

The Implications of Changing Definitions of Newborn Human Life in the Work of Virginia Woolf

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Today, we want to reconsider heritage by investigating the ways that it relates to past and present definitions of human life. We will begin by analyzing how war changed the definition of life and shifted the emphasis from maternal authority to infant welfare.¹ With a blend of history, theory, and literature, we will demonstrate how a changing definition not only affected the ways in which both men and women were governed, but determines how our society will be managed. Our paper demonstrates the ways Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* represents a heritage that pays attention to the history of women, specifically to aspects of culture that have previously been ignored. Woolf constructs heritage in *Three Guineas* around the history of woman's loss of authority over their bodies and around the rising emphasis on fetal life. Viewed through the lens of biopolitics, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* presents an inextricable link between reproduction and war aggression. We will also discuss Katherine Burdekin who imagines a world constructed on the most radical interpretation of this link.

Stephen Barber uses ideas of feminism with Michel Foucault's biopolitics to help us understand the tie between patriarchal constructs and warfare. With such insights, we can see how modernist works such as Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, articulates how culture disciplines and regulates bodies to serve as weapons.² Culture disciplines the body by taking

¹ Jean Moorcroft Wilson shows us how war is a very common theme through many of Woolf's novels, namely *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse* in Virginia Woolf's War Trilogy: Anticipating *Three Guineas*.

²Stephen M Barber discusses in *Feminism and the Final Foucault* the shared ethos surrounding feminism and politics as found in Virginia Woolf and Michel Foucault's works in *Feminism and the Final Foucault*.

control over the individual body and manipulating it to be both forceful and docile (Foucault 69). The regulation of the body, Foucault's second notion, focuses more on how we work to improve the population and to control life as a whole, such as socially encouraging women to stay in the home and continue to populate the country. Biopolitics has been used extensively to study a variety of things from concepts of social immunity to sexual behavior, as well as pointing out the connections between literature and biopolitics. For example, Michael Olin-Hitt shows us how biopolitics can be useful in literature by helping us understand how character development in novels creates models of regulation and discipline. Although the field of biopolitics has been explored extensively, almost no attention has been devoted to biopolitics in regards to disciplining the maternal and fetal body.³ Before we turn to Woolf, we want to first briefly outline how definitions of maternal and fetal life changed in those pivotal years from the end of the 19th-century to the beginning of the 20th-century. The history reveals an entire redefinition of infant and maternal life that leads to both the aggressive domestic and war-driven international society that Woolf so thoroughly rejects in *Three Guineas*.

Exactly during those years of Woolf's life, culture shifted from seeing the maternal body as an entity with power over all of its parts, including the fetus, to a parsed body that defined the mother and fetus as two different things. The maternal body of 1882, when Woolf was born, had a degree of authority that is strikingly at odds with how the maternal body was perceived in 1936 when she wrote *Three Guineas*. This authority can be seen in how a woman could designate when life began and in the legal variations of abortion. Only a woman could proclaim

³ Michael Olin-Hitt compares the work of Virginia Woolf, namely *Jacob's Room*, to the often studied theory of Michel Foucault in "Power, Discipline, and Individuality: Subversive Characterization in *Jacob's Room*." *Virginia Woolf Texts and Contexts: Selected Papers from the Fifth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*.

quickening, the first sign of fetal movement within the uterus. Considered the moment in which a woman was pronounced as pregnant, quickening could only be declared by the mother, not a midwife, not a doctor, not her husband or father (Keown 41). As such, punishing a women for abortion was incredibly difficult as a quickening could not be objectively proven.

