**Title:** ‘Altering the structure of society’: an institutional focus on Virginia Woolf and working-class education in the 1930s

**Abstract:**

Where previous analyses of Virginia Woolf’s relationship to working-class education by Melba Cuddy-Keane and Beth Rigel Daugherty have focused on the role of the public library and Woolf’s Common Reader essays, this article explores Woolf’s interest in institutional applications of working-class education in *The Years* (1937) and ‘The Leaning Tower’ (1940). It argues that Woolf drew on contemporaneous educational debates in her analysis of the educational institution’s role in the cultivation of cultural and political democracy.

The article builds on work by Anna Snaith and Alice Wood that has considered the influence of dialect scholar Joseph Wright on Woolf’s characterisation of Sam Robson in *The Years*. It further suggests the significance of Wright for a reading of the children’s song that explores its signifying role as a marker of educational division. ‘The Leaning Tower’, Woolf’s lecture to the Workers’ Educational Association, is assessed as a studied rhetorical performance that draws on contemporaneous educational debates as Woolf anticipates the socially and culturally democratic future of the post-war world that is ‘struggling to be born’ (E6, 276).

**Natasha Periyan**

‘Altering the structure of society’: an institutional focus on Virginia Woolf and working-class education in the 1930s

Virginia Woolf attended the 1935 Labour Party Conference as she was revising *The Years*. The experience provoked prevarication: ‘[o]ught we all to be engaged in altering the structure of society? […] Altering the structure of society: yes, but when its altered?’.[[1]](#endnote-1) Woolf’s interrogation of ‘the structure of society’ reflects Labour’s concerns with precisely such a wholesale overhaul. It called for ‘a bold policy of Socialist Reconstruction’, in which the expansion of education beyond the official school leaving age of fourteen was to play a key role: ‘[t]he Labour Party stands for a big move forward in education, including the raising of the school-leaving age’.[[2]](#endnote-2) Woolf’s diary comments recall her 1928 essay on Thomas Hardy, where she regretted Hardy’s ‘pessimism’ (E5, p. 569) about structural overhaul through the continued exclusion of Jude from Christminster, a version of Oxford.[[3]](#endnote-3) On 26 July 1933, in the early stages of writing *The Years* (*The Pargiters,* the essay-novel from which *The Years* emerged, was finished in December 1932), Jude sprang to mind once again: ‘couldnt [sic] settle on any [book] save T. Hardy’s life just now […] he felt bitter about the treatment of working men at Oxford; hence Jude’ (D4, p. 169). Shortly before the Labour Party Conference, on 13 September 1935, Woolf was similarly exploring how accessible Oxford was to the working classes: ‘[a] man could live on £200 at Oxford if he lived at home’ (D4, p. 341).

Woolf’s interest in social class and the institutional structures of education has largely been overlooked in the trend of critical discussion on Woolf and pedagogy, which has focused on two main areas. Critics who have taken an institutional focus have centred on Woolf and gender, with Anna Snaith, Carol T. Christ and Ann K. McClellan exploring Woolf’s critique of women’s exclusion from elite male institutions.[[4]](#endnote-4) Concomitant to this, exploration of Woolf’s engagement with working-class education has generally taken an anti-institution approach. Melba Cuddy-Keane, Hermione Lee and Beth Rigel Daugherty have all asserted the significance of Woolf’s model of the Common Reader, who uses the public library or the essay, to support a pedagogical strategy that enacts a classless model of autodidacticism.[[5]](#endnote-5) Institutional applications of social class and pedagogy have been marginalized in these debates: Cuddy-Keane argues that Woolf was concerned with democracy as ‘social discourse rather than social structure’.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Alison Light and Sean Latham have explored Woolf’s class-consciousness, with Light suggesting that this served as a fault-line in her socialist political commitment: ‘[s]ervants, as ever, were Virginia’s window on the world, the chinks of light glimpsed through the thick hedges of class feeling which boxed her in’.[[7]](#endnote-7) John Carey claims that modernists, including Woolf, sought to ‘take literature and culture away from the masses […] to counteract the progressive intentions of democratic educational reform’.[[8]](#endnote-8) While Carey alludes to the post-1880 Education Act, this article suggests Woolf’s familiarity with the specific terms of the interwar debate surrounding educational democracy, which was characterised by R.H. Tawney’s call for ‘secondary education for all’ as ‘the only policy’ which is ‘suited to a democratic community’.[[9]](#endnote-9) Despite Tawney’s 1922 clarion call, educational historians describe a period of failure in educational reform.[[10]](#endnote-10) Brian Simon suggests a direct link between educational reform and cultural politics, noting a vision of secondary education ‘dedicated to the aim of separating out a selected few, conceiv[ed][ing] of culture itself in terms of exclusiveness’.[[11]](#endnote-11) Cultural materialist theories reflect such notions; Raymond Williams suggests that ‘culture is one way in which class […] shows itself’, arguing that education was a site for a cultural class divide: ‘the majority of people […] were […] shut out by the nature of the educational system from access to the full range of meanings of their predecessors’.[[12]](#endnote-12) Frank Gloversmith aligns Woolf with the cultural theories of Clive Bell, rather than R.H. Tawney, but Woolf (like Williams) was also informed by Tawney’s work.[[13]](#endnote-13) Woolf read Tawney (who was President of the Workers’ Educational Association from 1928 to 1944) immediately after war was announced, and shortly before her 1940 lecture to the W.E.A.[[14]](#endnote-14) Jim McGuigan has drawn an opposition between Tawney’s conception of ‘common culture’, which connoted a dissemination of high culture to the masses via education and cultural policy, and Williams’s suggestion that, with increased access to education, the very form of a common culture would be transformed.[[15]](#endnote-15) Williams himself was a W.E.A. tutor from 1946 to 1961, and located the origins of cultural studies in the post-Second World War adult education movement ‘with some precedents […] in the thirties’.[[16]](#endnote-16) Attention to Woolf’s engagement with contemporaneous educational discourses ­– relating both to emergent ideals surrounding comprehensive education, and the adult education movement – reveals how her work was informed by early manifestations of debates surrounding the role of education in the cultivation of social and cultural democracy.

