society must be that whereas you will make use of the means provided by your position—leagues, conferences, campaigns, great names, and all such public measures as your wealth and political influence place within your reach—we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public but with private means in private.*

I called this book a barometer. For a more accurate metaphor, forgo Prometheus and carry the fire on your own.

*"Then, to, there was my belief that now and then women should do for themselves what men have already done—and occasionally what men have not done—thereby establishing themselves as persons, and perhaps encouraging other women towards greater independence of thought and action...When they fail their failure must be a challenge to others."*

-Ameila Earhart

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### **Mirela says**

It's a really great book! I enjoyed reading it!

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### **Maria says**

Without a hint of a doubt, my favourite, most cherished book of VW. i would go as far to say that this is, in fact, my favourite book ever and the best book I ever read.

It should be read at school instead of Mrs Dalloway, and that would change the (totally wrong and unfair) negative opinion many have on this writer. Three guineas is a a cry, a prayer, and a strong affirmation of equality between men and women and of the right to education, and an amazing song of love for all women of all times. Any educated woman should read it and cherish it forever, as a reminder of what it used to be

and of how far we have come. Most importantly, it should serve as a reminder that, to the present day, not every woman on earth has the right to education that we so easily take for granted. And finally, this book should be used as weapon from the educated women of today to conquer and grant the same right to education to every other woman on earth. Because, to put it like VW, "As woman, I have no country. As woman, my country is the whole world".

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### **Anna says**

I've heard Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) called the unofficial companion to *A Room of One's Own*. In the earlier book, Woolf connects systematic sexism to economics and art. She contends that a sister of Shakespeare, equal in the Bard's talent, would never write a word. All people deserve a living wage and private space, or else their potential will never be reached. It's not an act of charity either; our very society depends upon it. What has been lost because creative geniuses who were female lived in societies that limited them?

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf extends her ideas on gender and economics to include the prevention of war. Written during the Spanish Civil War, and as Hitler and Mussolini moved to extend their dominion, Woolf receives a letter from a pacifist organization asking for her membership, her financial donation, and her opinion on how our society can prevent the brutal violence that the enclosed photos of murdered Spanish children and burnt homes indicate.

Woolf's response, in the form of a series of letters, is this book.

Her reflection is still timely. As Woolf lays out the evidence for donating to "causes," and about the responsibilities of being a son or daughter of an educated man, she has such a thorough hand, it borders on satirical; I can imagine her bemused smile as she wrote. Woolf makes an airtight case for the deep connections of political domination and patriarchal domination. Her critique of education and religious systems that implicitly guide our society to militarism and war strikes true.

Particularly fascinating, Woolf illustrates her text with photographs: a clergyman in full regalia leading a procession; a military man in a parade wearing a jacket heavy with medals and ribbons; academics in a commencement ceremony, draped with robes and wearing tasseled hats. Her selection of images reflects her narrative style: she's presenting objective evidence of the authoritative positions, and at the same time, she pokes fun at the costuming of hierarchy.

My annotated Harvest Books edition includes facsimiles of Woolf's extensive notebooks, where she pasted letters, news clippings, and the like; much of it is her source material for *Three Guineas*. Curious reads, all.

I usually appreciate annotated editions, particularly of books that are embedded in their time and place as this one. The facsimiles from Woolf's notebooks were invaluable, and so were notes on public figures that Woolf discusses. But these annotation-happy editors take it far too far: overwrought explanations of the simplest things are ridiculous. Especially in juxtaposition with Woolf's style: her exhaustive research and clear-as-crystal reflection is carried forth with a smile and an intent.

The Harvest editors come off as desperate to sound smart. It made me a bit crazy.

Consider an endnote on the word "manifesto":

"manifesto (102) A manifesto is an open expression of one's tenets, goals, and plans, particularly with respect to politics, but also a form used for declarations of artistic intent. Readers in the late 1930s would invariably have connected the word with Karl Marx whose Communist Manifesto (1848) championed the rights of the working class and encouraged the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie."

Seriously? Isn't manifesto pretty well initiated into mainstream English? Do the editors think only 1930s-era readers have heard of Karl Marx?

