

# FOR TRANSLATION: VIRGINIA WOOLF, J. M. COETZEE, AND TRANSNATIONAL COMPARISON

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**T**he transnational legacy of literary modernism typically begins with idiom.<sup>1</sup> Early twentieth-century novelists, from James Joyce and Virginia Woolf to Ernest Hemingway and Zora Neale Hurston, replaced the heroic lexicons of patriotism and imperial confidence with explicit language and the syncretic vocabularies of cosmopolitanism and regionalism. Among late twentieth-century novelists, a revival of idiomatic modernism is not far to seek: think of the “chutneyfication” of English in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), *East, West* (1994), and *The Satanic Verses* (1988); the use of syntactic infelicity and translated speech in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986); and the play of accented voices in Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993) and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000).<sup>2</sup> These works deploy the vernacular resources of English to explore the politics of language in an age of decolonization, multiculturalism, and global migration. They are indebted to modernist precursors because, like *Ulysses* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), they suture narrative events to the sound and sense of Anglophone words. A modernist work such as *Ulysses* is difficult to translate, the novelist and translator Tim Parks has remarked, because it appears as “a thing made of language.”<sup>3</sup> The same may be said of *Midnight’s Children* and *A Pale View of Hills*, whose “accented” English signals the transnational circulation of their narrators but does not itself circulate into other languages with ease.<sup>4</sup>

This itinerary of modernist transnationalism appears persuasive if one looks forward from the major works of the early twentieth century, but it seems more limited from the perspective of the present. It doesn’t satisfactorily explain contemporary novels whose treatment of multilingualism and transnational collectivity eschews idiom but embraces other modernist strategies such as parataxis, recursive narration, and collage. And it misses altogether contemporary novels that resist homogeneous collectivities but nevertheless welcome, accept, or accommodate translation. What do translatable novels tell us about the afterlives of modernist transnationalism?

To consider this question, we need to begin by distinguishing among modernist literary strategies, so that we can observe greater variety within modernism’s legacy. It will therefore be useful, as a preliminary gesture, to understand works of contemporary fiction as being modernist in some ways and non-modernist in others. Such an approach will allow

us to expand our view in several directions. First, some contemporary works will appear newly indebted to modernism. Second, some modernist works will appear newly influential for the later period. And, third, because we have decoupled transnational impulses from idiomatic experimentation, some works from both periods will appear newly significant for thinking about the relationship between globalization and language. Identifying modernist and non-modernist strains within contemporary works is only a preliminary gesture because we may find that modernist works and modernist writers themselves managed contradictory impulses.

This essay approaches modernism's transnational legacy by turning to Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) and J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), multi-generic works that combine fiction, political philosophy, and documentary to imagine comparative frameworks for political agency, social embeddedness, and literary production. Both Woolf and Coetzee are concerned in their texts with the origins and futures of transnational violence: who causes it, how violence in one place is related to violence in another, and how it can be stopped. Both ask how political agency is complicated, blocked, refined, and possibly enabled by transnational frameworks. For these thematic reasons alone, *Three Guineas* and *Diary of a Bad Year* can be understood as works of transnational fiction: they care about how events that affect people in one nation are caused—and might be repaired—by people in other nations. For reasons of production, circulation, and reception, too, they fit various definitions of transnational or "world" literature. They are masterpieces produced by writers who are celebrated internationally; they are artifacts produced by writers who are marginalized by gender or location; they have been translated widely and published in many national languages; and they calculate their own participation in intellectual and political circuits beyond the nation.<sup>5</sup> *Three Guineas* collates the voices of politicians, intellectuals, biographers, and memoirists from several geographies and languages. *Diary of a Bad Year* appears as a series of brief philosophical essays, composed in English for translation into German and French, which are inter-paragraphed with personal diaries that reflect on the production and circulation of the essays. Coetzee's novel exemplifies what I have called "comparison literature," a genre of contemporary fiction that uses narrative structures of comparison to generate new paradigms of transnational belonging.<sup>6</sup> Woolf's text shares many of the impulses and deploys several of the features that we find in the later genre.

*Diary of a Bad Year* and *Three Guineas* were written "for translation" but in different ways. *Diary of a Bad Year* is a born-translated novel: it was published almost simultaneously in multiple languages, and it appeared first in Dutch and only later in English. It engages formally, thematically, and typographically with the theory and practice of translation. *Three Guineas* was not born-translated in the denotative sense. It was published almost simultaneously in several, somewhat different, British and U.S. versions between May and August 1938, but its first translation came later, in 1941.<sup>7</sup> We could extrapolate from this difference that Woolf did not have a transnational audience in the 1930s, as Coetzee surely does today. But in fact the delayed circulation of *Three Guineas* is more likely an effect of its genre, its

political moment, and the translation marketplace of the interwar period.<sup>8</sup> By 1938, Woolf's writing had travelled well beyond its nation and national language. She was, for her time, a world writer: most of her important early novels had been translated into multiple languages, and she had been the subject of book-length studies by non-Anglophone critics.<sup>9</sup> Woolf was uninterested in her translations and especially in her translators, as others have noted, but she was well aware of her many readers outside Britain.<sup>10</sup> This awareness is visible in her letters and diaries, and also in her professional writing. In the late works, we can see her thinking about literature's afterlives in subsequent historical *époques* and national contexts, as when she samples several centuries of English drama in *Between the Acts* and scrapbooks quotations from various U.S. and European intellectuals in *Three Guineas*. These voices from elsewhere are not invoked nostalgically as the ruins of a now-defunct civilization. Rather, they are used to offer a comparative view of the present.

