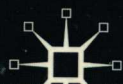




# VIRGINIA WOOLF AND FASCISM

Edited by  
*Merry M. Pawlowski*



# Virginia Woolf and Fascism

## Resisting the Dictators' Seduction

Edited by

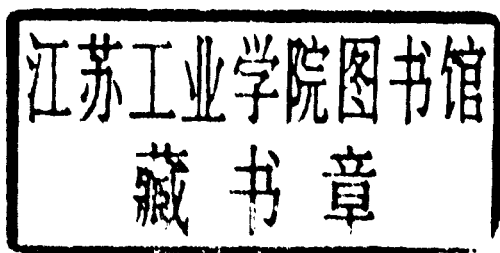
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*For Gordon, Neil, Allan, and Daniel*

# List of Abbreviations

- AWD     *A Writer's Diary*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. New York: Harcourt  
Brace Jovanovich, 1953.
- BA     *Between the Acts*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1941.
- Diary     *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 5 vols. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. New  
York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977–84.
- Essays     *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. 6 vols. Ed. Andrew McNeillie.  
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986–
- Letters     *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. 6 vols. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and  
Joanne Trautmann. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,  
1975–80.
- MB     *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. 2nd edn. London:  
Hogarth Press, 1978.
- MD     *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1925; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1953.
- AROO     *A Room of One's Own*. 1929; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1957.
- TGs     *Three Guineas*. 1938; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1966.
- TTL     *To the Lighthouse*. 1927; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1955.
- TY     *The Years*. 1937; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,  
1965.
- TW     *The Waves*. 1931; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,  
1959.
- VO     *The Voyage Out*. 1920; rpt., New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1948.

# Acknowledgements

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# Notes on the Contributors

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# Introduction:

## Virginia Woolf at the Crossroads of Feminism, Fascism and Art

Merry M. Pawlowski

if those daughters . . . are going to be restricted to the education of the private house, they are going, once more, to exert all their influence both consciously and unconsciously in favour of war.

(Virginia Woolf, *TGs*, p. 37)

A brief article in the Sunday London *Times* caught Virginia Woolf's eye on September 13, 1936. Its title, 'Praise for Women', captured the spirit of an address by Adolf Hitler to the Nazi Women's League celebrating the participation of German women in the triumph of Nazism. Since she was gathering materials to write an indictment of domestic fascism and patriarchy in *Three Guineas*, Woolf was especially interested in Hitler's assessment of women's willing collaboration in their own oppression, and quite aware of the insidious presence of a seductive ideology that played upon women's maternal and nurturing instincts in order to 'enslave' them. 'A woman lawyer', Woolf read from Hitler's speech, 'may be ever so efficient – but if there is a woman next door to her with five or six children all healthy and well brought up – then I say that from the standpoint of the nation's future the woman with children has accomplished more'. Woolf clipped the article to add it to a collection of news clippings and other documents which, by the time she was finished, would grow to fill three large scrapbooks, Woolf's personal contribution to the history of the 1930s and a 'triumph' as an example of one woman's resistance to tyranny.<sup>1</sup> The significance of Woolf's scrapbooks, and, indeed, of a voluminous collection of reading notebooks, has yet to be fully plumbed; but their very existence helps to establish Woolf as a serious student of the history of the oppression of women with special emphasis upon the role that European fascism has played in that oppression.<sup>2</sup>

