A HUNDRED YEARS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY*: A CONVERSATION WITH MARK HUSSEY ON WAR, LITERATURE, AND THE POLITICS OF THE PRESENT

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As *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) reaches its first centenary, the novel feels remarkably close to us, politically acute, stylistically daring, and uncannily attuned to the psychic fractures of modern life. Few scholars have illuminated this proximity with as much depth, nuance, and intellectual generosity as Mark Hussey, whose decades-long engagement with Virginia Woolf has decisively shaped the field of Woolf and Modernist studies. His scholarship traces Woolf's artistry across fiction, essays, letters, diaries, and the shifting landscapes of her reception, consistently demonstrating how her writing continues to speak to the crises, dissonances, and ethical dilemmas of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Hussey's critical legacy is inseparable from his insistence that Woolf's work must be read not as an artefact sealed within its historical moment but as a living, mobile form, capable of absorbing, refracting, and resisting the social systems it depicts. His analyses often illuminate the very forces that *Mrs Dalloway* lays bare: the pervasiveness of institutional power, the mechanisms of surveillance and discipline, the fragility of democratic life, and the tenuous bonds of empathy that hold a fractured society together. This becomes particularly clear in his readings of Woolf's engagement with war, trauma, and the long afterlives of conflict. In

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these studies, Hussey shows how Woolf's fiction anticipates many of the political and ethical questions that underpin contemporary criticism, particularly those concerned with violence, nationalism, and the shaping of subjectivity in moments of collective crisis. These concerns are central to *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel haunted by the deferred effects of World War I and the lingering psychic wounds that, as Hussey notes, remain painfully resonant in our own era.

When this interview was conducted, *Mrs Dalloway: Biography of a Novel*, Hussey's new project, had not yet been published. Now, as we present this conversation, Hussey's book has already appeared, released in May 2025 by Manchester University Press to mark the exact centenary of the novel. Beyond this significant contribution, Hussey's distinguished career has produced a substantial body of scholarship that has shaped Woolf studies and modernist criticism for decades. He is the General Editor of the Harcourt Annotated Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf, for which he prepared the annotated edition of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and he has served on the editorial board of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf, editing *Between the Acts* (1941). His broader work on Woolf includes influential titles such as *Virginia Woolf A–Z* (1996), *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* (1991), and numerous essays that have become essential reference points for scholars of modernism, war studies, and the cultural history of Bloomsbury.

Hussey's scholarship extends beyond Woolf. His major biography *Clive Bell and the Making of Modernism* (2022) repositions Bell within the intertwined histories of aesthetics, criticism, and modernist art, while *Modernism's Print Cultures* (co-authored with Faye Hammill, 2016) examines the material and cultural networks that shaped literary modernism. Together, these works testify to Hussey's long-standing commitment to understanding the aesthetic, political, and material conditions that define modernist writing and its afterlives.

It is precisely this breadth of vision, combined with a lifelong attentiveness to Woolf's formal and political innovations, that makes Hussey's perspective especially resonant at this centenary moment. His analyses of *Mrs Dalloway* in particular - its atmosphere of dread, its interplay between private consciousness and public life, its exploration of empathy as a fragile ethical force, and its sustained meditation on war, trauma, and the violences of the social system -offer invaluable insights into why the novel remains a vital text for thinking through the anxieties, urgencies, and ethical questions of our own time. The interview that follows is therefore grounded in the enduring relevance of *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel whose meanings continue to expand and whose critical biography Hussey has now so compellingly illuminated.

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: As *Mrs Dalloway* reaches its centenary, how do you perceive the novel's exploration of psychological

fragmentation, societal pressures, and individual consciousness resonating in a world increasingly polarized by authoritarian, fascist ideologies? Can Woolf's novel be viewed as a form of literary resistance to hegemonic power structures today?

