

Virginia Woolf's Class Consciousness

Snubbing or uplifting the masses?

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It is often said of Virginia Woolf's writings that they show an author who cannot constrain her own snobbery and elitist ideas. Particularly because of Virginia Woolf's intellectual and upper-middle-class circles of friends (i.a. the Bloomsbury Group, by critics jokingly referred to as the 'high-brow Bloomsberries') and her class-consciousness, there are present-day readers who even feel uncomfortable when they distill from Woolf's works her dread of 'the masses', her explicit contempt for 'working men attempting to write' and her fear of the demise of fine art. One would almost forget that it was Virginia Woolf who had been regarded as the greatest pamphleteer for women's rights, social reform and against the contemporary petty middle-class bourgeoisie of her time. This essay will attempt to show that Woolf's early twentieth-century class consciousness can only be truly evaluated if one keeps the spirit of the age in mind; that it was Woolf's class that enabled her to write in her renowned innovative way; that her elitist thought was not due to snobbery but, rather, that her elitism was a manifestation of a tradition cherished by Europe's intellectual elect; and that Woolf's class-consciousness gave her the opportunity to exercise power from within the influential intellectual circles.

In order to understand the type of elitist class-consciousness of European modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, here follows a quote from the book "The Revolt of the Masses" by the influential Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, published in 1932:

But nowadays the great mass believes it has the right to impose and lend force to notions deriving from its own platitudes. I doubt if it ever occurred in history that the multitude has had such direct government as is current in our time. Thus I speak of hyperdemocracy.

The same happens in other orders of life, particularly in the intellectual order. I may be mistaken, but the writer who takes up the pen in order to write about a subject that he has been studying thoroughly, must bear in mind that the average reader, who has never pondered the matter - and always assuming that he reads the writer at all - does not read in order to learn anything, but rather reads him in order to pronounce judgement on whether or not the writer's ideas coincide with the pedestrian and commonplace notions the reader already carries in his head. (...) *The characteristic note of our time is the dire truth that the mediocre soul, the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be mediocre, has the gall to assert its right to mediocrity, and goes on to impose itself wherever it can.* In the United States it is considered indecent to be different. The mass crushes everything different,

everything outstanding, excellent, individual, select and choice. (1)

"The Revolt of the Masses" was not an isolated exhortation. It was written in 1929 by an erudite, politically liberal philosopher. Psychologists like Gustave le Bon, Sigmund Freud and intellectuals like Nietzscheans Oswald Spengler (author of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (2)) and D.H. Lawrence also wrote about the masses in this fashion. Their disdain was the expression of an ongoing fear that Europe and European culture were in decay. In Great Britain, the Elementary Education Act of 1871 should have opened up education for everybody (albeit that many women were still denied access to education). An ominous foreboding was the population explosion that was changing the face of Great Britain.

The greatest source of inspiration for modernist writers was, without doubt, the aforementioned German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He supplied the élites with metaphysical and moral justification for their preordainment as the aristocrats who would have to rule in a humane way over the sly, mediocre (slave) classes:

Leave to speak. All political parties today have in common a demagogic character and the intention of influencing the masses; because of this intention, all of them are obliged to transform their principles into great frescos of stupidity, and paint them that way on the wall. Nothing more can be changed about this - indeed, it is superfluous even to lift a finger against it; for what Voltaire says applies here: 'Quand la populace se mêle de raisonner, tout est perdu.' (3)

Nietzsche also opposed universal education and its consequences in art; education should remain a privilege, and great and fine things could never be common: "That everyone can learn to read will ruin in the long run not only writing, but thinking too." (4)

Virginia Woolf's views on the masses were remarkably mild compared to Nietzsche's fury. The most scornful disqualification of the masses Nietzsche's oeuvre comes from his posthumously composed book *The Will to Power*. "[a] declaration of war on the masses by higher men is needed." (5)

Nietzsche explicitly envisages the ideal Europe to be ruled by a master race, where the masses should form a slave caste. Virginia Woolf, in a reactionary fashion, only feels somewhat uncomfortable when she thinks of the emerging masses of semi-educated people. Hence Woolf's strongest dislike of the masses could well be distilled from these quotes; trying to imagine what she calls: "That anonymous monster the Man in the Street" (6).

