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Modernism En Vogue: Popular Periodicals and Their Engagement with Modernist Culture

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MODERNISM EN VOGUE:
POPULAR PERIODICALS OF THE 1920s AND
THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH MODERNIST CULTURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

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NATALIE M. KALICH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER TWO: THE “AVERAGE CITIZEN” CONFRONTS “BOBBED-HAIRED THINKING”: THE SATURDAY EVENING POST’S TUMULTUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH 1920s MODERN CULTURE 22
From Inauspicious Beginnings to Massive Success 25
“Disgruntled Aliens” and the Intelligentsia: The Post Responds to Modern Culture 27
How the Post Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Jazz 39
“By God + Lorimer, I’ll make a fortune yet”: Post Fiction and F. Scott Fitzgerald 49
“In spite of his business, he is a man”: Gilbert Seldes as Advocate for the Middle Class 68

CHAPTER THREE: DOMESTIC MODERNISM: LADIES’ HOME JOURNAL AND ITS MEDIATION OF MODERNISM TO MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN 79
A Brief History of the Journal and the Mass-Market Magazine Industry 82
“Like What You Like, But—”: Barton W. Currie and Domestic Modernism 90
“Art and amusement—are they possible mates?”: The Journal’s Filmic Discourse 111

CHAPTER FOUR: MATCHING PEARLS TO SEQUINS: HOW BRITISH VOGUE COLLAPSED THE CULTURAL BINARY BETWEEN BLOOMSBURY AND JAZZ 132
Condé Nast’s Upper-Class Aspirations and Bloomsbury’s Intellectual Aristocracy 135
Dorothy Todd and Madge Garland’s Vogue 142
“. . . what I want, money”: Virginia Woolf in a Commercial Context 151
A Brave New World of Fashion and Romance 161
Sketching Out Cultural Identities: Fish and Covarrubias’s Jazz Age Pictorials 169

CHAPTER FIVE: “THE COCKTAIL WITHOUT A PADLOCK!”: VANITY FAIR’S INTOXICATING ARTICULATION OF MODERNIST CULTURE 188
The Beginnings of a Beautiful (and Profitable) Friendship: Frank Crowninshield and Condé Nast 192
Vanity Fair’s Place Among Commercial and Modernist Contemporaries 195
Vanity Fair Complicates the Gender Divide 212
Vanity Fair’s Interpretation of “American Noises” in Jazz and Poetry 223

WORKS CITED 234

VITA 247
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In 1919, *Vanity Fair* featured “Culture: Five Star Extra Edition, How to Make Sure that You are Enjoying Paintings and Verse of the New School,” by Richard Connell. The article begins by reassuring readers, “Modern Art is not so complex as the ordinary person might, at a casual glance, suppose. Ordinary persons are those who cannot appreciate it” (55). The article includes a list of “elementary principles” (55) to guide readers in the correct way to enjoy modern art. The second principle is particularly helpful in portraying the wrong and right ways to respond to modernism:

> How often does one see an ordinary person pause before a choice example of one of the new schools . . . and say, “I don’t understand it. I don’t get the idea.” Absurd! What does the artist care? He has given expression to *his* idea and to himself. He is too large-minded to expect you to take the same view of things as himself . . . . The second principle, then, is “Whatever a thing seems to be to you, IT IS.” (55)

In order to illustrate this point, Connell describes an artist friend who hung his photograph of a fried egg in his studio. “Ordinary persons” such as “the janitor, the installment collectors and the man who came to fix the plumbing, all agreed that it was a very life-like picture of a fried egg” (55). This, for Connell, signifies the ordinary person’s inability to appreciate modern art, especially when compared to the reactions of “our coterie of new artists” who were able to grasp “the real Inner Significance of the picture” (55). Connell then provides a list of titles the coterie audience proposed to demonstrate “Inner Significance”: “‘Internationalism Triumphant.’ ‘Susanna and the
Elders.’ ‘Fate and Hate.’ ‘A Nude Playing Parchesi [sic].’ ‘A Nude Playing.’ ‘A Nude.’ ‘Phyllis.’ . . . ‘The Sound of Water Leaving the Bath-tub.’ ‘The Temptation of Father Scothine.’ ‘Sex’ (55). These titles highlight the overall ironic tone of the article, as they reveal the lengths to which the coterie audience goes to see the fried egg photograph as anything but what it actually is. The article satirizes modern art and its selective audience, indicating the widespread reputation this aesthetic had already achieved by 1919. While *Vanity Fair* was famous for exposing upper- to middle-class readers to the latest in art and culture, this piece also assumes an audience—comprised of the elite and commercial—will understand a parodic treatment of the avant garde because of its notoriety.

Recent modernist scholarship has focused on the phenomenon’s development in magazines and newspapers. Consequently, textual studies scholarship, specifically periodical studies, on modernism has grown exponentially. Scholars such as Sean Latham and Robert Scholes have led the way in establishing the significance of periodical studies as it pertains to the study of modernism. In their 2006 collaborative article “The Rise of Periodical Studies” (2006), Latham and Scholes argue that magazines should be treated as “autonomous objects of study” (518), rather than “containers of discrete bits of information” (517). Treating magazines as unified texts, as opposed to mere ephemera to be dismantled according to one’s specialization, has resulted in efforts to protect these historical documents through digital archives. Latham and Scholes’s *Modernist Journals Project* has digitally reproduced magazines such as *Blast, Others, and Coterie* online to
show how “modernism began in the magazines” (*Modernist Journals Project*). The significance of research like Latham and Scholes’s lies in its explication of how modernists worked with editors, publishers, and other artists in order to produce works still largely attributed to individual writers. Furthermore, as a result of this kind of archival work, the complicated publication histories of works such as *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* in periodicals like *The Dial* and *The Little Review*, respectively, has been uncovered. Latham and Scholes’s archive focuses on the little magazines, which tended to be short-lived due to their small circulation rates and reliance on patronage, which could vary from month to month. Nevertheless, these magazines played an important role in providing a forum that welcomed the work of modernists like T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Amy Lowell, and Marianne Moore. The little magazine archives show how periodicals contributed to the development of modernism by publishing, reviewing, and advertising modernist work.

Modernism’s participation in selective and elite venues is well known, but scholarship has slowly begun to acknowledge the role consumer culture played in the development of modernism in larger-circulating venues. As Latham and Scholes observe, “high literature, art, and advertising have mingled in periodicals from their earliest years, and major authors have been published in magazines both little and big” (“Rise” 519).

The *Modernist Journals Project* website includes a small selection of commercial magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper’s Bazaar* ranging from 1910 to 1912 to

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1 Latham and Scholes’s digitization project extends from 1890 to 1922 due to “intellectual and practical reasons”: the practical reason is that copyright becomes an issue with publications from 1923 onward; the intellectual reason is that most scholars consider modernism to be fully fledged in 1922, a date marked by the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. We believe the materials on the MJP website will show how essential magazines were to modernism’s rise. (*Modernist Journals Project*)
“provide a perspective on what was being thought, said, pictured, and advertised in both Britain and America at the moment when ‘human character changed’” (Modernist Journals Project). This sample selection presents single issues of particular periodicals to show that commercial venues were aware of the initial cultural shifts that would lead to the aesthetic revolution of modernism.

As modernism developed throughout the early twentieth century, commercial periodicals with larger circulation rates followed its progression and exposed modernists to broader audiences. Karen Leick is one of the first scholars to focus expressly on the mainstream media’s response to modernism. In “Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press” (2008), Leick describes how major newspapers contributed to the popularity of Joyce and Gertrude Stein, arguing, “the response by the popular press to modernism has been neglected by scholars, who are unaware that mainstream Americans were familiar with the work of writers like Joyce and Stein in the 1920s thanks to the tremendous attention literary columnists paid to little magazines” (136). While Random House did not publish Ulysses until 1934, Leick asserts, “it would have been difficult for any literate American to remain unaware of modernists like Joyce and Stein in the 1920s, since their publications in little magazines were discussed so frequently in daily newspapers and in popular magazines” (126). In fact, it was because of the notoriety Joyce and Stein achieved in the American mainstream media during the 1920s that their works became bestsellers in the 1930s. Michael Levenson’s Modernism (2011) concurs with Leick’s work in his observation that modernism became known among larger audiences because of the “growth of the mass press and its reviewing apparatus” (268). Levenson’s scholarship considers the role “social and material
conditions” played in the development of modernism, arguing, “Modernism needs to be understood not as an elite craft refined in secret but as a complex exchange between artists and audiences” (3). Leick’s and Levenson’s scholarship provides the foundation for my investigation into this complex exchange as I examine commercial culture’s articulation and dissemination of modernism to middle- and upper-class audiences.

My archival research highlights the frequency with which modernists published in commercial contexts and the extent to which broader audiences were familiar with modernism. For example, while American readers would have to wait until 1933 to read Gertrude Stein’s *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, her poetry had been published in *Vanity Fair* almost fifteen years earlier. In the March 1919 issue, “New Poems by Gertrude Stein” appears, prefaced by an editorial note emphasizing the important contribution her work makes to “modern verse” (86). The note is also careful to highlight the significant role *Vanity Fair* plays in promoting her work to its readership:

One of the genuinely interesting figures among those who have attacked the task of revolutionizing modern verse is that of Gertrude Stein, the American woman, who, operating from Paris as her base, has stirred the critics and people of taste all over the world to the verge of ecstacy [sic]—or insensate fury . . . . Whether or not you like her art form—or lack of it, rather, whether or not you understand the cryptic meaning of her verses, there she is, and there is her influence, and there are her changes, and there will they remain. *Vanity Fair* has published poems by Miss Stein before; poems that have, to be sure, been often greatly misunderstood. But these are some which have just reached us from her in Paris. (86)

The preface to Stein’s poetry establishes two things for *Vanity Fair* readers: First, that readers should take note of this revolutionary poet causing controversy through her avant-garde style, and, second, that *Vanity Fair* provides readers with the latest works by this modern writer making waves in both critical circles and among “people of taste.” *Vanity
*Fair* appeals to its readers on both an intellectual and a cultural level, indicating that if they do not like or understand Stein’s work, they may not be people of taste.

This editorial note illuminates my dissertation’s primary purpose: To unearth commercial magazines’ participation in the development of modernism and analyze their various constructions of and responses to modernism during the 1920s. By tracing consumer culture’s mediation of modernism to larger audiences, I show how this cultural and aesthetic phenomenon was articulated to “ordinary persons,” and I undermine assumptions that only elite audiences were aware of or interested in modernism. The 1920s witnessed an expanding middle class and a disruption of conventional cultural boundaries that enabled the considerable overlap and blurring of categories like modernism and popular art. The disruption of these of socio-cultural hierarchies is most apparent in the pages of commercial magazines, as modernists published in commercial venues to a much greater extent than scholarship has acknowledged. I trace their work in these magazines to reveal the contributions larger-circulating magazines made to the development of modernism.

I have chosen four commercial magazines on the basis of their circulation rates and cultural influence. These periodicals include *The Saturday Evening Post, Ladies’ Home Journal, Vogue,* and *Vanity Fair.* The *Post* and the *Journal* were the highest-selling magazines in the U.S. during this decade, and thus represent discourse on modernism in mass culture contexts. Despite their smaller circulation rates, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* represent commercial magazines because of their dependence on advertising in order to return a profit. While American *Vogue* and British *Vogue* were similar in their emphasis on haute couture fashion and luxury consumerism, British *Vogue’s* editors,
Dorothy Todd and Madge Garland, were committed to publishing the avant-garde work of Bloomsbury and pursuing the growing influence of American popular culture in Europe. These subjects were largely ignored by American *Vogue*, which was, somewhat surprisingly, a much more conservative magazine in its emphasis on propriety and depictions of life among the wealthy. As *Vogue* became known as the Fashion Bible, *Vanity Fair*’s reputation as the how-to manual for sophistication grew, and these two magazines became highly influential in setting trends in fashion, literature, theater, and film. Moreover, *Vanity Fair* went even further in its promotion of modernism than British *Vogue* and took on modernist characteristics, particularly in its ironic approach to culture. Each magazine differed in terms of its response to an increasingly fast-paced culture for a particular, stipulated audience, but they all recognized modernism as an aesthetic phenomenon with larger cultural consequences.

In categorizing the *Journal* and the *Post* as “mass” magazines, I signify an arena in which elements across the cultural spectrum are included and discussed. For example, it was not uncommon for *Journal* readers to encounter articles on women’s suffrage and Charlie Chaplin, features by modernists like Vachel Lindsay and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and domestic columns on recipes and cleaning tips. Likewise in the *Post*, readers confronted a variety of topics, from the origins of jazz and its effects on culture to articles by modernist critics like Gilbert Seldes, all of which appeared alongside advertisements for Ford motors and Campbell’s soup. All of these subjects appeared in mass magazines because the general reader was interested in them. As James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger argue, “mass” indicates “ubiquity”: “Indeed, one way to define mass culture is as everything that members of an industrialized society share with all the other
members. Anything not universally shared may be less than ‘mass,’ an aspect of a ‘minority’ or ‘sub’-culture” (2). Naremore and Brantlinger’s approach in “Six Artistic Cultures” considers cultural categories as “discursive fields” that “partake of one another, sometimes overlapping, blurring together, or speaking dialogically—and sometimes . . . living in antagonistic relation” (8). In foregrounding the cultural discourse available in these mass magazines, I reveal the extent to which modernist culture was something “universally shared”—even if its relationship with mass culture was sometimes antagonistic.

My investigation of modernism’s participation in consumer culture also emphasizes the contribution commercial publishers and editors made to the development of modernism. Catherine Turner takes on this issue in Marketing Modernism, arguing for modernism as an “integrative mode,” that is, “both as a style and a cultural formation.” Understanding modernism in this way positions it “within the past and within the larger structures of modernity, especially consumer culture” (6-7). She observes,

Such a definition understands modernism as integrating a fascination with and opposition to mass culture and explains the growing evidence that modern authors played a role in making their own artistic works into commodities. In addition, this definition provides a place for the promoters of modernism, publishers, agents, patrons, and advertising men that is more complex than the role they have been assigned in the past. (7)

Turner’s conception of modernism parallels Levenson’s assertion, “There was no Modernism without individually audacious artifacts, but equally there was no Modernism without relationships among artists, their works, and the institutions and audiences that encircled them” (8). Understanding modernism as a cultural formation means taking into account a vast social and professional network comprised of artists, editors, diverse
publishing venues and varied audiences ranging from the exclusive coterie of the little magazines to the three million Post readers confronting this new cultural phenomenon. Investigating modernism as a cultural formation in a commercial context also reveals that mainstream culture perceived parallels between the avant-garde and developments in popular culture such as jazz and film. The massive popularity of jazz and film was discussed in tandem with modernism because these simultaneous cultural revolutions were viewed as similar in their effects on society. Naremore and Brantlinger primarily distinguish popular culture from modernism on the basis of collaborative or group-oriented activities, as opposed to modernism’s emphasis on the solitary artist creating work intended for a select group. Modernism came out of the high art tradition, and Naremore and Brantlinger’s construction of high art as possessing a “deep hostility towards the vulgar marketplace” as it elevates the “alienated artist” (9) accounts for the resistance some modernists had toward commercialism and larger audiences. On the other hand, they note, popular culture “connotes the world of sports, circus, fairgrounds, nickelodeons or penny arcades, early jazz, early rock ’n’ roll, comic strips, and certain kinds of down-market theater or film—a hazy terrain that resists most attempts at a definition” (12). Activities such as sports and circuses involve groups of people amassing together to watch other groups or collaborative efforts, as opposed to the modernist model in which a group of allegedly autonomous artists engage with a coterie audience. Despite these differences, the controversy jazz and film caused mirrored the upheaval modernism created in the high art world. Consequently, both popular culture and high art were frequent topics in mainstream media outlets. Commercial culture considerably
collapsed the high/popular binary, as revealed by the frequency with which magazines discuss popular and modernist art as analogous in their social consequences.

This approach differs from earlier modernist scholarship, like Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, which focuses on relational aspects of cultural spheres from a negative perspective. Huyssen argues that modernism always defined itself “in relation to two cultural phenomena: traditional bourgeois high culture . . . but also vernacular and popular culture as it was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture” (ix). However, Huyssen exaggerates modernism’s hostility to the marketplace in establishing the relationship between modernism and popular culture as an inimical one. According to Huyssen, “the nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the ‘wrong’ kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist, who tries to stake out his territory by fortifying the boundaries between genuine art and inauthentic mass culture” (53). While Huyssen’s text has become a popular target for modernist scholars seeking to problematize the high/popular binary, he is accurate in his depiction of how some modernist artists viewed themselves in relationship to mass culture, even as many of them published in commercial venues.

Later scholarship has analyzed the complex relationship between modernism and the marketplace through examinations of modernists’ participation in consumer culture. Joyce Piell Wexler, for example, examines the tightrope modernists such as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Joseph Conrad walked in their efforts to balance a reputation based on a rejection of material gain even as their work was well received by the public. The crux of a reputation as a professional writer versus that of a highbrow artist is reflected in
the publishing history of modernists such as Joyce, Lawrence, and Conrad. According to Wexler, “All three writers used the myth of the artist to further their professional careers; they had to conceal their professional aims to maintain their aesthetic reputations” (xii). Although they successfully perpetuated the artist myth, “Each found a commercial publisher with his first submission, and each had far more financial success than he liked to admit” (xiii).

As modernism’s relationship with the marketplace became increasingly ambiguous, magazine editors benefited from the cultural capital associated with these writers. The exclusivity associated with modernist art was appealing to editors like British Vogue’s Dorothy Todd and Vanity Fair’s Frank Crowninshield because publishing writers such as Pound, Eliot, and Woolf appeared a literary coup. These writers elevated a magazine’s cultural cache, as it could boast of being a commercial venue modernists were nonetheless willing to contribute to.