HUSSEY: The short answer to the last question is yes: I would agree that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a "form of literary resistance," not least because reading itself is under assault by forces similar to those that targeted books earlier in the twentieth century for their 'forbidden' content. Certain "hegemonic power structures" present in the novel are still very much in effect; it seems to me that *Mrs. Dalloway* has perhaps become even more meaningful as a "form of literary resistance" today than it may have been at any time in the past hundred years. Woolf was explicit about her intention to "criticise the social system" in her fourth novel, to "show it at work at its most intense." There are only a few moments in *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, where that criticism is explicit or direct. Mostly, the novel *shows* with extraordinary subtlety the dynamic operations of a system that is pervasive in its effects. The social system is institutionalized in myriad forms, but also works at the level of individual consciousness. In a sort of pre-Foucauldian analysis, Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* examines the practice of medicine, the status of the military, the policed norms of gender and sexuality, the effects of education, the divisions of economic class, the visibility and effects of various forms of media and culture, the role of the monarchy in Britain, and the 'spirit of religion'. Each of these contributes to the maintenance of that "social system" within which all the novel's characters are enmeshed; none can be isolated from the others. It is a dynamic system—always "at work."

Recently, Elon Musk—the man who many believe literally purchased the presidency of the United States in 2024—stated in an interview his belief that "the fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy." The *failure* of empathy has been quickly institutionalized as policy in the USA since January 2025, most visibly in the demonization of immigrants and non-white people as undeserving of care or understanding (such rhetoric is not, obviously, confined to the United States). This failure is reflected also in the eugenicist pronouncements of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. If we think of empathy as the ability to see the world from the perspective of another, to *imagine* ourselves in another's position, then (a) this is what *Mrs. Dalloway* is concerned with to a large extent, and (b) the act of reading itself can provide opportunities for empathy through the free indirect discourse by which Woolf invites readers into her characters' subjectivity.

Despite more than six years having passed since the Armistice that ended hostilities in November 1918, the First World War's effects (as well as those of the pandemic that immediately followed it) linger just below the surface of everyday life in *Mrs. Dalloway*—"This late age of the world's experience had bred in them

all, all men and women, a well of tears." Glances exchanged amongst strangers out shopping on this June morning, prompted by rumors of royalty passing in a mysterious motor car, wordlessly summon communal thoughts of "the dead." As she steps out of her house, Clarissa feels a sense of dread—"something awful was about to happen"—a premonition echoed a few pages later by Septimus when he thinks to himself, "The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?" It is this sense of dread, experienced by both the "sane" Clarissa and the "insane" Septimus, that still resonates today in a world riven by violence and inequality.

One of the most overt instances of Woolf's criticism of the social system occurs when Sir William Bradshaw explains to the Smiths that Septimus should be shut away until he can develop a "sense of proportion." The disciplinary power of the medical establishment is reflected in the fact that Sir William "had to support him police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey, that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control." The eugenicist phrase "lack of good blood" makes for chilling reading now, a time when the successful candidate for the US presidency in 2024 said of immigrants: "They're poisoning the blood of our country. That's what they've done. They poison mental institutions and prisons all over the world, not just in South America, not just to three or four countries that we think about, but all over the world. They're coming into our country from Africa, from Asia, all over the world." The consequence of this language has been seen in the first few months of 2025 as people are snatched from American streets and "disappeared" without any recourse: "He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up."

The lack of empathy, the will to dominate, reappears throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* in a variety of forms. When she sees him across the room at her party, Clarissa senses with a shudder that Bradshaw is capable of "forcing your soul," reviving her earlier premonition that "something awful was about to happen." The social system that Woolf wanted her novel to reveal "at work" is a web that connects along its filaments a variety of interconnected forces: the ability (for example) to get letters published in *The Times* that encourage the emigration of "young people of both sexes born of respectable parents" connects with conversations at a party in Westminster which follows a lunch in Mayfair; patriotic feelings stirred in passersby when they believe they might be close to royalty are also emblematized in bronze statuary celebrating imperial conquests. Clarissa's feeling "that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" is pervasive these days.

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: Woolf's portrayal of mental health struggles and societal alienation feels especially poignant in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. How do you think the novel's treatment of trauma, isolation, and human connection speaks to contemporary readers navigating the consequences of such a global crisis?

