

VIRGINIA WOOLF, MONEY, AND “THE WORLD’S OLDEST PROFESSION”: A CLOSE READING

Vara NEVEROW*

■ **ABSTRACT:** This paper aims at tracing Woolf’s references to money and its relation with prostitution in her essays *A Room of One’s Own*, *Professions for Women*, *Three Guineas* and in her novels *Orlando* and *The Years*. Woolf’s references to money are explicit from the start; indeed, the titles themselves suggest the importance of money. In *A Room of One’s Own*, the narrator states the title in the first sentence. To have a private room, one must have money or some other privilege. As the narrative evolves, it becomes clear that, to be free, an educated woman who is a fiction writer or a poet really needs is £500 a year (one may assume that it is this stable source of income that ensures the privacy of having one’s own room). In “*Professions for Women*” (a title that is clearly associated with paid work and income), the “Angel of the House” intrudes on the narrator and advises her “‘Never [to] let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.’” At this moment the narrator, a financially independent woman having inherited “five hundred pounds a year” and thus does not “depend solely on charm for [her] living,” realizes that she must kill this Angel who is trying to force the narrator back into the private sphere of subordination and subservience to men. Since the Angel would destroy the narrator’s intellectual freedom, the death would be justifiable. In *Three Guineas*, the narrator’s focus on money is even more blatantly obvious since the title is a direct reference to a currency, the guinea was originally a coin.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Money. Prostitution. Professions for women. Virginia Woolf.

The witty phrase “I did it for my own pleasure. Then I did it for my friends. Now I do it for money” has been attributed to Woolf although it was not coined by her; nonetheless, the concept is highly applicable to her complicated engagement with the term and practice of prostitution, a paid profession that she depicts as a two-sided oxymoron of freedom and indenture. In *Orlando* (1928), published just a year before *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Woolf writes that “Love [...] has two faces; [...] two bodies; [...] and each [...] is the exact opposite of the other. Yet, so

* Southern Connecticut State University, English and Women’s Studies. New Haven, CT 06515, USA – neverowv1@southernct.edu.

strictly are they joined together that you cannot separate them” (WOOLF, 2006a, p. 87). Entwined and conjoined, “Love, the Bird of Paradise,” and “Lust the vulture,” a doubled and corrupted fusion, can be aligned with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Sonnet” where the sestet describes the poetic structure as two sides of a coin – one depicting life and love while the other represents death. Woolf wrestles with her *doppelgänger* motif regarding the conundrum as who ultimately controls girls’ and women’s lives and bodies – the patriarchy or the females¹ themselves – swapping “money” for “love” in *A Room of One’s Own*, “Professions for Women” (1931),² and in *Three Guineas* (1938). Woolf’s narrators in these essays view financial independence as the sole way to possess one’s own life and depict dependency and reliance on men as the equivalent of intellectual if not bodily death.³ The narrator’s complex depictions of prostitution are not primarily about actual sex trafficking and pimping. Instead, she uses the term metaphorically as she equates fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands of the daughters of educated men as pimps who dominate women and girls through the control of money. Financial independence – as evident in the title of the manifesto – is central to the argument – and even the choice of selling one’s own body in prostitution is a form of autonomy preferable to being controlled by a male.

Woolf’s references to money are explicit from the start; indeed, the titles themselves suggest the importance of money. In *A Room of One’s Own*, the narrator states the title in the first sentence. To have a private room, one must have money or some other privilege. As the narrative evolves, it becomes clear that, to be free, an educated woman who is a fiction writer or a poet really needs is £500 a year (one may assume that it is this stable source of income that ensures the privacy of having one’s own room). In “Professions for Women” (a title that is clearly associated with paid work and income), the “Angel of the House” intrudes on the narrator and advises her “‘Never [to] let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.’ And she made as if to guide my pen.” At this moment the narrator, a financially independent woman having inherited “five hundred pounds

¹ In contemporary culture, the rise of trans, queer, and non-binary identities overlap with but does not entirely align with the ways that cis-born women and girls are defined by patriarchal societies. In *Orlando*, Woolf explores the fluidity of sexual and gender identities as the main character goes to sleep one night with a male body and awakes a week later in a body transformed into a female body. In this discussion, the argument is more narrowly focused on the ways that cis-born females have been controlled in Western society.

² The essay was written and delivered as a lecture in 1931 but not published until 1942.