Abortion laws existed, but historians generally agree that until about the time of Woolf's birth in 1882, they existed primarily to protect the maternal body (Keown 12, Rose 93). Cyril Means' history of abortion illuminates the very different view of abortion that existed before the 20th century. He describes how, historically, women enjoyed "common-law liberty to procure abortion" and that laws that evolved in the 19th-century were "motivated by desire to preserve maternal rather than fetal life" (quoted in *Abortion, doctors, and the law* 4). Dr. Means reveals two important aspects of abortion before modernism. First, the mother rather than the child merited the attention of the general public. Second, it shows us that abortion has not always been a rigid concept as we see it now, but for years has been a very complex, and almost messy, idea. Abortion laws sidestepped entirely the notion of when a fetus becomes a life, and when that life needs to be protected and focused on, instead of the well-being of the mother. Even in times of hard choices, when one life had to be chosen over another, the maternal life was often saved over that of the fetus. According to John Keown in *Abortions, doctors, and the law*, in 1899:

Dr. McVie urged that the value of the foetus was not actual but only potential and he described it as 'a parasite performing no function whatsoever. If,' he added, 'the life expectancy of the mother were greatly shortened in comparison with that of the foetus the balance might tilt in favour of the latter', but the general practice was to prefer the mother's life, even if her life expectancy were ten to fifteen years shorter. (63)

Even with a shorter life expectancy, and therefore a shorter opportunity to contribute to society, the mother's life inherently possessed more value. This emphasizes the immense worth a maternal body held and the contrasting expendability that was seen when looking at the fetal body.

We see a change in this mindset in England at the turn of the century due to the Boer War.

⁴ The nation began losing bodies faster than they could produce them, and people became more concerned with the quality, as well as quantity, of babies and children in order to give way to healthier and more able bodied soldiers (Dwork 11). In 1898 out of 66,501 recruits, 23,287 of those men were rejected for poor health (Dwork 12). As a 1914 report on Infant Life explains, the government decided:

the saving of infant life [being] a matter of Imperial importance, and that the infant death rate could without any exaggeration, be described as simply appalling, and demands the most serious and earnest consideration of all interested in the health and well-being of the community. (Dwork 23)

Childbearing was transformed into a patriotic duty. Women no longer had authority over their bodies as the medical profession began to control the definition of when life begins. Regulating women became a vital tool in the efforts to produce more healthy soldiers as a result of these new findings, beliefs, and understandings.

This theoretical and historical model provides tremendous insight into our understanding of the arguments against war in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*. There, Woolf reflects the change that occurred between the 19th and 20th century regarding human beings. She provides

⁴ The Boer War, 1899-1902. The Boer War pitted Britain against Boers between 1899 and 1902. The cause dates back to 1795 when Britain took over a Dutch settlement, who later became the Boers.

an overall critique of society, and how both women and men are reduced to commodities in order to fuel war. Reducing human life consists of viewing women as simply machines that make babies, in the way that factories make guns, therefore diminishing their worth and relating them solely to their reproductivity, while men are viewed as the pawns with which society can navigate and participate in war⁵. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf combines reproduction with destruction, creating a critique of the economy that regulates and disciplines human bodies in order to fuel war.

Clothing serves as one of Woolf's initial conversations that concerns itself with regulating and disciplining human bodies. When speaking of clothing, Woolf critiques the ways that clothes sexualize and objectify women by relating them to the clothes they are expected to wear. It would be easy to stop there, and simply conclude that Woolf ascribes clothing to the patriarchal constructs that trap women within the domestic sphere, as well as strengthens the hierarchy that fuels male superiority and female inferiority. However, we are able to connect clothing and the female body to achieve an even deeper meaning; clothes regulate and discipline the body in order to create healthy infants that will fuel the machinery of war. Woolf writes, "Besides the prime function of covering the body, it has two other offices — that it creates beauty for the eye, and that it attracts the admiration of your sex," going further to say, "the enormous importance of dress to a woman can hardly be exaggerated" (Woolf 20). Clothing's importance, then, as Woolf says, "can hardly be exaggerated", for it shapes and contours the body to regulate and discipline females into becoming mothers -- the very entity so demanded by British politicians during the initial decades of the 20th-century.

⁵ Berman, Jessica. "You Then: Three Guineas, The Spanish Civil War, and the Challenge of Total War" Woolf and The City Selected Papers from the Nineteenth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf.