Like Coetzee in *Diary*, Woolf in *Three Guineas* appears engaged with translation diegetically and conceptually but not idiomatically. Even when we are asked to notice that English and German speakers are "both saying the same thing," or to recognize that "Führer or Duce" are the German and Italian words for "Tyrant or Dictator," Woolf is pointing to rhetorical similarities and political effects rather than to the literal translation of individual words.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is rare for *Three Guineas* to approach translation by pointing at language, foreign or domestic. Comparison through figurative language is also rare. The text insists on likeness at every turn—"that slavery" and this one (55); "They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state" (121); "the causes are the same and inseparable" (170); etc.—but it is remarkably free of the metaphors and similes we associate with Woolf's most experimental writings. If we hold 1938's *Three Guineas* next to 1939's *Finnegans Wake*, to take one stark example from the period, the contrast between a transnationalism of narrative and a transnationalism of idiom is sharp and notable.<sup>12</sup>

It is not simply that *Three Guineas* accommodates translation through standardized English and essayistic prose. More important, it identifies translation, that engine of homogeneity, as a necessary component of anti-fascist and anti-patriarchal association. By addressing translation at the level of the sentence, the paragraph, and the chapter rather than at the level of idiom, *Three Guineas* makes comparison integral to its narrative structure and declines to link its political argument to any specific national language or national collective. Woolf argues that economic inequality and civic tyranny can be found in many nations and that these phenomena have transnational histories: they are embedded in attitudes and practices that have circulated widely. We might not call *Three Guineas* a multilingual text, because it does not use the mixing of languages as its principal strategy of transnationalism. But neither is it a monolingual text, because it resists unanimity through translations that operate visually and structurally.

Critics have argued persuasively that *Three Guineas* should be seen as part of Woolf's ethnographic turn.<sup>13</sup> But in *Three Guineas* the turn towards England stimulates a renewed

appreciation for international action and responsibility. Woolf generates her argument about England by establishing a principle of comparative thinking. This principle compels English readers to acknowledge English violence, to be sure, but it also understands thinking about England as a necessary step to thinking about elsewhere and to thinking about the systemic relation between England and elsewhere. While Woolf's text introduces us to a litany of English names, as any national work would, it mixes up English details with documentary reports from Italy, Spain, and Germany. In the pages that follow, I will show, first, how *Three Guineas* uses rhetorical comparison to test England's reputation as a beacon of liberty and to consider how tyranny in England is related to tyrannies elsewhere; and, second, how *Three Guineas* uses formal comparison—comparative sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and texts—to generate models of collectivity that involve likeness but not sameness, or “cooperation” instead of “conglomeration” (123–26). At the end, I will turn briefly to the uptake of comparison in Coetzee's twenty-first century fiction.

### **Comparative, Multidirectional Woolf**

Before we consider the treatment of comparative forms in *Three Guineas*, let us acknowledge that comparison operates thematically and diagetically in the text in ways that are both dramatic and tendentious. There are several comparisons worth noting, since each is striking and repeats several times. First, there is Woolf's comparison between the treatment of women in Germany and Italy and the treatment of women in England, and her more general comparison among sexism, racism, religious persecution, and political persecution. These comparisons imply that fascism involves “making distinctions” on the basis of sex as well as race, religion, and politics, and that there is fascism in England that ought to be acknowledged and fought before, or at least alongside, fighting fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain (65–66, 113, 121–22, 168). Second, there is Woolf's comparison between the early twentieth-century campaign for women's suffrage and the nineteenth-century campaign for the abolition of slavery, and the implication that the economic and legal exploitation of women's labor in England is similar in kind to the economic and legal exploitation of Africans and people of African descent (55, 81, 96). Third, there is the comparison among the imprisonment of suffragists in early twentieth-century England (“Holloway”), the silencing of Antigone and other dissenting women throughout literary and political history (death), and the confinement of Jews and dissenters in Germany (“a concentration camp”) (167). Elsewhere, this comparison places “Jews” and “women” side-by-side as victims of “dictatorship” (122). Finally, there is the implicit comparison between the photographs of “dead bodies and ruined houses” in Spain (not shown) and the photographs of Englishmen in professional regalia (shown), suggesting that there is some similarity between the visceral aggression of the Spanish war and the rhetorical aggression Woolf associates with sartorial distinction (13–14; 122; 167–69).

