

AGAPE, EROS, GENDER

Towards a Pauline sexual ethic

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CHAPTER ONE

Belonging together

‘Neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 11.11). In the Lord, woman and man are not independent of one another but interdependent. They face each other and must constantly reckon with the being of the other. They do not face away from one another; they do not find their true being by taking a path that diverges from the path of the other, crossing it only occasionally and accidentally. In the Lord, they belong together. That is so within the Christian community, in which Jesus is acknowledged as Lord, and also outside it; for, whether or not Jesus is acknowledged, it remains the case that God ‘has put all things [*panta*] in subjection under him’ (1 Cor. 15.27). The sphere in which man and woman belong together is coextensive with the sphere of this universal lordship. This ‘belonging-together’, to which all humans are called, is not a mere neutral coexistence. It is the belonging-together of agape, a pattern of living with others that this same Pauline text will later articulate and celebrate (1 Cor. 13).

Belonging-together does not exclude difference. If difference were dissolved into homogeneity, it would no longer be ‘man’ and ‘woman’ who belonged together; they would belong together not *as* man and woman but only as sharing in an undifferentiated humanity. In the Lord, humanity is not undifferentiated. But neither is the difference an absolute heterogeneity, which would make it hard to speak of a ‘humanity’ in which woman and man both share. Belonging-together acknowledges difference, but this is the difference of those who belong together, not the difference of those who are

separated. The possibility of separation – ‘woman apart from man’, ‘man apart from woman’ – is raised only in the form of its negation. Possibilities are not negated at random, however, and the negation concedes that a self-definition that excludes the other might at least be attempted. Man might define himself as apart from woman; woman might define herself as apart from man.

What it means for man to define himself apart from woman is clear enough. Speaking only of himself, he either fails to notice her existence or construes it as the mirror-image of his own. His identity is supposed to represent a universal human norm. Her identity is submerged in his; it is taken for granted that what is true of him must also be true, although secondarily and to a lesser extent, of her. Man defines himself ‘apart from woman’ in the sense that the difference represented by ‘woman’ is subsumed into a universal male identity. This self-definition is inscribed within language itself: ‘man’ both included woman and suppressed her difference by assimilating it to a male norm. As the universally human, ‘man’ is apart from woman. Within this schema of solitary universality, woman’s difference may indeed be acknowledged as a subordinate reality – but only in order that the distinctive male self-image might be reflected back in the mirror of the other. In the mirror, the disclosure of the image is achieved only by way of a reversal, in which right is seen to be right only in the image that displays it as left, as its opposite. The image of the other may be subject to praise or blame, but in either case the appearance of otherness is an illusion: for the image of the other serves the image of the narcissistic self and has no identity of its own outside that necessary service. Even in speaking of woman as the image of the other, man continues to speak of himself.

It is this project of male self-definition apart from woman to which the term ‘patriarchy’ polemically refers. Can this term do justice to the *total* reality of the male–female relationship, throughout history? ‘Patriarchy’ might represent a *metanarrative*, adapted perhaps from the claim of Marx and Engels that ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class

struggles'.¹ But it might also represent a *model*: a framework within which to view reality, disclosing a truth that is neither the truth of the whole nor a mere effect of the model itself; not the whole truth, but truth nevertheless. Understood as a model, 'patriarchy' would not occlude or compete with concepts such as 'class' and 'race' as means of articulating the reality of human sociopolitical life in its irreducible complexity. Within its limitations, 'patriarchy' identifies a project of male self-definition, 'apart from woman', whose effects are all too real. The critical use of this concept in historical or theological analysis is itself always subject to critical evaluation; the concept can never guarantee in advance the truth of the analysis. Conversely, the possible deficiencies of the analysis need not detract from the value of the concept.²

In reaction against masculine self-definitions 'apart from woman', woman may define herself as 'apart from man'; and this project of resistance may present certain formal resemblances to the masculine self-definitions it strives to counter. Thus, the male may now serve as the image of the other in which the self-image – now the self-image of woman – is disclosed. But the formal symmetry – man defines himself apart from woman, woman defines herself apart from man – should not be allowed to mask the underlying asymmetry. The two projects of self-definition cannot be seen as twin expressions of a perennial, perhaps not very serious conflict of two equal and opposite principles. In one project, self-assertion is the dominant element; in the other, the resistance of the victim of that self-assertion. The asymmetry of thesis and antithesis means that no cheap and easy synthesis is available. Belonging-together does not represent a *via media* between two equal and opposite extremes, 'patriarchy' and 'feminism'. The two terms

¹ 'The Communist Manifesto' (1848), in David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 221–47; 222.