Woolf also makes it clear that the clothes men wear serve as a mechanism to discipline and regulate the human body into soldiers and to define their identities exclusively by this designation that is produced through clothing. When speaking about the clothing of men, Woolf writes, “your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers.” Not formal attire, not academic regalia, not hunting clothes, but a soldier’s uniform is what Woolf astutely identifies as the “finest clothes” that would define a man, demonstrating that the uniforms soldiers wear regulate men into positioning themselves within warfare, and discipline men to believe that it is the role of the soldier that they must all fit into (21). Further, the uniformity of the soldiers’ war clothes distinguish them as identical and replaceable, all able to perform the same function. Woolf’s explicit alignment of “best clothes” and the military exposes the standard of masculinity by which all other degrees of rank are determined.

Just as Woolf shows that it is clothes that mold the body into a soldier, she also shows that any slight variation in the clothes mold men into a belief in their own superiority; a belief she exposes as no more than a trick, an empty signifier. Woolf also talks about the details of man’s dress, saying how “every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning” (Woolf 19). Although she explicitly claims that these meaningful details contribute to the level of respect a man receives in result of his dress, she then ends her thought with saying, “but no single pair of eyes can observe all these distinctions, let alone account for them accurately” (Woolf 19). The badges of honor train men into thinking that the jobs they are performing are important, and further commits them to the war efforts. However, her ending point counters the importance placed on these symbolical buttons and badges by saying that they don’t actually retain any sort of value, and that no one can “account” for their value “accurately.”

What begins as discussing the differences between clothing, as it relates to men and women, then turns into discussing how these symbolic badges and buttons regulate men into thinking their jobs are meaningful in order for them to never doubt their commitment to war.

In typical Woolf fashion, *Three Guineas* satirizes the idea of adornment as the definition of accomplishment by describing how such ornamental distinguishments appear silly without their masculine inflections. When playing with the idea of a woman's clothing having similar qualities to that of men, Woolf writes, "A woman who advertised her motherhood by a tuft of horsehair on the left shoulder would scarcely, you will agree, be a venerable object" (Woolf 20-21). Not only does this image expose the silliness of buttons as objects of accomplishment, but she also reveals that the playing field is far from even; women's accomplishment would never be worthy of such public recognition. She uses sarcasm here in order to raise an important issue. Woolf's analogy emphasizes issues surrounding motherhood and the lack of respect it receives. She also represents a societal viewpoint when she denies the idea of women advertising their maternity through their clothes. Treating motherhood as a dishonorable position regulates the female body to always, and unquestionably, operate towards the single goal of reproduction. This kind of regulation does not allow women to view maternity as a monumental achievement, and this attitude strengthens the concept of female inferiority and also does not allow women to ever believe that they could become capable of something more than being mothers.

Not only does *Three Guineas* show the ways that clothes discipline the body into categories of male and female, but it demonstrates the vacuity of those two categories. After constructing men as soldiers, Woolf takes a complicated yet subtle turn by sarcastically refuting the ideas of androgyny, which we know well, and arguing for fixed concepts of gender, rooting

those fixed genders in the idea of war. She writes, “[women] cannot understand what instinct compels him, what glory, what interest, what manly satisfaction fighting provides for him” (Woolf 107). The pronoun “him” represents all of man, an idea that she not only refutes in much of her other writing, but that she also refutes in *Three Guineas*, pointing out how some men despise war. She counters her previous argument when discussing Wilfred Owen, a poet who was disgusted by war. Woolf uses Owen as an example of a man existing outside of the fixed male role, specifically using his notes that say, “The unnaturalness of weapons . . . Inhumanity of war . . . The insupportability of war . . . Horrible beastliness of war . . . Foolishness of war” (Woolf 40-41). She uses Owen’s dislike of war to demonstrate the complexity of man, an argument that fights against a fixed masculinity that generalizes all men into agreeing with war. The fixedness of gender roles do not reveal truth of the sexes, rather they portray what society is tricked into believing concerning the behaviors of men and women. The outcome of uncompromising gender roles is women that unquestionably operate as mothers, a fate they are tricked into believing is destined for them, and men willingly surrendering their lives to war. Men need to be soldiers in order for the war cause to succeed, so by defining soldierness as an immutable fixed characteristic of manhood, she critiques the constructs of both war and masculinity, and motherhood and femininity.

