

FEMINISM: VIRGINIA WOOLF

On Avoiding “Unreal Loyalties” in the Professions



In *Three Guineas*, Woolf identifies the historic teachers of the “daughters of educated men” as “poverty, chastity, derision,” and “freedom from [unreal loyalties](#)” (16, 94). For Woolf, ‘unreal loyalties’ are those blind conformities to societal structures that tacitly endorse war: uncritical loyalty to “old schools, old colleges, old churches, old ceremonies, [old countries](#)” (*Three* 95). Precisely because women have been so long excluded from these sorts of societal structures, such as the professions, they have remained untainted by ‘unreal loyalties’ to the warmongering undertones of the

capitalistic professional world. As a staunch socialist and pacifist, Woolf exhorts her fellow ‘daughters of educated men’ to continue to evade these ‘unreal loyalties’ of the professional world even as she entreats them to join the professions’ ranks. For Woolf, the importance of the professions lies in independent income that allows for a woman’s independent opinion, an opinion that can speak out against war. Thus according to Woolf, by working within the professional world, yet remaining aloof from the seductions of its false loyalties, women can enact meaningful, pacifist-minded social change from within existing social structures. The first intimations of this idea, which come to fruition in *Three Guineas*, can be seen in Woolf’s scrapbooks, where she includes an opinion piece from a certain Cyril Chaventre who writes that “more than ever to-day women have the opportunity to build a new and better world, but in this slavish imitation of men they are wasting their chance” (Monks House Papers/B.16f. Vol 2 (Sussex), 14). For Woolf, this ‘slavish imitation of men’ takes the form of ‘unreal loyalties’ of the professional world, the temptations of capitalism. As Cyril Chaventre indicates, by following in the footsteps of men and subscribing to the ‘unreal loyalties’ of the professions, and thus forfeiting the power of their independent opinion, women are squandering the chance to build a more peaceful society. Thus, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf entreats women to enter the professional world on no terms but their own, evading the ‘unreal loyalties’ of the professional world in the name of pacifism.

That leaves very little time for friendship, travel or art. You will have to perform some duties that are very arduous, others that are very barbarous. You will have to wear certain uniforms and profess certain loyalties. If you succeed in your professions the words ‘For God and Empire’ will very likely be written, like the address on a dog-collar, round your neck.²⁰ And if words have meaning, as words perhaps should have meaning, you

will have to accept that meaning and do what you can to enforce it. In short, you will have to lead the same lives and profess the same loyalties that professional men have professed for many centuries. There can be no doubt of that.

Woman's Handicap

LEONTINE SAGAN'S article on the invisible barrier that women have to face in business and professional life reveals that the mentality of even outstanding women is essentially dependent, not creative.

She speaks of blazing a fresh trail, when actually she is treading in a path created by man and trodden by him centuries ago.

A woman's sense of values is indisputably different from that of a man. Obviously, therefore, a woman is at a disadvantage and under suspicion when in competition with men in a man-created sphere of activity.

More than ever to-day women have the opportunity to build a new and better world, but in this slavish imitation of man they are wasting their chance.

CYRIL CHAVENTRE.

North Wembley.