Such a focus on Woolf’s political engagements in the 1930s supplements work done by David Bradshaw, who has documented Woolf’s involvement with the anti-fascist organisations the IAWDC (International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture) and FIL (For Intellectual Liberty). Both organisations had similar aims: the defence of ‘peace, liberty and culture’ in response to the growing menace of continental fascism.[[17]](#endnote-17) Despite Woolf’s resignation from the IAWDC in June 1936, her role as a supportive writer-artist panellist in FIL meant that, in the mid to late 1930s, she ‘still moved very much within that milieu [of anti-fascist activity]’ yet operated as an ‘Outsider, working against fascism in her own way and on her own terms’.[[18]](#endnote-18) During this period, Woolf’s ideas on cultural democracy were simultaneously being forged through her reading of key thinkers in educational reform. Where the IAWDC and FIL’s efforts were pan-European, Woolf’s engagement with 1930s educational discourses emerged from a more distinctively British perspective. These discourses provided Woolf with a framework through which to interrogate the limitations of existing ‘democratic’ values. This article considers Woolf’s 1937 novel, *The Years,* and her 1940 essay ‘The Leaning Tower’ (originally delivered as a lecture to the Sussex branch of the W.E.A. on 27 April 1940), alongside her diaries and letters, to argue that Woolf positioned education’s institutional structures as playing a significant role in the development of cultural and political democracy in the 1930s. In working across published and unpublished materials, written in different genres and for different purposes, this article also recognises that the different contexts of Woolf’s political involvement informs the tenor of her negotiation of these debates.

***The Years:* 1880 and working-class education**

Hermione Lee asserts that the historicity of *The Years* is incidental to ahistorical philosophical problems confronting the individual.[[19]](#endnote-19) The novel poses, however, a degeneracy narrative with a political *and* psychological context. Each chapter ‘1880’, ‘1891’, et cetera, corresponds to a specific historical event that gradually erodes the hegemonic power of the imperialistic, paternalistic, Pargiter family. The start date of *The Years*, ‘1880’, is key. It denotes the establishment of universal, compulsory, elementary schooling for all children, in a significant expansion of the 1870 Education Act that theoretically advocated elementary education for all, but allowed for the discretion of local school boards in enforcing school attendance.[[20]](#endnote-20) An explicit reference to the establishment of working-class education was introduced as *The Pargiters* was transformedinto *The Years,* suggesting the significance of advancements in working-class education to the re-formulated project. The former refers to 1880 as a time when ‘Mr Gladstone was in power; Mr Bradlaugh had declined to take the oath; and at the head of the Irish party was a new leader, Charles Stewart Parnell’, while *The Years* also considers the role of working-class education in social change:[[21]](#endnote-21)

“Yes, just what I was saying to Bigge this morning”, she said, laying down the paper. […] That man almost always said the very thing that she was thinking, which comforted her, and gave her a sense of security in a world which seemed to her to be changing for the worse.

“‘Before the rigid and now universal enforcement of school attendance…?’” Kitty read out.

[…]

‘“…the children saw a good deal of cooking which, poor as it was, yet gave them some taste and inkling of knowledge. They now see nothing and they do nothing but read, write, sum, sew or knit,”’ Kitty read out.[[22]](#endnote-22)

The passage includes direct reference to *The Times’* editorial from 16 April 1880, whichobjects to the imminent introduction of universal, elementary-level education, regretting that such education has withdrawn ‘poor children’ from ‘their old healthy and instructive share in household duties’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Mrs Malone cites sections of this article,approving of the columnist’s conservative stance, as she laments the introduction of compulsory elementary education for its threat to the maintenance of the extant servant class*.*

Kitty is ‘thinking of the Robsons’ while Mrs Malone reads the paper aloud (p. 56). Woolf’s diary reveals that, when writing *The Years,* she was formally concerned with two main aims; compaction and contrast: ‘[m]y idea is to <space> contrast the scenes’; ‘[t]he thing is to contract: each scene to be a scene, much dramatized; contrasted [...] compacting the vast mass’ (D4, p. 266; p. 261). Woolf’s juxtaposition of this scene with the immediately preceding scene of Kitty’s visit to the self-educated, working-class, Robson home ironizes Mrs Malone’s conservatism while avoiding the overt ‘propaganda […] of the Aldous [Huxley] novel’ (D4, p. 281). Mrs Robson has already made the journey from servant to scholar that Mrs Malone so disapproves, exposing her concerns as myopic:

“Your mother’s family?” said Mr Robson.

“Rigby,” she said, and blushed slightly.

“Rigby?” said Mrs Robson, looking up.

“I wur-r-rked for a Miss Rigby before I married.”

[…] “My wife was a cook, Miss Malone, before we married,” he said. Again, he increased his accent as if he were proud of it. (p. 51)

Anna Snaith first asserted the significance of Joseph Wright as a source for Sam Robson in her exploration of the generic transformation of *The Pargiters* into *The Years.*[[24]](#endnote-24) In her editorial notes to *The Years*, Snaith further alludes to William Alexander Robson as a source for this character. An academic at the London School of Economics, Robson was also joint editor with Leonard Woolf on *Political Quarterly,* a journal Robson co-founded in 1930 with Kingsley Martin. Both Leonard and Virginia Woolf saw Robson ‘frequently’ in the 1930s, and Virginia Woolf later became ‘close’ to his daughter, Elaine.[[25]](#endnote-25) Snaith’s explanatory notes to the Cambridge edition of *The Years* nonetheless emphasise Woolf’s ‘interest in Joseph Wright and his prominent place’ in the novel.[[26]](#endnote-26) Robson’s dialect speech reveals how Joseph Wright informed aspects of Woolf’s characterisation of this figure. Wright was a dialect scholar from Yorkshire who retained his regional accent and speech after arriving at Oxford. Elizabeth Wright notes that her husband deliberately ‘allowed his dialect to be perceptible’.[[27]](#endnote-27) The scene is filtered through the consciousness of Kitty Malone, who registers the alien force of Mr Robson’s ‘Yorkshire’ (p. 51) accent. Such a narrative manoeuvre allows Woolf to register the effects of historical verisimilitude on individual consciousness, while maintaining an oblique authorial perspective through use of scenic juxtaposition.

**Sam Robson and Joseph Wright**

Margaret Comstock suggests that *The Years* is antifascist in intent through its refusal to focus on one ‘“leader”’ or ‘central figure’.[[28]](#endnote-28) Although there is no central character in the novel, Sam Robson emerges as the novel’s heroic figure. Woolf’s January 1931 speech to the London/National Society for Women’s Service found that heroism underpinned subversion; ‘[i]f I were to overcome the conventions I should need the courage of a hero’ (p. xxxix). Woolf’s approving 1932 diary entry reveals how she found, in Wright, an alternative to the conventional public-school leader. Wright offered a new ideal, born of autodidactic education:

Old Joseph Wright & Lizzie Wright are people I respect. […] He was a maker of dialect dixeries: he was a workhouse boy – his mother went charing. […] Their attitude to life much our own […] His notion of learning. I would sometimes like to be learned myself. (D4, pp. 115-116)