HUSSEY:

"I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park."

"He has left me; I am alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee."

"That was it: to be alone forever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone forever."

In many countries, the experience of dying alone dominated narratives of the Covid-19 pandemic. Exacerbating the dread engendered by the virus itself was the isolation it imposed, with loved ones barred from attending the bedsides of those who succumbed to the disease. While admittedly more existential in nature than the isolation imposed by disease, the aloneness conveyed by the three quotations above (Rezia, Clarissa, and Septimus, respectively) resonates with our particular "late age of the world's experience" differently than it would have prior to 2020.

I'm sure you're aware of Elizabeth Outka's book *Viral Modernism*, which was published just months before the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic. Outka argues that several key modernist texts—*Mrs. Dalloway* among them—can be read as 'pandemic' works, but that the carnage of the First World War has usually overshadowed that element in critical understandings of them. Clarissa's "heart, affected, they said, by influenza," is the reason her husband ensures that she rests after lunch. She "has grown very white since her illness." The tolling bells, Outka argues, would have summoned for contemporary readers the death knells of the pandemic years that immediately followed the War.

For those re-reading *Mrs. Dalloway* in 2020, or reading it for the first time because it was being referred to so widely—sometimes jokingly in social media posts such as "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the sanitizer herself"—its sensations of invisible danger, the experiences of loss, of being cut off from other people—"here was one room, there another"—caught the mood of the time. Outka explains how Woolf's narrative method itself was adapted to the novel's moods. Woolf created "a narrative perspective that could move as nimbly among bodies as a virus, a plot defined less by linear timelines and more by temporal and experiential fluidity, and a structure that could express the delirious, hallucinatory reality that infused the culture."

A counternarrative to the isolation imposed by Covid-19 was, of course, that we are all bound, one to another, by invisible ties. The pandemic made some dependencies, connections, more visible than they usually were. Clarissa feels herself "laid out like a mist" between people she knows best, but also that her "self" spreads "ever so wide," into places and people she is unaware of. At her party, hearing of Septimus's suicide shocks her into a moment of identification with the stranger. "Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly,

of an accident," and so she empathizes with Septimus's fall from the window onto the rusty spikes below. The effect on Clarissa is to evoke in her a reflection on the failures of her own life: she has a powerful sense of "something" that "mattered" that she has too often allowed to be obscured, "defaced" as she puts it to herself. All through the novel, shattered Septimus has stammered his overwhelming desire to *communicate*, but communicate what? He cannot say. Clarissa, though, is suddenly attuned to Septimus: "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone." When she wonders if Septimus had "plunged holding his treasure," the narrative echoes a moment she has recalled from her youth earlier in the novel, when the "treasure" bestowed on her by Sally Seton's kiss had evoked in Clarissa Othello's line, "if it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy."

Alone with her contemplation of what the young man's death means to her, Clarissa suddenly notices (again) an old woman going to bed in the house opposite hers. This woman puts out her light (another echo from *Othello*), and Clarissa returns to her party. It is sentimental, perhaps, to imagine how Clarissa might have been changed by her response to the death of the stranger, Septimus, because soon after this scene the novel ends. Sara Ahmed's reading of the scene, in *Living a Feminist Life*, speaks trenchantly to why this novel resonates so profoundly in our current world-historical moment; it is not simply that Clarissa is being empathetic, but that at this moment, a death becomes real or material because it has been allowed in. A death spreads as words into worlds. What is striking about *Mrs. Dalloway* is how suffering enters her consciousness from the edges, through the arrival of another, who is a stranger, an intruder, who has not been invited into the room. Suffering enters not simply or only as self-consciousness—as consciousness of one's own suffering—but as a heightening of consciousness, a world-consciousness in which the suffering of those who do not belong disturbs the atmosphere (59–60).