² Michèle Barrett is critical of the term 'patriarchy' in current usage, arguing that to use it 'is frequently to invoke a generality of male domination without being able to specify historical limits, changes or differences' (*Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter*, London and New York: Verso, 2nd edn 1988, 14). This problem is resolved if the concept of 'patriarchy' is understood as a model and not as an implied metanarrative.

are incommensurable – not only because of their historical asymmetry but also because of the semantic indeterminacy of ‘feminism’. If the term ‘patriarchy’ refers to the project of male self-definition apart from woman, it is not clear that ‘feminism’ refers univocally to the project of female self-definition apart from man. ‘Feminism’ is a contested term; there are many feminisms, overlapping and diverging. ‘Feminist’ reflection on the belonging-together of woman and man is quite conceivable. The concept of belonging-together opposes not ‘feminism’ but those strands of feminism and feminist theology which either advocate or (more likely) simply presuppose a self-definition apart from man.

The Pauline text that speaks of the belonging-together of man and woman also speaks, problematically, of the veiling or covering of woman’s head. The image of the veil is taken up by one of the text’s woman readers, Virginia Woolf, in the course of a polemical plea for woman’s separate identity.³ Her own text is not simply a reading of the Pauline text; it is an account of the relation of man and woman that resists compromise and premature synthesis, and that pushes the project of self-definition apart from man in the direction of a separatist account of woman as Outsider. Woman is defined as Outsider in relation to the patriarchal institutions that administer society and that lead it inexorably towards war. She is Outsider in relation to patriarchal institutions in general, but more particularly in relation to the Church, whose all-male priesthood represents patriarchy’s innermost shrine and secret. The enormity of this

³ My primary text in this chapter is Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*; page references are to the Penguin edition, edited by Michèle Barrett, where it is published together with *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin Books, 1993). Barrett underlines the importance of this text for contemporary feminism, describing it in her introduction as ‘a book that has now found its time’ (ix), and contrasting its current timeliness with the hostility it encountered when it was first published; on this see Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, London: Vintage, 1997, 691–4. The impact on recent feminist literary criticism of Woolf’s work as a whole is well illustrated by Jane Marcus’s hyperbolic comment: ‘She seems hardly to have lived among her contemporaries but to speak directly to the future, to our generation’ (‘Thinking Back through our Mothers’, in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus, London: Macmillan, 1981, 1–30; 4). Recent criticism has rejected the charge that Woolf failed to carry through her feminism into her novels (as argued by Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880–1920*, London: Methuen, 1979, 231).

situation, so cunningly concealed and so hard to grasp, makes it impossible for the Outsider to co-operate with men even in the cause of justice and peace of which she approves. Man has defined himself apart from woman, and the catastrophic social consequences of his decision continue to hem us in. In defining herself apart from man, woman is fighting for life itself, and the notion of an ultimate belonging-together of man and woman is no more than a faint utopian glow on the horizon.

This text is an expression of what is now called a ‘post-Christian feminism’, in which separation from the Christian church is paradigmatic of separation from patriarchal institutions in general. What is to be gained by engaging it in a close reading? What will come to light is the extent to which Christian agape as the basis of the belonging-together of man and woman is acknowledged *in this text itself*, despite its manifest intentions. To bring this situation to light is to expose the gulf between the transcendental basis of the Christian community and its empirical reality; but it is also to detect symptoms of the transcendental basis within empirical reality. Only through the appearance of truth can idols and ideologies be exposed. If feminist critique claims to be grounded in truth, it is at least conceivable that this truth-claim is in the end positively related to the transcendental truth-claim that a post-Christian, secularizing culture has sought to repress. That there is this positive relationship has yet to be shown; to assume it *a priori* would be theological wishful thinking. But if this relationship does not exist, the nature and basis of the truth on which a feminist ideology-critique might take its stand remains an open question; or rather, within the relativizing ethos of postmodernity, an ineffable mystery.⁴

⁴ The issue of the relation of feminism to truth is raised by Sabina Lovibond, in dialogue with Richard Rorty: ‘Should we say that there is (“ultimately”) *nothing but* an evaluatively neutral *ensemble* of social constructs or “discourses” to which different groups assign different values in accordance with their own preferences? Or can these evaluations be seen as answerable to a universal or quasi-universal standard that would identify some discursive regimes, but not others, as tolerable?’ (‘Feminism and Pragmatism: A Reply to Richard Rorty’, *New Left Review* 193 (1992), 56–74; 67).