But don't let the editors of the Harvest edition overshadow what Woolf has to say for herself! My copy was plumped up with the editors' Preface, Chronology, Introduction, Appendix, Suggestions for Further Reading: Virginia Woolf, and Suggestions for Further Reading: Three Guineas. But standing true in the center is a solid piece of work, written in a genre that's diminishing but invaluable (the long-form essay), one that holds innovative thinking, impressive reasoning and sympathy with alternative points of view, and, yes, that bemused smile.

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### **umberto says**

Some years ago I came across this book "Three Guineas" by Virginia Woolf and didn't want to read it since it looked tough to me. Indeed, some readers who enjoy reading her might not agree with me. I mean, while reading it, it's arguably tough due to her innumerable lengthy reasons deftly raised to support her points, that is, she's written like a professor. Incidentally, its readers would have no choice but keep reading it and be stunned by most of her lengthy paragraphs; therefore, from its 144-page content there are 28 pages (19.44%) without any paragraph. In other words, on average there would be one page without indentation for every five pages.

However, I liked the following excerpts as typical of her fine, unique and rare arguments:

We can say that for educated men to emphasize their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names are acts that rouse competition and jealousy -- emotions which, as we need scarcely draw upon biography to prove, nor ask psychology to show, have their share in encouraging a disposition towards war. (p. 21)

Next, what should be taught in the new college, the poor college? Not the arts of dominating other people; not the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital. They required too many overhead expenses; salaries and uniforms and ceremonies. The poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practised 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 art of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. (p. 34)

So, Sir, if you want us to help you to prevent war the conclusion seems to be inevitable; we must help to rebuild the college which, imperfect as it may be, is the only alternative to the education of the private house. We must hope that in time that education may be altered. That guinea must be given before we give you the guinea that you ask for your own society. But it is contributing to the same cause--the prevention of war. Guineas are rare; guineas are valuable, but let us send one without any condition attached to the honorary treasurer of the building fund, because by so doing we are making a positive contribution to the prevention of war. (p.

## **Sheila says**

Let us get straight to the point. For unlike Virginia Woolf who waited three years to answer the question *how can women prevent war*, I can't wait that long for me to understand what is happening in the south of the Philippines where Filipinos are fighting with the Malaysians over a property called Sabah.

### **So how, according to Ms. Woolf, can women prevent war?**

Influence.

Women can have great influence in this futuristic society that can communicate to millions at the touch of a button, but still considers killing another human being as a symbol of patriotism. Loyalty, if you will.

But how can women possess this influence?

We must have independent opinion, which is not a big problem now as it once was. But for the sake of clarity, this independence that Ms. Woolf recommends is a result of getting education and having a profession where women can earn enough money to live on and without getting contaminated by it.

Meaning: women who must have influence in society, must not sell their bodies and minds for money.

That bit might need more explaining so I'll share something that some of my friends can attest to.

When I was working for a multinational pharmaceutical company where I earned lots of money, well, more money than I had need for at the time, I didn't like what I was becoming. I was confident and charming, but I was arrogant. I was empowered and esteemed, but I was also callous and unsympathetic.

In short, I was becoming like a man (no offense to my male friends, some of whom would gladly cross the fence, but I don't know how else to describe my feeling at the time, so you'll forgive me and if you know me better---I don't hate men).

And I didn't like it because it made me uncomfortable. More than that, it alienated me. I'm a woman. I'm not used to having so much power that I would start hating myself for what it was doing to me.

So I decided to leave the company. I had many reasons, but when I finally resigned, the reason that I couldn't tell my family was that I didn't like the money.

They wouldn't understand. I didn't understand at the time. I just knew that I didn't like what I was becoming.

So I have to thank Ms. Woolf---her advice not to sell my brain was not in vain. And while some of my female friends still find me too idealistic, too wild, I am the better for it. How? I read and write at my own pace and frankly, *it's just the life for me*.

Going back to war, Ms. Woolf proposed a final solution when asked the question on **how to protect culture**

**and intellectual liberty**, which the questioner relates to the prevention of war.

The answer: Women should protect their own culture and intellectual liberty.