Wright was born in 1855, fifteen years before the 1870 Education Act, the first parliamentary legislation to address working-class education in any depth. Here he is celebrated for his autodidacticism in a period before the introduction of working-class education. Wright’s ‘notion of learning’ refers to his deep commitment to reading and his cultivation of private libraries; *The Life of Joseph Wright* notes that Wright bought books in Hamburg to form his own personal library.[[29]](#endnote-29) He did, in fact, have some formal education: his biography reveals that he attended Saltaire Mill School, evening classes at the Mechanics’ Institute in Bradford, and spent some time at University in Germany as an adult. Such institutional education was, nonetheless, piecemeal: ‘it is a fact that never in his life did he have a full day’s schooling’.[[30]](#endnote-30) *The Life* refers repeatedly to his ‘self education’.[[31]](#endnote-31) Like Wright, Woolf had little formal education – she noted in her memoir, ‘Sketch of the Past’, that ‘I was never at school’ (p. 79). Anna Snaith and Christine Kenyon-Jones, have demonstrated, however, that the young Virginia Stephen was registered on courses at King’s Ladies’ Department in 1897 to 1901.[[32]](#endnote-32) Woolf’s self-characterisation as autodidact-scholar overlooks this fact. Arguably, Woolf’s avowed exclusion from the establishment structures of education relates to her ‘outsider’ status, mobilizing the political objectivity that she favoured.[[33]](#endnote-33) Reference to Wright’s biography also suggests the pride associated with autodidactic scholarship and reveals that the label ‘autodidact’ did tolerate some degree of institutional education.

Histories of Oxford reveal the extent to which Wright was an anomaly amongst Oxford academics: both D.J. Palmer and Janet Howarth position him as ‘remarkable’ amongst the academics at Oxford, for his working-class, autodidactic background.[[34]](#endnote-34) In *The Years*, Robson is given Wright’s autodidact educational training, and his exceptional status is registered: ‘[a] Professor, who had done it all off his own bat, “a most creditable performance,” to quote Dr Malone’ (p. 48). Woolf had used similar terms to describe her own autodidacticism in September 1925, in reference to her cousin H.A.L. Fisher, the architect of the 1918 Education Act: ‘[h]aven’t I just written to Herbert Fisher refusing to do a book for the Home University series on Post Victorian? – knowing that I can write a book, a better book, a book off my own bat, for the Press if I wish!’ (D3, pp. 42-43). The shared terms (used again later in *The Years* for the novel’s other working-class autodidact, Chipperfield) reveals a sense of her kinship with Wright and their shared educational status outside the elite male public schools.

The ‘respect’ that Woolf’s diary registers for Wright also reflects the nature of his relationships with women; Snaith, drawing on Elizabeth Wright’s biography of her husband, comments on Wright’s ‘feminism’.[[35]](#endnote-35) *The Pargiters* notes that Mr Brook (an early manifestation of Sam Robson) ‘respected women […] respected them, honoured them, just as if they were men!’ (p. 153). This feminism is directly associated with his lack of formal education: ‘the force at the back of such opinions was not merely that Joseph Wright himself had received no schooling: he was not the product of Eton or Harrow, and King’s and Christ Church’ (p. 155). Instead, ‘[h]e was much more profoundly influenced by his mother’ who facilitated his education (pp. 155-156). The specific and unusual conditions of his autodidact educational ‘training’ led him to have ‘highly original’ opinions on marriage, as education informs gender relations (p. 158).

Mitchell Leaska notes that Woolf presents Wright as her ‘ideal model of manhood’ (p. xii) in *The Pargiters*. *The Years*, however, renders Robson through Kitty’s viewpoint:

Sam […] stepped forward and indicated with his stubby forefinger the picture of an old woman looking rather over life size in the photographer’s chair.

“My mother,” he said […]

The unwieldy old lady, posed in all the stiffness of her best clothes, was plain in the extreme. And yet Kitty felt that admiration was expected.

“You’re very like her, Mr Robson,” […]

Indeed they had something of the same sturdy look; the same piercing eyes; and they were both very plain. (pp. 52-53)

Kitty registers the ‘stubby’, ‘unwieldy’ ‘plain’ and ‘over life size’ Robsons, all terms which suggest a disdain towards their seeming inelegance. Kitty’s observation echoes Woolf’s 1931 ‘Introductory Letter’, a preface to a collection of testimonials by members of the Women’s Cooperative Guild, which references the ‘thick set and muscular’ bodies of cooperative women.[[36]](#endnote-36) Despite Kitty’s ambivalence, Woolf’s approval of Sam Robson’s feminism avoids the polemical tone of *The Pargiters* by manifesting itself on a symbolical level through the contrasting, but corresponding, depiction of maternal images in the Pargiter and Robson families. Lara Feigel notes the recurrence of objects throughout *The Years,* which function ‘as metonyms for […] the passing of time’; these objects also recur within the same section as Woolf invests them with political significance within each period. [[37]](#endnote-37) This is evident in the photograph of Sam Robson’s mother, the description of which draws heavily upon the photographic representation of Mr Joseph Wright’s mother, Sarah Ann Wright, in *The Life of Joseph Wright*. Earlier in the chapter, the Pargiter girls are presided over by a portrait of their dying mother: ‘[o]ver the fireplace the portrait of a red-haired young woman in white muslin holding a basket of flowers on her lap smiled down at them’ (p. 8). This portrait is referenced throughout the text, and as Feigel notes, its fading represents the passing of time.[[38]](#endnote-38) The image is also politically weighted; the flowers, the virginal white muslin and benign smile all connote an idealized portrait of the middle-class lady, akin to the ‘angel in the house’, the Coventry Patmore ideal that Woolf had so rebelled against in ‘Professions for Women’ (1931).[[39]](#endnote-39) It departs so much from reality, that, as adults, the Pargiter children have no recollection of this figure bearing any semblance to their mother: ‘“Was it like her”’ Peggy asks, ‘“Not as I remembered her”’ Eleanor replies(p. 268). Woolf provides a critical commentary on a middle-class tendency to idealize women out of existence, leaving the reality unrecognizable in the image. Mrs Robson is erected as a formidable matriarchal power, while Rose Pargiter dies at the beginning of the novel, her image left to decay, as patriarchal society is enacted within the middle-class Pargiter family. An integral aspect of Sam Robson’s heroism comes from his enlightened attitude to women – born of his autodidact education ­– which refuses the idealizing spirit that dominates middle-class conceptions of femininity.

After visiting the Robson family, Kitty is overwhelmed with affection for Sam: ‘[y]ou are the nicest man I have ever met, she thought’ (p. 53), and wonders of the family: ‘[d]id they know how much she admired them?’ (p. 53). The visit to the Robson home is presented as a defining formative experience for Kitty, echoing through the years: in ‘1910’ Kitty remembers the ‘very light room’ at the Robsons’; ‘“[t]hat’s the sort of life I like”’ (p. 135), she thinks.