Throughout the day, Clarissa has mounted a kind of internal resistance to those who mock her parties. "Here was one room; there another" is an emblem of isolation, and her effort is, she says to herself, "to combine, to create." Although people's experience of time during the pandemic lockdowns is beginning to be identified by researchers as having been affected by a number of factors other than just confinement and lack of variety in daily routine, there is a consensus that a common effect on the 3 billion people who were confined to their homes in 2020 has been a distortion of the perception of the passage of time. It is common nowadays to "forget" the order of things that occurred in those days and since, as if the pandemic created some kind of hole in the fabric of time passing.

Five years after the pandemic, perhaps readers of *Mrs. Dalloway* might pay attention to the novel's being set five years after the end of World War I. As Clarissa walks to the flower shop, her thought that the War "was over" is interrupted—

contradicted—by her memories of the dead. And Septimus, as Sir William tells Richard Dalloway at the party, suffers from "the deferred effects of shell shock." What has Septimus been doing in the five years since the end of the War? He brings his bride back to London; is "advanced to a post of considerable responsibility" by his employer; refuses to have the child Lucrezia so desperately longs for; and descends deeper into his sense that the world is without meaning and that human beings are vile. Sir William records that his patient was "attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind," in this case the word "war." *Mrs. Dalloway* implicitly examines what Freud named *nachträglichkeit*: for Septimus, the ordinary locations and events of life are imbued with the trauma he suffered at the Italian front five years earlier. Perhaps many are now experiencing the "deferred effects" of the pandemic, five years later.

It is a cliché to say that much modernist literature is concerned with the experience of lived time, often portrayed against a background of chronological time. Clarissa has been so ill that it has affected her appearance and she requires continuing daily rest to avoid stressing her heart. She experiences several moments in the novel when she seems to fall, in a sense, out of time: for example, she "felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on." She "feared time itself," the "dwindling" of her life, but also, with Peter Walsh, feels that "it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over." At another moment, "she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake."

Your question about how contemporary readers navigate the consequences of the pandemic has led me to reflect on the novel's concern with time. Has Septimus somehow fallen out of time? He is trapped in the time of his trauma, haunted by the ghost of Evans, and appalled that he cannot feel, but simultaneously feels himself to have transcended time because among the "truths" he is desperate to communicate is that "there is no death." *Mrs. Dalloway* has been called (by J. Hillis Miller) an All Souls' Day, the day of the dead. It is full of ghosts, and many of the people we meet in the novel's pages are weeping. Mr. Bowley has tears in his eyes; Peter Walsh bursts into tears—recalling the tears both he and Clarissa shed at Bourton that "extraordinary summer"; Clarissa cries; tears fill Septimus's eyes as he looks at the aeroplane; Rezia recalls how he would cry at home ("the most dreadful thing of all, to see a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave, crying"); Rezia herself cries in Regent's Park; Doris Kilman "nearly burst into tears" when she believes Clarissa was laughing at her. The "well of tears" catches these survivors unawares, reminding them of a trauma the consequences of which are yet to be resolved.

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: Considering the resurgence of conservative discourses around womanhood and femininity in the 21st century, what relevant discussions does Woolf's treatment of the angel in the house in *Mrs. Dalloway* still inspire? How does it engage with contemporary issues of gender, sexuality, and class, especially in light of current debates on intersectionality?

HUSSEY: Despite Peter Walsh's calling Clarissa "a perfect hostess," I have not usually thought of her as an example of "the angel in the house," though I know others do. The publisher of my recent book about *Mrs. Dalloway* described her as a "housewife," a term I questioned for its connotations—for me, at least—of someone who performs domestic tasks. Apart from going to the flower shop to choose flowers for her party, Clarissa does not seem to contribute any labor whatsoever to the household! But as a woman who has just entered her fifties, Clarissa's feeling that she is invisible, "not even Clarissa any more," does resonate with contemporary discourses on women and aging. Furthermore, there is the by now familiar narrative of Clarissa as a woman who has repressed her desire for women and chosen the socially-approved life-course of marriage to a man. But I don't think I can comment on "current debates on intersectionality," because (other than the right-wing attack on the concept itself as a challenge to white supremacy) I'm not really familiar with them.