Meaning: *women's culture and intellectual liberty*. For if women follow men's ways and methods, there is no hope in preventing war. Women must create their own words, new methods, new ways of doing things if we mean to preserve our humanity and civilization.

Can we do it? Can women possess independent opinion to influence a society in need of peace and can they form women's groups to preserve their culture and experiment on better solutions?

If there's still war, then we women have much to do.

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### **Roberta says**

I don't think words can express how much I love Virginia Woolf. In my opinion, she was one of the greatest minds to ever walk this earth and everyone should read her work. *Three Guineas* is no exception.

Even though a couple of her arguments are a little dated, since (even though it sometimes doesn't feel like it) women have more rights today than they did back then, but the majority of the book still applies to today's society.

Basically, this book is Woolf's response to a letter she received from a male friend in which he asked her how to prevent war. Of course, Woolf starts us off with a bang stating that, "But one does not like to leave so remarkable a letter as yours - a letter perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?- unanswered." Wow!

For here she tells the man that she has received two other letters asking for one guinea. One a women's college building fund and the second for a society promoting the employment of professional women. While these things do not seem to have anything to do with how to prevent war, Woolf makes amazing connections between the education and professionalism of women and how these two things would actually help to prevent war.

Her arguments are well stated and convincing, perfectly outlining how these institutions and the equality of woman would actually make the world a better and more peaceful place. I'm not going to go into the specifics of her arguments here since that would be an entire paper, actually a book, but I will say that Woolf

has some spot on points.

While I did enjoy “A Room of Her Own” more than this book (since the “Room” had more parallels with today’s society) I do think this book is well worth the read. I ended up giving it a 5/5. Woolf’s writing is stunning and she mastered the tongue and cheek humor that I love so much. There are so many sticky notes and markings (yes, I mark in my books) in my copy since so many of the things she says can’t be stated in a better way than she did. I highly recommend this book to any and all.

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### **Morgan says**

After reading most of Virginia Woolf novels (except for one) I have decided to move on to her non-fiction works. Wasn’t really a fan of this topic, I mean it was interesting, but if it was written by someone else I wouldn’t bother to read *Three Guineas*.

This is long essay about giving women the right to have a good college education to maybe prevent wars from starting or giving anyone the proper education to see that war is bad. Woolf herself was a feminist and she was against wars. She didn’t like seeing soldiers coming back with all these issues they never had before war (*Mrs. Dalloway* goes into this too). She was also self-taught. She never had the money for an education and she read books above her age limit as a girl. To her, learning was a key to life.

I wasn’t a fan of how this edition was set up either. It’s not Woolf’s fault at all, but there was no table of contents or index which I think would help this book. I also skimmed the chapter long notes page. Not that it’s not important, just nothing to my interest.

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### **Molly Amster says**

Another stinger...go Virginia!

"Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes."

"The value of education is among the greatest of all human values."

"Should we not help her to crush him in our own country before we ask her to help us to crush him abroad? And what right have we, Sir, to trumpet our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our most respectable newspapers any day of the week eggs like these?"

"Let us never cease from thinking - what is this 'civilization' in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us...?"

"...question the value of professional life - not its cash value; that is great; but its spiritual, its moral, its intellectual value...if people are highly successful in their professions they lose their senses. Sight goes. They have no time to look at pictures. Sound goes. They have no time to listen to music. Speech goes. They have no time for conversation. They lose their sense of proportion - the relations between one thing and another. Humanity goes. Money making becomes so important that they must work by night and by day. Health goes.

And so competitive do they become that they will not share their work with others though they have more than they can do themselves. What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, sound, and sense of proportion? Only a cripple in a cave."

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### **Jesi says**

V. WOOLF: \*drops mic\*

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### **Joseph says**

Virginia Woolf's essays on on a letter to a long unanswered letter asking her to join a society on the prevention of war. Her Woolf is at her snarkiest. She describes the new class of men that arose in England. Those who are not nobility but have made a comfortable living because they are educated. Woolf plays (lived) the role of a "daughter of an educated man." This indicates that she herself is not a recognized person but rather a part or extension of another.