The overlap between modernism and popular culture has been the focus of recent scholarship by critics like David M. Earle and Michael North. Earle’s work is text-based in seeking to create “an alternate populist history of modernism that can be traced back to its very beginnings” (3). Earle analyzes pulp paperback versions of modernist texts,

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2 In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu developed his theory of cultural capital to account for the non-economic power, or capital, wielded in culture through, for instance, higher education. Bourdieu argued that there is an inverse relationship between cultural and economic capital, that is, the more cultural capital a work has, the less concerned with economic capital the artist will be. Instead, the artist will earn a more exclusive audience, thus earning a great deal of symbolic capital. As Bourdieu explains, “Thus, at least in the most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers (as with Symbolist poetry), the economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of ‘loser wins’, on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies” (39). Bourdieu calls this kind of economy an “anti-economy,” noting it nonetheless contains an “economic logic” because, “There are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation” (40).
arguing that his study “is innately about and organized around the material product, modernism in the marketplace, as found on the newsstand, in the drugstore, over the counter” (5). His emphasis on the material and economic aspects of modernism in the marketplace dovetails with my own, as I also focus on the production and revenues of these magazines as they disseminated modernism to a broader readership.

In contrast, North’s Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern is based on a cultural studies approach. North studies significant events of 1922 to complicate the relationship between popular culture and modernism and reveal the overlap between these two cultural spheres:

How might it change current notions of a “great divide” between popular culture and modern literature to know more about the campaign on behalf of popular culture carried on by Gilbert Seldes, who first published The Waste Land in The Dial, or to see a long list of literary figures with whom Charlie Chaplin started or renewed acquaintances during the transatlantic tour he called My Trip Abroad? (9)

North’s reference to the “great divide” recalls Huyssen’s construction of the chasm between high modernism and mass culture, but North destabilizes notions of the divide as thoroughly oppositional. His work draws out the relationships and connections between modernism and popular culture to assert, “the revolution modernism was to make in the arts and the one being made by American popular culture were inextricably associated” (144). In treating commercial periodicals as unified texts containing elements of both high and popular culture, I demonstrate the effects of publishing modernist work alongside advertisements, pictorials, celebrity features, and editorials on controversial developments in popular culture.
The revolutionary development within popular culture that most closely resembles both the method and cultural effects of modernism is jazz. The experimental and improvised nature of jazz caused a great deal of scandal within the music world. Because of its notoriety as a style that challenged musical conventions, jazz came to signify any and all cultural changes occurring in this decade. In 1920, the Post argued,

. . . since those good old days when people wore lisle unashamed something has happened to the world; and that terrific, stupendous thing is not, after all, the world war, organized labor, Bolshevism, or women’s suffrage, but the infinitely more far-reaching catastrophe of jazz. (“Jazzing” 12)

The revolutionary nature of jazz and the havoc it wreaked on mainstream culture caused many modernists to celebrate it as “avant-garde.” As David E. Chinitz observes,

In 1920s criticism, jazz was perceived to be so deeply implicated in avant-garde aesthetics that what we now call modernism could usefully be termed jazz art. And modernist writers were not necessarily resistant to this label, for often they found in jazz a musical analogue to the aesthetic revolution they themselves were attempting to mount. (322)

The avant-garde aesthetic modernists recognized in jazz was among the causes of early resistance to jazz in the popular press. A Post article expressly connects the modernist qualities of jazz that Chinitz describes, blaming the “rabid modernist,” also referred to as the “ultra-modern, or freak composer,” for “polluting our highest art forms” with “this audacious shimmy music” (“Our American” 70). Mainstream culture also viewed modernism and jazz as analogous, but, unlike modernists, viewed this new music as an augury of cultural decline.

Perhaps the most controversial social change in modern culture, and one that was often linked to jazz and modernism, was the immense shift in gender expectations and
women’s role in culture. Liz Conor investigates the emergence of the Modern Woman in the 1920s and the “ocularcentrism” that surrounded her:

Social theorists and cultural historians of modernity have claimed that the modern is ‘spectacularized’ or ‘ocularcentric.’ . . . The contention that the eye is the elemental organ of modernity arises from the invention of the spectator, or the repositioning of the eye of the subject within a field of reproduced and proliferating images. (22)

The 1920s was a decade that witnessed a pronounced increase in the dissemination and consumption of images, primarily in the advertising and film industries. These reproduced and proliferating images often featured “spectacularized” women, that is, women wearing provocative clothing and displayed in such a way that they enticed the male gaze. The Modern Woman’s visibility is particularly apparent in commercial culture, where fashion models, actress profiles, and caricatures of female “types” abound. As Conor argues, “women’s bodies became a place of action in modern visual culture” through “techniques of appearing”—the manner and means of execution of one’s visual effects and status” (2). I consider the visual effects of images of the Modern Woman in both advertisements and the satirical pictorials of Anne Harriet Fish and Miguel Covarrubias to show how The Modern Woman was often interpreted as either a mark of social progress or a harbinger of cultural deterioration.

In addition to images of women, each magazine also contains contributions by modernist women writers and artists. Critics such as Elizabeth Majerus have highlighted the instrumental role women writers made to the development of modernism, despite the chauvinism within high-art circles:

Scholars of modernity increasingly see tremendous shifts in women’s roles, habits, and self-understanding as an essential aspect of cultural modernity. Yet, high modernism, which has traditionally represented the artistic and literary face
of modernity, was often very anxious about women and the ways modernity brought women into public life. While women played key roles in defining and promoting high modernism, many of the most influential male modernists were explicitly and aggressively misogynist. (619)

As Huyssen argues, gendering mass culture as feminine “always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions” (62). However, women were widely published in commercial venues, which allowed modernists like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Parker, and Edna St. Vincent Millay to define and promote modernism to larger audiences.

Levenson highlights the gender issues at play in considering modernism as a social practice, acknowledging feminist scholarship that has expanded the masculinist modernist canon to include women writers like H. D., Stein, and Woolf.3 He also describes the misogyny women writers endured within the modernist community, noting that social changes in gender expectations were not necessarily reflected in this community of supposedly progressive artists:

And yet the assimilation of once-neglected works must not obscure the strains in the sexual politics of experimental art. Women were producing some of the most challenging work of the period, work acknowledged by a small group at the time and by many larger groups since. But if we hold fast to the notion of Modernism not merely as a succession of isolated works but as a social practice, then we can better recognize the fraught conditions of women’s place within the communities of artists. (235)

Women writers’ roles within commercial culture were less fraught; they were published frequently and earned a considerable amount of fame as a result. Moreover, as Majerus argues,

3 Bonnie Kime Scott’s *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) and Rita Felski’s *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) were two of the first feminist texts to point out the need for such criticism. Felski argues, “Gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out—but also the philosophical assumptions underlying our interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes” (1).
[commercial] magazines affirmed that modernity was to a great extent about women’s large-scale entrance into public life and culture. As public ventures that stood to gain both popularity and profit from including women in their promotion of modern life and art, they did not suffer the kind of backlash against women and women’s culture evinced by some of the most prominent architects of high modernism. (623)

The archives of commercial magazines show the crucial role women writers played in both developing modernism and promoting women’s entrance into the public marketplace by embodying The Modern Woman. 4

My approach to each of the four periodicals examined here incorporates George Bornstein’s work on Jerome McGann’s concept of the “bibliographic code.” Both McGann and Bornstein differentiate between “a work’s words, or ‘linguistic code,’ and its physical features, or ‘bibliographic code’” (Bornstein 7). In more specific terms,

Bibliographic code can include features of page layout, book design, ink and paper, and typeface as well as broader issues which D. F. McKenzie might call “the sociology of texts,” like publisher, print run, price, or audience . . . . The bibliographic code corresponds to [Walter Benjamin’s] aura and, like it, points to the work’s “presence in time and space.” Subsequent representations, particularly if they emphasize only the linguistic code, correspond to the withering of the aura. They tend to set the text free from its original time and place, locating it in our own principally as an aesthetic rather than historicized object. (7)5

4 Recent scholarship on women editors of modernist magazines like Harriet Monroe (Poetry), Marianne Moore (The Dial), and Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap (Little Review) reveals how these women, many of whom were modernist poets themselves, were an integral part of the development of modernism for elite audiences and were only later neglected by critics in favor of male writers.

5 In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin argues that industrialized technologies such as film destroy the unique “aura” of the art object, and it is this aura which is authentic and singular to the aesthetic object:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissable from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (221)

Bornstein is arguing for a return to modernist texts in their original time and place, in an effort to emphasize the significance of the bibliographic code to an aesthetic work.
The publishers’ and editors’ intentions regarding the physical aspects of their periodicals and their stipulated audiences dictated each magazine’s construction and produce a different reading experience than the one gained by reading works in a critical anthology. By analyzing the seeming ephemera, such as advertisements, surrounding modernist texts in these magazines, I consider these works as historicized objects to further understand modernism as a cultural formation.

By comparing the publishing companies of these magazines, I uncover the social network of modernism, which included publishers, editors, and audiences. While Cyrus H. K. Curtis sought the highest circulation rates possible by creating mass periodicals like the Post and the Journal, Condé Nast’s Vogue and Vanity Fair were much more selective. The different approaches to texts, audiences, and culture exposes each company’s particular circulation and aesthetic goals, and these goals informed what was included in and what was left out of each issue. Each editor and publisher understood his or her role as a culture bearer to broad audiences, and close readings of editorials establish how these men and women interpreted socio-cultural issues for their readers. Each editor I discuss was concerned with both quality of content and profit margins; however, what each editor defined as quality, and the degree to which economic advantages trumped aesthetics, varied. Vanity Fair’s Frank Crowninshield would have recoiled at the parallels between his magazine and the Post, but the Post’s Lorimer published authors Crowninshield favored, just one of the multiple intersections between these two publications.

My first chapter studies the Post’s role as advocate for the “Average Citizen” confronted by the immense cultural shifts occurring in the 1920s. The Post archive
demonstrates mass culture’s engagement with popular and modernist cultures—in terms of both cultural connections and cultural chasms. The Post’s right-leaning politics and emphasis on traditional values have caused scholars like Kathryne Lindberg to treat the magazine solely as a vehicle for perpetuating capitalist propaganda. According to Lindberg, “American buzzwords [like] democracy, emancipation, individualism, and business” were “sacred, nationalistic, hegemonic words” the Post “redefined and redeployed to suit the specific actions they would justify” (60-61). The Post was largely conservative in its approach to culture; however, as women entered the workforce, as Prohibition became an unpopular and problematic issue, and as modernism became a phenomenon readers were increasingly interested in, the Post struggled to maintain a consistent message. Although the Post stood firm in its xenophobic stance on immigrants, it reversed its early position on jazz as vulgar and the product of “exciting heathen[s]” (“Our American”), eventually celebrating jazz as America’s music. The Post was also famous for the amount of space it devoted to short fiction, and while most stories perpetuated traditional gender roles early in the 1920s, by mid-decade its fiction depicted women finding fulfillment outside the home and glorified controversial feminine types, particularly the flapper. The Post’s commitment to traditional American values was part of the reason it achieved the highest circulation rates in the country, but its ability to change with the times was the reason it retained those rates throughout a tumultuous decade. The Post reveals mass culture’s complex responses to shifts in culture, undermining perceptions of this magazine as static in its perspective on the immense cultural upheavals going on at this time.
While the Post represents a mass magazine aimed at mainstream America, Ladies’ Home Journal demonstrates how a domestic women’s magazine could also be considered mass due to the wide range of its content and its record-breaking circulation rates. As Helen Damon-More writes, the Journal “had a clear formula from the beginning, one that is striking in its breadth and simplicity: the magazine sought to speak to every major interest in a white middle-class woman’s life” (116). These major interests included women’s higher education, the current state of drama, film as an art form, and a modernist’s approach to maternity, just to name a few. While skeptical of the alleged (and, in his mind, presumptuous) “genius” of modernism, editor Barton Currie nonetheless assumed a readership interested in new artistic movements, and his editorials reveal the cornucopia of cultural discourse available to Journal readers. Other scholars have focused on the Journal’s advertisements and fiction, arguing that they reinforce traditional gender expectations and construct female readers as, first and foremost, consumers. I argue against these readings, as many of Currie’s editorials expressly encouraged women to utilize their newly-gained political prowess to effect change in society. In addition to encouraging consumerism, the Journal also exposed women to new developments in popular and high culture, treating its readers as intelligent members of society eager to learn about and engage with an increasingly complicated modern world.

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6 One such scholar is Jennifer Scanlon, who argues:
In a time of tremendous actual and potential societal changes, when middle-class white women faced new opportunities and new challenges in education, in the workforce, and, due to changing technology, in their households, [the Journal] specifically encouraged them to read rather than act, to conform to middle-class mores rather than seek out new and possibly more revolutionary alternatives. (6)
British *Vogue* represents a women’s magazine with a smaller audience than the *Journal*, but one that was equally cognizant of the parallels between modernism and popular culture. British *Vogue*’s editors, Dorothy Todd and Madge Garland, contributed to the displacement of the high/popular cultural binary in their unflagging support of Bloomsbury and a voyeuristic interest in American popular culture. Articles by Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley appear alongside Miguel Covarrubias’s caricatures of the New Negro in America, demonstrating the transnational cultural inclusivity that set British *Vogue* apart from other women’s magazines of this era. Rather than creating a niche periodical focused on the latest in haute couture and only affordable to the wealthy, or a mass magazine primarily concerned with jazz and celebrity culture, Todd and Garland combined the elite with the popular under the *Vogue* masthead. These women considerably expanded what constituted “The Mode,” while exposing readers to the latest trends in literature, music, art, femininity, race relations, and, of course, fashion.

The periodical that went furthest in celebrating everything new in culture was undoubtedly *Vanity Fair*. This magazine not only provided a platform for the latest in art and culture, but also adopted modernist characteristics in its irreverent and experimental style. *Vanity Fair* advertised itself as “The cocktail without a padlock!” in the age of Prohibition, becoming famous for both its wit and its urbanity. Under the leadership of Frank Crowninshield, *Vanity Fair* mixed elements of popular culture and high art to create a modernist magazine that was self-reflexive and ironic in its approach to culture. Furthermore, in its preoccupation with everything innovative in the arts, *Vanity Fair* embodied the energy and spirit of the Jazz Age. If other parts of the world viewed Prohibition-era America as reactionary, *Vanity Fair* stood out as progressive and
cosmopolitan in its commitment to articulating and participating in the latest cultural
trends for the benefit of its readers. This chapter analyzes *Vanity Fair* as a modernist
magazine, in that it went beyond merely promoting this phenomenon by taking a
modernist approach to culture and the magazine business. This periodical was ironic,
irreverent, self-referential, and sought to create a pastiche, thus participating in
modernism as a style that could be applied to commercial culture as well as high art
forms. Through the collaborative efforts of Nast, Crowninshield, and the periodical’s
various writers and illustrators, *Vanity Fair* exemplifies modernism as a cultural
formation.

These periodicals show modernism as an aesthetic engaged in social practices and
comprised of a much larger network than the coterie community of artists that modernist
scholarship tends to focus on. As my scholarship shows, the modernist network included
editors, publishers, commercial culture, and large audiences. By exploring modernism in
a commercial context and mainstream culture’s responses to modernism, I problematize
assumptions that the general reader is resistant to or ignorant of progressive art and
expose the variety of cultural discourses available to broad audiences during the 1920s.
CHAPTER TWO

THE “AVERAGE CITIZEN” CONFRONTS “BOBBED-HAired THINKING”: THE SATURDAY EVENING POST’S TUMULTUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH 1920s MODERN CULTURE

In 1928, journalist Leon Whipple remarked in Outlook magazine, “Who reads the Post? Who looks in the mirror? Everybody—high-brow, low-brow, and mezzanine; the hard-boiled business man and the soft-boiled leisure woman; the intelligenzia [sic], often as a secret vice . . . You read it—and I” (qtd. in Wood 152; ellipses in original). In 1929, The Saturday Evening Post achieved a record-breaking circulation rate with three million subscribers and incorporated content ranging from high- to lowbrow and everything in-between. The Post represents a “mass-market” magazine, in that it sought and achieved large circulation numbers by appealing to the multi-faceted interests of a broad audience. However, the mass appeal of the Post across the sociocultural spectrum did not prevent the periodical from constructing itself as a platform for traditional, middle-class values.

My analysis of the Post’s archives and the editorial methodology of the formidable editor-in-chief George Horace Lorimer (known by his employees as “The Boss”) shows how the highest-selling magazine in America both represented and constructed
mainstream culture as it brought modernism to the masses.¹

The immense influence the Post had in American culture makes it difficult to compare to contemporary periodicals. Lorimer biographer Jan Cohn’s description of the national reach of the Post explains how significant this magazine was as a cultural medium:

Before movies, before radio, before television, the Post delivered its version of America week after week to an audience of millions. . . . No single contemporary medium has anything like so powerful, because essentially unchallenged, a hold on mass society. . . . Week after week [Lorimer] crafted the issues of his magazine as an image, an idea, a construct of America for his readers to share, a model against which they could shape their lives. Certainly, there were other magazines, other carriers of culture, and other visions of America, but for over a quarter of a century the Post was unrivaled in codifying the ground rules that explained and defined Americanism. Despite the vast changes in American society between 1899 and 1936, what the Post achieved was the fullest expression of a broad American consensual view. (5)

Post publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis cornered the market on mass-culture media and provided readers with a wide variety of news and entertainment for just five cents a copy. While the Post never wavered in its role as the mouthpiece for the average American, its various, sometimes contradictory, responses to cultural phenomena reveal the contentious struggle many people experienced in attempting to bridge nineteenth-century values with Jazz Age mores.