³ In *A Room of One’s Own*, Judith Shakespeare is seduced and abandoned by “Nick Greene, the actor-manager [who] took pity on her.” Because she soon was betrayed and “found herself with child by that gentleman” she “killed herself one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (WOOLF, 2005, p. 48) rather than being able to focus craft a work of fiction independently.

a year” and thus does not “depend solely on charm for [her] living,” realizes that she must kill this Angel who is trying to force the narrator back into the private sphere of subordination and subservience to men. Since the Angel would destroy the narrator’s intellectual freedom, the death would be justifiable: “My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence” (WOOLF, 2023, not paginated).

In *Three Guineas*, the narrator’s focus on money is even more blatantly obvious since the title is a direct reference to a currency (the guinea was originally a coin which was replaced by the pound in 1816 but continued to be used in the twentieth century as a unit of account valued at 21 shillings).⁴ To be petitioned by a privileged man to donate a guinea (a pound plus a shilling) is a radical turning point for a daughter of an educated man.⁵ In many of Woolf’s references to her women peers, they are employed as civil servants. They are the daughters of educated men who only now have their own assets or their own income and can make their own decisions. This self-sufficiency comes in the aftermath of the Great War when, after centuries of dependency on male family members, the daughters of educated men in Great Britain not only have won the vote for those women over thirty, with means – an achievement the narrator brushes aside – but also and far more importantly now have, at least in some contexts, garnered legal control their own fiscal assets through the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919.

The newly minted independent daughters discussed in *Three Guineas* do not need to plead or please their fathers (or brothers or uncles) to pay for what they want or to donate to a cause they support. So long as the woman is unmarried and working in civil service or, like the narrator⁶ (and the author herself), owns a business, she is no longer under the control of her male family members because she can earn the amount of income she needs for her survival. The money belongs solely to the woman herself, not to any man – and no man can control her life by controlling her finances. The narrator observes that, with this new freedom, a woman “need no longer use her charm to procure⁷ money from her father or

⁴ A search of the “Notes and Queries” in *The Guardian* provides interesting details about the history of the guinea. The information appears in sub-category titled “Root of all Evil” (all entries in this section focus on money-related topics). See: <https://www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0,-69044,00.html#:~:text=The%20guinea%20was%20introduced%20in,worth%20more%20than%20twenty%20shillings>.

⁵ In the body of the essay, excluding the endnotes, there are 76 instances of “daughters of educated men,” five of “daughter of an educated man,” 42 of “educated man’s daughter,” and 16 of “educated men’s daughters” for a grand total of 139 (and there may be other variations).

⁶ The narrator channels Woolf, but the story may not actually align precisely with Woolf’s own activities.

⁷ I should note that the word “procure” is also used as a direct reference to prostitution, pimping and trafficking.

brother. Since it is beyond the power of her family to punish her financially, she can express her own opinions” (WOOLF, 2006, p. 21). Financial independence equals freedom of expression.

The narrator celebrates this autonomy by describing this new world for a daughter of an educated man, stating that, “as she issues from the shadow of the private house, and stands on the bridge which lies between the old world and the new”, the woman holds “the sacred coin [of her profession] in her hand.” In awe, the woman asks herself “What shall I do with it? What do I see with it?” This moment is pivotal for the woman, and the narrator vividly invokes divine elements, suggesting that, for this woman, “The moon [...] seem[s] to [be] a white sixpence, a *chaste* sixpence, [...] the *sacred* sixpence that she had earned with her own hands” (Ibid., p. 20; my emphasis). The description of the moon as a sacred coin – though only a sixpence, not a guinea – clearly affirms the woman’s freedom. However, this reference to the moon is also symbolic. It invokes the Greek Goddess Artemis, the deity who practices and protects virginity at all costs. Woolf’s selection of the words “chaste” and “sacred” (italicized above) suggests that this young woman is now protected by the virgin goddess herself and will not have to sacrifice herself on the altar of man’s desire so long as her independence remains intact, and she does not choose marriage. At that historical moment, a woman working as a civil servant would be immediately terminated if she were to wed. And, as discussed below, the woman’s sacrifice of her virginity in marriage is not the sole risk she faces.