The discussion of photographs in *Three Guineas* underscores Woolf’s argument that the drive to create war is the result of regulating bodies into fixed gender categories of soldier and breeder.⁶ To demonstrate the counter argument, Woolf minutely describes two scenes captured in

⁶ Rebecca Wisor explains in “About Face: The Three Guineas Photographs in Cultural Context” *Woolf Studies Annual* (2015), “I wish to suggest that the photographs paradoxically gesture toward the world off the page while visually reinscribing recent history on the page, and that Woolf relies on them as a kind of visual shorthand capable of triggering readers’ associations and memories of the discursive field

photographs she had seen in the paper but which she did not include in *Three Guineas*, one of dead people, and one of a house that has been destroyed.⁷ Woolf writes, “But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house,” when describing the images received of the destruction caused by the Spanish Civil War (Woolf). During the course of the essay, Woolf discusses the image twelve times, reiterating that war is “dead bodies” and “burned houses,” repeating the two linked turns and stressing the explicit and well-known theme from *Three Guineas*: tyranny in the household connects to creating war. However, linking the repeated two images stresses the ways that war makes and then destroys human bodies for its own pernicious purpose. The first image, “dead bodies”, is an obvious image associated with war because war commonly causes the deaths of soldiers and civilians.

Beyond the obvious association however, in the economy of the war, it also signals a greater need for more soldiers since more bodies are going to be needed in order for the war to continue. The connection to the manufacturing of bodies for war can especially be seen when one considers the contexts in which Woolf uses the phrase. For example, one instance when Woolf brings up the image of dead bodies is when she discusses the idea of a woman’s college. She is responding to a woman’s letter; the letter requests funds to educate women. Towards the end of her response, the woman who wrote the letter is informed of the other letter, the letter asking about preventing war, and that woman is reminded of the images of dead bodies and burned houses. Woolf writes, “consider these photographs: they are pictures of dead bodies and

surrounding each figure—the recent speeches, policies, and/or rulings that would have been immediately accessible and familiar to her readers”.

⁷ Ira Nadel says photographs in *Three Guineas* embody trauma and reflect not only the destruction and trauma of war, but the trauma Virginia Woolf has fought throughout her life., “Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite: Photography and Trauma in *Three Guineas*.” *Virginia Woolf and the Common(wealth) Reader Selected Papers from the Twenty-Third Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*.

ruined houses. Surely in view . . . these pictures you must consider very carefully before you begin to rebuild your college what is the aim of education . . . what kind of human being it should seek to produce” (Woolf). By pairing the dead bodies of war with the idea of a different “kind of human being,” Woolf asks whether society can spring itself from the trap of using women’s bodies to produce arms for war. Women’s bodies are needed to reproduce in order to replace those dead bodies in the photographs. Jane Wood considers this idea of the true rights of women when she explains the absurdity of asking the daughters of educated men on how to end the fighting in war when society denies them equal rights, the same idea Woolf ponders.⁸ Might society shy away from providing funds to educating women because of society’s need for women as breeders? Or can, perhaps, women’s bodies, through education be trained, molded, disciplined to a different way? Can they, as she asks, become a different “kind of human being”?

The second half of the grammatical pairing that Woolf keeps repeating is the “burned houses,” an image that represents how the role of soldier is partially defined and regimented through society’s construction of the home. The dead bodies are the products of the burned houses as surely as the butterfly is the product of the cocoon that formed and protected it. The contours of home that formed the grisly image is one where women shape the domestic sphere. The constructs of the home regulate both men and women, forcing both sexes to remain in their designated roles and create children to endlessly perpetuate the destructive order. The burned house is the female analogue to the image of the dead body. Woolf repeats the images of the dead bodies and burned houses in order to convey that it is these two symbols that regulate and discipline bodies in order to promote war. Again, Woolf combines women’s reproduction and

⁸ Wood, Jane. "Chapter 4 Photographing Violence: Three Guineas and Contemporary Feminist Responses to War." *The Theme of Peace and War in Virginia Woolf's War Writings*

men's war contributions to create a domestic sphere that functions as a war economy with both sexes becoming war machines.⁹ Until society ceases to view the value of men as their ability to participate in war, the value of women as their ability to produce children, and ceases to view the construct of the home as one with such rigid gender roles paired with heteronormativity, efforts to prevent war will never be successful. What is particularly interesting about her choice of the two phrases is that a real live human being is present in neither. The end result of the disciplining of bodies into bifurcated categories of breeder and soldier will produce empty vessels of those two terms: soldiers become dead bodies and the home hearth at which the lessons of tyranny are learned becomes nothing more than a burned house.