Although the Post is largely remembered as a purveyor of Americana due to Norman Rockwell’s indelible artwork for the magazine’s covers, there was a darker side to the Post’s nationalism. Lorimer’s reactionary stance toward the cultural changes of the

¹ Lorimer biographer Jan Cohn explains the editor’s sobriquet:
“The Boss” encapsulates Lorimer’s presence and editorial style, his complete authority over the contents of the Post, the speed and assurance with which he selected or rejected stories, articles, illustrations. “The Boss” expresses as well his mastery over contributors, his insistent need to remain in charge, to make final determinations about the material he accepted for print—their content, length, diction, and especially their price. (268)
1920s often involved scapegoating immigrants. Throughout the decade, Lorimer published several articles by Lothrop Stoddard comparing the Nordic race to its allegedly inferior ethnic peers, and there were many articles by various authors that advocated for stricter immigration laws. The Post also supported Mussolini early in his career, comparing him to Theodore Roosevelt in his political prowess and ability to improve Italy’s economy during the 1920s.

The Post’s xenophobia and flirtations with fascism can overshadow its more progressive elements, as well as its willingness to revisit cultural issues from a variety of perspectives. In the early part of the 1920s, the Post rejected jazz as vulgar and the product of outside, primitive influences; however, the magazine eventually praised jazz as America’s music, publishing a three-part serial by famous jazz band leader Paul Whiteman in 1926. In addition, while the magazine expressed a great deal of skepticism regarding modernism and the intelligentsia, it also published modernists like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Gilbert Seldes. Their work not only demonstrates a willingness by modernists to participate in commercial culture, but also reinforces my argument that mass audiences were neither completely resistant to nor ignorant of experimental art.

While the Post was largely conservative in content, my research uncovers many moments of a more progressive Post, one that advocated changes in gender expectations and that gradually came to celebrate jazz and modern fiction as it continued to speak to a mass audience.
From Inauspicious Beginnings to Massive Success

When publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis purchased *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1897, he expected to see the same swift profits his other publication, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, had returned. Initially, the *Post* was to be the male counterpart to the *Journal*, addressing the interests and consumer needs of the middle-class businessman. When Curtis named Lorimer editor-in-chief in 1899, the two set about constructing the nation’s first mass-market magazine for men. However, Curtis and Lorimer’s strategy, while sound on paper, was not effective in application. The cultural divide that stereotyped mass culture feminine worked against Curtis and Lorimer: since women were the primary household consumers and men were not yet viewed by advertisers as potential consumers, Curtis and Lorimer struggled to come up with enough advertising revenue to keep the magazine afloat. Moreover, as Helen Damon-Moore argues, targeting the interests of businessmen proved more complicated than they had anticipated:

Men’s interests were more diffuse and were therefore more difficult to package. Hence there were political magazines and nature magazines and sports magazines in which men were presumed to have an interest, but there were no magazines that attempted to speak to all of a middle-class man’s interests. (116)

Damon-Moore also examines the economic power women wielded in consumer culture at the end of the nineteenth century and its effect on the Curtis Publishing Company:

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2 Andreas Huyssen argues that the masculinization of high art and the feminization of mass culture goes back to the nineteenth century:
the gendering of an inferior mass culture as feminine goes hand in hand with the emergence of a male mystique in modernism. . . . What is interesting in the second half of the 19th century, however, is a certain chain of signification: from the obsessively argued inferiority of woman as artist . . . to the association of woman with mass culture (witness Hawthorne’s “the damned mob of scribbling women”) to the identification of woman with the masses as political threat. (50)

3 The first successful men’s magazine would not be created until 1933, when Hearst Corporations began publishing *Esquire* magazine with the announcement, “The Quarterly for Men” ("Esquire").
A gendered commercial world, in which women were central as active consumers, had taken shape; and at this time even Cyrus Curtis, who had been one of the primary shapers of gendered commerce in the 1880s, had relatively little power to affect it in the 1890s . . . . Curtis’s lack of success [with a male-oriented Post] demonstrates how pervasive and strong the cultural hegemony of woman-centered commerce had become. (117)

In contributing to the development of advertising’s focus on women as the primary consumers, Curtis had unknowingly harmed his future endeavors. His dream of creating a male counterpart to his beloved and blossoming Journal would remain a fantasy.

After a decade of low sales, Curtis and Lorimer decided to expand the Post’s stipulated consumer base, declaring in 1908 that it was “Not for Men Only”—a passive way to announce the Post’s inclusion of women, perhaps indicating Curtis and Lorimer’s reluctance to relent on their original conception of the Post. Nevertheless, advertisements addressing women, articles on women’s suffrage and political power, fiction with female heroines and romantic themes, and opinion pieces on childcare and other familial issues became frequent features of the magazine. Cohn examines the implications of the Post’s decision to expand its audience, explaining how this move “illustrates fully the symbiotic relationship among advertising, circulation, and editorial projects that characterized the rise of the Post to its position of media dominance. That decision was, like Curtis’s advertising campaign, a part of the drive to push circulation to a million” (65). Since the Journal had already reached the one million mark in 1903, Curtis was anxious to repeat that success with the Post and proved willing to alter the magazine’s intended audience in order to gain higher subscription numbers. As a direct result of incorporating women’s interests into the Post’s, Curtis and Lorimer achieved their circulation goal:

The Post moved into position to overtake the Journal at the end of the first decade of the century, when its circulation also surpassed a million and its advertising revenues went over the million-and-a-half dollar mark. By 1910 the Post enjoyed
a mixed readership by gender while the Journal remained a magazine read primarily by women. This contrast eventually allowed the Post to outstrip its sister publication in both circulation and advertising revenues. (Damon-Moore 151)

By tapping into the interests, desires, and beliefs of the majority of people, the Post discovered a formula that was not only extremely profitable, but enabled a forum for perpetuating and disseminating the values of the Every American to the masses.

“Disgruntled Aliens” and the Intelligentsia: The Post Responds to Modern Culture

By the 1920s, the Post was a magazine known for promoting American ideals such as individualism, democracy, liberty, and a Protestant work ethic. However, after World War I, the younger generation challenged many of these ideals in their rebellion against the previous generation. Lorimer saw these youthful upstarts as too anxious to tear down values and possessing little to no clear idea of what they should be replaced with. As Cohn argues, “[Lorimer] was now, in his early fifties, moving inexorably toward the rearguard, and if his Post continued to hold a vast audience of Americans, that fact reveals only too clearly how desperately the mainstream, like Lorimer, sought the assurances of the past” (138). Lorimer and his readers struggled to reconcile the American values of their childhood with the upheaval of the Jazz Age and the rapid technological developments that irrevocably changed life as they had known it.

The Post’s championing of the middle class was a response to this rebellion, which, according to Lorimer, was a result of the growing cultural influence of the

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4 Cohn describes Curtis’s dual success with the Post and the Journal on a material level, Curtis presses were turning out 27,860,000 pages every day to produce 125,000,000 magazines a year. A single edition of either the Ladies’ Home Journal or the Saturday Evening Post consumed four square miles of paper and 60,000 pounds of ink and required sixty-five railway cars to distribute it. This was the magazine business on a colossal—which is to say, an American—scale. (64)
“intelligentsia.” Cohn describes what this group represented to Lorimer and many of his readers:

Intelligentsia neatly summed up everything that the Post opposed, from liberal-radical political opinions to avant-garde art forms. Because the term intelligentsia was, like radical thinking and experimental art, itself an import from Europe, it served as a scornful shorthand for all that was alien and un-American. (14)

For the Post, post-war cultural shifts seemed so alien to American values that they could only have come from the outside—thus the heavy-handedness with which the intelligentsia was connected to the immigration problem in various articles throughout this decade. For the general reader, the Post represented a respite from the avalanche of European art, and “was designed to reach audiences ignored by ‘highbrow’ magazines like Harper’s and the Atlantic” (Cohn 9).

The highbrow’s low opinion of middle-class taste was well known to those outside of the intelligentsia, and a 1919 Post article entitled “On Being a Bourgeois” confronts the highbrow/middle-class conflict. The article begins by describing the anonymous author’s confusion at being labelled a “bourgeois” by “one of the intelligentsia, who seem to know all about that sort of thing” (53). The anonymity of the author indicates the Every Man quality of it; in fact, the author states that the article’s “sole aim” is to tell Post readers what “bourgeois” means, because “chances are that you are [one]” (53). In his quest to determine what, precisely, it means to be bourgeois, he consults the dictionary, where the definition reads, “Of or pertaining to the commercial or middle class . . . uncultivated; unrefined; common” (53). The negative connotations of the definition surprise the author, since “the dictionary, ordinarily so nonpartisan and without prejudice, apparently can’t refrain from taking a slam at the poor old bourgeois!”

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5 I have gendered the author male because Lorimer often wrote unsigned opinion pieces in the Post.
(53). After further inquiry into the nature of the abhorrence for the bourgeois, the writer concludes, “this poor dub . . . always so contempuously spoken of or with a sort of pity, is nothing more or less than our old friend the Average Citizen . . . the fellow that, all my life, I have been taught to believe was the backbone of this country” (53). This article demonstrates the socio-cultural perspective of the Post throughout the 1920s—the bourgeois, or middle class, provided the economic and ideological foundation for the United States, and perceived challenges to middle-class beliefs were regarded by the Post as attacks on American ideals.

The nationalistic element of the article becomes apparent as the anonymous author shifts from a consideration of the bourgeois to an attack on immigrants who refuse to assimilate and fully accept American values as their own. The author asserts that Europeans come to the U.S. to live, because “they [are] sick and tired of what they [have] at home” (53). These dissatisfied immigrants come to America, but instead of melting into the proverbial pot, they bring along “socialist notions” (53) that undermine democracy. Allowing oneself to be influenced by these foreign ideas is ridiculous because it involves importing “ideas of living and social and economic conditions from people who are dissatisfied and fleeing from the only ones they know about.” Furthermore, these foreign notions have persisted because the melting pot “has not been doing its job” (57). The solution to this problem is to force assimilation by changing the oath of allegiance to root out immigrants still “cherishing foreign history, foreign ideals, foreign loyalty, it must be stopped; and they must begin at once, all over again, to cherish American thought, American history, American ideals” (57). Apparently, anything foreign must also automatically be anti-American: “[Immigrants] must adopt and believe
in our system and not try to graft their own on it. We have long offered asylum to the oppressed of Europe; but, slack as we are in so many things, we never intended to give over the direction of the asylum to the patients” (57). The author’s tone has shifted from that of a befuddled bourgeois victim to an assertive citizen demanding immigration reform.

The article also declares the intelligentsia’s contempt for the bourgeois moot because the United States does not have a class-based economy. The author proclaims, “there is no such thing as a bourgeoisie in this country” (53) because “We shift our economic condition too fast to be classified” (54). This statement conforms to the Post’s insistence on America as a classless society, a popular notion that originated from a desire to further dissociate from England and its rigid social hierarchy. It was an increasingly difficult argument to maintain during the 1920s, when the gap between the haves and have nots noticeably widened. David Kyvig argues that, while the Great Depression caused a pronounced economic stratification to occur, it was in the 1920s that cultural and economic differences first became apparent:

Demarcations clearly existed between the small minority who had achieved abundance and security, the much larger number who had gained only an insecure grip on financial comfort, and the largest segment of the population who at best enjoyed limited and irregular comfort and more often wrestled with poverty. Nevertheless the long-standing and ongoing notion that in America hard-working individuals could improve their lot and achieve economic success continued to obscure the reality that most did not. (165)

“On Being a Bourgeois” signifies the lengths to which the Post and mainstream culture were willing to go to insist that the American Dream was a reality. The proof of the

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6 David Savran breaks down the distribution of wealth more specifically: “Between 1923 and 1929, the wealth of the top 1 percent grew by 63 percent,” but by the end of the decade, “60 percent of American families earned less than the two thousand dollars annually deemed necessary to cover basic necessities, while the income of the wealthiest 0.1 percent was equal to that of the bottom 42 percent” (117).
American Dream was in the numbers of immigrants leaving their homelands for the United States. However, as the anonymous author intimates, while these values were strong enough to establish democracy, they were simultaneously fragile. The immigrants seeking refuge in democracy were also seeking to undermine it by stubbornly holding on to foreign values that were apparently diametrically opposed to American ideals.

This article establishes a rhetorical trend that recurred in the *Post* throughout the 1920s. Progressive developments in culture that challenged the status quo were often viewed as consequences of “outside” influences and described simultaneously as dire threats and pathetic attempts to subvert American values. Even a decidedly American phenomenon like the figure of the Modern Woman, which included the flapper, Greenwich bohemian, and working girl, was initially rejected on the grounds that her break from nineteenth-century gender expectations was the result of foreign influences. The *Post* was not alone in critiquing Modern Woman “types” such as the flapper, but it was singular in its association of flappers with immigrants.

In 1924, the *Post* published race theorist Lothrop Stoddard’s “Bobbed-Haired Thinking,” in which Stoddard associates one of the primary signifiers of the Modern Woman—her short hair—with the “disgruntled alien.” According to Stoddard, immigrants and the Modern Woman threaten the “American tradition” of common sense with their radical ideas (62). Here, Stoddard utilizes another *Post* hallmark, the importance of common sense, arguing, “in these latter days the common-sense tradition has been increasingly challenged. Especially since the war America has been deluged by a flood of what may best be described as bunk” (37). For the *Post*, “America was the realization of the set of values referenced by the magical phrase common sense. In
common sense resided the ideology of Lorimer’s America” (Cohn 13). The greatest opponent to common sense was the “disgruntled alien” and the influence his bunk radical agenda was having on American culture.

Stoddard deems these “bobbed-haired” rabble-rousers “The Affiliated Knockers”:

[While] no part of America is deprived of their stimulating presence, it is in New York that they are most numerous—and most articulate. Thither they congregate and there they commune together and perfect their mutual understandings. From the vantage point of Manhattan Island shell-spectacled young men and bobbed-hair ladies—often not so young—survey the land, and in books, magazines and futuristic verse tell the world what a lot of corn-fed hicks inhabit the outlying provinces of America. (37)

For the Post, and much of mainstream America, New York City was the hub of the intelligentsia, a corrupt metropolis that housed the largest number of immigrants and radicals, all of whom participated in the conscious undermining of traditional values, including conventional gender norms: the image of the shell-spectacled young men connotes an over-intellectualized, over-civilized group of unmanly boys, while the “not so young” bobbed-haired ladies signifies middle-aged women pathetically clinging to youth by following the next generation’s trends. These men and women represent the “professional radical” (62), and their relationship with the “disgruntled alien” has threatened to undermine common sense, and thus the American way of life.

After describing the various ways in which traditional values are imperiled by the bobbed-haired intelligentsia, Stoddard offers a somewhat surprising conclusion by reducing the disgruntled alien’s radical political beliefs to a kind of homesickness, “The truth is that [immigrants] just feel uncomfortable in their American environment and want to change it more to their liking” (64). Therefore, Bobbed-Haired Thinking “cannot become a real peril as long as the average American retains his sanity and common sense.
The best way to meet it is by learning precisely what it is and then treating it with intelligent foresight—and a sense of humor” (64). The paradox of the immigrant as a threat to and yet no match for American ideals informed the Post’s rhetorical strategy to anything it deemed “radical”—from bobbed hair to free verse and jazz. As in “On Being Bourgeois,” Stoddard begins by positing that American traditions like common sense are under attack by foreign influences, only to mitigate these threats by declaring them ultimately futile.

Pieces like “On Being Bourgeois” and “Bobbed-Haired Thinking” have caused many scholars to dismiss the Post due to its conservative perspective and persistence in staying the course of nineteenth-century values during the Roaring Twenties. Critics like Kathryn Lindberg sum up the Post as “a lot of bad prose and poetry” (79) and emphasize the magazine’s hegemonic language, which overlooked the very real economic stratification and hardships of some of its readers:

The American buzzwords democracy, emancipation, individualism, and business were the Saturday Evening Post’s stock in trade, but the particular mechanisms of the market were seldom the explicit text of the popular magazine, whose readership was not those capitalists who made “real” the imaginary success story. Instead, as goes the dreary story of ideology . . . readers were encouraged to look beyond class identifications and to be transformed into individual warriors committed to “making the world safe for democracy.” (60-61)

Lindberg’s essay compares the homogenizing efforts of the Post to socialist magazines such as The New Masses, claiming the Post ostensibly shied away from partisanship and instead “redefined and redeployed” certain words considered “sacred, nationalistic, [and] hegemonic . . . to suit the specific actions they would justify” (61). The Post initially claimed to be non-partisan, but as the 1920s wore on, it became clear that “the Post, like Lorimer, was Republican in outlook and ideology, sometimes progressive Republican
and sometimes conservative Republican, but always Republican” (Cohn 91). However, to characterize the *Post* strictly in terms of its Republican leanings does not account for the considerable number of articles and stories that challenged patriarchal, capitalistic, and nationalistic constructions of American culture.

The *Post’s* “progressive” element may appear very limited; however, there were several articles leading up to and immediately after the ratification of the 19th Amendment that advocated women’s suffrage, and by mid-decade the *Post* began to accept women leaving the domestic sphere to enter the workforce. For example, in 1920, “Women in Politics to the Aid of Their Party” by Eleanor Franklin Egan appears, in which she describes her initial resistance to the suffrage movement because she “did not believe the average woman would accept the responsibilities that go with active and direct participation in government” (22). However, now, Egan claims,

> I feel like apologizing to the women of the combat battalions who have done all the fighting and who now bear all the sears. . . . What I did not observe from my blind alley of conservatism was that the millions who were not being heard from, those of the great mass who never are heard from, were watching the progress of events with a deep concentration of thoughtful attention. (22)

Later that same year, Elizabeth Frazer’s “Encore Les Femmes!” series appears. Frazer essentializes various masculine and feminine traits in order to predict the consequences of women’s suffrage on American society. Yet, rather than the conventional associations of masculine as active and women as passive, Frazer argues, “The American woman is a political animal. For that matter, all women are. History reveals their instinctive powers in that direction” (17). She then cites John Stuart Mill’s and Havelock Ellis’s theories on femininity to argue that the modern woman “whenever her education has been sufficiently broad and sound to enable her to free herself from sentimentality and fads she
probably possesses in as high a degree as man the ability to govern well” (17). The problems of essentializing on the basis of gender are obvious, but the fact that the Post viewed women as powerful and able to enact change through political activism demonstrates a more progressive side to the periodical than critics like Lindberg allow.