After Woolf's death and following the horrible débacle of the holocaust and the Second World War, scholars' examinations of the phenomenon of fascism described it as an umbrella ideology linking Germany and Italy (and in Woolf's view, Great Britain), which most closely represented itself as a *Männerbund*, a society of males that needed continuity in peacetime with the camaraderie of the trenches of wartime.<sup>3</sup> It was an easy step from this bond to an intense nationalism, perhaps the most powerful ideology of modern times; indeed, as Himmler worked upon the concept, the *Männerbund* transformed itself into the *Männerstaat*. Zeev Sternhell sees fascism as an extreme manifestation of a much broader phenomenon in modern times, not, Sternhell insists, a 'parenthesis' in contemporary history but an integral part of European culture.<sup>4</sup> Fascism is an utter rejection, Sternhell argues, of Enlightenment philosophy and the lessons learned from the English, French, and American Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – a rejection of individualism, liberalism, and democracy and, in addition, a raising of nationalist consciousness among the masses.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, George Mosse's most recent work explores the complex and contradictory self-perception of a people who believed they were governing themselves *democratically* in conjunction with a charismatic leader who was their living symbol.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, fascist ideology is contradictory, revealing what Richard Golsan has called its 'unstable ideological core', confusing the general public about its aims and its methods.<sup>7</sup> Despite its unstable core, fascism never seemed to be in doubt regarding its view of the feminine sphere in social relations; and it is this very aspect of its ideology that Woolf sought to interrogate.

The majority of studies written on the phenomenon of fascism have focused on the nature of totalitarian government, the management of the masses and Caesarist leadership, the philosophical vagueness of fascist theory, and the attraction fascism held for some intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> A few recent studies have centered their efforts on either Italian or German women in an effort to reconstruct the realities of women's involvement with fascism and Nazism.<sup>9</sup> But the voices many women writers raised against the intolerable nature of fascist ideology go, today, largely unheard. It is our intent to offer new perspectives on Woolf's voice against tyranny and her resistance to fascist seduction, so that the power and contemporaneity of her argument may be brought more fully to light.

Not until 1977, with the work of Klaus Theweleit, and 1979, with that of Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, would there be specific scholarly

attention to the production of a fascist ideology of gender. Theweleit, in his magisterial two-volume study *Male Fantasies*, produces a theory of fascism that searches for its origins in post-First World War Germany to argue, as Barbara Ehrenreich points out in her Foreword, that fascism is 'implicit in the daily relationships of men and women'. 'Theweleit refuses', Ehrenreich reminds us, 'to draw a line between the fantasies of the Freikorpsmen (the advance guard of the Nazis) and the psychic ramblings of the "normal" man'.<sup>10</sup> It would be a mistake, however, Ehrenreich warns, to conclude simplistically that all men are fascists and thereby court the danger of trivializing Nazi genocide by forgetting that real Jewish, Catholic, gypsy, and communist women and men were murdered. Woolf herself acknowledges that Jewish men were as much at risk from the tyranny of dictators as women had been for centuries:

The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain is now apparent to you.

(TGs, p. 103)

It is, however, a masculine ideology, in Theweleit's terms 'male fantasies', in flight from women whose bodies are the 'holes, swamps, pits of muck that can engulf', that Woolf, who could not have been in full possession of the facts of Nazi genocide in 1938, would single out for feminist attack.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after Theweleit, Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi advanced a similar argument about Italian fascism, suggesting the complex connections among sexuality, feminist theory, and fascist ideology and acknowledging Woolf as an important foremother to her argument. Faced, as Woolf was faced, with the troubling assumption that many women were complicit with fascism, Macciocchi reflects upon feminine silence regarding the expulsion of women as subjects from history. Fascism enlists women, Macciocchi suggests, by seducing and addressing them in the terminology of a familiar sexual ideology, a terminology already deeply inscribed in the unconscious and capable of constructing women's desires within fascism. Women are summoned, Macciocchi insists, like 'corrupt voyeurs' to enter the space which fascism has fashioned for them.<sup>12</sup>

Woolf, though, was not seduced by fascist ideology. The impression of Woolf as an apolitical, lyrical, modern novelist so carefully culti-

vated by generations of New Critics and fueled by Woolf's own nephew's assessment of her during the 1930s as a 'distressed gentlewoman caught in a tempest and making little effort either to fight against it or to sail before it'<sup>13</sup> is necessarily exploded by the weight of evidence to the contrary which the present collection of essays develops. From at least 1929, with the publication of *A Room of One's Own*, marked by the beacon of *Three Guineas* in 1938, and continuing to the end of her life and the composition of *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf's work was explicitly infused with a sense of rage against injustice toward women. Just over a decade ago, the work of Jane Marcus, so foundational to this volume, introduced the Woolf of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* as an engaged feminist, acting as a counterpoint to the view of her politics offered by her husband Leonard and her nephew, Quentin Bell.<sup>14</sup> Nor does Woolf's work before 1929 lack traces of feminist politics in the making, as several essays in this collection demonstrate.