The narrator documents the challenges a woman civil servant experiences in the workplace. It is a sleazy boy’s club, a male enclave where rampant nepotism is ubiquitous, a corrupt practice of collusion that, as the narrator observes, “queers⁸ the professions” (Ibid., p. 61) that men have controlled for centuries. Having described the suppurating venality practiced in the workplace, the narrator then makes it abundantly clear that a single woman who holds a position as a civil servant is viewed by her male peers and superiors as an intruder and as an object of sexual provocation. Regarded by the men with contempt simply because of her sex, her value is determined and devalued based on the intimacies of her body – and her body is on display as a trespasser in a man’s world – the public world where, since she is no longer confined in the private home, she is both sexualized and ostracized. As the narrator observes in a complex passage:

it is quite possible that the name “Miss” transmits through the board or division some vibration which is not registered in the examination room. “Miss” transmits sex; and sex may carry with it an aroma. “Miss” may carry with it the swish of petticoats, the savour of scent or other odour perceptible to the nose on

⁸ The word “queer” appears six times, “queered” twice, and “queers” once in the essay. In no instance is the term a reference to sexuality.

the further side of the partition and obnoxious to it. What charms and consoles in the private house may distract and exacerbate in the public office (Ibid., p. 62).

This passage makes it abundantly clear that the presence of a woman is “obnoxious” because, for her male colleagues, she seems to exude an extremely unpleasant scent. She not only “distract(s)” these men but also annoys and revolts them. The men are aware at a sensory level that the woman is in the wrong place because she sounds and *smells* different from a man. The “swish” of her clothing suggests that the woman’s attire is inappropriate in the workplace. The references to the “scent” and the “odour” hint at the smell of a woman’s sex and thus also alludes to the transactions in the oldest profession – prostitution, discussed further below.

The presence of a co-equal woman in the workplace is a shock, a puzzlement, and an offence to these men. In a brief passage, the narrator describes the dimwitted calculation about women in the workplace that deeply perplexes these men who respect only other men: “Since Miss is a woman, Miss is not a son or a nephew” (Ibid., p. 62). The narrator then incrementally escalates her mockery. She states that, “We are trying, remember, to discover what flavour attaches itself to sex in a public office; we are sniffing most delicately not facts but savours.” Continuing, she decides to support her claim with data: “it would be well not to depend on our own private noses, but to call in evidence from outside” to determine “the atmosphere that surrounds the word ‘Miss’ in Whitehall” (Ibid., p. 63-64).

The revelation of public evidence emits the stench of misogyny. Drawing on letters in newspapers, the narrator quotes a man’s viewpoint that, during World War II, “Unfortunately, [women] were praised and petted out of all proportion to the value of their performances” (Ibid., p. 62). A second opinionator suggests that “re-grading a large number of women who have drifted into clerical service [sh]ould become available for domestic service” (*Three Guineas* 63). Here, the narrator briefly intervenes and states, “The odour thickens, you will agree” and then offers a third quotation: “Homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle” (Ibid., p. 63).⁹ At this point, she pounces: “There! There can be no doubt of the odour now. The cat is out of the bag; and it is a Tom” (Ibid., p. 63).¹⁰ One must ask, what do men in the workplace *really* think about women co-workers?

The narrator makes it evident that, while the virginal “aroma” a woman exudes is “delicious [...] in the private house” (Ibid., p. 63-64), it is an offence in the civil service that can be used as a rationale for women to earn the lowest of salaries. But the narrator points out that only a “Miss” can earn a salary: “As for ‘Mrs.,’ it is a contaminated word; an obscene word. The less said about that word the better. Such is the smell of it, so rank does it stink in the nostrils of Whitehall, that Whitehall

⁹ These passages are quoted from longer letters.

¹⁰ A tom is a sexually mature male cat who seeks and fights for female cats in heat.

excludes it entirely. In Whitehall as in heaven, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage” (Ibid., p. 64). The caustic humor of these observations makes painfully evident the systemic disparities and hierarchies between male and female earners in the workplace while also replicating and enforcing the whims of the patriarch in the private home. By revealing the rampant misogyny that women endure in a form of employment that demeans and devalues them, the narrator exposes not only the hypocrisy but the abuse.