At times, the Post undermined those “sacred” and “hegemonic” ideals. Elizabeth Jordan’s “On Being a Spinster” takes on an institution the Post would have considered sanctified and foundational to traditional, American values—marriage. Jordan rejects the negative connotations of single womanhood and critiques “the basic point of view that almost any marriage, no matter how wretched, is better for a woman than no marriage at all” (214). Jordan argues that spinsters today are not like those of yesteryear, a burden to married siblings and “[taking] care of their children because she could earn her living in no other way. . . . This type of spinster is almost extinct” (214). In stark contrast, today’s single woman is,

self-supporting, independent, very busy and surprisingly contented. If she is missing the best things in life, she does not seem to realize it. . . . She has, in one way at least, a fuller and much more varied existence than the average married woman. For, in addition to her family and social life, she has her working life—office, professional, artistic, whichever it may be. In any case, it opens to her avenues and experiences her married sisters never have, unless they, too, are workers outside of their homes. (214)

These three articles show the Post’s willingness to critique “sacred, nationalistic, [and] hegemonic” ideals regarding traditional gender expectations. While I would not argue that the Post was entirely, or even largely, progressive, scholarship on the magazine tends to be reductive in its consideration of the Post as merely a conservative periodical.

A more forward-thinking Post also emerges when we turn from its editorials to its advertisements. Despite its high circulation rates, the Post was heavily reliant on
advertising revenue in order to keep its cost down to five cents per issue. This was half the cost of the *Journal* and a fifth of *Vogue*’s twenty-five cents per issue. Curtis’s strategy enabled the *Post* to gain high circulation rates and attract big advertisers like Campbell’s Soup and Paramount Pictures. In addition to ads that spoke to the middle class, Curtis and Lorimer were occasionally able to secure luxury advertisers like Steinway pianos and Packard Automobiles, which emphasized that luxury was affordable and more economical in the long term due to the higher quality of their products. Consequently, the advertisements in the *Post* are considerably more diverse than those found in more specialized magazines like *Vanity Fair*, in that they appeal both to readers’ middle-class values and to their desire for luxury.

Immediately following World War I, patriotic ad copy was particularly popular. Styleplus Clothes reminds men returning from war, “You will need new clothes almost the first thing” (25). The ad also contains an illustration of demobilized soldiers buying new clothes from a helpful Styleplus retailer—emphasizing that Styleplus supports our returning troops and is aiding their transition to civilian life. The ad offers prospective consumers various reasons for buying Styleplus, concluding, “So when Uncle Sam gives you his Well-done! and Good-bye! visit your local Styleplus store and buy a suit” (25); in other words, Styleplus will be there to when Uncle Sam is done with you. This ad would not only have appealed to soldiers returning home, but also to patriotic consumers who wanted to support companies that supported the troops.

But patriotism was not merely a marketing strategy for ads appealing to men. A 1919 Campbell soup ad links loyalty to one’s country to domesticity in its proclamation, “With Uncle Sam on one side and the American housewife on the other, Campbell’s
wholesome Tomato Soup is in the advance of health and good cheer” (23). This ad highlights health as an American virtue, featuring a cartoon of a Campbell’s Soup chef arm-in-arm with Uncle Sam and an American housewife, who holds an oversized Campbell’s Soup can in her arm. These ads capitalize on the return of America’s young men from overseas and the patriotism of Post readers. Nevertheless, as time went on, consumers were less concerned with the war and more interested in new fashion trends and new technologies, desires which were reflected in the Post’s advertising.

Modernity in consumer culture was most readily apparent in women’s fashion, and ads for clothing companies in the Post reveal mainstream culture’s increasing acceptance of a woman’s desire to be alluring and to be liberated from constrictive Victorian attire. For example, a 1924 Jantzen bathing suit ad compares the bathing wear of yore to the contemporary model, emphasizing the connection between women’s liberation and fashion:

Now women can swim!
Casually she pauses in her smart, trim Jantzen—welcoming coyly the appraisal of flattering eyes. Then—she springs—rises—straightens—and disappears in a graceful swan dive. Shades of yesteryear! Can this be the modern sister of the frightened young thing who “bathed” with trepidation and who couldn’t swim if she wished because skirts and trappings impeded? . . . With this new freedom of the Jantzen-stitch and the Jantzen patented features, women nowadays can swim. (54)

The ad includes a picture of a lithe, bobbed-haired swimmer wearing a Jantzen swimsuit and about to dive into the water, juxtaposed against a smaller photograph of a woman rigid and trapped in her cumbersome bathing dress, the year 1895 written in the bottom left-hand corner. No Victorian woman could have pulled off a swan dive, let alone welcomed—however coyly—the appraisal of flattering eyes without severe social
consequences. This ad, published the same year as Stoddard’s “Bobbed-Haired Thinking,” celebrated the liberation of the Modern Woman because Jantzen knew most women do not simply pursue fashion for its own sake but instead buy clothes that reflect their lifestyles. For women in the 1920s, life was increasingly active and required clothing that allowed for modern mobility.

The importance of style and the appearance of luxury were other appeals Post ads made to female consumers—consumers who were perhaps not able to afford high-end fashion like Chanel, but wanted to look like they could. A 1925 Phoenix Hosiery ad takes appeals to women’s desire for modern fashion at affordable prices:

The short skirt has come for a long stay, for it is a convenience that women will never willingly surrender. And its smartness is conspicuously enhanced by the charm of lovely hosiery . . . . This long-mileage hosiery is today on sale at better stores everywhere, in a sumptuous array of the smartest patterns and tints that the American public has ever had to choose from. It holds the vogue for women in this day of the short skirt. (188)

The use of words such as “smartness” and “vogue,” and the availability of this hosiery at “better stores everywhere” connects high fashion to accessibility—women “everywhere” can purchase this smart hosiery. The ad also highlights the trend of short skirts as having a “long stay,” while emphasizing the “long-mileage” of the hosiery itself. The woman in the Phoenix Hosiery ad is not concerned with the wholesomeness of her family’s food or her patriotic duty to her family. Rather, she yearns to be up-to-date in eschewing long, Victorian skirts and showing off her legs in stylish Phoenix Hosiery.

Comparing the Jantzen and Phoenix ads to the 1919 examples reveals the evolution of middle-class values during this decade. While Post features advocated nineteenth-century values, Post ads show a magazine compromising old-fashioned values with modern-day desires in the name of business. Kyvig describes the cultural effects of
mass-market magazines and advertising on the average consumer, arguing, “Enhanced awareness of what other Americans were actually doing in their daily lives, or at least appeared to be doing, stirred desires to do likewise” (187). With the heightened awareness of how the rest of America lived came the pressure to buy as the rest of America did. The Post participated in the standardization of the nation’s commodity culture through the considerable space each issue devoted to advertisements. Although some Post advertisers continued to appeal to traditional values, an emphasis on modern efficiency, affordability, and style became a much more common advertising strategy. Advertisers like Jantzen and Phoenix understood the capital to be earned by exploiting progressive advancements within American culture. Lorimer saw the direction in which mass culture was moving and, as the decade wore on, offered less-reactionary considerations of modern culture in the Post’s articles and fiction.

How the Post Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Jazz

The Post would make its most dramatic reversal on modern culture in its views on jazz. The magazine began the 1920s vilifying the experimental method but, by mid-decade, celebrated jazz as America’s music. Ruth Miller’s 1919 article “Our American Music Makers” argues that jazz has started “to creep into our higher forms of art” (68). According to Miller, Germany has lost its status as the center of the music world, and America is primed to take its place. Unfortunately, “instead of something reserved and dignified on the order of the minuet,” Americans have become obsessed with “this

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7 According to Cohn, Commercially, as a magazine that carried national advertising and allied itself with the newest business economics of standardization and national distribution, the Post was created to echo and reinforce in its contents the emerging concept of America as a nation unified by the consumption of standardized commodities. (9)
audacious shimmy music” which is “polluting our highest art forms” (70). For Miller, jazz cannot be considered high art because its creators include “those exciting heathen who infest sundry remote inlands” and “hardly fit into the musical ideal of an aesthete” (70). However, the current symphonic composers do not meet Miller’s standards either. Her depiction of the “rabid modernist” who “takes a simple God-fearing orchestra” and replaces it with “a weird collection of instruments” (70) is a high-art parallel to her description of jazz’s primitive originators and reveals the connections mainstream culture was making between modernism and jazz. Moreover, Miller claims that it was a modernist composer who brought jazz into the mainstream: “In fact practically the first composer who brought darky tunes into popularity took a number of their old melodies and paraded them about in a highly pretentious work all dressed up and scandalously disguised in Bohemian clothes” (68). Although the specific composer remains unnamed, Miller connects modernism and jazz, arguing that the controversial experimentalism of “futurist composers” and the “reckless spell” of jazz (70) are equally threatening to traditional standards of music composition.8

Yet not all is lost. There is hope for American music, and it is found in the music of the Average Citizen. Miller argues that there is an “exponent of modern music” that offers an “eloquent expression of ordinary human beings, of their dreams, ideals, their eager timid hopes and ambitions” (70). Music that corresponds to the desires and hopes of the broad middle class will rescue high art from the nefarious influences of jazz and avant-garde composers. Someday soon, the “real American music maker” will “write

8 Putnam may be referring to Antonín Dvořák who was the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City from 1892-95 and incorporated African-American spirituals into his 1893 New World Symphony.
great symphonies and operas as well as the beautiful songs and smaller orchestral numbers in which he has already proved himself adept” (70). Miller reassures Post readers that the “[p]ractical musician” (70) will prevail: we simply have to wait patiently for these rabid modernists and heathens to wear themselves out.

By 1920, the influence of jazz extended far beyond music to signify an approach to life with, according to the Post, detrimental societal consequences. Nina Wilcox Putnam examines the effects of jazz on mainstream culture in “Jazzing the Dollar.” In this article, Putnam adheres to the Post’s contention that America is essentially a classless society, arguing that, aside from “swells or millionaires,” Americans do not class themselves “for fear the label will stick” (12). Nevertheless, “something has happened to the world; and that terrific, stupendous thing is not, after all, the world war, organized labor, Bolshevism or woman suffrage, but the infinitely more far-reaching catastrophe of jazz” (12). Putnam’s article provides a new twist in the argument against jazz, in that she does not emphasize the so-called sinfulness, sensuality, and improvisational nature of the music, the typical arguments brought against jazz in this era.⁹ Instead, Putnam focuses on the alleged economic consequences of jazz and, perhaps more significantly, does not talk about jazz as a musical genre at all. Jazz has become a lifestyle, and, for Putnam, the desire for this lifestyle has not only increased the cost of living, it has also caused “the cost of increased living” (12).

⁹ See, for example, “Does Jazz Put the ‘Sin’ in Syncopation?” by Anne Shaw Faulkner in the August 1921 Ladies’ Home Journal. Faulkner argues,

Welfare workers tell us that never in the history of our land have there been such immoral conditions among our young people, and in the surveys made by many organizations regarding these conditions, the blame is laid on jazz music and its evil influence on the young people of to-day. Never before have such outrageous dances been permitted in private as well as public ballrooms, and never has there been used for the accompaniment of the dance such a strange combination of tone and rhythm as that produced by the dance orchestras of to-day. (16)
Putnam describes growing up in an era before jazz, when merchandise was paid in full at the time of purchase, as opposed to on credit, and people were content with staying at home. Nowadays people are too impatient to save up, because why wait when you can have a “snappy flat . . . on the dollar-down-dollar-when-you-catch-me plan?” (161). Furthermore, the home has practically been abandoned because “[people] know that an evening at home is a deadly bore and that the hours after work should be spent in a café or movie or a theater in order that one may be thoroughly jazzed up for the next day’s toil” (13). This “increased living” has caused people to become overly concerned with a fast-paced life, one that is preoccupied with materialism and instant gratification.

Although critiquing the onset and popularity of the installment plan was a consistent Post theme because buying on installments encouraged people to live beyond their means rather than prudently saving money, the argument Putnam launches against businesses using “jazz” to increase sales contradicts the usual pro-business Post message. Typically, the Post supported and reported on successful business strategies, but Putnam condemns a retail store for modernizing its look to increase sales. The storeowners redecorate, increase their prices, and limit merchandise on the sales floor to appear more exclusive. Despite these tactics, “stuff began to turn over like a sleeper who has eaten a Welsh rabbit without beer” (12). Why? “Because the place was all jazzed up, of course, and people will pay for jazz. Indeed there is only one other thing on which they seem to spend their money with equal pleasure, and that is hokum” (12). For Putnam, jazzing a place up indicates using unethical tactics to swindle people out of money, and consumers are so jazz-blind that they willingly pay more for style over substance.
Putnam’s larger point is that jazz has infiltrated every aspect of modern life, and analyzing the Post’s bibliographic code substantiates her claim. Alongside the second page of her piece is a very large ad for Stasny sheet music, proclaiming that Stasny has the sheet music to the popular song “Jazzin’ the Blues Away.” The ad emphasizes that Stasny is superior to other sheet music because “You dance to Stasny Music, you hear Stasny Song Hits in all the best shows. Whenever you dine at a fine restaurant you hear Stasny Music played” (161). The placement of an ad capitalizing on the popularity of songs like “Jazzin’ the Blues Away,” and emphasizing the omnipresence of Stasny music reinforces Putnam’s claims that jazz has taken over modern life. Putnam’s article and the Stasny ad demonstrate the Post’s complicated responses to jazz and the conflicting messages given to readers. Furthermore, this juxtaposition reinforces my argument that the Post’s advertising was often more progressive than its content. Stasny obviously thought it would attract more customers through jazz and, unlike Putnam, Post editors viewed this tactic as a legitimate marketing strategy. Putnam was accurate in her contention that jazz was changing American culture, since Post readers were not immune to the seduction of “increased living,” even while reading an anti-jazz article.

The articles by Miller and Putnam represent the Post’s early responses to jazz. However, by 1925, not only was jazz described in more laudatory terms, but the magazine also published articles written by members of the New York intelligentsia that reveal highbrow ambivalence toward jazz and complicate the Post’s initial assumptions regarding the avant garde and jazz. In January 1925, for example, Vanity Fair editor and Algonquin Round Table member Alexander Woollcott began a five-part serial entitled, “The Story of Irving Berlin.” The series was an in-depth narrative describing Berlin’s
life, beginning with his childhood and concluding with detailed accounts of the revenue Berlin brought to particular theaters.

Although Berlin was largely famous as a composer of jazz and ragtime, Woollcott attempts to dissociate Berlin from jazz by virtue of his fundamental adherence to melodic structure:

For jazz is ragtime gone daffy. But one who says that much ought straightway add the fact that, for all [Berlin’s] knack at the modern rhythms and all his swift response to the nervous accents of his hour, he has within him as his dearest possession a fundamental sweet melody that is as remote from—and as defiantly independent of—all that is meant by the word “jazz” as anything in this world could be. (101)

However, Woollcott’s definitive dissociation of Berlin from jazz is soon undermined by his attempt to define jazz:

All that is meant by the word “jazz”—a large order, that. For any discussion of jazz is made maddening by the circumstance that there will be as many meanings of the word used in the discussion as there are persons present. By jazz, you, for instance, may mean less the ribald and rowdy caricature, which a sufficient uproar of catcalls among the saxophones and muted trombones may make out of any composition. You may have rather in mind that nervously emphasized syncopation which expressed so well the debauch, the spree, the jag on which the whole world was minded to go when the great guns ceased firing. But your neighbor will be thinking only of the fantastic instrumentation achieved in the mad orchestras. Then I have heard a distinguished musician use the word “jazz” as a synonym for “popular music” and another use it as a synonym for “pep.” (101)

Woollcott’s depiction of the unstable significations of jazz begs the question: If jazz can essentially mean what one wants it to mean, why is Woollcott so anxious to sever Berlin’s associations with it? Woollcott’s difficulty in maintaining a fixed classification of either Berlin’s music or jazz exposes the complicated ambivalence this subject aroused in both the mass Post and the New York intellectual, who, according to Miller, is responsible for the jazz craze. While the Post was aware of jazz’s immense popularity,
and the potential profit to be made from articles featuring those in the jazz community, the associations of jazz with sensuality and “debauch” were still problematic for a periodical devoted to conservative values.

Woollcott’s convoluted definition of jazz implies a more complicated relationship between the intelligentsia and jazz than Stoddard, Miller, and Putnam would have readers believe. In fact, some highbrows were decidedly against jazz. Bloomsbury critic Clive Bell’s 1921 “Plus de Jazz” rang the death knell for jazz, and argued, “Intellect in Jazz circles is treated rather as money was once in polite society—it is taken for granted. Nobility, beauty, and intellectual subtlety are alike ruled out: the first two are held up to ridicule, the last is simply abused” (216). What inflamed Bell’s ire more than the mockery jazz made of traditional music standards was its lowering of aesthetic standards in general through its mass popularity. According to Bell, “[Jazz] encourages thousands of the stupid and vulgar to fancy that they can understand art and hundreds of the conceited to imagine that they can create it” (227). Like Miller, Bell fears a contamination of high art because of the mass appeal of jazz, a contamination that contained racial overtones, as Bell describes jazz as music “for those who sat drinking their cocktails and listening to nigger-bands” (218). Just as Miller attributed jazz to “those exciting heathen who infest sundry remote inlands,” Bell’s comment reveals that the real “problem” with jazz, for some critics, came from a refusal to acknowledge aspects of African-American culture as high art.