Woolf's comparisons are tendentious because of their selectivity (haranguing England for its customary neglect of women's liberty while mentioning only in passing the statutory constraint of liberty in Germany, Italy, and Spain) and also because of their abstraction

(identifying kind without acknowledging degree, for example). Both of these gestures can be understood strategically, however, as efforts to disrupt ethical priorities that take for granted one's own country's achievements and obscure the international view of its shortcomings. In Woolf's case, this means putting into question England's longstanding sense of itself as a champion of liberty and emphasizing the hypocrisy of any liberty without economic and political opportunity. More positively, Woolf's comparisons can be understood as efforts to share resources: to see what one cause can learn from the history and method of another cause. This means thinking about how war might be prevented at the private as well as the public scale, or how political democracy might benefit from economic justice. It also means thinking about how war and social inequality might be stimulated by the same philosophical and religious dispositions, so that fighting the roots of social inequality would constitute fighting the roots of war. Of course, sharing resources can lead to some uncomfortable associations, the most risible being Woolf's repeated invocation of the imperialist travel writer Mary Kingsley, whose meager "paid-for" education (German lessons, only) Woolf cites as evidence in her case against England's failure to nurture the "daughters of educated men" (6). While Woolf seeks to avoid at all costs "intolerable unanimity" (125), in which cooperation becomes conglomeration, she is willing to associate causes whose fit is asymmetrical and sometimes contradictory—as when, for example, she aligns suffragists, many of whom were eugenicists, with abolitionists, many of whom sought to extend citizenship only to men.

Examination of Woolf's comparative forms will allow us to address the tension between cooperation and conglomeration in greater detail, but there is also the tension between the desire to maximize England's faults and the risk of minimizing the faults of Germany, Italy, and Spain. Bruce Robbins and Michael Rothberg have each addressed this latter tension in ways that can be helpful for our understanding of Woolf's comparative project, and also for our understanding of her commitment to the translation of concepts, the alignment of political discourses, and the promiscuous observation of likeness among situations divided by nation and history.

Writing about the cosmopolitanism of Noam Chomsky, whose treatment of the United States in some ways resembles Woolf's treatment of England, Robbins focuses on the risk of engaging in "an unrestricted, uninhibited practice of comparing" and additionally the risk of engaging in a practice of comparing that focuses most of all on "one's country and countrymen."<sup>14</sup> The slogan Robbins finds most striking, Chomsky's claim that "The standards we apply to others we must apply to ourselves," fits well with Woolf's insistence that any condemnation of fascism in Italy and Germany should acknowledge that England also has silenced political dissent and failed to make liberty accessible to all.<sup>15</sup> Robbins makes two important points about Chomsky's claim: that it is cosmopolitan, because it involves seeing one's own transgressions the way others in the world would see them and thus withdrawing the "double standard" that involves exempting one's own country from criticism;<sup>16</sup> and that it is surprisingly particular, because it sometimes involves applying standards to one-

self that are more stringent than one applies elsewhere. Robbins chides Chomsky for mistaking anti-Americanism for decentered universalism and for overdoing the strategy of reverse-discrimination, so that Chomsky minimizes other countries' transgressions in his effort to overcompensate for the relative invisibility of transgressions by the United States. Transnational comparison here reinforces the centrality of the United States.

Like Chomsky, Woolf uses comparison to provincialize her own nation. She aims to deflate England's assumption of moral superiority and also to insist that policies criticized in Germany should be criticized in England too. Woolf does not minimize the transgressions of Germany, Italy, or Spain in any direct way. But like Chomsky she does compare England's transgressions to the very worst examples of transgression in other countries (slavery, anti-Semitism), and she asks whether tyranny should be conquered first at home: "Should we not help her to crush him in our own country before we ask her to help us to crush him abroad?" (65). She then refines this question, initially by emphasizing the risk of hypocrisy: "And what right have we, Sir, to trumpet our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our most respectable newspapers any day of the week eggs [proto-Dictators] like these?" (65-66). In her application of the Golden Rule, Woolf risks turning transnational evenhandedness into competitive anti-nationalism.

But in fact *Three Guineas's* transnationalism does not rest with the critique of England. In the book's latter pages, the renovation of England becomes a preparatory gesture for the renovation of the world. Woolf thus imagines a kind of patriotism compatible with cosmopolitanism, in which the eradication of tyranny at home would allow her "to give to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world" (129). When Woolf is at her most cynical, she sounds a lot like Robbins's Chomsky: England "occupies a negative, devalued, nonhonorific center"<sup>17</sup> But when Woolf transforms the meaning of patriotism from the appreciation of England-as-it-is into the appreciation of England-as-it-might-be, for itself and for the world, she uses the Golden Rule to compare national and transnational standards. It is the translation of standards from one's own country to other countries and then back again that allows Woolf to imagine a world-sized collective that does not conglomerate, on the one hand, or falsely universalize, on the other. Robbins argues that Chomsky's problem is not his insistence on comparing but his failure to compare enough. I couldn't agree more. A genuinely comparative transnationalism means that no country is ossified as the incarnation of absolute tyranny or absolute superiority. Both Woolf and Chomsky most ossify nations when they most denigrate them. That is, "England last" has a way of recapitulating the logic of "England first." Even horizontal comparisons, when pursued nationally, can homogenize. When Woolf recommends fighting the "pride of nationality" by comparing English music to German music, English painting with French painting (97, 128), she promotes a transnational appreciation of culture but affirms the boundaries of country and metonymies of the nation.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf combines this synchronic mode of comparison with another mode that is roughly diachronic and that focuses not on competition (best and worst nations) so

much as cause (transnational histories and futures). If the first kind of comparison follows the Golden Rule by shoring up the boundaries of England, better to emphasize England as an agent of tyranny, the second kind qualifies those boundaries and emphasizes the global networks that support and may remediate violence. Woolf's text thus finds a compromise between emphasizing the nation (and blaming it) and emphasizing what she calls "connections" (more difficult to blame, because more diffuse) that are both smaller and larger than the nation (168). Michael Rothberg has called this second mode of comparison "multidirectional" because it resists the calculation of extremity and the subsequent ordering of violence.<sup>18</sup> It refuses the assumption that acknowledging one kind of violence automatically subtracts attention from another kind, as if ethical attention exists in a limited marketplace. On the contrary, Rothberg argues, a practice of "multidirectional memory" allows us to see more and to see more historically: "new objects and new lines of sight—and not simply . . . already given entities that either are or are not 'like' other already given entities";<sup>19</sup> "what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant."<sup>20</sup>