Woolf has been criticized for her representation of Doris Kilman. John Carey, for example, argued that due to her class prejudice, Woolf depicts Kilman "as a monster of spite, envy and unfulfilled desire." This has always seemed to me a naïve error, mistaking attitudes encountered in a work of fiction for those of the author herself. Kilman represents a social fact of the immediate post-First World War period in Britain, when there was a backlash against women in the workforce as well as an economic crisis that briefly affected the middle class. As Masami Usui pointed out in *Virginia Woolf and War*, Kilman and Rezia are both "victims of war." Clarissa is well aware that Kilman lost her job because, during the War, she refused to condemn all Germans.

Kilman's opinion is that Clarissa is "from the most worthless of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture." Her antipathy is communicated wordlessly to Clarissa, whose "pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well" and her enjoyment of her nicely appointed house is disturbed by Kilman's mere presence. It seems to me that Kilman is identified in the narrative with those who seek to "convert." That this is more sinister than simply Christian proselytizing is perhaps indicated by what Kilman thinks at the Army & Navy Stores about Elizabeth: "If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted." Richard Dalloway seeks to reassure his wife that their daughter's apparent infatuation with Kilman is a phase she will grow out

of (something that perhaps will remind Clarissa of her own youthful feelings for Sally), but Clarissa's suspicion seems warranted once the reader is made privy to Kilman's possessiveness. Her attitude stands in contrast to Clarissa's refusal to "say of anyone in the world now that they were this or were that."

Kilman does open to Elizabeth a sense of the possibilities that lie before her as a young woman coming of age after the War. Despite Elizabeth's consideration of such possibilities when she escapes from Kilman and jumps on the bus, any potential for their realization might be understood as undermined by our last sight of the Dalloways' daughter, in her party dress back home. It is clear that Kilman is well-educated (she has a degree), and a reader might set that against Clarissa's complete lack of any formal education: she "knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed." Yet Kilman's view of Clarissa as "worthless" conforms to a caricature that denies her the inner life Woolf allows the character. During the day of the novel, Clarissa has begun to question what she has made of her life, and her loneliness is no less real than Kilman's.

The "manliness" that Mr. Brewer desires his promising employee Septimus to acquire through playing football is the other side of the gender binary that makes Kilman self-conscious in the presence of women such as Clarissa. She is a woman over forty with a large bald forehead and shabby clothes, and hair that won't look nice no matter how she does it: does this elicit sympathy for a woman who cannot compete with slender girls of the 1920s in their sheath dresses and elegant gloves? Kilman thinks that women 'like' Clarissa escape the agony she feels, but should a reader necessarily agree? The "social system" is a gendered system that holds everyone in place. Septimus's "manliness" is acquired in the trenches. When Evans is killed, Septimus, "far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him." After the War, the absence of feeling is encouraged by Dr. Holmes who tells Septimus that he owes it to his wife to snap out of his "funk."

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: Woolf's formal innovation, particularly the structure of the one-day novel—has often been cited as a lasting influence. Do you see contemporary works, such as Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park*, as drawing upon Woolf's achievements? What elements of her narrative method continue to resonate with today's fiction writers?

HUSSEY: Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park* has affinities with *Mrs. Dalloway* beyond its taking place within a single day during which a character prepares to host a party. The five women on whom it centers return throughout the day to significant memories, experience epiphanies, and 'tunnel' into their pasts. At her dinner party, Christine Lanham proclaims, "You've got to love life … You've got to love just—

being alive," whilst her husband, Benedict, asks, "But how will anyone know you loved it?" That calls to mind, for me, Clarissa's thought that "no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all." The interlude in the park in Cusk's novel seems quite "Woolfian" to me. I suppose in a way it might be read as a fantastic extrapolation of Sally and Clarissa always speaking of marriage as a disaster (e.g. "Marriage is just another word for *hate*" says a sixth form girl). So yes, I think *Arlington Park* has strong connections with Woolf's novel. There are other Dallowayesque echoes in Cusk's *The Bradshaw Variations* too.