While Bell’s article predicted the death of jazz in 1921, by 1925 it was achieving rather lofty heights. Woollcott describes for Post readers how the highbrow Metropolitan Opera House sought to bring jazz into the high art fold by inviting Berlin, along with
George Gershwin and Jerome Kern, to write a jazz opera in “the effort to make a good
woman out of jazz” (101). Apparently, jazz was not too “daffy” for the Met, and it is
Berlin’s reputation as a composer knowledgeable in jazz that secures his invitation,
despite Wollcott’s insistence that Berlin’s fundamental sweetness is diametrically
opposed to jazz. This anecdote not only demonstrates the validation of jazz by the high
art community—Wollcott’s earlier hedging notwithstanding—but also serves to elevate
Berlin’s reputation in the eyes of Post readers, as he is not only popular, but obviously
well respected among high art circles as well.

Only a year later, the Post came to accept jazz, or, at least, its popularity among
readers, and ran a three-part serial by Paul Whiteman, the most popular jazz band leader
at that time. His first article appears immediately after the opening advertisements of
the February 27, 1926, issue, a prominent position that indicates the Post’s
acknowledgement of jazz as a topic of great interest to readers. Whiteman begins by
describing his first encounter with jazz as a moment of irresistible seduction:

catching as the smallpox, and spirit-lifting . . . . I liked it, though it puzzled me.
Even then it seemed to have vitality, sincerity, and truth in it. In spite of its
uncouthness, it was trying to say something peculiarly American, just as an
uneducated man struggles ungrammatically to express an original and true idea.
(“Jazz” 4-5)

Whiteman emphasizes the American nature of jazz, surrounded by words like “raucous,”
“crude,” and “uncouth,” indirectly calling up the image of the primitive, which is further
emphasized by the simile of the uneducated man. However, the primitive nature of jazz

10 The article’s byline credits Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride, which most likely means that
McBride did much of the writing. Cohn describes the “celebrity profiles” featured in the Post and how
celebrities often “collaborated” with ghostwriters on their pieces. Consequently, “One side effect of the
celebrity business was that collaborators were coming to see themselves as professionals, ghostwriting was
becoming a business” (187). Writers like McBride earned a considerable amount of money as ghostwriters
and contributed to the professionalization of this lucrative business.
as described by Whiteman does not negate its worth as an art form as it does for Miller
and Bell; rather, jazz’s raucous rhythm gives it a sincere vitality that is decidedly
American.

Whiteman reinforces the inherent Americanness of jazz in his March 6 article, in
which he describes his band’s journey to Europe, a sojourn he took in order, ironically, to
gain cultural capital with American audiences. According to Whiteman, American
audiences won’t accept jazz as a high art form until Europe first gives approval. The first
stop on the tour is London, where Whiteman discovers that, while jazz is a hit with
European audiences, British musicians prove incapable of improvisation; i.e., they cannot
jazz: “Jazz was simply not in their blood. They lacked the spontaneity, the exuberance,
the courage—I do not know what; the something, whatever it is, that we call American;
the indefinable something that is jazz” (32). Once jazz became internationally recognized
as America’s music, the Post found it increasingly difficult to continue condemning it.
After all, as the voice of the Every American, the Post could not disavow the nation’s
music.

When Whiteman returned to New York, he was honored with a gold crown at the
Waldorf and proclaimed the “king of jazz. It was a very heavy crown, and silly, I
suppose” (33). Upon his coronation, Whiteman seized the opportunity to reveal his plan
to hold a jazz concert at Aeolian Hall, to solidify jazz’s validation in the high art realm
for American audiences. His proposal was greeted with a decidedly hostile response:

I was called “fresh,” “publicity hungry,” “money mad”—and some of the
musicians I most admired, who had until then regarded me with a slightly amused
but tolerant air, now talked themselves red in the face about the insolence of “jazz
boys” who wanted to force their ridiculous efforts upon the world—by the world
meaning, I suppose, their own little coterie, the final court of critical appeal in
their opinion. Here’s something I have never been able to understand. Why should
it be supposed that all the good taste in the world is monopolized by a few people? Isn’t it possible that the so-called masses have considerable instinctive good judgment in matters of beauty that they never get credit for? (180)

Whiteman pinpoints the crux of the cultural divide: if many people think something is beautiful, or enjoy an activity, then it is considered part of “mass culture,” which decreases its value because of its wide appeal. The exclusivity of “good taste” arbiters is an issue taken up by contemporary scholars working on the historical reception of jazz.

As David Savran argues in his study of highbrow responses to jazz in the 1920s, The elite’s fervor for cultural order thus provided them with an important weapon in their drive to organize and rationalize the social and economic realms and to buttress their own power. For in certain respects, the ability to fashion a hierarchy (cultural or otherwise) and police its boundaries is far more important than the specific content of categories like highbrow and lowbrow. (47)

According to Whiteman, certain highbrows were policing a literal boundary—Aeolian Hall.

Whiteman refused to relinquish his dream of jazz at the Aeolian and his persistence was richly rewarded, as his description of the attendees signifies the appeal of jazz across the cultural spectrum, and includes highbrows: “I trembled at our temerity when we made out the list of patrons and patronesses . . . . These included Fannie Hurst, Heywood Broun, Frank Crowninshield, . . . Gilbert Seldes, Deems Taylor, and Carl Van Vechten” (180). But it is more than modernists in attendance: “It was a strange medley out there in front; society women, vaudevillians, concert managers come to have a look at the novelty; Tin Pan Alleyites, composers, symphony and opera stars, flappers and cake-eaters, all mixed higgledy-piggledy” (180). For some, jazz would always be the enemy, but for many, including those among the intellectual set, jazz became the lynchpin connecting popular and modernist culture through its emphasis on experimentalism and undermining of traditional conventions. For Post editors, jazz became a subject they
could no longer ignore or entirely condemn, as its popularity extended across the cultural spectrum, resulting in a mass appeal not unlike that of the *Post*.

**“By God + Lorimer, I'll make a fortune yet”: Post Fiction and F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Short fiction was a predominant feature of the *Post* during the Jazz Age. The number of short stories published in each issue grew considerably throughout the early twentieth century, and by the mid-twenties almost equaled the amount of space devoted to nonfiction. According to Cohn, “as popular literature a good deal of [the *Post’s* fiction] was very good indeed, but it was safe, it was conventional, and it shunned absolutely situations, characters, or ideas that undermined nineteenth-century American values and sensibilities” (189). Fiction was in particularly high demand because readers wanted cheap entertainment, and the *Post* provided its audience considerable entertainment for a mere five cents. Contrary to Cohn’s claim regarding the absolute rejection of controversial subject matter, I will argue that the *Post* gradually expanded what it considered acceptable content in response to the shifts in American culture. While some *Post* fiction, such as Mary Robert Rinehart’s Tish stories and Will Rogers’s tales of the Old West, continued to espouse conservative values, by 1929 *Post* mores were much less rigid. Fictional depictions of divorce, adventures of life abroad, and women entering the workforce became increasingly common in accordance with the growing frequency with which these events occurred in mainstream culture.

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11 Cohn specifically breaks down how much space the *Post* devoted to ads, nonfiction, and fiction as the twenties came to a close:

With advertising growing throughout the decade and with the percentage of advertising in each issue holding fairly constant at about 60 percent, the number of pages per issue and the amount of editorial content necessarily grew as well. By 1929 the average issue contained 180 pages, and one-third of the issues exceeded 200, at least 40 percent of which had to be filled with fiction and nonfiction. As a result, there were typically twenty or more pieces of material in a single issue and occasionally as many as twenty-eight pieces, exclusive of weekly features. (189)
Nalbo Bartley’s *A Woman’s Woman*, which was published serially from February to April 1919 and eventually appeared as a novel, represents the safe, conventional early fiction of the *Post*, while also providing a clear message to women who dare to question prescribed gender roles. The narrative concerns the shift from traditional nineteenth-century values and gender expectations to modern-day trends and behaviors and the threat this shift poses to home and hearth. Bartley’s protagonist is Densie Plummer, a middle-aged housewife in a lackluster marriage with three almost-grown children. The story begins with the family attending the eldest child’s high-school graduation, where we learn that Densie’s husband John is no longer attracted to her because she is frumpy—especially in comparison to the more modern mothers in the audience. Over the next few months, Densie’s marriage proceeds to deteriorate as John is seduced by the stock market and consequently becomes addicted to gambling, causing the Plummer family to plummet into debt. Densie, despite her husband’s admonitions, finds work to keep the family afloat, and thus begins her journey beyond the domestic sphere.

Over the course of the narrative, Densie becomes immensely successful in her professional endeavors, which include starting a business to help lower-income families and becoming a community leader for the suffrage movement. When John questions Densie’s new lifestyle, she replies,

... you and I were born at the end of a certain era—American Victorian ... a distinct era with certain beliefs and limitations and admirable qualities; and it has ended. Therefore, you and I, as many, many people of to-day, are dragged into the new era. ... We of the old régime must either be labeled hopeless by the younger generation and be passed by, left to live with memories; or else we must forge ahead despite the handicaps of our early environment and be one with this new generation and its platform. You have done so, in a sense, because you are a man and have a man’s rights—the rights that this past era unfairly gave to man and not
to woman. You have stayed in the world and caught up with the march, you have not had the petty, humiliating, endless tasks that fall to no one else but a woman—a woman with a family. (77)

Unfortunately, the more success Densie achieves, the more her family suffers and disintegrates: She separates from John, who falls for a youngish actress seeking the remains of his once-modest fortune. The eldest daughter, Harriet, moves to New York, where she becomes a man-hating feminist (there are also unsubtle hints that Harriet is a Bolshevik lesbian). Meanwhile, Sally, the middle child, falls for the rich, much older Rex Humberstone who says he will marry her but never does, consequently ruining her reputation. In addition, because Densie is so busy with her work, Sally never learns how to cook or clean properly, becoming nothing more than a pretty face whose beauty is fading as her elderly beau continues to delay matrimony.

However, it is Densie’s youngest child and only son who meets a particularly tragic end. Despite his gentle nature, Kenneth joins the army at the onset of World War I to prove to his father that he is brave. While on leave visiting his flapper girlfriend Geraldine, he returns to base late, is imprisoned as a result, and is shot trying to escape prison when Geraldine—the reason for his tardiness—comes to base demanding to see him. After Kenneth’s devastating demise, Densie realizes that she has no one but herself to blame for her family’s various misfortunes:

The unemployed husband, Sally, the nerve-racked feminist [Harriet], the unburied boy who mutely pleaded to lie in his own home! And there was no home. Densie realized that once more she must provide a home, that a home is a veritable joy of creation. No matter what else may change or be counted out the home must be kept if wars are to be won. Without homes there can be no sustained achievement or ultimate progress. Densie had been tempted by the modern enemy of women—the home-destroying spirit—and she had yielded. She should have withstood the enemy, weathered the difficulties, the stings of ridicule, the pricks of neglect—but kept the home. It was a sacred duty in which she had temporarily failed. (5)
Once the Plummers have established a new home, John finds a new job, and the narrative explains that his long unemployment was, in large part, because of Densie’s professional success: “She had trespassed on his territory, driven him from it—into nowhere” (5). The story concludes with a reassertion of traditional gender expectations:

to the man is given the power of intellect and the talent of logic, and to the woman is awarded the emotional power and the duty of spiritual influence over her home and all therein . . . . one must be careful in this new era that destruction is not misnamed progression. (5)

Through Densie’s fall and subsequent salvation, the narrative emphasizes to readers that nothing must threaten the sanctity of the home, and a woman must be willing to sacrifice her own happiness and her family’s financial security in order to maintain her role as wife and mother.

The heavy-handedness with which Bartley’s narrative reinforces gender expectations reflects values typical of the Post’s fiction at the commencement of the Jazz Age. Only five years later, a very different kind of narrative emerges, one that espouses the kind of progression that is labeled destruction in A Woman’s Woman. In 1924, Mary Stoneman Douglas penned “At Home on the Marcel Waves,” a story featuring two female protagonists, six-foot Augusta McCann and Miss Julia Trimble, the shy owner of a failing hair salon. Augusta blows into Miami from Cuba, instantly befriending Miss Julia and treating both her and the salon to extreme makeovers. Augusta has been single for most of her life, and her skepticism toward men is only surpassed by her contempt for passive and submissive women:

Men are bad enough. But these namby-pamby females, too fat and too thin and delicate and no good to anybody, I hate ‘em . . . . I’ve always had to jump around for them, and I’ve hungered for the time when I could get my hands on them and
make them jump around. Not just marcel and fix them so their surface would be all right, but strip and overhaul them from the keel up. (52)

Augusta transforms Miss Julia’s hair salon into a modernized spa and gym, so that the rich women vacationing at the various Miami resorts can engage in exercise and other healthful activities.

The salon expands, becoming the “it” spot for wealthy vacationers, and it is at this moment that a piccolo player named Andrey Gobchek enters the story to woo Augusta.\textsuperscript{12} After reading Bartley’s story, one might erroneously predict that Augusta will marry Andrey, quit the salon, and start a family, but this story demonstrates the Post’s growing acceptance of women’s liberation from the home. Andrey proves to be nothing more than a con man, out to take advantage of Augusta and the salon’s success. After Andrey’s ruse is exposed, Augusta refocuses on work, and her friendship with Miss Julia is repaired.

Unlike \textit{A Woman’s Woman}, where Densie’s work for the poor and the suffrage movement is condemned because it leads her to abandon her home, Douglas’s story presents two women finding fulfillment through their friendship and careers. The romantic interest and dreams of a life of domestic bliss turn out to be full of false promises. Instead, working in the salon with Miss Julia and facilitating women’s health and fitness is Augusta’s happy ending.

The shift in \textit{Post} fiction from thoroughly conservative to moderately progressive reflects the changes occurring in mainstream culture at this time. Additionally, as the predominant medium of American culture, the \textit{Post} also helped usher in these changes.

\textsuperscript{12} Despite the \textit{Post}’s gradual acceptance of women entering the workforce, its xenophobia remained consistent throughout the decade. When Augusta approaches Miss Julia about hiring Andrey at the salon, Miss Julia shrieks, “In my—with that name? Why, Augusta, are you crazy? He might be a foreigner” (54). The fact that Andrey turns out to be a con man reinforces the bias against immigrants on the basis of their allegedly inherent unscrupulousness.
The *Post* published many now-canonical writers, from Edith Wharton to William Faulkner, early in their careers, making them household names before they had reputations as literary geniuses. F. Scott Fitzgerald was one such writer, and the *Post* supported his work from the beginning stages of his career until five years before his death. In a study of Fitzgerald’s short stories Bryant Mangum observes, “The forty-seven stories which were published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1925-1933 phase of Fitzgerald’s career comprise . . . a stage [of his career] marked by his virtual employment by the *Post*” (77). Fitzgerald’s success in 1920 with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, established him as a popular writer with critical acclaim. For the *Post*, publishing a writer like Fitzgerald not only sold more magazines, but elevated the *Post*’s status as a periodical that published authors of renown in the literary community. Therefore, Fitzgerald represents a resolution of the professional writer/artist binary, and his work for the *Post*, while under-studied, is nonetheless important in understanding modernism as a complex network of artists, editors, agents, and audiences.

Fitzgerald’s short stories are often considered less complex than his novels, particularly *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby* (1925), an assumption that has resulted in a dearth of scholarship regarding the 178 stories he wrote between 1919 and 1940. Even if these stories are not “as good” as his novels (and that point is debatable), their vast quantity demands the attention of any scholar seeking to better understand Fitzgerald and his work. Fitzgerald’s publications in mainstream culture not only reveal a much more prolific writer than his five novels would indicate, but also a far more complex writer. Fitzgerald’s talent was such that it convinced the notoriously hard-to-
please Lorimer to publish stories that problematized traditional values and the American Dream.¹³

Fitzgerald’s relationship with the Post lasted from 1919 to 1935 and ended because Fitzgerald’s alcoholism had affected his writing to such a degree that the Post no longer considered his work up to its standards. Prior to his downfall, Fitzgerald earned a great deal of money from the periodical, enabling him to finance an extravagant lifestyle as his novels established his literary reputation.¹⁴ Fitzgerald exemplifies Sarah Churchwell’s claim that “American writers [in the 1920s] were negotiating two mutually exclusive ideologies: a European, aristocratic discourse of taste as ‘high class,’ and an American, middle-class, democratic egalitarianism” (138). While Ernest Hemingway looked down on Fitzgerald because of his preference for quickly producing short stories rather than taking the time to focus on writing a few brilliant novels, the truth is that Fitzgerald wanted and needed money more than he desired literary posterity.

Throughout the 1920s, Fitzgerald wrote many letters to his literary agent Harold Ober that specifically request he first contact the Post for particular stories because Lorimer was known for paying authors exceptionally well. While smaller-circulating

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¹³ Fitzgerald wrote five novels if we include his unfinished The Last Tycoon, which was published posthumously in 1941.

¹⁴ Fitzgerald’s earnings from the Post between 1925 through 1933 alone totaled $163,601. Mangum breaks down Fitzgerald’s earnings to show how he was essentially financially dependent on the Post for his income. His 1925 to 1933 earnings were “nearly four times greater than his income from three novels ($46,896). The figures suggest how popular Fitzgerald was during this central period of his life; in addition, they indicate how little, comparatively speaking, bookbuyers were willing to spend on his novels” (61). Furthermore, Whereas in the 1919-1924 years the Post published only eleven of the thirty-two stories—slightly more than thirty-four percent—to appear in that period, the percentage was much higher in the 1925-1934 period: the Post published forty-seven of the fifty-eight Fitzgerald stories—over eighty percent—that appeared in the nine years following the publication of The Great Gatsby. Not only did Fitzgerald earn more from the Post than any other source, but by the end of the twenties it published a vast majority of his stories, bestowing on Fitzgerald material riches and fame from mass exposure.
magazines like *The Smart Set* paid writers forty dollars per story in 1919, the *Post* paid $400 (*As Ever* 6-7), and by 1929, the *Post* paid on average $1,500 per work (Lindberg 57). Fitzgerald also often told Ober to attempt other commercial magazines such as *Collier’s* if the *Post* rejected the story in question. If these magazines also rejected the story, Ober was to approach highbrow magazines like *The Smart Set*. Fitzgerald wanted to be a famous writer, both for the money and the prestige, but his lifestyle (and Zelda’s medical expenses) required him to prioritize income over highbrow approval.