Woolf covers three main topics in her essays -- Prevention of War, Education, and the employment of women. The prevention of war and education for women blend nicely together. Repeated through out the essays is that 300,000,000 is spent on the military. A daughter of an educated woman can, with experience earn 250 pounds a year. Women in allowed employment roles earn significantly less than men for the same positions. Woolf not only describes the current problems but also offers some solutions. An interesting read from 1938 that has still is still felt today with wage inequality and war. Although education is open, the thought of crippling student debt is now a reality.

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### **Sentimental Surrealist says**

If you take it from the patriarchy's most slavishly devoted agents, the so-stupid-they-practically-drool white men ("not all m- " \*defenestrates protester\*) who upload videos on YouTube where they yell about how everyone's way too emotional, the dumbasses, why can't they be fucking rational like us ("yeah, well, double dumbass on you," sez a Captain Kirk displaced into the '80s), anyone who actually gets passionate about social justice is just proving the irrationality of it all. While meanwhile the Amazing Atheist, that master of the carefully studied and utterly rational scream-a-thon, gets to scream all he wants, inheritor as he is of the dubious-at-best legacy of Sam Kinison and Bill Hicks. So emotional displays are bad, but only if they're emotional displays that go against... look, fuck these clowns, all right?

The point being that Virginia Woolf's rhetoric here is masterful, even as it's obvious she had to play the "don't get mad, no actually don't get emotional at all, the men on the side of patriarchal thinking can get as emotional as they want but you as an opponent of it absolutely cannot, that is OUR territory, &c., &c." which she herself addresses in the wonderful passage about "infantile fixation" in some of the men of the 19th century. Not a lot has changed, really, it's just the dudes with the infantile fixation have youtube and reddit and facebook to be infantile on. Except Woolf smacks each and every one of them down here. She keeps an

outward tone of pleasant conversation, yes, but lurking about two centimeters beneath the surface is this badass pissed-off Woolf whose guns blaze subtly but blaze nonetheless.

As a work of rhetoric, *Three Guineas* is masterful, but that doesn't even begin to get at it. Woolf's points on the various hypocrisies of society and the way human competitive instinct ties to human war instinct, especially male competitive instinct-male war instinct (hey! Today's Super Bowl Sunday! I'm not gonna watch the Super Bowl today!) is brilliantly well-realized. Barbarism, as Morrissey reminds us, begins at home, and while he might have intended that as one of his many beautifully coy Morrissey turns of phrase, it's a song title that nonetheless ties in well. The basic idea being that the patriarchy is everywhere and we support it without even knowing it.

Which led to some self-examination on my own part, since I, as a white male (maybe not a heterosexual white male, there are a million reasons why that's up for debate, but certainly white and certainly male), have almost certainly benefitted from this sickening system in ways I don't even understand. So yes, this is a discomfort-inducing book for any white man to read, but the discomfort it causes proves how important it is. So read this book. And Aubrey's right, think of it as philosophy, because if it isn't, what is?

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### **Burcu says**

I like the polemical style of Woolf. Her literary finesse combined with intellectual acuteness make her arguments quite effective. A most memorable passage from the essays reads:

"if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or "our" country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. For, the outsider will say, '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.'"

This is a great reply to the masculine nature of war from a woman's point of view.

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### **Samadrita says**

Four score years ago Woolf envisioned a time when the very prospect of members of her sex delivering sermons from the pulpit will not elicit scorn or sneers, when the blonde-wigged, ageing torch-bearers of society would allow women to administer justice, climb the ranks of the distinguished Civil Service and teach young men in universities. The indefatigable benevolence of time has transformed many of her ardent wishes into reality not only within the confines of England but beyond.

And yet as I type this, there's an educated man, a graduate of India's premiere engineering institute if his profile is to be believed, *insulting* a feminist author on my twitter timeline by accusing her of whoring herself.

At the expense of two dozen or more whatsapp messages and weeks worth of bickering back and forth have I managed to convince a dear friend not to use the term '*feminazi*' to discredit radical feminists. What Woolf called an '*infantile fixation*' remains a prime character trait of the *less fair* sex still.