Extending her discussion on the ways bodies are made into the pieces of war is her remark of a photograph of something or someone dead. She writes, "This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig" (20). This image extends from that of burned houses and dead bodies, for not only will disciplining the body into bifurcated positions create burned houses and dead bodies but bodies, once they have been used, will be stripped of all the characteristics that molded them and formed them into tools to create war. Conor Tomas Reed goes as far to say in regards to photographs, people are "un-humanized into eviscerated animal clumps".¹⁰ After war has used the body to its greatest possible extent, does it make a difference whether it was male, female, or animal? Perhaps the answer is no. All that exists beneath the

⁹ Stephanie Zappa shows us how this economy within the domestic sphere unconsciously contributes to militarism in "Woolf, Women, and War: From Statement in Three Guineas to Impressionism in Jacob's Room." *Virginia Woolf Texts and Contexts: Selected Papers from the Fifth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*.

¹⁰ Reed analyzes pacifism in *Three Guineas* using the photographs of the Spanish Civil War and its destruction throughout the novel in his piece "Q. and Babies? A. And BABies: On Pacifism, Visual Trauma, and the Body Heap" *Interdisciplinary/ Multidisciplinary Woolf Selected Papers from the Twenty-Second Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*.

regulated and disciplined body is a mass of flesh. Or perhaps the answer is yes, the mound of flesh represents the potential to be organized into instruments of different value: soldiers of great value, women of less, and pigs, of value only for their flesh.

We want to stress that the biopolitics of the female body in the early twentieth-century is of such profound importance that it can be seen in many other modernist writers, including H.D., Dorothy Sayers, and Mina Loy. In our remaining time we want to turn to just one of these writers, the often forgotten Katharine Burdekin. Her dystopian novel *Swastika Night*, published within three months of *Three Guineas*, offers a haunting vision of an ultra patriarchal, militaristic German empire 600 years after Hitler won the war. The society depicted in *Swastika Night* exists solely on a foundation of extreme militarism and hierarchy in all aspects of public and private existence. Whereas Woolf establishes a base for the connection between warfare and patriarchal hierarchal society, Burdekin imagines a world in which these suppositions become fact and exist as the structure to society.

Since *Swastika Night* is not well known, I want to briefly summarize the plot. The story revolves around a futuristic world in which Hitler has won the war and primarily involves three men: Alfred, a revolutionary Englishman, Knight Von Hess, a high ranking Nazi official, and Hermann, a low ranking Nazi soldier. In the novel, women are reduced to caged animals whose main purpose is to produce male babies. The discovery that the female birthrate is falling provides much of the impetus behind the conversations that take place between the three men of vastly different social standings. Concentrating on Hermann, we can establish the connection between militarism and sexism in the novel. An extended analysis that examines the interplay of

religion, biology, and sex reveals how warfare influences and regulates biology into fixed societal roles.