Nonetheless, Fitzgerald was keen to stay on good terms with the intellectual set and felt himself capable of playing both sides of the cultural divide. In a 1920 letter to Ober, Fitzgerald classifies a story he has mailed Ober as a “*Post* story” (*As Ever* 10) and mentions that *The Smart Set* has also been after him for work. In order to appease the *The Smart Set*’s editors, H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, Fitzgerald directs Ober to send “A Smile for Sylvo” to them because “I want to keep inright [sic] with Mencken + Nathan as they’re the most powerful critic [sic] in the country” (10-11). Clearly, Fitzgerald was interested in both the profits to be had by publishing in a mass-market magazine and in maintaining a good relationship with Mencken, whose vituperative contempt for the masses was infamous.

Fitzgerald’s preference for money over Mencken is exemplified in his correspondence with Ober over the publication of what became “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz.” Fitzgerald originally wrote the story as a novella entitled *The Diamond in the Sky*, and Ober struggled to find a commercial publisher. Fitzgerald expressed his disappointment in being unable to “get a real good price for the three weeks that story

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15 “A Smile for Sylvo” was eventually published as “The Smilers” in the June 1920 issue of *The Smart Set*.
represents” and directed Ober to send it to The Smart Set because “I’d much rather get no price but reap the subtle, and nowadays oh-so-valuable dividend that comes from Mencken’s good graces” (As Ever 35-36).\textsuperscript{16} Fitzgerald’s letters to Ober regarding “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” which The Smart Set published in 1922, reveal the author’s considerable skill in manipulating the literary market to his advantage. While Fitzgerald laments the inability to find a commercial publisher—and thus the higher payment he feels the work warrants—he was able to place the story in a venue that would further establish his literary reputation. Ultimately, Fitzgerald was able to reap material wealth from publishing in periodicals like the Post, while accruing highbrow dividends from Mencken and the critical reception of his novels.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1922, Fitzgerald predicted, “by God + Lorimer, I’m going to make a fortune yet” (As Ever 36), and he was right: At Fitzgerald’s height with the Post, he earned $4,000 per story. However, his desire for a fortune did not preclude a concern for his art, as evidenced in a letter Ober in which he wonders, “Is there any market at all for the cynical or pessimistic story except Smart Set [sic] or does realism bar a story from any well-paying magazine no matter how cleverly its [sic] done?” (7). Fitzgerald occasionally chafed at the artistic restraints the Post and other magazines of its ilk imposed on his

\textsuperscript{16} Mencken’s opinions on Fitzgerald wavered from novel to novel. He reviewed This Side of Paradise for The Smart Set and declared it, “The best American novel that I have seen of late” (qtd. in Some Sort 117). He was more ambivalent toward The Great Gatsby, which most reviewers considered a shining example of Fitzgerald’s artistic progression. Mencken’s review for The Baltimore Sun, labeled the novel, “a glorified anecdote,” while commending “the charm and beauty of the writing” (qtd. in Some Sort 218).

\textsuperscript{17} In Matthew Bruccoli’s Fitzgerald biography, he describes the reviews for The Great Gatsby as “the best of any of Fitzgerald’s books” (218). These laudatory reviews appeared in the little modernist magazines and helped establish Fitzgerald’s reputation as an artist. Gilbert Seldes’s review of the novel appeared in The Dial, proclaiming, “Fitzgerald has more than matured; he has mastered his talents and gone soaring in a beautiful flight, leaving behind him everything dubious and tricky in his earlier work, and leaving even farther behind all the men of his own generation and most of his elders” (qtd. in Some Sort 218).
work but apparently decided it was worth catering to the *Post* readership in order to maintain the lifestyle to which the Fitzgeralds had grown accustomed. Furthermore, Fitzgerald was able to sneak realism and cynicism cleverly into the *Post*, reinforcing his position as a commercially viable literary talent.

Mangum breaks down Fitzgerald’s earnings and creative freedom according to medium, analyzing both the financial and artistic returns Fitzgerald reaped from each:

[Between 1919 and 1940] Fitzgerald had three major markets: the book publishing industry from which he earned $120,000; the magazine market which netted for him over $250,000; and the movie industry, from which he made over $110,000. From an artistic viewpoint the book industry was the most important, and it was also the market that brought in a relatively small amount of money. The least important for its contribution to Fitzgerald’s artistic development was the movie industry, which, in terms of money earned for actual time spent working, was the most profitable . . . . Standing between these two outlets for his work was the magazine market. It served neither a purely artistic purpose as did the book industry, nor did it act solely as a financial resource as did the movie industry. (6)

Fitzgerald’s work for the *Post* served a dual purpose: It enabled him to earn a living, and it enabled him to utilize his artistic talent to a greater degree than his work in the movie industry. Characters like Myra from “Myra Meets His Family” and Ardita Farnham, the heroine in “The Offshore Pirate,” echo Rosalind Connage from *This Side of Paradise* and prefigure *The Great Gatsby*’s Daisy Buchanan. As Mangum argues,

The writer of *This Side of Paradise* did not simply blossom into the author of *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*. He worked a lot in between. The stories, particularly his tailoring of them for particular buyers, provide “a more orderly writer’s notebook” through which his development as a professional writer can be followed, almost literally, month by month. (5)

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18 Unfortunately, despite the increased pay he received from the *Post*, Fitzgerald was never able to stay solvent, at one point owing Ober over $4,000 (*As Ever* 118).

19 Unless otherwise noted, stories mentioned were first published in the *Post*. 
Fitzgerald’s short stories provide critics with more than rough drafts of characters later developed in his longer works. His work for the Post reveals a writer adept in a variety of genres—both fiction and non-fiction. Stories like “The Ice Palace” (1920) contain fantastical elements that lean more toward the gothic than Fitzgerald’s typical, more realistic fare. A young southern girl named Sally Carrol Harper falls in love with the northerner Harry Bellamy. Despite the alarm this arouses in her friends, Sally Carrol agrees to marry Harry and visit his family up north. Harry takes Sally to a winter carnival, featuring a towering ice palace that contains an underground ice labyrinth. Sally becomes separated from her group and hopelessly lost in the labyrinth. As she collapses from fear, the cold character of the North becomes personified:

She was alone with this presence that came out of the North, the dreary loneliness that rose from ice-bound whalers in the Arctic seas, from smokeless trackless wastes where were strewn the whitened bones of adventure. It was an icy breath of death; it was rolling down low across the land to clutch at her. (170)

Harry rescues Sally before she freezes to death, but the damage is done: she breaks off their engagement and returns home to the South, vowing never to venture North again. The story, and particularly the quoted passage, contains imagery combining Melville and Poe with Jazz Age romance, creating scenes demonstrating Fitzgerald’s breadth as a writer as he explores different literary styles.

Fitzgerald’s work not only enabled him to explore different avenues as an artist, but it also pushed the boundaries of the Post’s mainstream mores by problematizing traditional gender expectations and glamorizing the decadent upper class. His first Post story, “Head and Shoulders,” was published less than a year after A Woman’s Woman and features a female protagonist who accidentally becomes a literary star. The story describes the romance between brainy Princeton alum Horace Tarbox and aspiring
actress/ vaudeville performer named Marcia Meadow. Marcia is slightly older than Fitzgerald’s typical heroine, but conforms to his penchant for blondes and also possesses the Fitzgerald flapper personality. For Horace and Marcia, opposites attract— they marry and have a daughter, whom they name after her mother. Because intellectual Horace does not bring in much income, Marcia continues to work, promising, “When you pull down three hundred a month I’ll quit” (82). However, Horace becomes obsessive about his “abstract theories” and his health begins to suffer so Marcia suggests he join a gymnasium (still a relatively new activity in this era), where he discovers his talent for the trapeze. His skills are such that a scout at the gym approaches Horace and he becomes a trapeze artist starring in shows at the Hippodrome, thus enabling Marcia to return to the home.

As a housewife, Marcia quickly becomes bored and decides to write a novel, an updated version of Samuel Pepys’s diary which Marcia titles Sandra Pepys, Syncopated. The novel is written in Marcia’s conversational voice, complete with grammatical errors and replete with slang. The book is published, first serially in a magazine and then in book form—in other words, she becomes a professional writer like Fitzgerald. Surprisingly to Horace, her book is a great success, particularly among intellectuals. A renowned French philosopher, Anton Laurier, comes to visit the Tarboxes, showing Horace a review that lauds Marcia’s book as “A distinct contribution to American dialect literature . . . . No attempt at literary tone; the book derives its very quality from this fact, as did Huckleberry Finn” (86). In other words, her book is a literary smash because it is not literary in nature—Marcia, not unlike jazz, is appropriated by the intelligentsia through an aesthetic style that thwarts high art conventions. Her slang-ridden, working-
class dialect with its lack of a “literary tone,” i.e., one that implies higher education and exposure to culture, parallels jazz’s origins from the margins and flouting of musical conventions.

The couple’s roles become reversed, much to the chagrin of Horace. A newspaper article praising Marcia’s book proclaims, “It is said that the young couple have dubbed themselves Head and Shoulders, referring doubtless to the fact that Mrs. Tarbox supplies the literary and mental qualities while the supple and agile shoulders of her husband contribute their share to the family fortunes” (86). In actuality, “Head and Shoulders” was Marcia’s nickname for them in the early days of the relationship, when Horace was working on his theories and she was making money onstage, shimmying her shoulders among other body parts. Here, Fitzgerald creates an ironic twist that pokes fun at the fickleness of the intelligentsia: Laurier the philosopher ignores a fellow thinker in Horace to gush over Marcia, whose down-to-earth street smarts make her decidedly unlike the typical philosopher. However, the irony is not only reserved for the Bobbed-Haired Thinking crowd, since, in making Marcia the “head,” Fitzgerald inverts the gendered cliché naming the “man as the head of the family” that is promoted in A Woman’s Woman. Rather than slink away from professional success, as Densie Plummer does in order to rescue her family from destruction, Marcia takes these shifts in stride, and her family remains intact. Horace is frustrated by the fact that she is now considered the intellectual, while his contribution to the household income depends on physical prowess—something he, for all of his brains, had not predicted in his Princeton prodigy days. The story concludes with Horace a bit bitter about the way things have turned out, but the overall tone of the story is one of humorous irony, as opposed to the polemical
disapproval expressed in *A Woman’s Woman* when Densie becomes a successful professional.

Fitzgerald again inverts gender expectations in “The Swimmers,” published in the *Post* in 1929. This story also introduces a subject still largely considered controversial by *Post* editors—divorce. The narrative’s conflict resides in the main character Henry Marstand’s decision to divorce his adulterous French wife Choupette, whose latest dalliance with the older, wealthier Charles Wiese has been ongoing for over a year. Not only is the subject of divorce a driving force behind the plot, but Henry also takes on a stereotypical feminine position in pursuing full custody of his two sons because he wants them educated in America and doesn’t trust Choupette to send them to the right schools. Henry agrees to meet Choupette and Wiese on his boat, ostensibly to try and work out the details of the divorce without involving lawyers. However, as they motor into the bay, Choupette and Wiese attempt to blackmail Henry with a bought doctor’s note claiming Henry is an unfit parent due to a fabricated previous nervous breakdown. As Wiese presents this document, the battery in his boat runs out, and they begin to drift with the tide out to sea. Henry is the only one of the three who knows how to swim, and he agrees to rescue them on the condition that he is granted full custody of the boys.

Although divorce is an understandable choice for Henry, Fitzgerald was concerned the *Post* would reject “The Swimmers,” and his fears were not unwarranted.

Prior to publication, Ober wrote to Fitzgerald, stating,

The *Post* are [sic] taking THE SWIMMERS and they are paying $4000 for it. They say the story was a little difficult for them in spots, but it was so unusually good that they could not resist it. When he says it was difficult in spots he means, of course, the part about divorce, etc. (*As Ever* 144)
Despite its controversial elements, *Post* editors recognized the aesthetic worth of “The Swimmers” and did not ask Fitzgerald to revise it. Fitzgerald even offered to take out the divorce plot so that it would conform to the *Post* paradigm, but Ober replied that there was not enough time to revise and “as a matter of fact, they intend to publish the story exactly as it stands, with perhaps a change of one or two words” (145). The publication history of “The Swimmers” thus undermines Cohn’s assumption that the *Post* “shunned absolutely” anything that undermined traditional family values, and, moreover, it shows that the *Post* was willing to pay a considerable amount of money for work it considered “unusually good,” as opposed to only supporting writers who adhered to the *Post’s* social agenda.

Most of Fitzgerald’s stories focused on youth, wealth, and love—in other words, the perfect ingredients for escapist fiction, but, like *The Great Gatsby*, they also exhibited a degree of skepticism regarding the reality behind the American Dream. Fitzgerald’s stories and essays simultaneously glamorized and critiqued the upper class, further demonstrating his deftness with multiple perspectives. As Mangum argues, “in a magazine for middle America [Fitzgerald] became the specialist in upper class life—an historian of the wealthy who could make his chronicles as amusing to the average citizen as they were sometimes, perhaps, tragic to him” (31). Mangum’s assumption that middle-class readers would not enjoy reading about the pitfalls of being rich is rather simplistic, but Fitzgerald’s essays reveal his own bittersweet feelings on the subject of class. In the 1924 nonfiction piece entitled, “How to Live on $36,000 a Year,” Fitzgerald presents an ironic perspective on the pitfalls of conspicuous consumption and the hardships of the
“new money” class. Again, Fitzgerald pushes against the Post’s boundaries, this time in the nonchalant depiction of his reckless spending, a practice typically condemned by the practical and prudent Lorimer.

“How to Live on $36,000 a Year” also provides Post readers with Fitzgerald’s humorous observations regarding wealth and social class, which have little to do with income and are primarily based on appearance. While this essay is thoroughly satirical in nature, the Fitzgeralds’ spending led to dire consequences for the family, which are only obliquely implied here. After balancing his checkbook, Fitzgerald discovers that, technically, he is poor. However, he rejects his impoverished state by proclaiming, “Poverty means being depressed and living in a small remote room and eating at a rôtisserie on the corner, while I—why, it was impossible that I should be poor! I was living at the best hotel in New York!” (22). For Fitzgerald, class is not determined by whether or not he can actually afford to live in the best hotels; instead, the fact that he is living in a luxury hotel establishes his “wealth,” or, at least, prevents him from being poor. Fitzgerald’s article depicts a man consumed by the Veblenian concept of conspicuous consumption as a leisure-class mandate and struggles to maintain his upper-

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20 Recently, William J. Quirk analyzed Fitzgerald’s income tax records, courtesy of Bruccoli, in conjunction with information from the Bureau of Labor’s Consumer Price Index to discover that a yearly salary of $36,000 in 1924 would equal $720,000 today and was thus “a salary well beyond a majority of Post readers. . . . While Fitzgerald exaggerates his own income in this piece, he still earned well beyond the average, thus becoming a spokesperson/representative of the upper class for the Post’s middle-class readership” (“What F. Scott”).

21 In “What Makes a Social Class?” Pierre Bourdieu theorizes class in similar terms as Fitzgerald, that is, as relational and a matter of “attraction” versus “repulsion”:

This sense of one’s place is at the same time a sense of the place of others, and, together with the affinities of habitus experienced in the form of personal attraction or revulsion, is at the root of all processes of cooptation, friendship, love, association, etc., and thereby provides the principle of all durable alliances and connections, including legally sanctioned relationships. (5)
class status when his consumption exceeds his income. In reality, the Fitzgeralds frequently moved around across the United States and Europe, in large part to escape debt, but also because they quickly became bored or wore out their hosts’ welcome.

As nascent nouveau riches, the Fitzgeralds have also had to reconcile their preconceptions of this class with its realities:

Now when you say “newly rich,” you picture a middle-aged and corpulent man who has a tendency to remove his collar at formal dinners and is in perpetual hot water with his ambitious wife and her titled friends. As a member of the newly rich class, I assure you that this picture is entirely libelous. I myself, for example, am a mild, slightly used young man of twenty-seven, and what corpulence I may have developed is for the present a strictly confidential matter between my tailor and me. (94)

Fitzgerald, as an insider to the new money class, seeks to correct assumptions that were probably shared by many Post readers while, rather comically and self-deprecatingly, distancing himself from those negative images. As an authority on the “newly rich,” Fitzgerald seeks to redefine it and undermine an assumed mass bias against the wealthy. Fitzgerald’s article is thus amusing and tragic, as it ironically presents the expectations of the leisure class and the fragility of one’s social status, even after one has achieved considerable success.

22 As Thorstein Veblen argues in The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions, Closely related to the requirement that the gentleman must consume freely and of the right kind of goods, there is the requirement that he must know how to consume them in a seemly manner. His life of leisure must be conducted in due form. . . . High-bred manners and ways of living are items of conformity to the norm of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption. (75)

23 Fitzgerald also describes the failure of his play The Vegetable and his continued overspending, Fitzgerald to take stock of his whirlwind year as a new money man:

I was $5,000 in debt, and my one idea was to get in touch with a reliable poorhouse where we could hire a room and bath for nothing a week. But one satisfaction nobody could take from us. We had spent $36,000, and purchased for one year the right to be members of the newly rich class. What more can money buy? (97)

Here, Fitzgerald describes class in terms of appearance over reality: You can still be upper class, or at least nouveau riche, as long as your ritzy lifestyle is made visible, never mind that next week you and your family will be living in the poorhouse.
Fitzgerald explains to *Post* readers that he has decided to scale back expenses after ending up in the red month after month. The plan is to “cut them away to almost nothing—or at least to $1500 a month” (94). There is a considerable amount of irony in this figure, as Fitzgerald’s new, scaled-down monthly budget represents almost 70% of the average American’s yearly salary in this decade. When Zelda tells him to reduce the budget further, Fitzgerald replies, “We can’t. We’re too poor to economize. Economy is a luxury. We could have economized last summer—but now our only salvation is extravagance” (97). Obviously, this is a humorous way of portraying the Fitzgeralds’ precarious financial situation (which was actually quite serious by this point), but also a wink at *Post* readers whose lives required economizing and budgeting. Fitzgerald justifies their foolhardy spending practices by claiming they are necessitated by class obligations. Fitzgerald ironically declares that the middle- and lower classes are lucky, because they are free from the “responsibility” of having to appear wealthier than one is. The Fitzgeralds, on the other hand, are trapped by the demands of conspicuous consumption, and the only way they can maintain their social status is through the appearance of wealth. Unfortunately, this facade has cost them a great deal of actual money, despite the substantial fortune Fitzgerald had earned through the *Post*.