THROUGH THE SHADOW OF THE VEIL

As she prepared to write the work eventually published as *Three Guineas* (1938), Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary for Tuesday 16 February 1932: 'I'm quivering & itching to write my – what's it to be called? – "Men are like that?" – no that's too patently feminist: the sequel then, for which I have collected enough powder to blow up St Paul's' (*Diaries*, iv.77).⁵ As the preceding lines show, her impatience has been exacerbated by the petty annoyances of the day: there are problems with Nelly and Lottie (the servants), Miss McAfee has turned down an article, and dinner tonight with Ethel Sands means that much valuable time will be lost. But it is characteristic of the intellectual to be able to draw a clear dividing-line between ephemeral matters and the long-term project – in this case, a writing that will blow up St Paul's.

Why does she want to blow up St Paul's? This building is identified in *Three Guineas* as one of a number of central London landmarks that together symbolize the dominant masculine order – along with the Bank of England, the Mansion House, the Law Courts, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament (133). But is that a good enough reason for wanting to blow it up? St Paul's differs from the other buildings in explicitly placing itself under the aegis of a male patron. The same is true, however, of another domed building in central London. In *Jacob's Room* (1922), it is noted that 'not so long ago the workmen had gilt the final "y" in Lord Macaulay's name, and the names stretched in unbroken file round the dome of the British Museum' (143). One of the readers (for the reference is to the British Library, within the Museum) is 'Miss Julia Hedge, the feminist', who was waiting for her books to arrive: 'Her eye

⁵ In addition to *Three Guineas* and *A Room of One's Own*, other works by Woolf cited here are: *Jacob's Room*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; *To the Lighthouse*, London: Penguin Books, 1992; *Orlando: A Biography*, London: Penguin Books, 1963; *The Waves*, London: Grafton Books, 1977; *The Years*, London: Penguin Books, 1968; *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, London: The Hogarth Press, 2nd edn 1985; and *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. iv: 1931–1935, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, London: The Hogarth Press, 1982.

was caught by the final letters in Lord Macaulay's name. And she read them all round the dome – the names of great men, which remind us – “Oh damn”, said Julia Hedge, “why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or Brontë?”” (144–5). But Julia Hedge has no intention of blowing up the British Museum. As the narrator of *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf herself visits the British Museum in order to research her forthcoming paper on ‘Women and Fiction’. Entering through the swing-doors, ‘one stood under the vast dome, as if one were a thought in the huge bald forehead which is so splendidly encircled by a band of famous names’ (24). She has, as it were, strayed into a male brain, and the thoughts about women that she finds there are all the thoughts of men. However, although irritated by what she finds, and especially by Professor von X.'s monumental *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*, she never betrays any inclination to blow up the British Museum. Why, then, is St Paul's chosen instead as the target of her incendiarism?

In *The Years* (1937), Martin Pargiter, on his way to visit his stockbroker, passes St Paul's, part of the stream of ‘little men in bowler hats and round coats’, of ‘women carrying attaché cases’, of vans, lorries, and buses: ‘Now and then single figures broke off from the rest and went up the steps into the church. The doors of the Cathedral kept opening and shutting. Now and again a blast of faint organ music was blown out into the air. The pigeons waddled; the sparrows fluttered’ (183). Admiring the building from the outside, Martin suddenly recognizes his cousin Sara, who has been attending the service. He invites her to lunch in a nearby restaurant, where the following dialogue takes place:

‘I didn't know you went to services’, he said, looking at her prayer-book.

She did not answer. She kept looking round her, watching the people come in and go out. She sipped her wine . . . They ate in silence for a moment.

He wanted to make her talk.

‘And what, Sal,’ he said, touching the little book, ‘d'you make of it?’

She opened the prayer-book at random and began to read:

‘The father incomprehensible; the son incomprehensible –’ she spoke in her ordinary voice.

‘Hush!’ he stopped her. ‘Somebody’s listening’.