By merging faith and government into one body, the Church of Hitler, the most powerful institution in the society of *Swastika Night*, permeates every aspect of the men's lives and moulds them into a military form most suitable for the fascist society. Deviation from this classification leads to a forced feminization. The novel opens mid way through a church service where the men repeat the prayer, "And I believe in pride, in courage, in violence, in brutality, in bloodshed, in ruthlessness, and all other soldierly and heroic virtues" (Burdekin 6). The Church of Hitler allows for no deviation from the path set out for its men, one of war, violence and, above all else, soldier hood. As explored earlier in relation to Woolf, an alignment of idealized masculinity with being a soldier supports the construction of the masculine. In *Swastika Night*, manhood is underpinned by soldierhood, separating the two opposes every value the society grounds itself on. When the construction of his society crumbles under Von Hess's revelation, Hermann bemoans the loss of his identity as a war machine, asking, "Not even that left sir? A chance to die for Germany?". Von Hess responds, "The hope of war is even wearing thin. A people which is conditioned for war from childhood, whose ethic is war and whose religion is war, can live, though not very happily, on the hope of war" (Burdekin 76). The mention of war conditioning alludes to another aspect of regulating men into the role of soldiers- toxic patriotism. Von Hess remarks, "You see, the lunatic vanity of the Germans was concentrated really in the males among them. The women hadn't beaten the world and made the Empire" (Burdekin 81). Nationalistic pride and belief in the superiority of one nation over another, generates a hierarchy that encourages warfare and promotes the partitioning of men into the role of a soldier. Once

presented with a system of power that stations them above all other nations and beings, the men must conform to the role of a soldier or face the consequences of falling from the hierarchy. In this model, there is no other option for manhood than extreme violence.

If not aligned with the military and fascism, he must become extremely feminized. When Hermann loses the certainty of his status as a proud soldier, he also begins to lose the qualities that would define him as masculine in the society. He pleads with Alfred to give him a purpose; “Alfred, if any man I trust will tell me what to do, I’ll do it. You or the Knight. I don’t care which” (Burdekin 93). The childishness and dependency that Hermann shows Alfred emerges as his defining feature, implying that his status as a man was completely based on national pride and soldierly commitment. Alfred addresses the true implications of Hermann’s fall from soldierly grace, “Is he perhaps not so much childish but rather like a *woman*, when women were different?” By calling Hermann a woman, Alfred articulates a potent method of regulation enacted upon men- the threat of being classified as female and losing the dominant place in the hierarchy. In order to understand the true scope of this trespass, we need to consider the role of women in the Church of Hitler.

In *Swastika Night*, the church excludes and alienates women, but more importantly it degrades and reduces their biology, limiting them to their function as soldier making machines. Like all aspects of the dystopian society, the church relies on war and brutality to spread its message of domination, and, in this futuristic world, as in the 20th-century society Woolf remarks on, women have no place in its network. The women remain in a state most conducive to the society- reduced to animal like beings with no personality or intelligence by extreme regulation of their bodies. The novel dedicates very little speaking time to women, yet women

are a prominent topic of discussion among the main male characters. Von Hess remarks in his dialogue with Alfred, ““Women *are* nothing, except an incarnate desire to please men ... women have always followed the pattern set, so how can they ever have had anything in themselves”” (page 82,105). The women in the novel are reduced to livestock for breeding by the implementation of The Reduction of Women, a decree instituted after the war in order to maintain Nazi superiority.¹¹ Kept in pens and taught to feel shame for their own existence and the existence of their daughters, the women exist to benefit the militaristic society of the German Empire in the only way allowed to them- producing sons. Von Hess connects the biological impetus of The Reduction indivisibly to the spirit of warfare in fascist Germany, “They wanted *all* women to be at their will like the women of a conquered nation” (Burdekin 81). This quote hearkens back to a significant and much discussed point made by Woolf in *Three Guineas*; patriarchy excludes women from patriotic feeling. Specifically, Woolf comments that women have no share in the instinct towards war, they feel less nationalistic pride, and consequently lack a national affiliation (109). Burdekin perceives the same distance and pushes it to a disturbing conclusion. Simply, in a purely militaristic world which isolates women from every avenue except reproduction, the female body becomes nothing more than machinery, performing the one task that benefits the society- childbearing. More, women, lacking nationalistic pride and affiliation, occupy a space in society to be exploited and conquered.