It is the particular strength of this volume to build upon a vision of Woolf's political involvement shared by feminist readers to argue for the importance of her anticipatory vision of the inextricable links between power and gender and her awareness of the roles of fascism and patriarchy in the forging of those links.<sup>15</sup> The volume also foregrounds a debate between aesthetics and politics which has a natural connection to the study of a woman writer best known for her art rather than her political writing.<sup>16</sup> This is a debate which becomes especially significant in the context of Woolf as artist and political thinker, who reacts against fascist propaganda, but is complicated by Woolf's own apparent desire to rid her art of politics. In an October, 1932, diary entry, Woolf, in reaction to the letters of D. H. Lawrence, writes: 'Art is being rid of all preaching: things in themselves: the sentence in itself beautiful . . .' (*Diary 4*, p. 126). Our case, however, is that the evidence in and argument of *Three Guineas* undercuts that position; for that work at its very conception, as a novel-essay, was Woolf's effort to merge her art and her politics. The essays here present Woolf, therefore, as embedded in and actively engaged in making the history of her time, a view distinct from Marcus's argument that Woolf could propagate without preaching and from Pamela Caughie's emphasis upon a rhetoric 'uncommitted to any one position'.<sup>17</sup> To that end, the arguments of this volume fold back continuously into a reconsideration of *Three Guineas* as the strongest example in her oeuvre of Woolf working as a contemporary cultural critic and feminist historian.<sup>18</sup>



While our enemies assert that women are tyrannically oppressed in Germany, I may reveal that without the devoted and steady collaboration of German women the Nazi movement would never have triumphed.

(Adolf Hitler)<sup>19</sup>

The present volume divides into three sections, the first of which, 'Fascism, History, and the Construction of Gender', offers four essays which counterpoint each other in positioning Woolf's tract as a voice of feminist resistance to and revision of masculine constructions of femininity in the midst of a long history of misogynist patriarchy. The historical foundation for the essays in this section rests upon Virginia Woolf's prescience in recognizing the danger of fascism at a time when many men and women in her society blinded themselves to it. Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain, and Rudyard Kipling expressed their admiration for Mussolini in 1929; and in 1933, H. G. Wells wrote: 'Fascism indeed was not an altogether bad thing. It was a bad good thing; and Mussolini has left his mark on history.'<sup>20</sup> The work of fascists in the 1930s reveals an effective campaign and concerted effort against women's rights, equality, freedom, and access to education, jobs, and the professions which Woolf was quick to point out.

As the first essay, Quentin Bell's '*A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*' suggests an ongoing view of his aunt's politics and feminism against which many feminist readers have reacted. Jane Marcus emblemized the tone of these responses when she wrote about the difficulty of 'explaining yet again to Quentin Bell how his Virginia Woolf is different from our Virginia Woolf'.<sup>21</sup> But the inescapable value in Bell's judgment of *Three Guineas* is that it has been a spur to scholars, goading us increasingly to look more closely at the text and serving as an important catalyst for an ongoing reassessment of the work. Bell tackles the interlocking issues of history, gender, and fascism, from quite a different perspective than those adopted in other essays in the volume, for he is especially concerned with what he believes was Woolf's misrepresentation and essentialization of masculine attitudes toward war at the time. He also takes a hard look at the problematic core of Woolf's solution to war – her 'Society of Outsiders', expressing gratitude that his aunt was spared by fate from the spectacle of a female Prime Minister 'joyfully leading her country into a short but bloody war fought over a "little patch of ground that hath in it no profit but the name" '.