In deference to him she assumed the manner of a lady lunching with a gentleman in a City restaurant. (185)

To attend a service at St Paul’s is to behave abnormally. Individuals may break off from the passing crowd to do so, but they thereby identify themselves precisely as individuals, who may justly be interrogated about their conduct. Sara’s answer is drawn from the *Quicumque vult*, which, as her prayer-book would inform her, is ‘commonly called the Creed of Saint Athanasius’ and is appointed to be sung or said at Morning Prayer on certain feast days in preference to the Apostles’ Creed. The words of this text belong only to the ecclesiastical interior of St Paul’s and are quite inappropriate on the secular exterior. To utter these words, in a restaurant, where there are many to overhear it, and in one’s ordinary voice, is to commit a solecism. Sara is therefore silenced, even though Martin had previously ‘wanted to make her talk’. More to the point, the words she quotes are no answer to the question that has been put to her. They merely confirm the abnormality of the interior and of those who worship there. What concern can Sara possibly have with the incomprehensible father and the incomprehensible son to whom the worship is addressed? A woman may reasonably enter the ‘huge bald forehead’ of the British Library and become for a while a thought in a vast male brain; for, although all the thoughts about women there are men’s thoughts, their progenitors are *only* men. They are not God. The woman reader who has infiltrated the brain can sit there drawing her caricature of Professor von X. with impunity. But what if she enters the huge bald forehead of St Paul? (An ancient source assures us that St Paul was indeed bald.)⁶ She can hardly sit there drawing caricatures of the incomprehensible father and son; for they are not human, they are divine. The all-male

⁶ In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (ii.3), Paul is described as ‘a man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace’ (translation from M. R. James (ed.), *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, 273).

relationship that lies at the heart of the deity is underlined by Sara's mention only of the father incomprehensible and the son incomprehensible, without proceeding with the Creed to the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. Sara's conduct in worshipping at St Paul's is as incomprehensible as the father and the son. It participates in their incomprehensibility, and her response tacitly acknowledges this. Woolf's narrator therefore remains resolutely on the outside, along with Martin, approaching closely enough to hear snatches of organ music and of the 'faint ecclesiastical murmur' from within (184), but declining to enter.⁷

Here then is the reason for the planned incendiarism: St Paul's represents the deification of the male. At the British Museum, the male is still recognizably human, and even the names around the dome – Macaulay and the others – are at best only half-way to deification. At St Paul's, the situation is otherwise. St Paul himself is human, but the father and the son whose names circulate in his brain are not. They are divine, and they therefore appear to represent an exclusively masculine symbolic order in which God is the male and the male is God. The unique function of St Paul's is therefore to project into transcendence the male-dominated social order represented by the other great buildings of central London. The material that will blow up St Paul's will also bring down the whole of that social order with it.⁸

Incendiary imagery is still employed in the final form of the text that Woolf envisages in 1932; but it plays a subordinate role, as befits a pacifist manifesto, and it is not now directed against St Paul's cathedral. In *Three Guineas* the building escapes attack, but the man whose name it commemorates does not.

⁷ When, in *The Waves*, a character (Bernard) gives his impressions of the interior of St Paul's, the tone is sceptical and contemptuous (222–3).

⁸ In chapter 12 of *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), I have argued that biblical father/son language should be understood in an anti-patriarchal sense. This language originates in Jesus' naming of God as *Abba* and God's corresponding naming of Jesus as 'son', and a patriarchal misinterpretation can occur only where this origin is forgotten. Where this occurs, the unreality of the resultant patriarchal deity will eventually become obvious, as Sara Pargiter's ironic, mocking quotation – 'the father incomprehensible; the son incomprehensible' – indicates.

St Paul, we learn here, ‘was of the virile or dominant type, so familiar at present in Germany, for whose gratification a subject race or sex is essential’ (300). St Paul is assimilated to Hitler.

Three Guineas is a substantial work, comparable in scale to a medium-length novel and divided into three parts that correspond to the ‘three guineas’ of the title. Its setting is fictional. A male correspondent wrote, three years ago, asking Woolf or her fictional *alter ego* how she thinks war can be prevented. Now at last she writes her reply. Although she has long been deterred by the difficulty of the question, ‘one does not like to leave so remarkable a letter as yours – a letter 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’ (117). Embedded in her response are replies to two further letters, one from the treasurer of a women’s college, the other from the secretary of a society for promoting the interests of professional women. After due reflection and with considerable ambivalence, a cheque is sent to each (parts 1 and 2), and to the initial correspondent, who is the secretary of a society devoted to the prevention of war (part 3). In the end, however, the emphasis falls on the need for women to resist assimilation to male institutions – the academy, the professions, even the anti-war society whose pacifist convictions Woolf shares. Declining the invitation to join, Woolf announces the formation of an unstructured ‘Society of Outsiders’, in which women dedicate themselves to analysis and critique of the patriarchal order.