Virginia Woolf finds herself visualising: "A vast, featureless, almost shapeless jelly of human stuff - occasionally this way or that as some instinct of hate, revenge, or admiration bubbles up beneath it." (7)

Her views were class-based and not, as in Nietzsche's work, of a totalitarian nature. They were no part of any higher universal plan. Her concern mainly limited itself to the realm of aesthetics and aristocracy, but in order to understand the sentiments of modernist writers Nietzsche's influence cannot be omitted.

What was "the mass"? It was not exclusively the working class (8). The mass

represented average man who constituted the majorities within the nations. In her essay entitled *Modern Fiction* Virginia Woolf complains about the seeping through of mass characters into fiction (in a work by H.G. Wells):

He (Wells - *MRB*) is a materialist from sheer goodness of heart (...) the crudity and coarseness of his human beings. Yet what more damaging criticism can there be both of his earth and of his Heaven than that they are to be inhabited here and thereafter by his Joans and Peters? Does not the inferiority of their natures tarnish whatever institutions and ideals may be provided for them by the generosity of their creator? (9)

Wells must have been sensitive to this critique, since he abhorred the anonymous masses (he referred to "the extravagant swarm of new births" (10) as "the essential disaster of the nineteenth century" (11)), yet at the same time his science-fiction prose and personal descriptions of ordinary people was popular among these same people. (12)

Since it was assumed that the majority of the populace would be able to read read by now, some modernist writers would seek to reach the masses. In her diary, on April 28th 1933, Virginia Woolf mentions accidentally meeting Shaw, quoting him: "I've written 3 or 4 books I like to give the public full weight. Books should be sold by the pound." (13) To a degree Woolf would have agreed with Shaw, since her aim was to write as artistically as possible, being independent of commerce, hence feeling free to create works and to experiment new ways of conveying thoughts. On the other hand, she also believed that all people should have the possibility to develop themselves by going to schools and universities (cf. "Three Guineas" and "A Room of One's Own"). Here we see the important area of tension between universal education and preservation of art from the semi-educated masses.

Virginia Woolf was reluctantly reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which gave an inward view of the life of Leopold Bloom; a used-to-be working-class mass man who attempts to read literature and understand sculptures of nudes. Woolf is irritated about so much attention to an unrefined soul:

I should be reading *Ulysses* (...). I have read 200 pages so far - not a third; and have been amused, stimulated, charmed, interested, by the first 2 or 3 chapters - to the end of the cemetery scene; and then puzzled, bored, irritated and disillusioned by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples. And Tom, great Tom, thinks this on a par with *War and Peace*! An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me; the book of a self taught working man, and we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking and ultimately nauseating. (14)

Obviously, it would be absurd to compare Count Lev Tolstói's *War and Peace* with the work of a mediocre man, regardless of Joyce's genius.

On the other hand, Woolf truly appreciated the touch of class found in literature and within her social life: Mrs. Dalloway, the main character of Woolf's novel of the same name, might have been overtly class-conscious by setting store by wearing gloves and correct shoes, but her ideals and principles (particularly when she was an adolescent) can hardly be distinguished from Virginia Woolf's own ideals and disappointments. The character of Mrs Dalloway is the heroine of the book of the same name. Her thoughts are meticulously being recorded, and -- keeping in mind Virginia

Woolf's complaints about male dominance and underestimation of women's intellectual capacities, see striking parallels:

Although it was Clarissa Dalloway who bent over backwards to organise the upper-middle class party around which the whole story of the novel revolves (it was also her idea to organise it), the party-goers were supposed to think that it was the man of the house who should show off with the party's success. And as women -- no matter how bright their spirits were -- had to be preoccupied with homely matters, their intellectual performances could impossibly be ascribed to their own feminine genius:

In all this there was a great deal of Dalloway, of course; a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit, which had grown on her, as it tends to do. With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes -- one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard -- as if one couldn't know to a tittle what Richard thought by reading the Morning Post of a morning! These parties for example were all for him, or for her idea of him (to do Richard justice he would have been happier farming in Norfolk). (15)

Also Virginia Woolf's strong love for women is shared by Clarissa when she remembers her friend Sally Seton, whom she fell in love with when she was an adolescent:

But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love? (16)

The resentful spirit of the poor towards the rich is well depicted when we see what Miss Kilman thinks of the Dalloways and their class:

Yes, Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh; but had her reasons. First, it was cheap; second, she was over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor. Otherwise she would not be taking jobs from people like the Dalloways; from rich people, who liked to be kind. Mr. Dalloway, to do him justice, had been kind. But Mrs. Dalloway had not. She had been merely condescending. She came from the most worthless of all classes -- the rich, with a smattering of culture. They had expensive things everywhere; pictures, carpets, lots of servants. She considered that she had a perfect right to anything that the Dalloways did for her. (17)

Virginia Woolf's admiration for middle-class refinement and her dislike of religion is noted where the embittered Miss Kilman is the antithesis of Mrs Dalloway who does know what finesse means. We can compare this quote with the way Nietzsche speaks about the people of the slave class who need a religion through which they express their resentment:

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs. Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry-coloured eyes upon Clarissa, observing her small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion, Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered. (18)

Another example comes from *A Writer's Diary*:

February 16th, 1922 Then she seemed to me as she came in gigantically tall; tailor made; with a pearl dolphin with red tongue swinging from a black ribbon; rather stouter; with her white face, prominent blue eyes; nose with a chip off the end; and small beautifully aristocratic hands. (19)

Mental freedom and a non-materialistic, sublime sense of art was not at everybody's disposal: in *Mrs Dalloway*, the aforementioned working-class character Miss Kilman is depicted as the typical example of Nietzsche's over-exited and exhausted *décadent* (20). From the previous and the following quotation of Miss Kilman we can see that Kilman is driven by resentment, an inferiority complex and christian religious fanaticism. More importantly; as a member of the working class, she is not artistic. Her interest in music does not offer any redeeming value, because she will not be able to play the violin well anyway:

[W]hether it was the music, or the voices (she herself when alone in the evening found comfort in a violin; but the sound was excruciating; she had no ear), the hot and turbulent feelings which boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously. (21)

In Virginia Woolf's days it was not uncommon both to be on the left wing of politics and to retain and foster class consciousness; José Ortega y Gasset was a liberal; Wilhelm Reich and Theodor Adorno -- of the *Frankfurter Schule* -- were influenced by Karl Marx but still they thought that the labouring masses did not deserve to be regarded as creators of a new and free society. Mass man was prone to vote for a fascist regime, as Italy and Germany showed (arguably, being a Marxist, Reich did know what was best for the working class) (22). But even the sources of inspiration for German and Italian fascism were elitist: both the German author and philosopher Ernst Jünger (23, 24) of the *Conservative Revolution* and the Italian fascist philosopher Julius Evola (25) thought that Hitler's and Mussolini's mass-parties were 'treason to the Idea'.

In England, fear of the masses grew more intense because of the way mass movements nurtured fascist organisations. Keep in mind that in the previous century, the 19th century, population growth had been remarkable. And population growth was still on the increase in Woolf's days. Another totalitarian system, communism, had gained total power in Russia, by overtly speaking on behalf of the working class. In such an intellectual climate one may ask oneself whether it is realistic to expect from an English antifascist and refined intellectual such as Virginia Woolf, to have confidence in the forces of the masses without being biased or without occasionally retreating into her own class.

It is argued that Woolf's modernist art was conceived to be the antithesis of mass culture (26). The *hoi polloi* were mainly interested in facts and human interest. In the nineteenth century, the introduction of affordable photo-cameras, newspapers and mass literature had lead to a countermovement that had "L'art pour l'art" as its motto. Art should no longer be accessible to anybody, but it should be a world of its own, achieving the pure aesthetics

(27). Art should become too difficult for the masses to understand. It was an ideal that Ortega y Gasset explicitly proposed as *La deshumanización del arte e ideas sobre la novela* (1927) (28). Virginia Woolf deprived her later works from facts, (clear) plots, human interest and an all-too personal narrator. The *stream of consciousness* writing technique should enable Woolf to break away from the old patterns.

A symbolic representation of the lack of aestheticism in newspapers and the beauty of the stream of conscience was the brusque interruption of the narrator's stream of consciousness caused by a newspaper, as shown in Woolf's early work *The Mark on the Wall* (1917):

It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. I should like to take each one separately but something is getting in the way.... Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing.... There is a vast upheaval of matter. Someone is standing over me and saying

"I'm going out to buy a newspaper."