With Rothberg's framework, we can return to moments in which Woolf's calls for remediating liberal England seem to compete with urgent calls for remediating fascist Europe. Instead of seeing these moments simply as instantiations of Chomsky's Golden Rule, in which England is the biggest loser, we can understand them as arguments for more complex and more varied strategies of collective action. Multidirectional comparison allows Woolf to investigate the systems of thought that lend support to war and also to suggest that old injustices are vivified by new injustices that rely on the same principles of exclusion and exploitation. This is her point about slavery: not only that the exploitation of labor and trade in humans is always unethical but also that the success of abolition is disgraced and belied by the persistence of those activities in any quarter and to any degree. Unlike Golden Rule comparison, which orders faults and highlights England's transgressions, multidirectional comparison highlights underlying causes such as the philosophical roots of social inequality, the history of exceptions within the history of liberalism, and the consequences of reinforcing competition as a principal value of European civilization. It is in this light that we should understand the significance of multidirectional phrases such as "whether man or woman, white or black" (81); "all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour" (96); "distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races" (122); and "the testimony of the ruled—the Indians or the Irish, say—with the claims made by their rulers" (128). Notionally, Woolf is speaking about women's education and economic opportunity, but periodically and persistently her rhetoric enlarges to focus on additional experiences of inequality, including racism and colonialism. Woolf insists that preventing war and supporting women's equality require not simply the critique or defense of one or another country, one or another class of people. Instead, they require a radical transformation of civic principles, which would root political community in practical cooperation rather than biological inheritance. This change is as important for Jews as it is for women.

The combination of Golden Rule and multidirectional comparison leads Woolf to insist on strategic likeness: either the likeness that leads first to the remediation of English liberalism and then to the subsequent remediation of collectives at several scales; or the likeness that leads to supporting laws and philosophies that would open civic participation, economic opportunity, educational resources, and professional advancement to all members of society. Woolf thus translates instances and methods of violence not to reduce kinds but to increase analytic resources. By suggesting that the circulation of examples enriches our ability to scrutinize them, *Three Guineas* presents translation as the best antidote to violence.

### Forms of Translation

For all its many gestures of translation among causes such as patriarchy, slavery, and anti-Semitism, *Three Guineas* may be most memorable for its resistance to the more local acts of translation that lead to joining societies or identifying with one's nation. The narrator famously proposes, "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (129). Lines such as these align *Three Guineas* with Woolf's earliest intuitions about the dangers of intellectual, social, and political association. When she rejects "generalisation" in her first published short story, 1917's "A Mark on the Wall," we understand that she is saying, wittily but seriously, that in conventional prose and social custom we find the seeds of militarism (there is a general in generalization).<sup>21</sup> *Three Guineas* likewise argues that the rituals of male pageantry prepare the way for fascist aggression, disdains the homogeneity implied by marriage and the language of official newspapers, and worries that collectivity leads to violence (124–25). Conversing with an imagined interlocutor but speaking rhetorically, Woolf's narrator asks, "is there not something in the conglomeration of people into societies that releases what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves?" The narrator wonders about belonging's fundamental exclusiveness. Must it mute individuality and create attitudes of competition and antagonism?

Since the question is rhetorical, the answer would seem to be "yes." For this reason, Woolf's narrator proposes what has become *Three Guineas's* most enduring concept: the Outsiders' Society (126–28). This oxymoron—a group of people whose collectivity is defined by being excluded from collectivity—echoes the attitude of cautious, sometimes ironic appreciation that Woolf brings to her depiction of social gatherings such as parties, dinners, and pageants in many of her fictional works. Christopher Reed and Natania Rosenfeld have noted that feelings of social and political marginality seem to have excited, even nourished creativity in Woolf's early work. Reed in *Bloomsbury Rooms* and Rosenfeld in *Outsiders Together* have urged us to see Woolf's set as a dissident coterie whose models of belonging and art were rooted in their experience at the edges of the sexual and political mainstream.<sup>22</sup> Woolf's novels feature characters who are linked, however provisionally, by their imperfect socialization: Septimus Warren Smith, Peter Walsh, Clarissa Dalloway, Lilly Briscoe, William Banks, and many others. These characters are valued by Woolf and preferred

to the social insiders because they cultivate sympathies that operate at a scale much smaller than the nation. However, the choice of small-scale sympathies often comes at the cost of a character's sanity, her professional advancement, and her political agency. Exclusion may nurture individuality, Woolf seems to suggest, but it can wear down individuals.