Monica Latham's *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism: Rewriting* Mrs Dalloway (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) is the most important source for an answer to this question, but examples of writers whose fiction has clear affiliations to *Mrs. Dalloway* continue to proliferate. (Another source I drew on when I considered this question in my recent book is Alice Lowe's pamphlet, *Beyond the Icon: Virginia Woolf in Contemporary Fiction* [Cecil Woolf, 2010].) There are many examples of "circadian" novels (taking place within one 24-hour period) but that does not necessarily mean they are indebted to *Mrs. Dalloway* (indeed, sometimes hostile critics believed—mistakenly—that Woolf herself was copying Joyce's *Ulysses* in this aspect of her work). What seems to me the most salient characteristic of *Mrs. Dalloway* for contemporary writers is that sense of threat that I have already alluded to above. As I say in my book, there are many ways in which writers have refashioned and reimagined elements of *Mrs. Dalloway*—its structure, its mood, its themes—in a world where the anxieties and fears of Clarissa, as well as the trauma and terrors of Septimus, have become common psychological currency.

I suppose for most people it would be Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* that comes immediately to mind when considering the "influence" of *Mrs. Dalloway* on contemporary writers. Cunningham skillfully replaces the trauma of war with the trauma of the AIDS crisis in his novel. More recently, although I don't think it necessarily owes anything to *Mrs. Dalloway* specifically, Ali Smith's *Companion Piece* finds a similar source of trauma in the Covid-19 pandemic: her protagonist at one point says, "I think we're all under quite a lot of pressure…. I think there's a lot of raw feeling in the air, and not just because there's been so much illness. I think there's a great deal of despair around, and even more anger than there was before." It is the mood of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and it's captured in many recent novels.

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: Your forthcoming book, *Mrs. Dalloway: Biography of a Novel,* traces the genesis, publication, and enduring reception of Woolf's work from its earliest diary entries to its place in literary history today. In what ways does understanding the "life" of the novel—its creation, initial reception, and evolving afterlives—reshape or deepen our reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* at this centenary moment? How might this biographical approach help readers and scholars see the novel not as a static

masterpiece, but as a dynamic cultural artefact with urgent relevance in today's fractured world?

HUSSEY: I think that if readers did in fact regard it as a "static" masterpiece then it probably would not have had the afterlife it has had (& continues to have). I knew the "story" of Woolf's writing the novel quite well, but only when I had to focus on its reception over the last hundred years did I realize quite how influential a work it has been. Having already written the biography of a person (Clive Bell), it was interesting for me to tackle the biography of a work of art, and to keep in mind that my "subject" was not Woolf herself but this novel. Typically, a person's biography ends with their death, but in this case the subject is—like Orlando—apparently immortal!

In the introduction she wrote for the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf stressed her belief that novels belong to their readers, despite whatever intentions their writer might have had. This is certainly borne out by the biography of the novel, which becomes, after 1925, the story of its readers. It would be true of any work of art, I'm sure, but the changing reception of *Mrs. Dalloway* by both critics and common readers over the past hundred years is an essential part of its biography and also a reflection of how different generations as well as different cultures, globally, have read it. Your questions have emphasized the contemporary "relevance" of the novel, and while I don't think that is necessarily the criterion by which the worth of a work of art need be judged, it is certainly the case that *Mrs. Dalloway* does seem to speak to many concerns of contemporary artists and readers.

I assumed that anyone picking up the biography of *Mrs. Dalloway* would have either read, or at least have some familiarity with the novel, because I wasn't thinking of it as a kind of guide for how to read it. Whether the biography will "reshape or deepen" anyone's reading is a question only its readers can answer. It's not a work of scholarship, by which I mean that although I have, inevitably, relied on the work of many, many Woolf scholars in telling the story of the novel, I resisted any urge to *interpret* the text myself. I suppose my selections of information are a kind of interpretation—what is left out might strike some readers as significant, though I am not thinking of anything specific here (and this will only apply to readers already steeped in Woolf scholarship!). *Mrs. Dalloway* is reimagined in so many ways. In fiction, obviously, but also in dance, in film, in memes, tattoos, poetry—it's all of a piece with Woolf's point that books belong to their readers.