The Pauline injunction that women should be veiled serves initially as an image of women’s unjust, oppressive confinement to the private sphere. At this point, St Paul incarnates the figure of the dictator. He is Creon, who shut Antigone up in a rocky tomb; he is Hitler, and the obscure authors of letters to the newspapers demanding that women be banished from the workplace. In the passage on veiling, Paul invokes ‘the familiar but always suspect trinity of accomplices, Angels, nature and law, to support his personal opinion’, arriving a few chapters later at ‘the conclusion that has been looming unmistakably ahead of us’ – that women are to be silent outside the confines

of their own homes (299). St Paul presided grimly over the whole Victorian concept of ‘chastity’, which affected every aspect of female behaviour; and ‘even today it is probable that a woman has to fight a psychological battle of some severity with the ghost of St Paul’ (301). The way forward, it seems, is to do away with the Pauline veil which – ever-present although almost invisible – divided the private sphere of women from the public sphere of men. The veil must be consigned to the past; only reactionaries want to reimpose it.

And yet the marginal position represented by the veil is *also* a prerequisite for the critique of the patriarchal order undertaken by the ‘Society of Outsiders’, in word and deed. The veil – or the shadow still cast by this now-outmoded garment – gives women a curious and critical perspective on the professional world of men. This masculine world must be seen ‘through the shadow of the veil that St Paul still lays before our eyes’, and from this angle it is undoubtedly a strange place:

At first sight it is enormously impressive. Within quite a small space are crowded together St Paul’s, the Bank of England, the Mansion House, the massive if funereal battlements of the Law Courts; and on the other side, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. There, we say to ourselves . . . our fathers and brothers have spent their lives. All these hundreds of years they have been mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, money-making, administering justice. It is from this world that the private house . . . has derived its creeds, its laws, its clothes and carpets, its beef and mutton. (133)

But as women look more closely, they are astonished at what they find. Who would have thought that men took such pleasure in dressing up?

Now you dress in violet; a jewelled crucifix swings on your breast; now your shoulders are covered with lace; now furred with ermine; now slung with many linked chains set with precious stones. Now you wear wigs on your heads; rows of graduated curls descend to your necks. Now your hats are boat-shaped, or cocked; now they are made of brass and scuttle shaped; now plumes of red, now of blue hair surmount them . . . Ribbons of all colours – blue, purple, crimson – cross from shoulder to shoulder. After the comparative simplicity of your dress at home, the splendour of your public attire is dazzling. (134)

This clothing not only looks striking, it also speaks. Every item has symbolic meaning, and every detail serves to communicate the wearer's status, achievements, and moral and intellectual worth. This comprehensive professional dress code is illustrated by a series of photographs of 'a general', 'heralds', 'a university procession', 'a judge' and 'an archbishop', which serve to locate the text as a piece of anthropological research into an exotic tribe whose offices and institutions will be quite unfamiliar to readers.

Yet, seen from the perspective of the Outsider, 'through the shadow of the veil', this dress code is *sinister* as well as exotic. Within it there lurks a culture of *war*. The connection is obvious: 'Your finest clothes are those you wear as soldiers' (138). The professional dress code is a seamless garment, and at its centre lies the seductiveness of military uniform – which, even now, clothes the reality of immanent war in the false colours of an essentially masculine patriotic fervour. In rejecting the dress code and its attendant honours, Outsiders can make a small but definite contribution to the cause of peace. They will maintain an attitude of complete indifference to their brothers' fevered preparations for war, refusing to participate in the accompanying rhetoric. They will purge themselves of the destructive illusions of patriotism. The Society of Outsiders would work in parallel with other societies dedicated to the prevention of war, but it would hold itself aloof in order not to lose the distinctive perspective of women. Women alone can observe the world from the perspective of 'the shadow of the veil that St Paul still lays upon our eyes' – a perspective which discloses that the ultimate truth underlying the male world's dazzling appearance is the culture of violence and war. A woman may be intimidated in the workplace, a country may be annexed with bombs and poison gas – and the same forces are at work in both cases. The veil, still signifying separation, although this time within the public sphere itself, has now become the necessary condition for perceiving the truth and for venturing whatever acts of small-scale resistance are appropriate and possible. The veil is women's prerogative. Only women can belong to the Society of Outsiders; only women look at the world 'through the shadow of the veil'.

The feminism of this text is shaped by a particular historical situation, marked by the movement for women's emancipation on the one hand and the rise of Fascism on the other; and its construal of this situation is limited by the perspective of one for whom political power is held by 'fathers and brothers' – that is, by close relatives with whom she has much in common. 'When we meet in the flesh we speak with the same accent; use knives and forks in the same way; expect maids to cook dinner and wash up after dinner; and can talk during dinner without much difficulty about politics and people; war and peace; barbarism and civilisation . . .' (118). Throughout the book, Woolf's concern is with 'the daughters of educated men', that is, with professional women, the hardships they have endured in the recent past and the dilemmas they continue to face in the present. Nothing is said of the hardships and dilemmas of those women who are expected to cook and to wash up. Yet Woolf is conscious that she is speaking from the limited perspective of a particular class, and makes no pretence to universality. In this respect, she is perhaps more self-aware and self-critical than some more recent feminisms, in which 'women's experience' is understood as a trans-cultural universal. In addition, in her overriding preoccupation with the problem of war she addresses an issue that impinges on all social classes alike.