Through his short stories and nonfiction pieces, Fitzgerald not only achieved his financial goals as a professional writer, but also made significant aesthetic strides that

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24 Five months later, Fitzgerald wrote “How to Live on Nothing a Year,” which was a retelling of the Fitzgeralds’ sojourn to Europe in an attempt to economize, since, according to the friend who invites them, the cost of living abroad is much cheaper than in America. Unsurprisingly to *Post* readers who had read the original essay, the Fitzgeralds’ experiment failed completely.
raised the *Post’s* threshold for the cultural changes the Jazz Age wrought. Although Mangum argues that Fitzgerald, “in order to earn a regular income,” recognized that he “at least verbally, [had] to espouse the American Dream” (58), the examples I have described reveal Fitzgerald challenging *Post* ideals, especially the American Dream, and his short fiction demonstrates Fitzgerald’s ability to successfully manipulate the professional/artistic binary. There is no doubt that Fitzgerald increased his output to earn as much money as possible, but, as his nonfiction indicates, his espousal of the American Dream was ambiguous at best. If hard work and wealth only result in the pressure to appear more successful and tempt one to live beyond one’s means, the American dream quickly becomes a Sisyphean nightmare. By the 1920s, American society was increasingly based on consumption and consumption on credit whenever possible. Consequently, the American dream became more about the amount of wealth one could display, as opposed to a sense of satisfaction derived from adequately providing for one’s family.

While some of Fitzgerald’s stories did adhere to conventional understandings of the American Dream, Fitzgerald was also able to subtly undermine the *Post’s* political agenda by exposing the masquerade of social class and the constant deferral of the Dream. Fitzgerald’s essay, while ironic, nonetheless reveals a man with money rapidly slipping through his fingers like so much sand and anxious over where he and his family would reside in a week—and his yearly salary was ten times that of the average American. Furthermore, his depictions of divorce, working women, and changing gender dynamics show the *Post* increasingly willing to publish subject matter it had previously deemed inappropriate. As the Average Citizen was confronted by these cultural changes...
more often, the *Post* featured them, and Fitzgerald’s perspective on them, with increasing frequency. Fitzgerald’s work in the *Post* reveals his exploration of character types, literary genres, and elements of modern life, while his regular appearances in the *Post* show his profitability for a magazine, somewhat begrudgingly, entering the Jazz Age.

“*In spite of his business, he is a man*”: Gilbert Seldes as Advocate for the Middle Class

Gilbert Seldes is not a name one typically hears in a list of canonical modernists; however, he has become increasingly important for scholars considering modernism as a cultural formation due to the role he played in establishing the aesthetic reputations of works like *The Waste Land*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Ulysses* in his reviews for *The Dial*. According to Michael North, Seldes was “the very first critic to acclaim [*The Waste Land*] as the quintessential example of literary modernism” (141). Additionally, from 1922-23, the period scholars like North consider modernism’s zenith, Seldes was also *The Dial*’s managing editor. Seldes holds a unique position in the history of modernism, as he was “the only one involved in the extensive private negotiations that brought [*The Waste Land*] to *The Dial* [and] helped to shape public perception of it after publication” (141). Consequently, in considering modernism as a social network, scholars have begun to recognize how crucial Seldes’ contributions were to both the publication and reception of modernist works.

While Seldes was considered a member of the intelligentsia, he became famous for his 1924 text *The Seven Lively Arts* in which he argued that elements of popular culture such as jazz and film should be considered art. Seldes was the first to consider
popular culture worthy of serious criticism, and he represents the early connections
between modernism and popular culture that were later ignored by scholars emphasizing
modernism’s origins in high art. Nonetheless, as North argues,

If it now seems somewhat remarkable that the same person who made American popular culture a legitimate object of criticism also played a central role in formulating the public definition of literary modernism, and that [Seldes] should have done these two things at exactly the same time, it is because antipathy to popular culture has become, over the years, an indispensable part of accepted definitions of modernism. (141)

Much of the work on Seldes by critics like North and David Chinitz focuses on the role he played in legitimizing elements of popular culture as valid art. What has yet to be analyzed is his later, prolific work for the Post, in which he advocates for the Average Citizen and reveals contempt for highbrow pretension similar to that expressed in other Post articles such as “On Being Bourgeois” and “Bobbed-Haired Thinking.”

Seldes and Stoddard are not writers who would have agreed on very much, especially politically. While Stoddard represents the Post at its most conservative, Seldes was very liberal. In discussing these politically oppositional writers, North nonetheless draws a connection between them on the basis of their mutual recognition of the changes wrought in culture during this time period: “Cheerleaders for the popular arts like Seldes and conservative opponents like Stoddard . . . sensed that something fundamental was changing in the way that art and society informed one another, and both sides felt that modernist literature was part of that change” (172). Lorimer also recognized these fundamental changes, that readers were interested in these changes, and that publishing articles examining these changes from various perspectives would result in higher profits.

Stoddard’s conservative ideology remained consistent throughout the 1920s, and he repeatedly connected the intelligentsia and avant-garde art with images of the invading
immigrant hell-bent on transforming America into a Bolshevik state. Seldes, on the other hand, made a considerable shift in his cultural perspective during the time period in which he contributed to the Post: he came to increasingly favor mass culture’s inclusiveness over highbrow elitism. In The Seven Lively Arts, Seldes described the middle class as “those who are invariably ill at ease in the presence of great art until it has been approved by authority” and proclaimed, “Be damned to these last and all their tribe!” (296). But by 1927, Seldes was a frequent contributor to a mass-market magazine that marketed itself as the voice of the middle class. Moreover, unlike Fitzgerald and his upper-class insight, Seldes was not published as an expert on highbrow culture; instead, his work for the Post shows Seldes advocating for the Average Citizen in the plight against the tyranny of highbrow arrogance.

Seldes’s work for the Post should not be read as a rejection of his earlier promotion of modernism as a revolutionary development in the high-art realm. As Michael Kammen argues, “It should be understood, however, that [Seldes] did not repudiate the best of high culture. He simply rejected highbrow snobs and insisted that popular culture deserved and required serious critical scrutiny” (26). For Seldes, the most difficult obstacle to overcome in establishing popular-art criticism was the highbrow autocracy: “Seldes the man and critic was a cultural democrat. Although he genuinely wished to elevate taste levels, he respected the diversity that he encountered among cultural preferences. He found excellence, and mediocrity, at all levels” (13). Seldes’s commitment to popular culture and democratic perspectives on art and culture made him an ideal Post contributor. Furthermore, as a member of the intelligentsia turned advocate
for the ordinary person, Seldes simultaneously possessed authority and expertise regarding the art world as he appealed to the largely middle-class readership of the *Post*.

Seldes’ tenure with the *Post*, in which he wrote over twenty articles, lasted from 1927 to 1929. In “What Happened to Jazz: Rejected Corner Stones,” his first *Post* piece, Seldes, who was mentioned in Paul Whiteman’s list of “patrons and patronesses” at the Aeolian (180), critiqued highbrow culture as a false authority slow to catch on to the value of popular culture:

As far as I can trace it, no word of critical approval, or even of serious consideration, came to Charlie Chaplin until after he made his famous contract for $670,000 for one year’s work in February, 1916. Certainly the great flood of writing about him which gave him his due credit as a great artist did not come until he had presented *The Kid*; but it is estimated that $25,000,000 were being spent by the public at the movie box-offices to see the films he made before *The Kid*. (102)

Here, Seldes claims that, despite assumptions to the contrary, the public recognizes the aesthetic worth of Chaplin ahead of the “highbrows” (102), who only acknowledge Chaplin as an artist after his films have made millions—i.e., are commercially popular. According to Seldes, “no matter how far ahead [highbrows] are of each other, they are always five or ten years behind the average man in making their discoveries” (102). This runs counter to the highbrow’s avant-garde reputation, instead arguing that cultural biases have led the intelligentsia to become more reactionary than innovative.

In later articles, Seldes would take on specific members of the intelligentsia, including former editorial competitors. For Seldes and the *Post*, The Smart Set’s H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, as well as Sinclair Lewis, because of his 1922 novel
Babbitt, embodied highbrow arrogance. However, “Babbitt” soon became the lesser evil when compared to Mencken’s epithet for the Average Citizen—“boob.” A few months after “What Happened to Jazz,” Seldes published “The Boob Haters,” where his frustration with highbrow pomposity inspires a rather hilarious commentary: “homo boobiens, the mass known as the booboisie, which has changed our democratic form of government into a boobocracy. There is against this poor boob a bill of complaint running into hundreds of bound volumes” (43). For Seldes and the Post, not only was the contempt for the masses (and, specifically, the middle class) misguided and childish in its name-calling, but also the amount of effort exerted in this endeavor was excessive and unnecessary.

Attacks on the middle class and popular culture were the primary factors in Seldes’s shift from highbrow venues like The Dial to mass magazines like the Post after writing The Seven Lively Arts. Kammen observes, “[Seldes] had an impulse to cut against the grain, and he tended to advocate whatever it was currently fashionable to attack” (9). As modernists and highbrows sought to distinguish themselves from the booboisie through mockery and a verbal rejection of the commercial marketplace, Seldes began publishing in the largest mass-market venue available. Furthermore, Seldes was not only actively participating in consumer culture but became a staunch supporter of the masses and the middle class. While Fitzgerald’s stories and essays reinforced his reputation as “historian of the wealthy” (Mangum 31), Seldes left the coterie realm of modernism to

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25 Sinclair Lewis had aroused special contempt in Lorimer, because he had published Lewis’s early stories and helped establish his reputation as a writer, only for Lewis to betray his scorn for the Average Citizen in Main Street and then to a greater degree in Babbitt. Lewis’s short stories, like Fitzgerald’s, attempted to bring the Post into the modern era; unfortunately, his novels were too explicit in their critique of the middle class for him to continue working for Lorimer. See Cohn for more on Lewis’s falling out with Lorimer and the Post.
argue for popular culture and against highbrow conceit, using the mass Post as his platform. Despite his own highbrow status, “Seldes disliked the terms highbrow and lowbrow because he felt that they created or conveyed a misleading if not false dichotomy” (Kammen 91-92). For a cultural democrat like Seldes, the manufactured antagonism between the highbrows and the masses (which included middle- and lower classes) distracted from the exciting developments in culture and erroneously ignored the similarities between high art and popular culture.

“The Boob Haters” also commenced a line of argument Seldes continued to follow in future articles, namely, that the highbrows are hypocrites for condemning the boobs as “a flock of sheep” who “are certain to follow the leader; . . . they tend to form a mob and, as the mob is always at the level of its meanest elements, to commit stupidities or crimes under the sway of mob psychology” (43). According to Seldes, the highbrows, though less in number, are just as likely to play Follow the Leader: “while the boobs all go to Chinatown in a rubberneck wagon, the aesthetes all go to Harlem night clubs in taxis. They all suffer the same crazes, only it is a craze for period furniture or cubist painting, while the boob crazes are for radios and day beds” (44). For Seldes, there is no significant difference between the taste of the masses and the interests of highbrows, since both largely result in a group of people doing a particular thing because other people of their ilk do it too.

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26 When Seldes married Alice Wadhams Hall in 1924, they spent part of their European honeymoon with the Fitzgeralds. Kammen relates, “Seldes and Fitzgerald became good friends despite Seldes’ critical review of Fitzgerald’s early fiction, especially his ‘deplorable’ short stories and The Beautiful and Damned (1922). . . . The friendship would be considerably strengthened, however, when Seldes wrote a rave review of The Great Gatsby for the Dial in 1925” (109).
Seldes’s concludes “The Boob Haters” with one final sally against highbrow arrogance, one that speaks to the subjective bias upon which the boobocracy was established:

But the boob hater has one crushing argument left. It is that the rich who go in for palmistry, and the professors who become jingoes, and the sophisticates who accept psychoanalysis—that these are boobs, too, and that the only really superior people—the aristocracy of the mind—are the very few indeed, the thinnest slice of the upper crust. It is impossible to identify them by the ordinary means. They are not the rich or the leisured class; they are not the educated class; they are not the artists—as anyone who has compared an artists’ quarrel to a quarrel between truck drivers will know. In fact, the only distinguishing mark of the man who is not a boob turns out to be that he is a boob hater. (44)

For Seldes, a Harvard graduate who associated with avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso and E. E. Cummings, there is no stable definition for the mental aristocrat; critics like Mencken simply deem anyone outside of their coterie a “boob” and behave as though no further justification is necessary. The boob-hater is defined by his hatred of boobs and nothing else. It is the invention of an elusive upper-upper crust that incites Seldes’s acrimony, since the highbrows find ways to exclude people and aspects of culture through meaningless, arbitrary standards that have nothing to do with class, education, or creative capacity. Boobery is in the eye of the highbrow beholder.

Seldes returns to the distinctions between the mass and the highbrow in “A Super-American Credo.” He begins by describing the “scientific research” currently being conducted on “the mind of the average American” (23). This research has uncovered sundry superstitions of the average American: “That large dogs are more affectionate than small ones,” “That a doctor knows so much about women that he can no longer fall in love with one of them,” and “That something mysterious goes on in the rooms back of chop-suey restaurants” (23). Seldes then directly addresses his readers,
These are the things which you, if you are an average American, are supposed to believe; if not these, then a sufficient number of the thousand similar beliefs credited to you by the investigators. Not only do you believe these things, but they are fundamental in making you what you are, affecting your intelligent life as much as the length of your thigh affects your stride. From knowing these things about you, the scientists can judge your “probable behavior in the face of unaccustomed stimuli”—as, for example, what you will do when an earthquake rocks your house, when you hear that a Lindbergh has flown across the Atlantic, and when you meet a Fiji Islander for the first time. (23)

However, with all of this attention focused on the Average Citizen, the intelligentsia has committed a grievous error, in that “the investigators of the boob mind have so far failed to supply a body of beliefs held by the super-American himself . . . . We have a right to better acquaintance with our supermen” (23). Thankfully for Post readers, Seldes has taken it upon himself to investigate some of the superstitions of the highbrow, revealing them to be just as absurd as those of the everyday American: “That there is a great difference between six lowbrows telling dirty stories in a Pullman smoker and six intellectuals telling dirty stories in a New York speak-easy,” “That going to, and reporting on, cocktail parties constitutes a significant part of the literary life,” and “That if you join a lodge you are a herd man; but if you join a literary group and lunch with the same people every day you are a man of force and originality” (45). These claims reflect Seldes’s irritation with New York intellectuals, particularly the Algonquin Round Table, due to their cliquey behavior and sheep-like mentality. This article reinforces the claims made in “The Boob Haters”: The distinctions between the masses and the intelligentsia are arbitrary, at best, and for every ridiculous “average-American” endeavor, there is an equally foolish highbrow activity.

In 1929, Seldes combines his arguments against supercilious highbrows with his literary acumen in “The Business Bogeyman,” in which he advocates for more realistic
depictions of the middle class in fiction. According to Seldes, the trend Lewis started in *Babbitt* of mocking the middle-class has finally started to fade away. Seldes posits that this drop-off is due to the flimsiness with which the businessman character was constructed:

The fictional figure which represented the business man was dressed in correct clothes and shaved with the latest razor and was appropriately bald in spots and used the most highly publicized tonics—the surface was right in every detail and the whole world recognized the surface. But there was no one underneath. (29)

The lack of true verisimilitude, the kind that comes from a genuine character study, in favor of an over-dependence on parody, has led to a momentary dearth in highbrow fiction about the middle class. Now that the highbrows have exhausted their satirical capacities, Seldes hopes for a more complex treatment of this type:

Perhaps that is what the novelty of the next style will be—a business man who is as fully equipped internally as externally, who can be put into a book with as little idolatry and as little rancor as any other person. After some fifty years in fiction, it might occur to someone that, in spite of his business, he is a man. (148)

Indeed and, despite the nuggets of truth and humorous effects of pieces such as “Super-American Credo,” one wishes Seldes had taken his own advice and not reduced highbrows to the kind of over-generalizations espoused by Stoddard. Seldes had the opportunity to further undermine the dichotomy Kammen claims Seldes resented; however, as is blatant in his *Post* articles, Seldes simply reified the antagonistic relationship between the intelligentsia and the Average Citizen by appropriating highbrow strategies in his critiques of “the aristocracy of the mind.”

Seldes’s articles for the *Post* represent a rogue member of the intelligentsia arguing against highbrow assumptions regarding popular culture and the masses. Furthermore, his insistence on the similar societal consequences of developments in high
and popular culture remains a central focus in the Post as they were in The Seven Lively Arts. As North argues,

Modernist experiment in the arts was seen by its critics as part of a larger cultural change in which public life and private consciousness came to be dominated by representations, by images in the wide and generally pejorative sense of the term. . . Some writers rejected the association, but others, including Seldes, embraced it and in so doing suggested that modern literature and popular culture shared something more fundamental than a common enemy. (141-42)

As Seldes shows, many highbrows refused to embrace popular culture as parallel to the modernist methodology. In his advocacy for the masses and the middle class, Seldes undermines snobbish highbrows by turning their criticisms of the bourgeoisie around on them. This rhetorical tactic ultimately strengthens Seldes’s larger argument regarding the arbitrariness of distinctions between high art and popular culture as he highlights the parallels between these two cultural spheres, but Seldes’s Post articles also demonstrate that the hostility between the highbrow and the Average Citizen would not soon be tempered.