But the virginity of the woman’s own mind is also at stake as are her ethics, for, as the narrator argues, women in the workplace are still continually at risk of succumbing to patriarchal values due to their sustained poverty. With a very limited income in the male-dominated workplace, the daughter of an educated man can be driven into another kind of prostitution as she serves the “pimps and panders of the brain-selling trade” or “accept[s] any of those baubles and labels by which brain merit is advertised and certified – medals, honours, degrees[,] tokens that culture has been prostituted and intellectual liberty sold into captivity” (Ibid., p. 112). She approaches these motifs both from the perspective of an advocate for women’s rights and as a writer who seeks legitimate revenue from her work in a society that also constrains her voice through censorship in ways very similar to the policing of prostitution.¹¹ Celia Marshik points out that Woolf clearly associates her own work with prostitution. As Marshik states, “Woolf use[s] commercial sexuality to figure a writer’s relationship with her public” and also endorses “‘whoring’ at the expense of respectable intercourse, which is deprecated as a pedestrian form of union” (853). Further, from her earliest novel, *The Voyage Out* to her posthumous *Between the Acts* and in her most explicitly political and feminist published writings including *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), “Professions for Women” (1931), and *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf consistently integrates observations about the risks and challenges that women face if they work in the public sphere – a space that is dominated by men. Whether these women are actively practicing the “world’s oldest profession,” are working-class women who labor outside the home, or are “daughters of educated men” controlled by their fathers for centuries but now able to enter the newly opened professions in such fields as the publishing industry and civil service, they are all still policed, constrained, and exploited by patriarchy.

Woolf also interweaves these “public” paid professions with what she terms “unpaid professions” assigned to women limited to the private sphere. Women who work at home are tasked with sexual availability (whether consensual or otherwise), childbirth, mothering, eldercare, and multiple domestic responsibilities. As Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*, if there were equity – a if the wife “were paid

¹¹ According to the *Quote Investigator*, the slogan probably originated during a conversation between the prominent drama critic George Jean Nathan and the playwright Ferenc Molnár who coined the term (<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/01/17/for-pleasure-for-money/>).

for her work, the work of bearing and bringing up children, a real wage, a money wage, so that it became an attractive profession [...] [rather than] a precarious and dishonoured profession” – then the husband’s “own slavery¹² [in the workplace] would be lightened” (Ibid., p. 131).

Focusing closely on the economics embedded in a patriarchal system designed to control women in *all* professions, including their work in the private sphere, Woolf concentrates intently on the fluctuating accumulation and distribution of money for women. As noted above, even the titles of the three works discussed in most detail here emphasize the degree to which women can—or cannot—access money. In the essay, Mary Beton,¹³ Woolf’s surrogate narrator, repeatedly calls attention to the woman’s right to privacy and financial stability. A woman who has “a room of her own and five hundred a year” (WOOLF, 2005, p. 103) is autonomous and secure. In “Professions for Women,” originally delivered as a lecture (as was *A Room*), Woolf explores the freedoms women can acquire through their waged or salaried employment. And, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf zeroes in even more closely on the professions and exchange systems both ancient and new in which women either do or do not have access to money. The word “money” appears 37 times in *A Room*, once in “Professions for Women,” and 111 times in *Three Guineas*. In *A Room* “five hundred” is mentioned 12 times and in “Professions” twice while in *Three Guineas*, the “guinea” is referenced 65 times (including 11 mentions of “guineas”). In the two longer essays, Woolf links her references a woman’s autonomy to money and also uses explicit and recurrent references to prostitution as a central motif in her complex analysis of women’s struggles to escape from patriarchy and establish their independence through financial stability. While Woolf also recognizes that the oldest profession can, for some women, be an effective form of self-employment that offers a degree of freedom from patriarchal control, she also acknowledges that for others it is pure exploitation.

For context, the first version of the now-familiar phrase “the world’s oldest profession” mentioned earlier can be traced back to a variant in Rudyard Kipling’s short work “On the City Wall” published in the collection of stories titled *In Black and White* (1888).¹⁴ Kipling’s narrator describes Lalun, a courtesan in Lahore, as “a member of the most ancient profession in the world. Lilith was her very-great-grandmamma, and that was before the days of Eve as everyone knows” (Kipling).

¹² This term is problematic but must be retained since it is in the original text.

¹³ Shortly after the beginning of the essay, the narrator shifts identities and states, “Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please it is of not a matter of an importance) sitting on the banks of a river.” Later in the narrative, Mary Beton identifies herself and tells the story up until the moment when there is a break between paragraphs in Chapter Six where the original narrator, who perhaps is a surrogate voice for Woolf herself, speaks.