**‘Present Day’ and the children’s song**

In ‘1880’, advances in working-class education are represented as a nascent force and a potential stimulant of social change. ‘Present Day’, however, presents a similarly class-divided society: at Delia’s party, North questions ‘where are the Sweeps and the Sewer-men […] there were only Dons and Duchesses’ (p. 296). The children’s song towards the end of ‘Present Day’ provides a stark confrontation with social otherness for the party’s guests, and represents a deeply ambiguous moment. Enigmatic and indeterminate, it has invited an array of critical interpretations. Anna Snaith has noted that, in the manuscript of *The Years*, one character suggests that the working-class voices “might have been hottentot” rendering the song’s ‘otherness […] as much about class as race’.[[40]](#endnote-40) David Bradshaw and Ian Blyth have noted Woolf’s knowledge of ‘Greek, Latin, French and Italian’, suggesting ‘she appears to be drawing on all of these languages in this incomprehensible song’, while Avrom Fleishman has suggested that it ‘may be discovered to be a transformation of a classic text, mingling as it does a number of Greek and Latin syllables and words’.[[41]](#endnote-41) The cultural politics of widening educational opportunity provide a further productive context against which to read the song, and suggests the influence of Joseph Wright in the characterisation of Sam Robson. Alice Wood has noted Wright’s occurrence in *The Pargiters, The Years* and *Three Guineas,* suggesting that this reveals how ‘Woolf […] strove to ground her cultural analysis in fact’, I explore the influence of Joseph Wright on the novel as a culturally influential figure, and a transgressor of class and cultural boundaries.[[42]](#endnote-42)

The children’s song is given a climactic role in the novel, usurping Nicholas’s fragmented speech, which was intended to provide the party with ‘a fillip, a finish’ (p. 308). The voice of the idolatrous individual is replaced with the voice of the working-class collective who comprise ‘“The younger generation”’ (p. 314). The children have notably learnt their song ‘at school’ and their education is repeatedly alluded to in this short scene; ‘“No school tomorrow?”’, ‘“Weren’t you taught something at school?”’, ‘“What they teach ’em at school, you know”’ (p. 314, p. 315). The song is dissociated from the paradigm of middle-class facilitation of working-class education presented elsewhere in ‘Present Day’, in the depiction of ‘Runcorn’s Boy’ and ‘Chipperfield’, who call on Edward Pargiter to ‘“direct […] [their] reading”’ (p. 302), instead, it alienates the middle-class audience:

Etho passo tanno hai,   
Fai donk to tu do,   
Mai to, kai to, lai to see  
Toh dom to tuh do –

[…]

Fanno to par, etto to mar,

Timin tudo, tido,

Foll to gar in, mitno to par,

Eido, teido, meido –

(p. 314)

Woolf criticised the didactic learning method of the lecture in her 1934 essay ‘Why?’: ‘[w]hy, since life holds only so many hours, waste one of them on being lectured?’.[[43]](#endnote-43) The methods of elementary school education are implicitly figured as similarly deficient; the chanting recalls rote methods of learning that are positioned as effacing individuality, the children act ‘with one impulse’ (p. 314). The extent to which the children themselves understand the song they have performed is unclear, and the narrator, as if to affirm the song’s inscrutability to the reader, impartially notes ‘[t]hat was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognizable’ (p. 314), it is a ‘shriek’, ‘discordant […] meaningless’ (p. 315, p. 314).

Jane Marcus argues that Eleanor ‘instinctively understands speech unintelligible to others, [this] reflects a mystical communion between women and children’.[[44]](#endnote-44) The interrogatory intonation in Eleanor’s assessment of the song as ‘“[b]eautiful?”’ (p. 315) reveals, however, the uncertainty of middle-class response when confronted with this other cultural force. Eleanor is not allied with the children in social or political intent, first assessing them with deep ambivalence. The narrator neutrally observes that the children look ‘awkward and clumsy’ (p. 313). But when rendered through Eleanor’s viewpoint, they are transposed into a Nordau-ian discourse of degeneration. With the gaze of an anthropologist, she notes ‘their hands […] the shape of their ears’ (p. 313). From this, she deduces that they are ‘“[t]he children of the caretaker, I should think”’ (p. 313). These children appear feral to Eleanor, they take large slices of cake with ‘a curious fixed stare as if they were fierce’ (p. 313).

Kitty’s experiences in ‘1880’ are evoked immediately prior to the song; she attempts to recall the name of the man ‘“I used to like so much at Oxford[?]”’ (p. 309), eventually happening upon: ‘“Robson”’. Such an allusion back to the early stages of the text is productive for a reading of the children’s song. Joseph Wright was a transgressor of class barriers through his role as interpreter of working-class cultures: he produced the first *English Dialect Dictionary* for Oxford University Press. After the children sing their song, Patrick notes the children’s ‘“Cockney accent”’ (p. 315) and, indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Woolf was evoking the actual sounds of English dialects and accents in the song itself.

Woolf was familiar with the lexical contents of the *English Dialect Dictionary*. Proof pages from the *Dictionary* were included in *The Life of Joseph Wright,* the biography Woolf enthusiastically consumed.[[45]](#endnote-45) Further, in addition to its status as a long-established surname dating back to the sixteenth century, Jane Marcus has noted Joseph Wright’s *Dialect Dictionary* as a source for the ‘“Pargiter”’ family name.[[46]](#endnote-46) Mitchell A. Leaska notes that ‘“pargiter”’ appears neither in Wright’s dictionary, nor in *The OED*, but comments that ‘“[p]arget”’ does appear in the *English Dialect Dictionary*, meaning ‘“plaster with cement or mortar”’, with ‘“[p]argeter”’ also appearing by extension, and defined as ‘“a plasterer”’.[[47]](#endnote-47) While both ‘parget’ and ‘pargeter’ also appear in *The OED*, Snaith has followed Marcus in suggesting that Wright’s *English Dialect Dictionary* is ‘the most likely source’ of the name.[[48]](#endnote-48)

While the structure of the dictionary (from dialect word into English) makes it unlikely that Woolf was attempting to encode a particular message in the children’s song, the words of the song are either directly evident in the dictionary, or their sounds are evocative of English dialect sounds. ‘Donk’ is included as an adjective meaning ‘damp, moist, wet’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Various dialectal variants of ‘to’ are given over two pages of the dialect dictionary, and ‘do’ is similarly revealed to be a common dialect word in various grammatical forms: it occupies four pages of Wright’s dictionary. ‘Fai’ is a variant of ‘Fain’, an adjective meaning ‘glad, happy, well-pleased’.[[50]](#endnote-50) ‘Tanno’ is found to be a variant of ‘tino’, which is an adverb, ‘a negative expletive’, in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.[[51]](#endnote-51) Wright’s dictionary included ‘the complete vocabulary of all English dialect words which are still in use or are known to have been in use’.[[52]](#endnote-52) The lexicography in the dictionary is opposed to ‘the literary language’: for inclusion, words must differ from the literary language in both meaning and pronunciation.[[53]](#endnote-53) There is some indication here of the relevance of Wright for Woolf’s search for a ‘democratic art’ in ‘The Niece of an Earl’.[[54]](#endnote-54) The narrator in the ‘Introductory Letter’ met the cooperative women’s writing with a sense of ambivalence; ‘[w]hether that is literature or not literature I do not presume to say’ (p. xxxv), but speculated that ‘images and saws and proverbial sayings must still be current with them [working-class women] that have never reached the surface of print’ (p. xxiii). Wright’s dictionary gives access to such a lexicon. In the children’s song, Woolf brings dialect words into relation with words of more directly classical and romance language origins, as identified by Blyth, Bradshaw and Fleishman. On occasions, such words overlap: ‘donk’ – occurs, as noted, in Wright’s dictionary and is also the French term for ‘donkey’. This represents a suggestive lexical experiment that recalls the ‘Introductory Letter’s’ hope that ‘society will pool its possessions instead of segregating them’ (p. xxiv); *The Years* presents an equivocal – and uneasy – vision of the implications of such ‘democratic art’.