More important than the limitations of her feminist perspective is her vacillation between the feminist projects of 'equal rights' and 'separate identity', with a constant bias towards the latter.⁹ This vacillation is dramatized in the ambivalent symbol of the veil, drawn from 1 Corinthians 11.2–16 as traditionally understood. The veil signifies the division of the public sphere inhabited by men from the private sphere inhabited by women. As such, the veil is rejected, and its instigator is denounced as

⁹ Alex Zwerdling gives an illuminating account of the historical background to this tension between feminisms of equality and of difference (*Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986, 210–42). Woolf's 'separatist thinking was a radical departure from the assumptions of the women's movement' (237), and was occasioned by her sense that 'the movement had not sufficiently divorced itself from the world created by men; it had been largely uncritical of the existing institutions of society and anxious merely to enter them' (238). The Suffrage movement's enthusiastic support for the First World War exemplifies this lack of critical distance.

the archetypal male oppressor. The entire nineteenth- and twentieth-century movement for women's emancipation – and especially for admission to higher education and to the professions – is presented as a struggle against the veil and everything it represents. Despite real progress, the struggle continues; the voice of the oppressor, demanding that women leave the workplace to men and return to the home that is their natural habitat, is as loud in democratic England as it is in fascist Germany. On the other hand, the danger is that precisely as women succeed within the male world of the professions, they will assimilate its culture – which is a culture of war. The possibility of a voice of independent critique and resistance will have been eliminated. Women, existing at the margins of higher education and the professions, should not resent their marginality; they should treasure it. They must continue to stand within the shadow of the dividing veil, identifying themselves as Outsiders who can criticize the war-oriented world of the patriarchal institutions from a privileged perspective. The veil of difference is to be rejected, but it is simultaneously to be preserved. Having rejected it, women must now ensure that the priceless treasure it offers – the Outsider's privilege of critical insight – is not lost. As the Outsider watches 'the procession of educated men', moving onwards 'like a caravanserie crossing a desert' (183), it is vitally important to ask the critical question: 'Where is it leading us?' (184).

The text dramatizes the dilemma posed by different feminisms – one a feminism of equal opportunity, the other a feminism of separation; one optimistic about the possibility of reforming male-dominated institutions as women gain access to them, the other pessimistic about this possibility and about the value of this access. The claim that 'woman is not apart from man nor man from woman, in the Lord', contained in a Pauline passage that Woolf discusses at some length, is ostensibly rejected in favour of a feminism in which woman must define herself as apart from man. Her 'Outsiders' are vehemently opposed to the church as the archetypal patriarchal institution, and the idea that men and women relate appropriately to one another 'in the Lord', in the ecclesial context of agape, would

have been instantly dismissed had Woolf bothered to mention it at all. And yet, contrary to its author's intentions, it is precisely this idea that this 'separatist' text permits and encourages us to think. Woolf's own text shows that this initial 'apart from man' is actually the precondition for a situation in which 'neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord'. Despite itself, her text gives grounds for the theological conclusion that, in the Lord, women and men are interdependent.

THE THREAT OF PEACE

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf sets her discussion of women's place in a male-dominated society in the context of the issue of war and peace. However widely the argument ranges, the correspondent's initial question – how can we prevent war? – is never forgotten.¹⁰ The author and her correspondent are agreed that war is an unmitigated evil and that it cannot be justified. They maintain their pacifist conviction even in the face of Fascism, at a historical juncture – 1938 – when the tide of public opinion is turning decisively against them. They do not advocate a policy of 'appeasement' that involves turning a blind eye to the evils of Fascism. They agree that the essence of Fascism is its violence, and that to oppose it with violence is to allow oneself to be corrupted by it. Satan cannot be cast out by Satan. If the essence of Fascism is disclosed in the violence that destroys Guernica or Coventry, what is it that is disclosed when the target is Cologne or Dresden? The 'horror and disgust' evoked by images of war are shared. 'War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. And we echo your words. War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped' (125).