OLIVEIRA, MAROUVO and SANTIAGO: In your book *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth,* you present Woolf as a theorist and novelist of war, emphasizing its pervasive presence across her works. Considering the political, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of her writing, how do you see her

addressing the intersections between war and gender, particularly in *Three Guineas?* How do her texts help us understand the nature of war and its entanglement with patriarchal, capitalist, and imperialist structures? What insights can we draw from Woolf's reflections on democracy and war, both in her time and ours? Finally, as a theorist and novelist of war, which authors do you believe most influenced her thinking?

HUSSEY: That essay collection (1991) was, as you say, intended to make the argument that Woolf was a "theorist and novelist of war," which at the time was not at all a widely-held view. But to answer your questions would really require summoning decades of scholarship because there has been so much written since *Virginia Woolf and War* came out about those intersections between war and gender. There was also, of course, a great deal of scholarship on gender and war to draw upon already when that volume was put together (as its introduction—"Living in a War Zone"—makes clear).

I am not historian enough to make the case, but I have long believed that the First World War inaugurated an era of war that we are still living through. Keynes, as we know, argued that the conditions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles risked starting another conflict. He wrote *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* at Charleston, Vanessa Bell's home. Virginia Woolf was close to many pacifists, such as Roger Fry—who worked with the Quakers during the war—and her brother-in-law Clive Bell, whose pamphlet *Peace at Once* was censored by the government in 1915. After the War, she assisted Leonard with his research for *Empire and Commerce in Africa*, as well as with his work on the document that argued for the creation of what would eventually become the League of Nations (precursor to the UN). In January 1916, writing to Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Woolf described the *Times*'s reporting on the war as a "preposterous masculine fiction," combining her insight that making war depended simultaneously on a specific notion of masculinity and a great deal of myth-making. When she reviewed Siegfried Sassoon's *Counter-attack and Other Poems* in 1918, Woolf wrote, "We know no other writer who has shown us as effectually as Mr Sassoon the terrible pictures which lie behind the colourless phrases of the newspapers."

There are interesting correlations between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Three Guineas*, I think, in that both texts demonstrate how the power of various institutions—the church, education, media—promulgates the thinking that leads to war. There was plenty of evidence in the 1930s, as her endnotes in *Three Guineas* document, to support Woolf's argument about the link between patriarchal and fascist tyranny. She draws out the lines of connection between, for example, St. Paul and Hitler and Mussolini. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Peter Walsh's frightening observation that "the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread" finds its echo in the comparison

in *Three Guineas* between the patriarchal attitudes to women found in both Nazi Germany and in England. (The parallels to be drawn between those attitudes and those expressed by the current American government show that we are still, as Woolf puts it, going round the mulberry tree.) Analyzing a report commissioned by the Church of England on the question of admitting women to the ministry, Woolf draws parallels between the Church leaders and Hitler and Mussolini, all of whom argue for women's subservient role as necessary to sustaining the social hierarchy they desire.

Three Guineas also echoes the theme of empathy that I mentioned earlier with respect to *Mrs. Dalloway*. Quoting from the biographies of various professional men, Woolf determines that the price of success in the professional world is to become a "cripple in a cave," devoid of all sensory experience. While she has been writing her letter to the barrister who has sought her help in preventing war, Woolf says, another picture has come into focus in the foreground of her mind's eye, supplanting the photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses. It is the "figure of a man," "Man himself," the "Tyrant or Dictator." This picture, she suggests, means that the private house and public world are connected; "that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other": this connection must never be forgotten if the world is to be saved from war. I suppose, in a way, this draws a line from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Three Guineas*: both "criticise the social system" and "show it at work." And both ask us to examine the operations of that system within the small domestic circle of our own lives as well as in the institutions and norms of the society at large.

In terms of a text that influenced her thinking, I would put forward Sophocles' *Antigone*—that "primer of resistance to masculine tyranny" as Woolf called it.

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