¹⁴ Also of interest are the notes on the story: https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/readers-guide/rg_ontcitywall1.htm.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the first known usage of the “euphemistic” term “the oldest profession” in Alexander Woollcott’s 1922 *Shouts and Murmurs: Echoes of a Thousand and One First Nights* where Woollcott references a narrative featuring “a touching picture of an old broken-down tragedian sharing a park bench with a bedraggled and unappetizing street-walker.” The tragedian despondently says to the woman that “the two oldest professions in the world [are] ruined by amateurs” (WOOLLCOTT, 1922, p. 57). Both the aging actor and the disheveled prostitute lack money because they have been upstaged by untrained performers. This confluence of performance and profession is a fleeting moment of equality between the sexes that also reveals the rigid patriarchal underpinnings of society.

While acting has been a legitimate vocation for men in Western cultures from the earliest period of dramatic performance, women were banned from the stage until the nineteenth century. Prostitution has for millennia been a profession delegated primarily to women and often categorized as illegal. But the term “profession” as a reference to prostitution was already in use in theatre as Woollcott himself confirms when he mentions a French performance of Bernard Shaw’s notorious 1893 *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, a play which touches on Mrs. Warren’s own early desperate work as an independent prostitute and her later lucrative business as a madam who manages and traffics women and girls in brothels. Thus, it is evident that prostitution as a profession (specifically for women who were banned from almost all other paid work) was already in the discourse just a few years after Kipling’s phrase appeared in his short story. Woolf herself uses the phrase “the oldest profession” twice in *Three Guineas* (see 160; 164).

Kipling, Woollcott, Shaw, and Woolf herself all indicate that prostitution is specifically the world’s oldest profession for women, but, based on its tendency toward illegality, Robin Lopez Lysne argues for an alternative view, stating that midwives probably represent “the oldest *legitimate* profession for women from earliest recorded history besides, of course, motherhood” (LYSNE, 2006, p. 48; my emphasis). Lysne’s reference to the burdens of motherhood evokes Woolf’s references to the *unpaid* professions imposed on women. All three types of professions – a legal, quasi-illegal, and unpaid – highlight purposes assigned to women’s bodies by patriarchal culture: the women dedicated to managing the gravidities of pregnancy and childbirth, the women who provide services primarily for men who seek sexual pleasures, and the women who are expected to labor in the private home are all constrained and exploited by patriarchal control.

Even though the word “prostitute” never once appears in *A Room of One’s Own*, the oldest profession certainly is discussed in the manifesto in a coded fashion. When the narrator, Mary Beton, assesses Mary Carmichael’s novel *Life’s Adventure*, she realizes that Carmichael was able to depict the coded Sapphic relationship between Chloe and Olivia but does not yet have the courage to write “in the spirit of fellowship [...] [of] those small, scented rooms where sit the courtesan,

the harlot and the lady with the pug dog” – all of them women whose financial stability depends on revenue earned from the oldest profession. These three women are differentiated by subcategories in prostitution, and thus they also differ in terms of finances. The courtesan, the companion of a nobleman, has the greatest degree both of freedom and financial stability, although her income typically depends on that man, and she is more disposable than a wife. The harlot provides sex for money and does so in a more unpredictable fashion. She is potentially at risk of financial instability, and she certainly does not have the rare privileges that the courtesan enjoys. The woman with the pug dog is a man’s mistress and relies on him for such benefits as a place to live and certain perks, including the comfort of having a pet. In Woolf’s *The Years*, Mira, Captain Abel’s mistress, has a small dog, echoing a canine motif in European painting traditions from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century where the lap dog was used as an “accompaniment” in portraits of “seductive women” by artists of the period such as Jan van Eyck (HARBISON, 1990, p. 285). Mary Beton anticipates that middle-class writers such as Carmichael will soon be describing such marginalized women sympathetically, respectfully, and courageously. Not coincidentally, Woolf herself had experimented with depicting prostitutes in an affirming fashion in her faux biography *Orlando*, published just a year before *A Room of One’s Own*. Set in the era of Neoclassicism with direct references to “Addison, Dryden, [and] Pope” (WOOLF, 2006a, p. 124), Orlando, now a woman, chooses to cross-dress as a man so that she can walk the streets at night without being targeted as a prostitute so that she can spend time with women who do, in fact, practice the oldest profession and who welcome her into their company. “These poor creatures, she ascertained, for Nell brought Prue, and Prue Kitty, and Kitty Rose, had a society of their own of which they now elected her a member” (WOOLF, 2006a, p. 160). Orlando’s new friends are very chatty and “many were the fine tales they told and many the amusing observations they made, for it cannot be denied that when women get together – but hist – they are always careful to see that the doors are shut and that not a word of it gets into print. All they desire is – but hist again – that not a man’s step on the stair?” (Ibid., p. 160).