¹⁰ According to Elizabeth Abel, 'Woolf's political agenda in *Three Guineas* is less to articulate a pacifist response to the fascist threat, her stated goal, than to bring the impending war home, to resituate the battlefield in the British family and workplace' (*Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989, 91). This seems a misstatement. Woolf's aim is to show how the feminist analysis and agenda is relevant to the pacifist one. The pacifist issue is not the scaffolding for the argument, it lies at its heart.

The author's correspondent is a man – a barrister, very much part of the masculine order that the outsiders observe from their peculiar vantage point 'through the shadow of the veil'. Yet – to the author's astonishment – he has broken ranks by asking her advice about what might seem a purely masculine concern: war and the prevention of war. He has also asked her for a donation for the pacifist society of which he is honorary treasurer, thereby acknowledging the new economic autonomy which (for the author) is a necessary condition for the independence of mind presupposed by his question. On the basis of this apparently rather hopeful situation, the author enthusiastically sends the anti-war society her guinea – 'would that it were a million!' (226). And yet, asked to join that society, she declines; for her rejection of war, ostensibly shared with her correspondent, is located within a larger argument whose premises he may be expected to reject. The problem of war is consistently interpreted as a *gendered* problem. War is a *male* activity:

For though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental. 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 . . . (120–1)

Interpreted in this light, the problem of war cannot be isolated from the wider problem of men's treatment of women. The same male violence of which war is the supreme epiphany is also manifested in the fathers' continuing attempts to subjugate their daughters, locking them up in the private world of the home, or, if this proves impossible, ensuring that their participation in the public world of the professions remains as marginal as possible.

It is Fascism that discloses the connection. Fascism glorifies the male warrior and the wife and mother who heals his wounds and bears his children. It requires the separation of the two worlds of men and women, the reversal of women's hard-won freedoms, and it can call upon a long legacy of hostility to those freedoms: the hostility of men who feel threatened by them, and the hostility of women who, lacking economic or

intellectual independence from their husbands, have internalized the patriarchal delimitation of their role. Far from being a pathological phenomenon of certain societies remote from our own, Fascism actually discloses the dynamics of 'normal' social life in capitalist countries that pride themselves on their democratic traditions and their capacity for social progress. There is no perceptible difference between English and German expressions of the view that paid work is a male prerogative and that 'homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle' (174):

Are they not both saying the same thing? 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. (175)

As in Freud's account of sexuality, the distinction between the aberrant and the normal cannot be maintained. The aberration discloses and grounds the reality of the normal, as the excluded term of a binary opposition revenges itself on the privileged term by recurring at its very heart.

In disclosing the connections between war, maleness and the subjugation of women, Fascism thus serves as a mirror in which a supposedly democratic society can see, even if in heightened and exaggerated form, its own lineaments. But it is the female author who holds this mirror up and invites her male correspondent to look into it. Will he accept that what he sees there is in any sense a true reflection of the society to which he belongs? Or will he argue, as many of Woolf's first readers did, that women's emancipation, however important and desirable, must now be subordinated to the far more urgent and quite different concerns that arise from the threat of Fascism? Will he claim that it is one thing to confine women to the home, quite another to subject that same home and its inhabitants to the terrors of aerial bombardment? Even if he appears to endorse the claim that Fascism is a mirror in which we see our own reflection, will he be capable of retaining this insight by placing the oppression of women at the centre of his political vision and

holding it there? If he fails to do so (as is all too probable), will it not be because – as a beneficiary of the dominant patriarchal order who takes its privileges for granted – he regards the cause of women as much less important than the cause that he himself espouses? The optimism that welcomes the new reality of ‘men and women working together for the same cause’ (227) is tempered by the pessimistic conclusion that – as one of the working titles for this text puts it – ‘men are like that’. Because even the honorary treasurer of the anti-war society has been shaped by the same social forces that have issued in the hyper-masculinity of Fascism, he too must be kept at a certain distance even as the integrity of his work is acknowledged and honoured. The Outsiders share an experience of being outside that he lacks, and this experience is a necessary although not a sufficient condition of the integrity of their political vision.¹¹

But is it necessarily the case that ‘men are like that’, incapable of grasping that the issue of gender is of *fundamental* political significance? Woolf’s own text gives grounds for doubting it. The question hinges on the issue of *experience*. Is the respective experience of those whom Woolf coyly calls ‘the sons and daughters of educated men’ so radically different that the sons are constitutionally incapable of understanding what the daughters are saying?