Jane Marcus argues that the children’s song represents an ‘ecstatic speaking in tongues’, suggesting that it evokes the ‘anguish of being excluded from language and culture she explained […] in “On Not Knowing Greek”’ (1925).[[55]](#endnote-55) These comments are provocative given Edward Pargiter’s refusal to translate his citation from Classical Greek: ‘“[t]ranslate it” he [North] said. Edward shook his head. “[i]t’s the language”, he said’ (p. 303). The phrase is from *Antigone*, and translates as: ‘’[t]is not my nature to join in hating, but in loving’.[[56]](#endnote-56) The translated citation occurs in *Three Guineas*, where Woolf notes that ‘[l]ame as the English rendering is, Antigone’s five words are worth all the sermons of the archbishops’ (pp. 206-207). In ‘Present Day’, however, the missing translation renders both the meaning, and effect, of the original Ancient Greek inaccessible to North. Joan N. Burstyn argues that the Classics are the ‘hallmark of a gentleman’.[[57]](#endnote-57) Public-school educated Edward is positioned as holding a monopoly on elite cultural forms, ‘locked up in that fine head’, this classical knowledge is inaccessible to outsiders: ‘why not prise it open? Why not share it?’ North wonders (p. 299). ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ (1925) identified Greek as ‘the language that has us most in bondage; the desire for that which perpetually lures us back’.[[58]](#endnote-58) The acquisition of Greek is a perpetual charm, luring the individual out of the entrapment of philistinism. The sorcerous language of the essay is echoed as Edward’s refusal to ‘share’ his knowledge elevates him to ‘a priest, a mystery monger’ (p. 299).

‘Present Day’ suggests education’s role in cultivating both a social, and a cultural, class divide: the incomprehensible children’s song represents the inadequacies of working-class education, while the elite classical culture of the public school and university is rendered inaccessible. Carey suggests that modernists such as Woolf developed a literary style that counteracted ‘democratic educational reform’.[[59]](#endnote-59) However, ‘Present Day’ is concerned with the very limits of such democratic reform, as the institutional structures of education manifest separate cultural forms, rather than a democratic culture in common.

Woolf made her final revisions to *The Years* in 1936: in the same year, the Haldane Education Act was passed, promising to raise the school-leaving age to fifteen (although the advent of the Second World War and under-funding meant such reforms were never instituted). Woolf’s response to reviews of *The Years* suggests her frustration with attempts to assess the novel within received political categories: ‘[t]he TLS spoke as if it were merely the death song of the middle classes’ (D5, p. 68), ‘[a]s it is I’m discussed (as usual) & no one has yet seen the point – *my* point’ (D5, p. 70). Instead, Woolf sought to ‘rethink politics very slowly into my own tongue’ (D5, p. 114). In *The Years* this manifests itself in the ambivalent ‘speaking in tongues’ of the children’s song.

‘**The Leaning Tower’, the W.E.A. and multilateral education**

‘The Leaning Tower’ is less equivocal than *The Years* in its analysis of the cultural and class division cultivated by education. In this, the lecture is informed by its immediate historical and rhetorical context. It emerges from a distinctly wartime perspective, which privileged the work of the adult education movement in the cultivation of social and cultural democracy. G.D.H. Cole, Vice-President of the W.E.A. until 1938, found that ‘such bodies as the Workers’ Educational Association’ were fundamental in shaping an educated post-war democracy: ‘[t]he weapons which we Socialists possess for fighting […] are those of reason and education […] [w]hile men’s minds are keyed up by suspense, the chance is ours to organise and re-direct the democratic forces’.[[60]](#endnote-60) ‘The Leaning Tower’ reflects Cole’s concern to use the W.E.A. to ‘find new anchorage for their [working people’s] minds’ in the ‘fight[ing] for cultural values’ in the post-war world.[[61]](#endnote-61)

The lecture also represents a studied rhetorical performance, designed to appeal to its W.E.A. audience. Erika Yoshida’s analysis of the adaptations Woolf made between drafts of the speech held in the Berg Collection, and the version published in *Folios of New Writing*, reveals that she wrote her lecture specifically for her working-class audience.[[62]](#endnote-62) Maroula Joannou has used W.E.A. records to explore the gender composition of Woolf’s audience, commenting:

While we do not know […] it may well have included a sizeable number of women […] the absence of men of military age made the W.E.A. nationally increasingly reliant on female students and Tutor Organizers. Thus Woolf’s use of the pronoun ‘we’ includes the women listening with whom she would have identified more easily than with an audience of working men.[[63]](#endnote-63)

As Joannou notes, Woolf aligns herself with her working-class audience as she opposes their collective educational fortunes with the educational privilege of the public-school educated Auden Group: ‘[s]he [England] has left the other class to which almost all of us must belong, to pick up what we can in village schools; in factories; in workshops; behind counters; and at home’.[[64]](#endnote-64) This list recalls pedagogic venues Woolf has explored throughout the 1930s: ‘the village school’ of *The Waves Holograph I,* and the ‘workshop’ (p. xxxii) of the ‘Introductory Letter’.[[65]](#endnote-65) Woolf also rewrites the narrative positioning established in the ‘Introductory Letter’. The narrator there emphasised working women’s place ‘behind a counter’ (p. xiii), noting the impossibility of meeting the working classes ‘not as masters or mistresses or customers with a counter between us’ (p. xxiii).