In her early texts, Woolf deploys evasiveness to reject the menu of actions that were available to women, pacifists, foreigners, and other nonconformists in early twentieth-century Britain. We can hear the echo of that strategy in *Three Guineas*, where instead of joining a society for the prevention of war she proposes "creating new methods" (170) in which absence, obscurity, refusal, experiment, and "complete indifference" are revalued as authentic expressions of liberty (127). Yet, the continuity of affect between the earlier and later works can obscure some real differences: in *Three Guineas*, we see a new commitment to cooperation among political agents, suggested by the thematic comparisons I've discussed, and the effort to imagine more enduring principles of association. Woolf here exchanges the renovation of community's size for a renovation of community's structure.<sup>23</sup> I see this latter renovation, especially the effort to manage the relationship among communities of different sizes, as a crucial feature of Woolf's legacy to contemporary debates about literary history and transnational belonging.

I've shown that Woolf uses thematic comparisons among histories of violence to create grounds for collective action. But Woolf also generates new collectives through narrative arrangements that operate at several levels of attention: the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, and the text. The chapter is perhaps the most obvious of these devices, since the book is neatly divided into three interrelated sections, or essays. As readers will know, Woolf presents these essays as though they were a single letter to a correspondent who has asked for a guinea in support of his cause, the prevention of war. However, because Woolf's narrator associates the cause of preventing war with the causes of education for women and the advancement of women in the professions, she assesses the initial request only after considering the other two claims. In this basic sense, three essays and three causes are treated as one, and at the end of the book the narrator will claim that each cause is deserving of a guinea because the topics are "the same and inseparable" (170). The comparison of causes looks in this light to yield ethical and conceptual equivalence, such that we should regard the often-discussed, never-shown photographs of "dead bodies and ruined houses," victims of the Spanish Civil War, with the same outrage, the same horror that we consider the displayed images of male pageantry and the described exclusion of English women from public life.

But the shape of Woolf's narrative actually contradicts the story it tells and complicates the horizontal logic of equivalence. In the story, the topic of war stimulates the topic of women's liberty and thus appears as the catalyst for the analysis of women's education and financial dependence. In the narrative, however, Woolf presents it the other way around: she argues that women's lack of intellectual and economic liberty precedes war and indeed stimulates it. The structure of comparison—the three chapters, the three guineas, and the three topics

—yields not a single object of analysis but instead what I will purposefully call an *anthology of violence*, which Woolf organizes in a number of different ways. There is the organization of the epistolary story; there is the organization of the political argument; and there is the organization of Woolf's apparatus, that is, the anecdotes, quotations, photographs, and endnotes that serve additionally to interrupt and reframe the book's comparative method.

In addition to the chapters, we have the final paragraphs of *Three Guineas*, which serve to create the impression that there are multiple authors and several unique endings. In the text's wry conclusion, the narrator suggests that the original correspondent is responsible for the production of the narrator's letter, since it "would have never have been written had you not asked for an answer to your own" (170). *Three Guineas* thus seems to end with a feedback loop, in which literary agency recedes into a network of actors. The logic of writing matches the logic of political analysis: the claim, that is, that fascist tyranny in Spain, Italy, and Germany has to be understood as part of a more expansive global history of economic and social oppression. That history includes colonialism in Africa and slavery in the transatlantic world. Woolf indicates the first in the title of her book.<sup>24</sup> She indicates the second when she observes that women's suffrage was achieved on a budget that was much smaller than "the sums that . . . the Society for the Abolition of Slavery had for its disposal for the abolition of that slavery" (55). The demonstrative pronoun—"that"—is the most significant term in this claim. She uses it here and elsewhere ("that cause") to establish conceptual affiliations among varieties of violence and exploitation. Demonstrative pronouns signal the sharing of characteristics (both involve objectification; both involve constraint), but they also signal the sharing of rationales (both depend on exceptions to liberty; both narrow the application of democratic principles). The diffusion of agency at the end of the narrative likewise suggests that the narrator's argument is an outgrowth of her interlocutor's because they have been moved by the same impulse. In each case, narrative structure and political analysis, the emphasis is on process rather than outcome. Woolf is concerned about the experience of slavery and the conditions of unpaid labor, but she focuses her energy on their rationale and their source.

Through lists and catalogues, too, Woolf asks us to see relationships of genre, such that we associate violence abroad with systems of oppression that exist at various geographic scales. At one point, the narrator's address shifts from the honorary treasurer requesting funds to the antifascist sons of Europe. She conjectures, "You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. Now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of religion" (122). Again, we are tempted by the grammar of equivalence: the notion, say, that the treatment of Jews in Germany is the same as the treatment of women in Britain. But Woolf's argument emphasizes, through the repetition of "because," the economic and social systems that make exceptions to what she calls the "great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty" (122). Two sentences later, Woolf claims that "dictatorship" is terrible no matter where it is found, "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" (122). Woolf suggests that dictatorship exists at scales both smaller and larger than the nation, and that it need not operate uniformly in order to register its influence. She insists in addition that the sources of dictatorship are institutional (universities, government ministries, and the highest offices of state) as well as social. While the conjunction "or" stresses variety and pervasiveness, it also places the ethical standard before the specific case. There could be other victims and other perpetrators, she suggests, but it is the "iniquity" of dictatorship that matters most (122). Of course, lists and catalogues risk generating the abstraction and aggression that—as Woolf points out—tend to accompany the "conglomeration" of individuals into groups. Woolf tries to mitigate that aggression by allowing groups to proliferate, by displaying the process of translation, and by creating visual and verbal images of cooperation.