Burdekin makes painfully explicit that men and their ideologies -- i.e., the church -- shape women into breeders, not because they are inferior and this role is all they are fit for, but because women have the potential to control men, both on a biological and a social level. Von

¹¹ WILPF discusses militarist states in the context of *Three Guineas* through feminist and pacifist views in "Politics "through different eyes": *Three Guineas* and Writings." *Three Guineas and Writings.* *Virginia Woolf Texts and Contexts: Selected Papers from the Fifth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf.*

Hess directly addresses the biological root of male anxiety towards the feminine, "...Nature does not mind, either, a shortage of males. One male can fertilise hundreds of females. A shortage of females is the only naturally serious thing" (Burdekin 105). To admit this indispensability of the female body clears the way to realizing the deeper root cause of reducing women: the fear that, once the biological superiority of needing fewer men for reproduction combines with a woman's ability to choose what to do with their bodies, they will threaten the structure of militaristic nations. Before the fascist and patriarchal culture made women into animals, they had the "power of choice and rejection" (...). While perusing an ancient and hidden photograph of a beautiful and proud pre-Nazi woman, Von Hess explains that, although she may seem attractive to men, she is ultimately dangerous:

"You men think of yourselves as seeing her and having her. But she need not have you. ... She can reject any man even though he plead with her in a way that is quite outside our sense of manly dignity; she can reject every man throughout her life. ... She has the right to refuse any or every man, and if any man infringes it he is a criminal" (Burdekin 71).

That right of rejection was the ultimate "insult to Manhood" (81). A hierarchy which admits women's biological superiority over men and allows women to possess a right of sexual refusal cannot be tolerated in the Church of Hitler, because such an allowance would destroy the systematic means by which both male and female bodies are controlled.

Swastika Night reveals the methods by which men reduce women to an animal-like existence, and unsurprisingly those same methods are highlighted by Woolf. The dress and appearance of the women in *Swastika Night* hint at the impact of clothing on the managing of bodies. Burdekin takes Woolf's discussion of clothing one step further, seeing it as the last shred

of power left for women in such a society. Burdekin writes “...the beauty of women [through appearance and dress] was an insult to manhood, as giving them an enormous and disgusting sexual power over men” (Burdekin 81). The women must shave their heads and cover themselves with simple brown outfits. This strict dress code excludes women from the realm of beauty and grace, recoding such attributes as male ones and further lessening the influence of female seduction.

Additionally, any value a woman has in the Empire coincides only with fertility. A girl past the age of sixteen falls under the “age of submission”, a period during which women cannot refuse any male sexual advance. Further, the Nazi realm sees an elderly woman as something so dehumanized that she is not even considered a part of society. Von Hess describes an elderly woman accordingly, “Perhaps she was so old she was no longer a woman at all, and therefore out of reach of all womanly feelings of shame and humility” (Burdekin 15). The indifference towards women outside the window of fertility reinforces the image of the female body as machinery, and reestablishes the anxiety towards the biological capabilities of women. The young girls yet lack the ability to reproduce, and so are afforded more freedom than fertile women. The elderly fall completely outside the realm of womanhood. The classification of women in the German Empire has no place for non reproductive women because reproducing is the only attribute afforded to them. A reproductive woman who falls outside of the helm of compulsory motherhood and stringent control is consequently the most hated and formidable threat to the society of *Swastika Night*.

Considering the importance of maternity, it follows that a woman can break herself out of the reduction of her personhood by controlling her own biology. The solution then, is to create a

space for women in society that allows them to divorce themselves from motherhood, taking their biological capabilities out of the public and back into their own control. Woolf may call it an “outsider's society”, and define it simply in terms of abstinence from social life, but we propose that the core of the argument is biological in nature and can be reduced down to the ability of a woman to control her reproductive abilities and break out of the disciplining and regulating forced upon her body.

Understanding the nuances of the regulating and disciplining of bodies transforms texts such as *Three Guineas* and *Swastika Night* into novels that capture how the influence of war shifts perceptions of human value. The infant becomes a necessary national commodity, and a woman's value is measured only in her ability to reproduce. Unfortunately, such a view still persists. Women are still seen largely in relation to men, and women do not have exclusive control over their own bodies. Society works against the female body maintaining control over her reproductivity, shaming those that choose to have abortions and not supporting birth control as a universal, normal aspect of healthcare. Examining and understanding the changing definition of human life provides us with a foundation on which to further explore the conflicts we encounter everyday in our culture. Woolf was perhaps one of the first to identify and speak about the control of bodies in the era of modern war, and her articulation helps us understand the ways that this still exists today.