Alice Wood recognizes Woolf’s ‘fictionalising’ of her narrator-persona in the ‘Introductory Letter’ as a ‘narrative strategy’ designed to ‘engage a middle-class reader’.[[66]](#endnote-66) Woolf’s direct recollection in ‘The Leaning Tower’ of the terms around which class division was figured in the ‘Introductory Letter’ further suggests the elements of performance in the former text, as Woolf’s political positioning shifts as her sense of her audience shifts – Woolf, notably, wanted *Life As We Have Known It* to find a ‘general public’, and it was reviewed in *The Bookman* and *The Observer*, with a focus on Woolf’s introduction.[[67]](#endnote-67) The organ of the W.C.G., *Woman’s Outlook,* notably, however, focuses on the guildswomen’s testimonies, only briefly noting the 1913 Congress ‘about which Mrs Virginia Woolf writes so vividly in an Introductory Letter to Miss Llewelyn Davies’.[[68]](#endnote-68) Woolf’s dialogic experimentation with rhetorical positioning reveals that she tested different political positions as she explored her allegiance to different communal groups. Woolf’s letters suggest the posed nature of the cross-class unity established in the lecture: she characterised her audience as ‘200 betwixt and betweens’ in a letter to Vita Sackville West, noting ‘[t]hats [sic] what comes of yielding to the damnable importunity of a wretched little man who lives on tinned tomatoes on top of a hill. My swan song – positively my last public misery’.[[69]](#endnote-69)

This indicates that there were also men in the audience, in addition to the women that Joannou suggests dominated. The W.E.A. emerged from educational discourse that sought to establish a new type of masculine ideal, taken from a different, unilaterally empowered, social class. A 1908 W.E.A. pamphlet, *Oxford and Working Class Education*, explored the W.E.A.’s institutional involvement with Oxford. Ramsay MacDonald expressed his concern over the issue in a letter to the W.E.A. leader, Mansbridge, rendering the competing models of W.E.A. and Oxford masculinity clear: ‘Oxford will assimulate [sic] them, not they Oxford. […] [T]hey are the only good, and everything that takes them away from their internal sources of power and culture is bad’.[[70]](#endnote-70) In 1913, Cole wrote that the new adult education movement was forming ‘a type of man […] capable of understanding the working class, and remaining of it, even if his standards rose higher than those of his fellows’.[[71]](#endnote-71) Cole is circumspect, avoiding the suggestion that working-class education will create new leaders that would dominate the rest of their class. Instead, the focus is on improving the social group as a whole. *Three Guineas*’ assertion that the educated working class must ‘remain[ing] in their class’ in order to ‘improve’ (p. 310) it from within closely reflects this W.E.A. ideal. Virginia Woolf had met G.D.H. Cole during his tenancy as Vice-President of the W.E.A., and responded to him in terms that connote an awareness of this alternative masculine ideal: ‘[a] positive domineering young man he seemed […] I write from the outsiders [sic] unsympathetic point of view’ (D1, p. 268).

Woolf therefore explores the failure of a particular brand of public-school masculinity before an audience informed by alternative ontological and leadership ideals. The lecture notes the waning political and cultural dominance of ‘Day-Lewis, Auden, Spender, Isherwood, Louis MacNeice’, suggesting that this group are ‘tower dwellers like their predecessors’ who went to ‘public schools and universities’ (E6, p. 267). However, during their literary ascension, from ‘1925’ to ‘1939’, there was ‘[e]verywhere change; everywhere revolution’ (E6, p. 267). The shared ‘tendency’ of their writing thus expressed ‘the tower of middle-class birth and expensive education – to lean’ (E6, p. 267). The post-war world will be ‘a world without classes and towers […] if they [the politicians] mean what they say’ (E6, pp. 274-275). The imagery suggests a world without elites and leaders, as Woolf departs from her Wright-based model of the working-class hero and accords more closely to Cole’s advocacy of a democratic improvement of the condition of the working class as a whole.

Woolf’s lecture inhabits the same conceptual space as T.C. Worsley’s *Barbarians and Philistines: Democracy and the Public Schools* (1940), a text Woolf had read: her diary refers to ‘little soft round Worsley’s discourse on the young [?] – which should bring in my lecture’ (D5, pp. 282-283). *Barbarians and Philistines* found that the public school’s continued presence in the post-war world ‘will effectively sabotage the establishment of democracy’.[[72]](#endnote-72) Instead, Worsley advocated the establishment of ‘common elementary schools for *all* children’ [emphasis in original] to create a ‘common cultural heritage’ and ‘social cohesion’.[[73]](#endnote-73) Worsley’s reference to the ‘common elementary school’ reflects contemporary debates on multilateral education, an early term for comprehensive schooling – a system widely established in 1965. In the late 1930s, the ‘comprehensive’ school was a conceptual category that was in the process of being realized. The term itself was variable: ‘multilateral’, ‘multibias’, ‘common’ and ‘comprehensive’, were all names used to denote this system. Following the 1926 Hadow Report’s advocacy of a selective secondary system, the call for multilateral education gained momentum during the 1930s. The *TES* had argued for multilateralism throughout the decade, and, in 1930, the National Association of Labour Teachers pledged their support for the ideal. In 1939, the Labour Party’s educational advisory committee urged multilateralism as ‘an immediate practical policy’. The government’s 1938 Spens Report deemed, however, that multilateralism was ‘too subversive’ to implement*.[[74]](#endnote-74)* Woolf, notably, was aware of the Report – it is mentioned by Worsley in *Barbarians and Philistines*[[75]](#endnote-75) – and it is also alluded to in W.H. Auden and T.C. Worsley’s *Education Today and Tomorrow* (1939)*,* published by the Hogarth Press.[[76]](#endnote-76)

Informed by such debates,‘The Leaning Tower’ suggests that war-time necessity, the ‘income tax’ (introduced by Sir John Simon in April 1940) is creating ‘equal opportunities’ by swallowing middle-class incomes: ‘[t]he income tax is saying to middle-class parents: You cannot afford to send your sons to public schools any longer; you must send them to the elementary schools’ (E6, p. 275).[[77]](#endnote-77) The lecture claims that economic pressure will fundamentally alter the social structure: ‘classes will disappear […] [a]ll classes will be merged in one class’ (E6, p. 275). Woolf cites a letter from the *New Statesman and Nation* written by a parent whose ‘boy, who was to have gone to Winchester, had been […] sent to the village school’ (E6, p. 275). The letter explores the conditions of public-school and state education: the public school has ‘the sense of the past […] the gentle influences that belong to the best spirits of all ages’, while the village elementary school has a ‘young, highly qualified and enthusiastic’ teacher, ‘more effective’ teaching, and ‘[t]he question of class does not arise’.[[78]](#endnote-78) It concludes by calling for a ‘fresh wind’ to blow through the ‘proud’ public schools.[[79]](#endnote-79) Woolf uses the letter as a stimulus for the lecture’s exploration of new institutional forms:

But it is in the future; and there is a deep gulf to be bridged between the dying world, and the world that is struggling to be born. For there are still two worlds, two separate worlds. “I want […] the best of both worlds for my son.” She wanted, that is, the village school, where he learnt to mix with the living; and the other school – Winchester it was – where he mixed with the dead. […] She wanted the new world and the old world to unite, the world of the present and the world of the past. (E6, p. 276)

Steve Ellis notes that the lecture maintains that the ‘post-war classless society’ is to be achieved ‘largely through the developing public library system’.[[80]](#endnote-80) Here, however, the focus is on institutional education, as the mother’s problem is rendered symptomatic of wider debates in education. The lecture previously suggested that the 1930s poet was ‘a dweller in two worlds, one dying, the other struggling to be born’ (E6, pp. 272-273) in an allusion to Matthew Arnold’s ‘Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse’: ‘Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born’.[[81]](#endnote-81) Now, similar terms are used to categorise the indeterminate state of the educational system, suspended between two social ideals. Stephen Spender’s *The New Realism* (1939), used these terms to describe the manner in which class conflict was informing his generation’s aesthetics: ‘[t]he situation, as I have outlined it, leaves the artist […] in a split position, between two worlds, “one dead the other waiting to be born”’.[[82]](#endnote-82) While Arnold’s verse animates a sense of division as he explores a shift away from faith to modern rationalism and technological progress, in Woolf and Spender’s appropriation, passivity is transformed into action as educational systems and aesthetic forms are deemed complicit in the struggle away from middle-class liberalism and into working-class socialism.