Of the many images of transnational comparison that appear in *Three Guineas*, perhaps the most dramatic and least noticed comes in the final footnote, in which Woolf gathers together the voices of three writer-critics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walt Whitman, and George Sand. Melba Cuddy-Keane's eloquent analysis of the chorus in *Between the Acts* leads me to think of this final paragraph as a choral assembly: a non-hierarchical, multi-voiced gathering.<sup>25</sup> Woolf uses this British-American-French alliance to invoke several national traditions of Romantic and post-Romantic thought, and she allows these traditions to speak their own languages, as it were: all quotations appear in the original. This is striking for several reasons. First, because almost all of *Three Guineas's* other non-English quotations, including those from Hitler's and Mussolini's speeches, have been translated into English.<sup>26</sup> Second, because the appearance of French at the end of the text—George Sand gets the final word—seems at odds with the book's apparent effort to reroute thinking about Europe through a renewed analysis of England. And third, because hewing to the original French suggests a commitment to untranslatability that seems to contradict not only the book's insistence on promiscuous comparison (English patriarchy is like German fascism) but also Sand's emphasis on the "interdependence" rather than the singularity of individuals (247). Concluding with Sand, the text declines in the final instance to give England a voice—and a history—all its own.

*Three Guineas* thus affirms transnationalism as a formal as well as a thematic project: formal, because the untranslated quotation reminds us that Woolf's English-language text is indebted to traditions (and languages) beyond England; thematic, because Coleridge, Whitman, and Sand allow us to register Woolf's peroration about the "inseparable" causes of three English societies (war, education, the professions) as a more global statement about any individual's responsibility to causes that do not seem to be her own. Translation is required: one must acknowledge networks of causation and responsibility, and it is often necessary to imagine larger political frameworks. But translation must be resisted, or at least made visible, in order to make distinctions among agents and among the histories that have divided those agents. The voice of Sand is a French voice, a nineteenth-century voice,

and the voice of a woman writer who, like George Eliot (also invoked by Woolf), used a male pseudonym in order to be heard. For Sand, individuality and cooperation are inseparable. "All beings are interdependent," she writes in my English translation (222). "Individuality," she continues, "has no significance or importance whatsoever on its own."

Woolf cites Sand, and indeed Sand's final words become Woolf's, but their arguments are not identical. By marking the edges of her narrative with someone else's language and in particular with the language of a writer known for appropriating philosophically the physical suffering of others, Woolf suggests that interdependence in some ways trumps and in some ways secures individuality. That oscillation between trumping and securing is central to the contradictions of Woolf's text, and it reminds us that the cosmopolitan enlargement that extends agency will always have to compete with the cosmopolitan enlargement that limits it. Woolf uses multilingualism at the end of *Three Guineas* to create, at once, the experience of translation (French and English; or French as English) as well as the experience of singularity (French, not English).<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Woolf presents a trio of quotations and at least two possible conclusions, both of which help this multilingual moment survive multilingually—that is, in non-English editions of the work.<sup>28</sup> Readers are thus asked to imagine a community that is local and global, national and transnational, inside and outside the text.

Woolf has produced in *Three Guineas* an anthological text, which samples and collates many voices, genres, and histories of violence, and thus she has created a book whose uniqueness accrues to its comparisons: the comparison of histories, the comparison of causes, the comparison of texts. Woolf's polemic should be understood within the tradition of modernist literary anthologies, which arises alongside and to some extent in conflict with volumes focused on national literatures; and it should be understood, too, within the broader tradition of modernist anthologizing, which we might trace back to the aesthetics of social grouping we see in Walt Whitman's lists or James Joyce's series or Langston Hughes's compilation of themes. In Woolf, the anthological structure can be differentiated from something like pastiche or collage by its effort to resist the synecdoche of liberal nationalism and the temporality of Golden Rule comparison. The modernist anthology, as Woolf presents it, requires a practice of group-making that has to operate provisionally and persistently: there are always more comparisons to be made.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Contemporary Novel and Translatability**

Now, if we were to look for a contemporary writer who most shares Woolf's suspicion of social collectivity, her disdain for associations based on country, and her sense that political agency nevertheless requires groupings of various kinds, we could do worse than to light on J. M. Coetzee, whose recent novels have focused on transnational comparison, the ethics of uniqueness, and the relationship between transnational circulation and political communities. As I've suggested, Coetzee's work is part of a genre of transnational writing I call "comparison literature." By using this term, I mean to draw our attention to the traditional distinction between the disciplines of national literature, which typically refer to what books are, who wrote them, or where they were produced, and the discipline of compara-

tive literature, which typically refers to what we do with books. Contemporary works of comparison literature have internalized many of the intellectual strategies that have in recent years transformed and blurred these disciplines: the investigation of transnational and multilingual histories of literary culture; the analysis of how the global dissemination of literature has been tied to institutions of the state and the apparatus of imperialism; a new focus on technology and translation; the effort to design concepts—scale, network, system, republic, and so on—that can better describe the relationship among literatures worldwide.