In “Professions for Women,” Woolf addresses one of the first generations of young, college-educated women, stating: “You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able [...] to pay the rent. You are earning your five hundred pounds a year.” Their new freedom is explicitly linked to their annual earnings. Similarly, in *A Room of One’s Own*, Mary Beton observes that, “women have always been poor [...] [.] That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own” (WOOLF, 2005, p. 107). Beton herself is set free from patriarchal control when she inherits a legacy of five hundred pounds per year from her aunt, and she shifts from a state of financial anxiety to the stable security of a guaranteed revenue for life. Thus, Beton has an exceptional degree of autonomy—and she is no longer at risk of being driven to prostitute either her mind

or, in the very worst case, her body. As she observes, she can no longer be forced to do:

Work that one d[oes] not wish to do, and to do it like a slave, flattering and fawning [...] No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labour cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me (Ibid., p. 37).

As Beton makes clear, it's all about the money. She even notes that, "of the two – the vote and the money – the money, I own, seemed infinitely more important" (Ibid., p. 37).

But the source and the amount of the money both matter immensely. Prostitution is a paid profession, and, in *Three Guineas*, variations of the word "prostitute" appear eleven times. The profession is conventionally associated with the sex trade, but Woolf recalibrates the vocation and applies it to the ways that the daughters of educated men are exploited. The first and most familiar instance is the narrator's bitter assertion that, for the daughters of educated men, "many of us would prefer to call ourselves prostitutes simply and to take our stand openly under the lamps of Piccadilly Circus rather than use [the real nature of our influence]" rather than accept being limited to the kind of "indirect influence" that only the daughters of noblemen wield (WOOLF, 2006, p. 19).

But streetwalking is not the only form of prostitution. The daughters of educated men are subjected to a different sort of prostitution: peddling their intelligence. Woolf argues that:

to sell a brain is worse than to sell a body, for when the body seller has sold her momentary pleasure she takes good care that the matter shall end there. But when a brain seller has sold her brain, its anæmic, vicious and diseased progeny are let loose upon the world to infect and corrupt and sow the seeds of disease in others (Ibid., p. 111).

Woolf argues that intellectual prostitution is particularly blatant in the publishing industry, a realm controlled by "the pimps and panders" who either force women into "the brain-selling trade" or censor their work (Ibid., p. 112). To illustrate this victimization, Woolf selects the Scottish author Mrs. Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), who "sold her [...] very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn her living and educate her children" (Ibid., p. 109).

In the introduction to the first chapter of *Three Guineas*, the narrator responds to an educated man who is soliciting donations from middle-class women to

advance his cause. Having described the vast chasm between him and the daughters of educated men, she speculates that he likely “object[s] that to depend upon a profession is only another form of slavery,” but she urges him to “admit from [his] own experience that to depend upon a profession is a less odious form of slavery than to depend upon a father” (Ibid., p. 20). By identifying *any* profession, however privileged, as a kind of indenture, Woolf reveals the complexities of economics involved in selling oneself or being trafficked. As defined by Kathy Akpom and Tammy A. King, “Prostitution involves the exchange of sexual services for money or another form of material compensation. The main reason for becoming a prostitute is economic: the need for income among individuals who lack other job opportunities or believe they can earn more from prostitution than from a conventional job” (Akpom and King). Woolf’s own argument aligns with their definition, but the narrator in *Three Guineas* goes beyond the sale of the flesh in her analysis of these “sexual services” when she investigates the ways that prostitution exploits the mind of those humans who are allocated and constrained to the second sex.