*Three Guineas* used the term ‘gulf’ to represent the difference of ‘paid-for education’ (p. 118), which created ‘two classes’ of educated brothers and their uneducated sisters within the middle class. Here, ‘gulf’ connotes a difference between the upper and working classes with the discrepancy between the paid-for public school which is ‘“so very, very private[?]”’ in its exclusivity and ‘“the system of free national education”’ (E6, p. 276). Multilateralism is the ‘bridge’ between these two worlds. Woolf is alluding to this ‘future’ ideal as she identifies the struggle between the new world of the ‘living’ village school, and the old world of the ‘dead’ public school, echoing the mother’s distinction between the vital nature of state education, as opposed to the traditional ethos of the public school. The two worlds, divided by social class, would ‘unite’ in the multilateral institution, which could both accommodate, and create the possibility, for social unity. The broad, allusive terms reflect the fact that multilateralism was an ideal in process, a concept in flux. Nonetheless, Woolf clearly alludes to its key feature of bringing together ‘children differing in background’, as identified by Spens.[[83]](#endnote-83)

Multilateralism’s resolution of different social classes in one institution could foster a unified cultural form:

How will that change affect the writer who sits at his desk looking at human life? […] The novel of a classless and towerless world should be a better novel than the old novel. The novelist will have more interesting people to describe […] real people, not people cramped and squashed into featureless masses by hedges. The poet’s gain is less obvious […] [b]ut he should gain words; when we have pooled all the different dialects, the clipped and cabined vocabulary which is all that he uses now should be enriched. (E6, p. 275)

The novel of a world without elite leaders and social class holds direct implications for literature. In contrast to the culturally divided society presented in ‘Present Day’ Woolf suggests (in line with Worsley’s thesis) that multilateralism cultivates a ‘common culture’. The biblical implications of the Leaning Tower as the Tower of Babel are also in play here; Genesis 11 v 1-9 functions as an aetiology of cultural differences, as God creates a polyglot nation following man’s building of a tower in a previously monoglot city. H.A.L. Fisher’s October 1931 article, for *The Highway* (the W.E.A. journal), ‘The Tower of Babel’, alluded to this biblical story as headvocated the benefits of language learning to members of the W.E.A.[[84]](#endnote-84) ‘The Leaning Tower’ re-versions this biblical allusion; the ‘leaning’ tower is presented as ripe for dismantling through institutional overhaul.

The socialist vision established in the ‘Introductory Letter’ is echoed; there society ‘will pool its possessions’ and here this material sharing is figured on a lexical level: ‘we have pooled all the different dialects’. This is opposed to the current division of ‘human life’ ‘by hedges’ that hold mastery (‘dominion’) over the poet. These ‘hedges’ of class division are held to curtail human potentiality. In *The Waves Holograph I*, Woolf suggested that it was the ‘field labourers, factory workers, miners’ who were part of this mass: ‘features they had none’ (p. 64). Now all social classes will become ‘real people, not people cramped and squashed into featureless masses by hedges’ through a common education system.

In the present, without a multilateral system (‘that change’), the public library can offer the working classes access to literature. Woolf returns to the terms of her 1925 essay ‘The Common Reader’ as she holds her library book aloft and proclaims that ‘England lent it to a common reader, saying “It is time that even you, whom I have shut out from all my universities for centuries, should learn to read your mother tongue”’ (E6, p. 276). The active ideal of the autodidact reader who ‘create[s] for himself’ from ‘The Common Reader’ is recalled as Woolf argues that readers should ‘“make yourselves critics”’ (E6, p. 276).[[85]](#endnote-85) Melba Cuddy-Keane has read ‘The Leaning Tower’ as a straightforward advocacy of autodidactic methods, while Steve Ellis, commenting on the lecture’s closure, has noted the ‘powerful counter-strategy of private reading running through […] [Woolf’s] work in the late 1930s and early 1940s […] which […] offers a […] convincing resolution of the problems of the resolution between the community and the individual’.[[86]](#endnote-86) Woolf’s final peroration is also, however, haunted by the political potential of the institution. Traces remain of the multilateral institution’s claims to cross-class communality:

Let us trespass at once. Literature is no-one’s *private*ground; literature is *common* ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and *cross the gulf*– if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and how to write, how to preserve and how to create. [emphases added] (E6, p. 278)

As Ellis, acknowledges, the final phrase of ‘The Leaning Tower’ is a striking advocacy of autodidacticism,[[87]](#endnote-87) and here the common ground recalls the place of the Common Reader. However, Woolf does not completely abandon the political significance of multilateral education; also written into these lines is a tacit awareness of the political role of the institution. Woolf’s words recall the actions of her other great trespasser: the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* who ‘audaciously’ ‘trespassed on the turf’ (p. 6) of the Oxbridge college, an act of political rebellion against women’s exclusion from education. The terms of Woolf’s enclosure metaphor also mirror the names for different schools: the ‘common’ ground of the ‘common’, ‘multilateral’ or ‘multibias’ school is opposed to the ‘private ground’ of the public school, described previously in the lecture as ‘“so very very private”’. ‘[C]ross the gulf’ echoes the phrase’s previous usage to suggest how the multilateral institution would help overcome the divide of social class.

Archival material in the Berg Collection reveals that Woolf went back and changed her citation of the mother’s letter to include the mother’s opposition between the inclusive, free national education system and the exclusive public school at the same time as she typed up the lecture’s final part.[[88]](#endnote-88) The amended section and the closure are in the same blue typing ribbon, as opposed to the black typing ribbon used to type out the lecture’s earlier sections. The amendment also appears on a loose leaf of paper at the end of her typed transcript, out of sync with its order in the text. Unlike the rest of the lecture, this sheet of paper has no staple marks, instead bearing holes made from a hole-punch, further suggesting its status as a later revision. This detail about Woolf’s writing processes supports an interpretation that privileges her concern with contemporary debates surrounding the benefits of multilateralism, revealing that she deliberately generated textual resonances between the lecture’s closure and the mother’s earlier words on contemporary schooling. Such allusive references make ‘The Leaning Tower’ a more complex advocacy of autodidactic methods than it may – at first – appear.