"Yes?"

"Though it's no good buying newspapers.... Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!... All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall."

Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail. (29)

However lofty as this quotation may seem, it is full of symbolism. With its onset in the late 1800's, the newspaper industry was booming as this was becoming the main source of information for the great gulf of the people of the working classes who could read. Their thirst for short chunks of trivial information and their shunning the aestheticism of art was thus met with by the press. John Carey (2002) writes, in his interesting, yet pedantically moralising book on the intellectuals of the modernist era:

Among European intellectuals hostility to newspapers was widespread. The rabble vomit their bile, and call it a newspaper, according to Nietzsche. (...) Surveying the cultural scene in *Criterion* in 1938, T.S. Eliot maintained that the effect of daily or Sunday newspapers on their readers was to affirm them as a complacent, prejudiced and unthinking mass. (30)

Woolf writes about the mass element of the press when she compares newspapers with crocuses, stating that newspapers are not made to last:

The Press is undoubtedly a great multiplier of crocuses. But if we look at some of these plants, we shall find that they are only very distantly related to the original little yellow or purple flower which pokes up through the grass in Kensington Gardens early in March every year. The newspaper crocus is an amazing but still a very different plant. It fills precisely the space allotted to it. It radiates a golden glow. It is genial, affable, warm-hearted. It is beautifully finished, too, for let nobody think that the art of "our dramatic critic" of the Times or of Mr. Lynd of the Daily News is an easy one. It is no despicable feat to start a million brains running at nine o'clock in the morning, to give two million eyes something bright and brisk and amusing to look at. But the night comes and these flowers fade. So little bits of glass lose their lustre if you take them out of the sea; great prima donnas howl like hyenas if you shut them up in telephone boxes; and the most brilliant of articles when removed from its

element is dust and sand and the husks of straw. (31)

We could imagine pieces of newspapers lying scattered in the parks, as if they were flowers (an interesting parallel can be made: today South Africans ironically speak about their 'new national flowers' when they refer to the thousands of little plastic bags (known as '*checkers*' in South African English), that are stuck in thornbushes in the vicinity of African *townships* and *locations*, in present-day South Africa).

In *Mrs Dalloway* we see what trivial things newspapers can write about nowadays:

Those five years -- 1918 to 1923 -- had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. That you couldn't have done ten years ago -- written quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. (32)

In the aforementioned stream of consciousness of "The mark on the Wall" we are taken up to a level of telling which will not be understood by everybody, as the intruder with the newspaper demonstrates in a confronting way. The other symbol is that of the need for 'a room of one's own' for women; the language of the intruder has a masculine tone, and thus the presence of a man in a woman's meandering thoughts will likely interrupt this way of thinking by straight forward facts. Women are more peaceful than men ("It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. I should like to take each one separately, but something is getting in the way...."), they could prevent the war if they had more right of speech. We will address this issue of women and pacifism below.

In order to escape the ugliness and the artistic limitations of commercial writing Woolf decided to no longer write for *The Times Literary Supplement* as she continued to explore ways of writing novels by 'dehumanizing' it and by shunning 'egotistic subjects (note how she felt about Joyce's novel "Ulysses", when she considered it "egotistic"). In her *Diary* she wrote, *inter alia*:

October 14th 1922 - As for my views about the success of *Jacob*, what are they? (...) It will be highly praised in some places for "beauty"; will be crabbed by people who want human character.

(...)

October 29th 1922 There was *The Times* review on Thursday (...) saying that one can't make characters this way; flattering enough.

(...)

August 17th 1923 Also to have a setting for each would "make an book"; and the collection of articles is in my view an inartistic method. But then this might be too artistic; it might run away with me; it will take time.

(...)

November 18th 1924 What I was going to say was that I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here, for if one lets the mind run loose it becomes egotistic; personal, which I detest. At

the same time the irregular fire must be there; and perhaps to lose it one must begin by being chaotic, but not appear in public like that. (33)

Not egotistic, but impersonal. No facts, more thoughts: quoting Michel de Montaigne, she would not teach, but tell: '*Je n'enseigne point, je raconte*' (34). The semi-educated and the lower classes needed instant information, but this is the new way of telling, sometimes being chaotic, having no clear plot, and even Woolf's essays lack facts for the sake of beautiful writing. This should create a new form of art which we now call Modernism. How topical this is today, in the 21st century, when we see that on television and on the radio people need chunks of information in the shape of soundbytes and oneliners, when politicians attempt to attract the masses by saying what the masses think, by using the commonest language. And what to think of the popularity of the tabloid newspapers?