Comparison literature asks us to think about how comparative processes of transnational reading, global circulation, and translation that take place, as it were, outside of texts shape those that take place within texts at the level of theme, style, and structure. Works of comparison literature are difficult to assign to any one national literary system—English literature, French literature, and so on—because they typically begin in several places and in several languages. At the same time, they appropriate to themselves many of the disciplinary practices we associate with comparative literature and thus suggest that we may need to rethink the traditional distinction between national objects and comparative evaluation. Simply put, “comparison literature” refers to books that analyze the transnational contexts of their own production, circulation, and study.

Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year* uses the architecture of comparison to make wide-ranging connections among literary genres, violent episodes, and national histories.<sup>30</sup> Like *Three Guineas*, *Diary* seems everywhere committed to an ethics of enlargement. Essays printed at the top of each page make sweeping transnational and transhistorical comparisons: at one point, they yoke together the U.S. torture of prisoners, South Africa’s system of apartheid, and Britain’s imposition of colonial rule; elsewhere, they move seamlessly from the suppression of indigenous populations in Australia to histories of genocide in South Africa and the United States. Other essays treat with irony and distaste the assumption, as one entry puts it, “that each person on earth must belong to one nation or another and operate within one or another national economy.”<sup>31</sup>

Yet, alongside its thematic and formal emphasis on comparative beginnings, Coetzee’s novel suggests that large-scale comparisons, while ethically necessary, are socially paralyzing. “Moral theory,” the essayist opines at the end of the novel, “has never quite known what to do with quantity, with numbers. Is killing two people worse than killing one person, for example? If so, how much worse?” (204). He later asks, turning to the relationship between animals and humans, “Which is worse the death of a bird or the death of a human child?” (205). The problem implicit in these questions, which concerns Coetzee in all of his recent world fictions, is not only how to compare narratives of violence but also whether there is a single conceptual scale that can comprehend and order local actions. By creating a novel in which individual voices are always modified by circulation, Coetzee suggests that transnational communities—like transnational novels—will have to operate at several scales at once.

Throughout his career, Coetzee has shared in the Bloomsbury tradition of meeting political tyranny with evasion and indifference, and he has been criticized—as Woolf was—for a style of writing that seems impractical and irresponsible in the context of atrocity in his own country and abroad. We see in both writers, however, not an outright rejection of social collectivity so much as an effort to match its structure to the most strenuous democratic principles. Both Woolf and Coetzee lament the contraction of individual liberty in the service of national, even antifascist causes. But despite that lament, Woolf’s individualism comes to depend for its agency on expansive affiliations and on the provisional suppression of circulation. For each writer, the exercise of individual liberty requires the limitation of scale and, consequently, the drawing of social and generic boundaries. As a woman, Woolf may reject her country, but she can only engage with the world by establishing country-like containers of solidarity and action. The trick for Woolf, as for Coetzee, is to imagine those containers differently. Envisioning an Outsiders’ Society, Woolf points to the tension between the aspirations of cosmopolitanism and the agency of states. She tries to manage that tension in *Three Guineas* not by rejecting the inside but by emphasizing its permeability and its foreignness. Woolf imagines a community whose uniqueness operates comparatively because its principles of organization have to be translated—established in relation to other principles—not once but over and over again. Anthologizing violence, Woolf uses the aggression of group-making against the aggressiveness of groups. The legacy of Woolf’s modernism, then, is not only its anxiety about translation (“intolerable unanimity”) but also its commitment to translatability as a source of renewal for both national and transnational collectives.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the National Humanities Center for the fellowship that allowed me to complete this essay under the best possible conditions. I am especially grateful to the center’s wonderful research librarians for helping me acquire many foreign-language editions of *Three Guineas*. Early versions of this work were presented to audiences at the Modernist Studies Association and at Duke University, and later versions benefitted from David James’s careful reading and generous editorial care. A very short extract of this essay first appeared in *English Language Notes* 49:1 (Spring/Summer 2011) and a longer version appeared in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicizing Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, edited by David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> By describing this account as typical, I don’t mean to suggest it’s simply wrong. I associate modernism’s transnational legacy with the renovation of idiom in my book *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). In the present essay, I am presenting an alternative to my earlier argument.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Parks, *Translating Style: A Literary Approach to Translation—A Translation Approach to Literature*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2007), 147.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of writers who produce multilingual fiction by mixing various languages into English, see Joshua Miller’s “Multilingual Narrative and the Refusal of Translation: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* and R. Zamora Linmark’s *Rolling the R’s*,” *How Far Is America From Here?*, ed. Theo D’Haen, et al.

(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 467–80; and *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For traditional and emergent definitions of world literature, see David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “Comparison Literature” in *New Literary History* 40:3 (Summer 2009): 567–82.

<sup>6</sup> Walkowitz, “Comparison Literature,” 567.