In 1940, Woolf drafted a letter to Ben Nicolson, which implored: ‘[w]hat is the kind of education people ought to have?’ (L6, p. 420). Mary Childers comments on Woolf’s tendency to outwit the critical categories through which she is approached.[[89]](#endnote-89) In this way, the critical trend that has focused on Woolf’s democratising, class and gender-crossing concept of the Common Reader as the measure of her engagement with working-class education has evaded the narrative of Woolf’s direct confrontation with issues of social class and institutional education. Such a focus reveals Woolf’s analysis of the educational institution’s role in shaping social and cultural class division, and her speculative anticipation of its potential to cultivate a politically and culturally democratic future in the post-war world that is ‘struggling to be born’ (E6, p. 276).

*Goldsmiths*

1. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume IV 1931 ­– 1935*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), p. 346. Further references to this edition are included in brackets after the citation, as D4 and then the page number. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Labour Party General Election Manifesto 1935: The Labour Party’s Call to Power’, in *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900 – 1997*, ed. by Iain Dale (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 45-47 (p. 47). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Virginia Woolf, ‘The Novels of Thomas Hardy’, in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume 5: 1929 – 1932,* ed. by Stuart N. Clarke (London: Hogarth Press, 2009), pp. 561-572 (p. 569). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Anna Snaith, ‘Introduction’, in Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012); ‘Chapter 4: Negotiating Genre: Revisioning History in *The Pargiters*’, in Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (London: Macmillan, 2007); Carol T. Christ, ‘Woolf and Education’, in *Woolf In The Real World*, ed. by Karen V. Kukil (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2005), pp. 2-9, and Ann K. McClellan, ‘Adeline’s (bankrupt) education fund: Woolf, women, and education in the short fiction, *Journal of the Short Story in English,* (2008), *50,* 2-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 414; Beth Rigel Daugherty, ‘Virginia Woolf Teaching/ Virginia Woolf Learning: Morley College and the Common Reader’, in *New Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Helen Wussow (Dallas: Contemporary Research Press, 1995), pp. 61-77 (p. 74); Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, The Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 109. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cuddy-Keane, p. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 235. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: pride and prejudice amongst the literary intelligentsia, 1880 – 1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. R.H. Tawney, *Secondary Education for All: A Policy for Labour* (London: Labour Party Advisory Committee and George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1922), p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Peter Gordon, Richard Aldrich, Dennis Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (London: Woburn, 1991), p. 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920 – 1940* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p.148. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Raymond Williams, ‘The Idea of a Common Culture (1967)’, in *Raymond Williams On Culture & Society Essential Writings,* ed. by Jim McGuigan (London: Sage, 2014), pp. 93-100 (p. 94; p. 97). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Frank Gloversmith, ‘Defining Culture: J.C. Powys, Clive Bell, R.H. Tawney and T.S. Eliot’, in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s,* ed. by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 15-44 (p. 30). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume V 1936 – 1941,*ed. Anne Olivier Bell(London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 233. Further references to this edition are included in brackets after the citation, as D5 and then the page number. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *Essential Writings*, p. 93. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Raymond Williams, ‘The Future of Cultural Studies’, in *The* *Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 151-162 (p. 154). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. FIL’s ‘Resolution’, as cited in David Bradshaw, ‘British Writers and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s, Part I: The Bray and Drone of Tortured Voices’, *Woolf Studies Annual,* Vol. 3 1997, 3-27 (p. 24) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. David Bradshaw, ‘British Writers and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s, Part II: Under the Hawk’s Wings’, *Woolf Studies Annual*, Vol. 4 1998, 41-66 (p. 48). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890 – 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters,* ed. by Mitchell Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 159. All subsequent references to this edition are included in brackets after the citation. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 56-57. All subsequent references to this edition are included in brackets after the citation. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Editorial, *The Times,* 16 April 1880, p. 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Public and Private*, pp. 108-109. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. The names Wright and Robson also appear in Woolf’s preface to a series of testimonies by members of the Women’s Cooperative Guild, the ‘Introductory Letter’ (1931), alongside a third name ‘Potter’. In a discussion of possible sources for a character named ‘Mrs Potter’, who appears in 1880 of *The Years*, Snaith quotes thus from Woolf’s ‘Introductory Letter’: “‘Thus it came about that Mrs. Robson and Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Wright at Newcastle in 1913 were asking not only for baths and wages and electric light, but also for adult suffrage and the taxation of land values and divorce law reform’”. Snaith suggests a variety of sources for the name ‘Potter’: Rose Macauley’s bestselling novel, *Potterism: A Tragi-Farcical Tract,* which Woolf had read (D2, p. 57), Woolf’s friends, Lady Shena Simon and Beatrice Webb both had the maiden name ‘Potter’, and Woolf ‘may have Beatrix Potter in mind’. A further possible source, made more likely by the connections the ‘Introductory Letter’ had with the WCG, is Mr. Potter, the Secretary of the men’s branch of the Cooperative Guild at the time that Leonard and Virginia Woolf attended the 1913 conference in Newcastle that informed the ‘Introductory Letter’. *The Cooperative News* contains a detailed report of the conference and lists both ‘Mr. Potter (National Men’s Guild)’ and ‘Mr. and Mrs. L.S. Woolf’ amongst the guests ‘on the platform’ at the conference. Mr Potter gave a speech where he expressed ‘the hope that the time would come when they [the men’s and women’s guilds] would have a combined report. (Loud applause.)’. It is interesting to note that *The Cooperative News* also reveals that a ‘Mrs Robson’ spoke amongst a number of other speakers at the conference, who were expressing their gratitude to the departing secretary of the WCG, Mrs Scurlock, on her retirement. Snaith, *The Years,* p. 444; *The Cooperative News,* 21 June 1913, p. 768; p. 768; p. 769; p. 799. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. *The Years,* p. 394. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Elizabeth Wright, *The Life of Joseph Wright*: *Volume I* (London: O.U.P., 1932), p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Margaret Comstock, ‘The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*’, *The Bulletin of the New York Public Library: Virginia Woolf Issue*, No. 2 Vol. 80 (Winter 1977), 252-275 (p. 254). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Wright, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Wright, pp. 30-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Wright, p. 39; p. 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Anna Snaith and Christine Kenyon-Jones, ‘Tilting at Universities: Virginia Woolf at King’s College London’, *Woolf Studies Annual,* Vol. 16 (2010), 1-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. The issue of Woolf and autodidacticism is a productive one that demands further consideration. The present article’s focus on Woolf’s relationship to the institutional structures of education precludes an extended discussion here. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
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