About shunning the facts for the sake of *believing* in one's stories Woolf (also with the barrenness of contemporary post-Great War literature in mind) writes:

And the random talk of people who have no chance of immortality and thus can speak their minds out has a setting, often, of lights, streets, houses, human beings, beautiful or grotesque, which will weave itself into the moment for ever. But this is life; the talk is about literature. We must try to disentangle the two, and justify the rash revolt of optimism against the superior plausibility, the finer distinction, of pessimism. (35)

When we compare *Mrs Dalloway* with the later novel *The Waves*, we see the characters in her novels become more introspective, sharing a mass of thoughts and memories, as if they have been de-individualising.

We find misery and heartache in *Mrs Dalloway*, where Septimus Warren Smith kills himself due to the effects of being shell-shocked during the Great War. Causes have clear consequences in the novel. The frictions that atheism vs. blind belief, class differences and envy cause in *Mrs Dalloway* are everyday sentiments that can be found and expressed overtly in daily life. The novel contains many facts and more than one human interest subplot, and it all takes place within one day. It could be accessible to a large public. Woolf's other novel, *The Waves*, however, is full of poetic language, it is an "abstract playpoem, (...) an abstract, mystical eyeless book" as she says herself in her *Diary* (36). Woolf intended to mix the scenes in the book together: "Suppose I could run all the scenes together more -- by rhythm, chiefly." (37), and the work lacks a plot. Rather, the thoughts and the talks of an intellectual (upper-middle class) group of people are described, throughout their lives. The characters repeatedly meet each other and think about each other, expressing their impressions of each other. Life is represented as one single day, where the sun reaches its zenith and sets. Here a day is merely symbolical, and not twenty-four hours. The evening encompasses - predictably - the days of the characters' old age. Thus Woolf attempts to make her work less accessible to the large public. It is often said that the modernists have tried to abalienate the great public from their work by making it difficult to comprehend, by changing both the topics and the methods of writing.

But in her epistolary work "Three Guineas" (1938) we finally see that class can be both a smothering crystal house, and a means of exercising authority. After all, without Woolf's circle of friends and abilities to write, she could never have had influence on affairs - like Lady Bruton had in "Mrs Dalloway", when she was introducing one of her political solutions to her influential husband and his political friend. In "Three Guineas", Woolf's idealism invites her to stand up for the rights of women and all the oppressed; moving straight through exclusionist class conventions. She addressed a male treasurer who had previously asked her to donate money and who wanted to have her advise on how to prevent the war (World War II). "Three Guineas" contains the ingredients of religion (organised Christianity oppresses women (38)), and of her own class (she writes to a person of her own class, repeatedly referring to women of her own class).

On the second page of "Three Guineas", the narrator shifts from a personal point of view to that of "the daughters of educated men" (39). On this page we are given an idea of what Woolf associates with class and class consciousness, but she expresses neither contempt nor great sympathy for her own class :

We both come of what, in this hybrid age when, though birth is mixed, classes still remain fixed, it is convenient to call the educated class. When we meet in the flesh we speak with the same accent; use knives and forks in the same way; expect maids to cook dinner and wash up after dinner; and can talk during dinner without much difficulty about politics and people; war and peace; barbarism and civilisation (...). (40)

Speaking on behalf of a large group within that influential class, she seems to create a separate class within the learned class. The narrator, the I-figure, disappears when she writes: "Let us ask Mary Kingsley to speak for us."

From this moment on the problem of war and oppression seems a binary question; 'we' is used to indicate 'daughters of learned men' and 'you' is used to address 'men / militarist men / sexist oppressors within the upper middle class'.