For Woolf, a woman of any class deserves sufficient money to achieve independence from the patriarchal control of both her body and her mind. Money earned from a profession is contractual and measured while paternal oversight of finances was then – and, in many instances, still is – an arbitrary, discretionary, and capricious act of constraint. The patriarch is little different from a pimp. He can curtail and exploit his daughter and decide whether, when, and why to dole out money to her – or decide not to do at all. He can evaluate, restrict, and even block her choices while forcing her to continue to rely on him and to plead with him for the money she needs for survival. He owns her body and soul during his life and even after his death if he leaves her only a pittance of inheritance or none at all. As the narrator writes of Sophia Jex-Blake and other women at the mercy of their fathers in the 1800s:

A daughter who left her father was an unnatural daughter; her womanhood was suspect. Should she persist further, then law came to his help. A daughter who left her father had no means of supporting herself. The lawful professions were shut to her. Finally, if she earned money in the one profession that was open to her, the oldest profession of all, she unsexed herself (Ibid., p. 160).

Thus, the domination of women in the private sphere is directly linked to their male relatives’ control of money.

To avoid this corruption, women must learn to practice a new version of their ancient training in the “unpaid-for education” by following the same archaic rules of “poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties” (Ibid., p. 95) imposed on them for millennia. Scholarly interpretations of these terms do not

typically link the phrases to money, but when one delves deeper it is evident that each category is a stern rejection of the corruption that comes with money. The old patriarchal traditions taught women how to survive without money under these constraints. Now that the daughters of educated men can legitimately earn money, they must avoid intellectual seduction or they will succumb to brain prostitution. To do they must comply with the same values as they learned before. They must accept only modest earnings in compliance with their previous poverty. They must repurpose “the old idea of bodily chastity” for “the new ideal of mental chastity” (Ibid., p. 99) and consciously limit their income. Instead of defending their sexual vulnerability as valuable property sold in marriage, they must defend their intellect. They must practice derision by rejecting the fame and praise that are linked to money and that generate money. They must practice freedom from unreal loyalties by fending off the privileges and pride associated with the flow of money to support and fund organizations such as schools and churches. The only manifestation of women’s pride that Woolf endorses is earning an income.

In both *A Room of One’s Own* and “Professions for Women,” Woolf emphasizes the ways that money – whether inherited or earned – can set women free from patriarchal control, seduction, and forced prostitution. In the penultimate pages of *Three Guineas*, Woolf briefly traces the legal progress for women from the mid-Victorian era to the 1919 the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, stating that the resistance “was a force of tremendous power. It forced open the doors of the private house. It opened Bond Street and Piccadilly; it opened cricket grounds and football grounds; it shrivelled flounces and stays; it made the oldest profession in the world in the world [...] unprofitable” (Ibid., p. 164). In this passage, Woolf envisions a bright future for educated women who now have sufficient income to survive independently and who will be able to fight “the tyrannies and servilities” of the interconnected “public and private worlds,” thereby fulfilling Josephine Butler’s advocacy for “the rights of all – all men and women – to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty.”

■ **RESUMO:** Este artigo tem como objetivo traçar as referências de Woolf ao dinheiro e sua relação com a prostituição, nos ensaios *A Room of One’s Own*, *Professions for Women*, *Three Guineas* e em seus romances *Orlando* e *The Years*. As referências de Woolf ao dinheiro são explícitas desde o início; na verdade, os próprios títulos sugerem a importância do dinheiro. Em *A Room of One’s Own*, a narradora afirma o título na primeira frase. Para ter um quarto todo seu, é preciso ter dinheiro ou algum outro privilégio. À medida que a narrativa evolui, fica claro que, para ser livre, uma mulher educada que é escritora de ficção ou poeta realmente precisa de £ 500 por ano (pode-se supor que é essa fonte estável de renda que garante a privacidade de ter um próprio quarto). Em “Professions for Women” (título claramente associado ao trabalho

remunerado e renda), o “Anjo do lar” se intromete e aconselha “‘Nunca [para] deixar ninguém adivinhar que você tem uma mente própria. Acima de tudo, seja pura’. Nesse momento, a narradora, uma mulher financeiramente independente, tendo herdado “quinhentas libras por ano” e, portanto, “não dependendo apenas do charme para viver”, percebe que deve matar esse anjo que está tentando forçar o narrador a voltar na esfera privada de subordinação e subserviência aos homens. Como o Anjo destruiria a liberdade intelectual do narrador, a morte seria justificável. Em *Three Guineas*, o foco do narrador no dinheiro é ainda mais óbvio, já que o título é uma referência direta a uma moeda, o guinéu era originalmente uma moeda.

■ **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dinheiro. Prostituição. Profissões para mulheres. Virginia Woolf.

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