<sup>7</sup> The first translation was a Spanish-language edition, published by Editorial Sudamericana in Argentina. Rebecca Wisor provides an excellent account of the various British and U.S. “first” editions and suggests that the several texts should be understood to constitute the work. Wisor discusses only English-language versions. See Rebecca Wisor, “Versioning Virginia Woolf: Notes toward a Post-Eclectic Edition of *Three Guineas*,” *Modernism/modernity* 16:3 (2009): pp. 503–4. For the early translation history of *Three Guineas*, see *The Reception History of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, eds. Mary Ann Caws and Nicola Luckhurst (London: Continuum, 2002), xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Marcus notes that the French, who were Woolf’s earliest translators and critics, rejected *Three Guineas* because its discussion of England seemed “untranslatable” (“The European Dimensions of the Hogarth Press,” in *The Reception History*, 328–56).

<sup>9</sup> Caws and Luckhurst, “Introduction,” in *The Reception History of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, xi–xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus, “The European Dimensions of the Hogarth Press,” 332. For an excellent study of Woolf’s writing about translation, see Jennifer Raterman, “Reading from the Outside: The Uses of Translation for Virginia Woolf’s ‘Common Reader,’” *Translation Studies* 3:1 (2010): 78–93. Raterman argues that Woolf was actually more interested in translation, especially late in her career, than some of her early writings would suggest (79). Steven Yao has also discussed Woolf’s lack of interest in translation as compared to modernist writers and translators such as Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats. Steven G. Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. Jane Marcus (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 65, 168. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most untranslatable element of *Three Guineas* is its title, which is so peculiar to its time and place that it has required translation, or at least explication in English-language editions (*Three Guineas*, 224).

<sup>13</sup> Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 96.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Chomsky’s Golden Rule: Comparison and Cosmopolitanism” in *New Literary History* 40:3 (Summer 2009), 549.

<sup>15</sup> Chomsky quoted in Robbins, 549.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Natania Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together: Virginia and Leonard Woolf* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> In an eloquent essay that anticipates my argument about the relationship between narrative form and community in Woolf's late work, Melba Cuddy-Keane shows how *Between the Acts* uses the genre of comedy to model inclusiveness without homogeneity. By replacing the voice of the leader with the voice of a chorus, Cuddy-Keane argues, Woolf allows for "dissonance" and mutuality (283). Cuddy-Keane suggests that satire and aggression—both central affects of *Three Guineas*—have to be rejected because they recapitulate the competition and violence of traditional community. In *Three Guineas*, I suggest, Woolf uses the rhetorical leverage of satire to reject customary distinctions among histories of violence and to insist on new ways of ordering (Melba Cuddy-Keane, "The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*," *PMLA* 105:2 [March 1990]: 273–85). See also Brenda R. Silver, "The Authority of Anger: *Three Guineas* as Case Study," *Signs* 16:2 (1991): 340–70. Jessica Berman's excellent work on "the problem of commonality" in Woolf focuses on the early novels, in which she finds a "fractured yet coherent political life" modeled in character, language, and action (140, 5). The early novels use poetic language to emphasize the ephemeral quality of community, as Berman shows, whereas *Three Guineas* largely avoids poetic language and focuses instead on narrative structure and the persistence of historical associations (*Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]).

<sup>24</sup> As Jane Marcus points out, guineas were forged from gold mined by unpaid African workers ("Notes to *Three Guineas*," in Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 224).

<sup>25</sup> Cuddy-Keane, "The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*," 283. On Woolf's gathering of voices from the past and from other nations, see Celia Marshik, "Thinking Back through Copyright: Individual Rights and Collective Life in Woolf's Nonfiction" in *Modernism & Copyright*, ed. Paul K. Saint-Amour (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65–88.

<sup>26</sup> There are two other passages in languages other than English: Antigone's "five words," in Greek, for which Woolf offers a translation (202); and a passage from a French manifesto against war, which Woolf does not translate (105).

<sup>27</sup> George Sand was one of Victorian England's most popular and most respected "ladies." In this sense, Woolf's invocation of Sand could be understood as a gesture of nostalgia and familiarity, or as a reminder that the most national sentiments—"reading and writing our own tongue," as it were (*Three Guineas*, 107)—will sometimes be expressed in a foreign language. For Sand's popularity in Victorian England, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 62. For a reading of this footnote that emphasizes the contrast between interdependence and untranslatability in the content and form of Sand's quotation, see Raterman, "Reading from the Outside," 89.

<sup>28</sup> Non-English editions of the work variously preserve, transform, and homogenise the final footnote. For example, in French and Japanese editions, Sand's words appear in the same language as Woolf's, whereas Spanish and German editions retain the French while assimilating Woolf's tongue to the languages of Franco and Hitler. Virginia Woolf, *Trois Guinées*, translated by Vivianne Forster (Paris: des femmes, 1977); Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* [Japanese], translated by Keiko Izubuti (Tokyo: Misuzuo Shobo, 2006); Virginia Woolf, *Tres Guineas*, translated by Andrés Bosch (Barcelona: Lumen, 1999); Virginia Woolf, *Drei Guineen*, translated by Anita Eichholz (Munich: Frauenoffensive, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> For more on the modernist anthology, see my "Shakespeare in Harlem: *The Norton Anthology*, 'Propaganda,' and Langston Hughes," *Modern Language Quarterly* 60:4 (1999): 495–519.

<sup>30</sup> I discuss this novel at greater length in Walkowitz, "Comparison Literature."

<sup>31</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 78. All subsequent references are to this edition.