It becomes clear that the daughters of educated men suffer material inequity. If they could own money, get degrees and have a share of the power, the world might be a better place, she asserted. Woolf here radically broke out of the classical upper-class Tory idea of an 'organic society' where women remain at home, being the proverbial 'angel of the house'. Strictly speaking, if 'the daughters of educated men' cannot possess large capital like their men do, they do not belong to that class:

Our ideology is still so inveterately anthropocentric that it has been necessary to coin this clumsy term -- educated man's daughter -- to describe the class whose fathers have been educated at public schools and universities. Obviously, if the term 'bourgeois' fits her brother, it is grossly incorrect to use it of one who differs so profoundly in the two prime characteristics of the bourgeoisie -- capital and environment (41).

According to Woolf women are pacifists. About women joining the war industry in World War I, Woolf poignantly wrote that they wanted to escape

the smothering environment of the bourgeoisie. Politicians pettily congratulated the women for their contribution to the war. But being powerless and deceived, women of her class could do no other thing than to join the war industry:

But her unconscious influence was even more strongly perhaps in favour of war. How else can we explain that amazing outburst in August 1914, when the daughters of educated men who had been educated thus rushed into hospitals, some still attended by their maids, drove lorries, worked in fields and munition factories, and used all their immense stores of charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that to fight was heroic, and that the wounded in battle deserved all her care and all her praise? The reason lies in that same education. So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired 'our splendid Empire'; unconsciously she desired our splendid war. (42)

Suddenly we are made aware that, for women, the class of learned men and women was not that privileged. The wings of the 'Angels of the House' had been clipped. Their men already took care of everything. For a woman, bourgeoisie was a frustrating stranglehold. Working-class women were better off:

If the working women of the country were to say: 'If you go to war, we will refuse to make munitions or to help in the production of goods,' the difficulty of war-making would be seriously increased. But if all the daughters of educated men were to down tools tomorrow, nothing essential either to the life or to the war-making of the community would be embarrassed. Our class is the weakest of all the classes in the state. We have no weapon with which to enforce our will. (43)

If need be, Woolf wrote, she will have to call on women of her own class to form, what she calls "The Outsiders' Society". Further in the text, this Society should have to swear that they

(...) 'will do all in [their] power to insist that any woman who enters any profession shall in no way hinder any other human being, whether man or woman, white or black, provided that he or she is qualified to enter that profession, from entering it; but shall do all in her power to help them. (44)

On page 205 we read that this new class should not only help other women, but all qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter their profession (45). The reader should realise that now the idea of class has been inflated. It is no longer an exclusionist group; it is not an elect or an organically developed stratum of society. This is 'the rest of society', leaving the educated men on their own, in a minority. From now on, the *masses* should be considered partners. Woolf will donate one guinea:

[o]n condition that you help all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter your profession; and further on condition that in the practice of your profession you refuse to be separated from poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties. (46)

Class consciousness and fear of the masses is no longer relevant here, after Woolf is asked what to do in order to prevent the war. She is, as it were, turned into a class-ridden internationalist and we start realising that we can

viewing the numerical strength as a numerical and political superiority. Virginia Woolf asserts that extension of the Outsiders' Society will gain freedom of movement and power by mentioning the case where the Northants Football Association was to forbid women's football because it was growing too popular. The greater the group will grow, the smaller the elite's freedom of movement will be. Here classes have become totally irrelevant and gender is the issue:

There we have proof positive of those inhibitions and persuasions which make it harder for your sex to experiment freely in altering current values than for ours; and without spending time upon the delicacies of psychological analysis even a hasty glance at the reasons given by this Association for its decision will throw a valuable light upon the reasons which lead other and even more important associations to come to their decisions. (47)

Seen from our contemporary perspective, Virginia Woolf may seem elitist and disdainful. In her days, and particularly among the intelligentsia, this was a normal attitude. It was the time when democracy changed the face of the Western world, when banality and triviality were taking over. Art was losing its sublimeness as it was becoming common property. Being a member of the intellectual aristocracy, she could view the demise of her aristocracy in no other way than from a worried observer's point of view. But despite her *artistic* contempt for mass culture, *socially* Virginia Woolf did consistently cherish ideals that opposed elitism. For while she saw fascism growing, she advocated the emancipation of all subordinated groups, so that they could stop the brutality and discrimination by the 'educated men'. Without Virginia Woolf's class endorsing and facilitating her deeds, she could not have reached the millions of people that would be inspired by her writings. She disliked her class for its sexism, but, as she also realised, it was this same class that enabled her to do the powerful things that other women could not do.

Sources and footnotes

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