Even now people would rather invoke some misogynous claptrap passed off as inviolate truisms recorded in

a book written centuries ago by unenlightened individuals instead of applying intellect or acquired knowledge to judge a real life scenario. Case in point being the initial denial of anaesthetics to expecting mothers in labour on the assumption that women must endure the worst pain known to mankind to atone for 'Original Sin', something Woolf doesn't fail to point out here.

So before I go on any further and launch into a full-fledged tirade which will be a regrettable disservice to the purpose and spirit of this essay, let us turn to Woolf's three guineas.

To borrow from bell hooks, this is Virginia Woolf disemboweling the 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' of her times with a merciless precision. She is a force of nature in this pretend-letter - inexorable but reasonable, irate but calm, bursting with indignation but dignified, sarcastic but inoffensive - exuding wisdom and poise in every sentence. Not only does she trace the complex interrelationship between war and the lust for power and wealth, but attributes all of it to the underlying patriarchal sentiment of governing the world through tools of intimidation.

*"Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us; and it is difficult to judge what we do not share."*

She chastises the world of academia rooted in baser interests of personal profit which jeopardize the sacrosanct search for truth and knowledge and criticizes the mode of education which delights in enforcing rigid hierarchies instead of striving to achieve synthesis and harmony.

*"...what should be taught in the new college, the poor college? Not the arts of dominating other people; not the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital. (...) The poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practised 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."*

Composed in the format of a letter addressed to a (probably fictional) gentleman (a lawyer) who asked Woolf to help preempt war by making contributions towards the preservation of artistic and intellectual liberty, the essay tries to delve deep into the causality of inequalities both in the public and private spheres and exposes how these inequalities between the sexes and the classes cripple society and foment antipathy and hatred. She also proves how the unhealthy obsession with imperious titles, monetary rewards, uniforms and ranks in various professions encourages nepotism and power-grabbing thereby stunting the advancement of civilization.

*"Obviously the connection between dress and war is not far to seek; your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers. Since the red and the gold, the brass and the feathers are discarded upon active service, it is plain that their expensive and not, one might suppose, hygienic splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers."*

Flaying open the anatomy of fascism, she explicates how the politics of injustice and oppression perpetuated in England is just as deserving of censure as Hitler and Mussolini's doctrines of totalitarianism, how

patriotism is nothing but a shallow excuse for perpetuating violence.

*"Are they not both the voices of Dictators, whether they speak English or German, and are we not all agreed that the dictator when we meet him abroad is a very dangerous as well as a very ugly animal? And he is here among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison, small still, curled up like a caterpillar on a leaf, but in the heart of England. (...) And is not the woman who has to breathe that poison and to fight that insect, secretly and without arms, in her office, fighting the Fascist or the Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms in the limelight of publicity?"*

In staccato bursts of intellectual rigour, Woolf points out every single thing wrong with the world of her times (and ours too) with a devastating sort of forthrightness. This is Virginia at the height of her literary powers and probably at her argumentative best.

*"The daughters of educated men who were called, to their resentment, (\*)'feminists' were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the same enemy that you are fighting and for the same reasons. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state."*

To conclude, this is the kind of essay which validates the existence of this narrative form like few others of its kind.

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(\*)Important to note here that Woolf resents the term 'feminist' because the subjects she elucidates with great vigour in this essay spill beyond the boundaries of an issue like gender equality.

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### **Belinda says**

This is a great feminist rant about the disgusting nature of male interference in women's education and how women could prevent war. She also takes a few deft stabs at fascism and patriotism, in searing Woolf style. It makes me sad that so much of this is still relevant. I even kept forgetting that this was written in the 20th Century and not in the 18th or 19th... a lot has changed, but there's still ingrained remnants of this attitude remaining in society.

I liked A Room of One's Own more, as this became a bit too repetitive at times, but it is well worth the read.

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### **Kimberly says**

I read this book in college, and fell in love with it. I love her almost anthropological analysis of men, education, and war - the decorations of university students in robes compared to the medals and uniforms in the military, how ornamentation and pride play a role in the cause of war. Woolf's nonfiction writing has more of an appeal to me; in these works, she uses her observations and descriptive writing to convince an audience.

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