The honorary secretary of the anti-war society is introduced in the following terms:

You . . . are a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your head. You have reached the middle years of life not without effort, at the Bar; but on the whole your journey has been prosperous. There is nothing parched, mean or dissatisfied in your

¹¹ Woolf’s aloofness towards the anti-war society may be compared to Mary Daly’s criticism of organizations that ‘fix all their attention upon some deformity *within* patriarchy – for example, racism, war, poverty – rather than patriarchy itself, without recognizing sexism as root and paradigm of the various forms of oppression they seek to eradicate’ (*Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* [1973], London: The Women’s Press Limited, 1986, 56). As Woolf proposes a Society of Outsiders that will preserve women’s distinctive identity and experience, so Daly advocates a ‘sisterhood of women’, that is, of those women who ‘decide that independent “bonding” with each other and cooperation on this basis with male-governed groups is the better choice’ (59). Like Woolf, Daly finds intimate connections between masculinity and war, and sees in Fascism the full disclosure of a ‘masculine metaphysical madness’ that is still alive and well today (120).

expression. And without wishing to flatter you, your prosperity – wife, children, house – has been deserved. You have never sunk into the contented apathy of middle life, for, as your letter from an office in the heart of London shows, instead of turning on your pillow and prodding your pigs, pruning your pear trees – you have a few acres in Norfolk – you are writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions, with the sound of the guns in your ears. For the rest, you began your education at one of the great public schools and finished it at the university. (117–18)

The description appears to make the correspondent a typical representative of the male-dominated establishment, marching confidently near the front of the strangely attired procession of fathers and brothers, an unknowing participant in the culture of violence that it secretly represents. The division between the sexes seems at this point to be absolute: ‘Obviously there is for *you* some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which *we* have never felt or enjoyed’ (121; italics added). But if that description fitted the correspondent, he would never have written asking how war could be prevented; and he would never have become honorary treasurer of a society that holds that ‘war must be stopped at whatever cost’ (125). If he has written ‘with the sound of guns in [his] ears’, that sound is presumably not music to his ears but an unspeakable cacophony. But that means that he has seen through the illusions of a particular masculine self-image, which Woolf illustrates from a biography of a certain Viscount Knebworth: ‘The difficulty’ – his biographer writes – ‘to which he could find no answer was that if permanent peace were ever achieved, and armies and navies ceased to exist, there would be no outlet for the manly qualities which fighting developed, and that human physique and human character would deteriorate’ (122). Woolf acknowledges, however, that this ideology of masculinity is by no means universal by quoting the testimony of the poet Wilfred Owen:

Already I have comprehended a light which will never filter into the dogma of any national church: namely, that one of Christ’s essential commands was: Passivity at any price! Suffer dishonour and disgrace, but never resort to arms. Be bullied, be outraged, be killed; but do not kill . . . Thus you see how pure Christianity will not fit in with pure patriotism. (122)

According to Woolf, this is very much a minority view among men. The vast majority 'are of opinion that Wilfred Owen was wrong; that it is better to kill than to be killed' (123). Yet her correspondent remains, as late as 1938, a committed advocate of the minority position. Middle-aged now, he belongs to the generation of Wilfred Owen – the generation that was decimated in the years from 1914 to 1918. The sound of guns in his ears is the sound not only of the next war but also of the last war; the gunfire sounds loudly and persistently in his own memory. His pacifism is almost certainly the result of a similar revelation to the one described by Owen. As a member of the ruling classes, he will have been a member of the 'national church' and assimilated the prevailing ideology of manliness and military glory. Judging from his background, he is unlikely to have been a conscientious objector. Like Owen, he will have learned his pacifism not second-hand but as the result of first-hand experience of risking being killed, of killing, and of seeing others killed.

His pacifism stems from a first-hand experience of war that his sister lacks. According to Woolf, 'the daughters of educated men' responded with enthusiasm to the events of August 1914 because military hospitals, fields and arms factories offered them an alternative to the intolerable confinement of the private house. 'Consciously she desired "our splendid Empire"; unconsciously she desired our splendid war' (161). It is as a nurse that the correspondent's sister comes closest to the reality of war. Her experience of the immediate impact of war on human bodies is, of course, first-hand; but she still lacks her brother's experience of risking being killed, of killing, and of seeing others killed. She is at relatively little risk of being killed. She has never directed machine-gun or bayonet against her fellow human beings. She has no direct experience of the sudden deaths of others, since her concern is with those who die lingering deaths or who may recover from their wounds. Since war has always been men's work and alien to her, her pacifism will not fundamentally jeopardize her identity as a woman. Her brother's situation is different. As a convert to pacifism, he has experienced what Woolf calls an 'emancipation from the old