Between 1919 and 1929, the Post published 520 issues, each of which reveals the myriad responses to cultural changes by a mass magazine. Because of its role as a major cultural mediator in a time before television and the Internet, the Post not only reflected American values but also constructed mainstream culture for its three million subscribers. For many of its readers, the Post represented an America that still cherished middle-class values in its skepticism toward the fast-paced world of the Jazz Age. Despite this skepticism, as readers increasingly desired products promoting style and modern efficiency; as jazz, working women, and divorce became aspects of mainstream culture; and as the middle class threatened to destabilize the hierarchy of the art world, the Post gradually came to accept the passing of nineteenth-century mores. Nonetheless, while the
periodical compromised some beliefs in order to stay current and maintain its position as the leader in circulation, the *Post* remained a platform for the everyday American and traditional values during a decade in which change seemed the only constant.
CHAPTER THREE
DOMESTIC MODERNISM: LADIES’ HOME JOURNAL AND ITS MEDIATION OF MODERNISM TO MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN

During the 1920s, Ladies’ Home Journal was the highest-selling women’s magazine and the second-highest selling magazine in the United States.\(^1\) The Journal was considered a “domestic” magazine, a generic term signifying a readership comprised primarily of middle-class women, most of whom were married with children and spent their days cleaning, laundering, cooking, and (perhaps most importantly) shopping. However, the Journal’s record-breaking circulation rates and immense variety of content make it a mass magazine—its readership expanded beyond middle-class women and its content was not restricted to domestic concerns. The Journal’s broad range of topics and considerable cultural influence uncover the interests and desires of the general reader during this decade, which included the modernist aesthetic and developments in popular culture. While the Journal’s stipulated audience was middle-class women and its

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\(^1\) To fully understand the influence and significance of the Journal’s circulation figures, it is important to note the cultural impact of magazines in this period. Maureen Honey reveals the incredible numbers associated with the periodical business during the 1920s:

Conservative estimates place the number of periodicals in the United States by 1923 somewhere in the neighborhood of 3,000, with a combined per-issue circulation of 128,621,000. \ldots To put these figures in perspective, the population at this time numbered around 114 million; only 60,000 homes possessed radios in 1922, yet as early as 1905 there was an average of four magazines to every household—a figure that increased dramatically over the ensuing twenty years. The mass-market magazine industry took root before the advent of talking pictures in 1927, the dominance of radio in the 1930s, and the explosion of high-quality, low-cost paperback books just prior to World War II, but these media, by all accounts, did not curtail readership, which continued to grow until the 1950s. (89)
dependence on advertising revenue made it an active participant in consumer culture, the
_Journal_ also assumed an audience of readers concerned with the shifting values and
significant cultural events of the era that went beyond, and even contradicted, traditional
gender expectations. In fact, the _Journal_ was a complex women’s magazine that troubled
conventional notions of femininity and exposed women readers to modernist culture in a
mass culture context.

Unfortunately, current periodical studies scholarship surrounding the _Journal_
focuses solely on how the magazine perpetuated gender stereotypes and considered
women readers only as consumers. To date, Helen Damon-Moore’s _Magazines for the
Millions: Gender and Commerce in the “Ladies’ Home Journal” and the “Saturday
Evening Post” 1880-1910_ and Jennifer Scanlon’s _Inarticulate Longings: “The Ladies’
Home Journal,” Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture_ are the only book-length
studies of the periodical. Damon-Moore investigates the early years of the magazine,
concluding:

> By 1910 . . . the framework for a powerful cultural hegemony was firmly in place. Magazines like the _Journal_ and the _Post_ were gendered texts that served as forums for commercial messages as well as for both direct and indirect gender norms. The gender norms themselves were convincingly commercialized, with women centrally defined as consumers and men centrally defined as breadwinners. The equation at the level of individual relationships was complete (women consume, men earn), as was the relationship at the cultural level (commerce is gendered, gender is commercialized). (187)

Scanlon concurs with Damon-Moore’s argument that the magazine was largely
responsible for the gendering of commerce and that the _Journal_ continued to perpetuate
this gendered cultural binary well beyond 1910. Scanlon’s study also illuminates certain
contradictions in the periodical that reveal its primary purpose, to promote consumerism:
By tying middle-class women’s inarticulate longings to consumption, the Journal, the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, and the larger consumer culture of the early twentieth century succeeded in both bolstering capitalism and nurturing patriarchy. (230)

Both Damon-Moore’s and Scanlon’s texts provide valuable archival research that substantially contributes to textual, cultural, and women’s studies discourse; Scanlon’s reading in particular demonstrates how the Journal both reinforced and disrupted the gendered assumptions surrounding mass culture, but, like Damon-Moore, she concludes that the magazine perpetuated conventional notions of femininity and mass culture as feminized.2 Building on Damon-Moore’s and Scanlon’s scholarship, I expand their focus on the Journal as complicit in a gendered consumer culture to complicate and challenge assumptions regarding domestic women’s magazines.

The anxiety, excitement, and uncertainty caused by the tremendous cultural shifts of the 1920s are revealed in the Journal’s pages, from its unflinching support of Prohibition to its admiration for the flapper, who drank unapologetically. While Journal editor-in-chief Barton W. Currie would lament in 1923, “We are asked by the new school of literary critics to indorse [sic] and enjoy books that deal almost exclusively with the lowest and meanest of animal instincts and human impulses” (“What Children” 4), an article later that year by F. Scott Fitzgerald includes a prefatory note that hails him as “one of the most brilliant writers of the modernist school” (21). The preface to

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2 Andreas Huyssen was one of the first modernist scholars to note the significance feminizing mass culture had on the high/popular binary, arguing, “It is indeed striking to observe how the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities” (47). Unfortunately, the feminine mass/masculine high culture binary has persisted in criticism, despite recent feminist scholarship that exposes the various roles women played in developing and promoting the high modernist aesthetic.
Fitzgerald’s piece explains that this work is published “solely as a representation of the modernist viewpoint,” which indicates a desire on the Journal’s part to distance itself from a potentially controversial article. Despite the ambivalence Journal editors may have toward modernist viewpoints, they declare that they “cannot help being interested in the ultra-modern methods” Fitzgerald presents to Journal readers. Currie’s editorial and the prefatory note to Fitzgerald’s article are but two examples of the conflicting ideals and values the magazine struggled to reconcile and mirror the bifurcation of American culture at the time: do we maintain and protect traditional American values, or open up to new, modernist modes of thinking? How much do we resist, and how much of this new school do we find irresistible? My archival research and analysis of Currie’s editorials, modernist work in the Journal, and its commitment to the aesthetic debate on film uncovers the complexity and depth of mass culture that has long been overlooked by scholars due to its associations with consumer culture. This chapter argues that the Journal’s high circulation rates and mediation of various phenomena across the cultural spectrum to a mass audience demands both our scholarly attention and a re-consideration of assumptions regarding a text that reached two million subscribers each month.

A Brief History of the Journal and the Mass-Market Magazine Industry

From 1883 through 1898, the Journal’s first editor was Louisa Knapp Curtis, wife of the Journal’s founder, Cyrus H. K. Curtis. Under Knapp’s tenure, “the magazine simply embodied middle-class womanhood: its various features and departments corresponded to perceived interests in women’s lives, and its overall tone bespoke middle-class femininity” (Damon-Moore 29). Knapp also supported women’s right to vote and understood the difficulties facing women at the turn of the century as they
increasingly found themselves navigating domestic and public spheres. When she left the magazine in 1889 to raise her daughter, Edward Bok took over and greatly changed the Journal’s editorial tone. While Knapp wrote in an intimate, personal style to establish a peer-like relationship with her readers, “Bok by personality and mission was a preacher” (64). Furthermore,

Pedantic, opinionated and moralistic, Bok delighted in the prospect of reaching and influencing huge numbers of Americans with his observations and advice. A congregation consisting mainly of women was perhaps the most appealing group to try to reach, since the “woman question” was a major topic of the day, and since preaching and lecturing were common and approved styles of public discourse with women. Bok joined many late nineteenth-century ministers, physicians, and politicians in their defensive and adamant condemnation of women’s “progress.” (64)

Bok was thoroughly conservative in his views on women and their role in society, and this perspective served the magazine well until 1919, when growing pressure to modernize the magazine led to Bok’s somewhat premature retirement. When Barton Currie became the Journal’s editor in 1922, the magazine presented more nuanced perspectives to readers, who were increasingly interested in modern approaches to life and culture.

Despite the high turnover rate among Journal editors, the magazine maintained “a clear formula . . . one that is striking in its breadth and simplicity: the magazine sought to speak to every major interest in a white middle-class woman’s life” (Damon-Moore 116). While this formula may appear to allow for a wide range of discourse and perhaps even conflicting viewpoints, Damon-Moore notes how the content was informed by publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis’s own middle-class status and the effect subscription rates had on the magazine’s content:
As they spoke to white, upwardly-mobile, lower-middle-class and middle-class readers, the Curtis publication editors were communicating with people they considered to be essentially like themselves. To the extent that readers supported the magazines with their subscriptions, the messages of the magazines accordingly reflected a range of gender constructs acceptable to a certain segment of the late nineteenth-century white population. (7) Although “certain segment” seems to imply a particularized group, that segment actually represented a majority of American women at this time, as indicated by the Journal’s high circulation rates. Moreover, the emergence and expansion of the middle class in the nineteenth century created more women readers, leading to “increasing gender segregation of reading materials and a broadening of the function of reading for women” (23). The Journal capitalized on this growing demographic by providing these readers with a diverse range of topics. As Mary Ellen Zuckerman argues, “Studying women’s journals illuminates issues beyond the publications’ own histories. Women’s magazine content reveals the possibilities and limits of popular media journalism” (xv).

Furthermore, mass magazines such as the Journal and The Saturday Evening Post contributed to the construction of middle-class identity through their content and advertisements. While the Journal was similar to the Post in its general adherence to traditional values, Currie was much less conservative than the Post’s George Horace Lorimer. The Journal thus represents a women’s mass magazine that nonetheless complicated issues surrounding gender and culture to a larger degree than the Post. As Scanlon asserts, “The emergence, tremendous success, and lasting influence of magazines like the Ladies’ Home Journal and the many magazines of this genre which

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3 Nicola Humble reinforces the cultural significance of the middle class during the interwar years, arguing, “In the years after the First World War, the middle class became increasingly self-conscious. Its members began to question their own identity, the role of their class and its future in the nation” (58).
followed reveals a great deal about the gender issues historians have identified as most significant during the early twentieth century” (6). The Journal’s archives from the 1920s not only reveal a great deal about gender issues historians have identified as significant, but also undermine over-generalizations scholars have made regarding how these issues were articulated by mass magazines.

In addition to appealing to a variety of interests, the Journal’s success on the newsstand indicates a wider array of women readers than the label “domestic” implies. Prior to the 1920s, most women’s magazines relied on year-long subscriptions to make a profit. However, with an increasingly urbanized culture came increasingly urbanized purchasing—people were more inclined to buy a magazine while walking past a newsstand than to commit to a year-long subscription, even if the latter was the cheaper option. Zuckerman explains the shift from subscription to newsstand:

The major women’s journals differed in their reliance on subscription and newsstand sales, with Ladies’ Home Journal highest in percentage newsstand sales throughout [1910-1930] (over 50% in the twenties). In 1922 the overall rate for the major women’s journals . . . stood at 37 percent sold on the newsstand and the remainder through subscriptions. (127)4

The Journal’s growing dependence on newsstand sales in this era not only demonstrates women’s entrance into the public marketplace from the domestic sphere, but also shows the appeal this magazine had for an urban demographic. While it may not be surprising that magazines like Vogue and Vanity Fair earned most of their sales at the newsstand,

4 Magazines with smaller circulations like Vanity Fair and even the little modernist magazines like The Dial also followed this trend. Meanwhile, women’s magazines such as Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar that sought a more sophisticated readership than the mass Journal received over half of their sales from newsstands. For more on newsstand versus subscription rates, see Zuckerman and Lawrence Rainey’s Institutions of Modernism.
for the *Journal* to find considerable success in an urban market reinforces claims of its broad appeal across the cultural spectrum.

The *Journal* also targeted its readership through new consumer tracking technology in order to reach the most readers possible. As Zuckerman points out, this data “reveals the buying power of a publication’s readers” (133); in other words, the data revealed the socio-economic status of readers.\(^5\) This data enabled Curtis to develop specific marketing strategies to target a particular demographic—the middle class.

Scanlon explains how Curtis constructed his stipulated audience according to income:

> At an advertising conference within the Curtis company in 1915, the target audience for the *Journal* was described in terms of its income. The magazine would reach middle-class women, those from families whose incomes were between $1200 and $2500 per year. More wealthy women, those from upper middle-class and wealthy families with incomes between $3000 and $5000 per year, would only be “supplementary” customers. Apparently women with incomes lower than $1200, who could sustain neither the magazine nor its advertisers, would not be sought after as readers. (14)

The *Journal*, like the *Post*, achieved mass appeal as it sought after and spoke to a middle-class readership. For Curtis, the middle class represented his primary demographic in terms of its numbers and its purchasing power, and the advertising was directed at middle-class female consumers’ desires to further attract this demographic.\(^6\) As Damon-

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\(^5\) Zuckerman also explains the breakdown of readers according to income:

The information also situated the traditional women’s service journals in relation to other publications. For example, in 1927 women’s magazines generally had 17 percent of their circulation going to families with annual incomes of $5,000 or more. This differed from general periodicals, which on average had 24 percent of their circulation finding its way into such homes. It diverged even more from the “class” magazines such as *Vogue*, which had between 42 and 51 percent of their circulation going to families with incomes of $5,000 or more. (133)

\(^6\) The significance advertising had for a magazine is further revealed through its editorial/advertising page ratios. Zuckerman explains how the ratio changed over time for the *Journal*, which “reversed itself from about 60/40 (editorial/advertising) at the turn of the century to approximately 40/60 by the mid-1920s, a 50 percent increase in advertising volume” (161). Clearly, encouraging consumerism was in the *Journal*’s best interest to retain those increasingly important advertisement dollars.
Moore remarks, “Cyrus Curtis, magazine publisher, was also known in his time as the ‘Father of Modern Advertising.’ His greatest contribution [to the magazine business] in the long run was his advancement of the concept of selling directly to women” (27).

Curtis earned this moniker both in featuring a large quantity of advertisements in his publications, and also by capitalizing on a relatively new phenomenon to earn large profits. According to Zuckerman, “Curtis Co. reported that in 1920 its three journals took in 46 percent of all ad dollars placed in magazines, and noted that Ladies’ Home Journal garnered 33 percent of all advertising going into women’s journals.” Moreover, the Journal received “over 80 percent of its total revenue from advertising in the prosperous 1920s” (160). But Curtis did more than simply profit from advertising; he led the market:

Throughout the twenties, Ladies’ Home Journal led in advertising revenues. For its April 1922 issue, the Journal secured well over a million dollars’ worth of advertising, the highest amount captured by a single issue of any magazine up to that time. In the early twenties the Journal attracted more than twice the advertising dollars of its nearest challengers. And even though Pictorial Review’s circulation neared the Journal’s, the Journal’s quality image with advertisers enabled it to draw the significantly larger amounts of advertising. (Zuckerman 161, emphasis in original)

Combining strategic marketing toward a particular demographic and attracting advertisers through quality of content and quantity of readership made the Journal into one of the most profitable and popular periodicals of the Jazz Age.

The Journal’s dependence on advertising revenue reinforces its categorization as a mass-market magazine and distinguishes it from the highbrow: little magazines like Others and Blast, which relied on the more prestigious method of earning revenue— patronage. Advertising was so integral to the magazine’s success that even a moralist like
Bok sometimes compromised his ethical beliefs in favor of ad dollars. According to Damon-Moore,

... advertisements for Pearline [a laundry detergent brand], as well as for other products featured in the *Journal*’s pages, regularly contradicted Bok’s editorial messages. This contradiction is striking since Bok at the least approved all advertisements; in many cases he was closely involved in creating them. And this contradiction is important since it helped to complicate the message of the magazine, broadening the range of its commentary to reflect more realities of the day. (102)

While Pearline told women that its detergent doubled as bicycle grease, thus appealing to both domestic and modern aspects of femininity, Bok vehemently discouraged women’s new-found mobility and sermonized that they stay at home because “our entire social order: political, religious, and industrial” relies on it (qtd. Damon-Moore 159). Like the *Post*, advertising not only brought in a considerable amount of revenue, it also, by appealing to women’s modern desires, prevented the *Journal* from being entirely rearguard by appealing to women’s modern desires.

Despite Curtis’s marketing the *Journal* to the middle class and the magazine’s mass-market status due to its diverse content and dependence on advertising revenue, Curtis still desired a more highbrow reputation. As Scanlon observes:

When the publishing world’s journal, *Printer’s Ink*, classified the readers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* with those of *Farm and Journal*, Curtis wrote indignant letters of protest. He repeatedly denied the rural, hence working-class, label that others imposed on his magazine. *Journal* readers were cosmopolitan rather than rural, he claimed; they were more like readers of *The Atlantic* or *Scribner’s* than *Farm and Journal*. (13)  

In contrast, Bok remained ever-conscious of the magazine’s middle-class audience.

Scanlon describes a conversation Bok had with *The Atlantic*’s editor, Ellery Sedgwick:

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7 While “rural” and “working-class” are not synonyms per se, they were for Curtis in that both meant “not cosmopolitan.”
[The two editors] discovered their publications had the same number of subscribers on Boston’s fashionable Beacon Street. As Ellery Sedgwick remembered it, Bok was careful to distinguish their audiences: “But there is a difference,” he remarked. “You see, Sedgwick, you go in at the front door, and I at the back. I know my place.” Bok jokingly underestimated the class status of his audience, but he also took pride in addressing middle-class rather than wealthy women. (14)

These two anecdotes reveal the struggle to establish the Journal’s cultural reputation: the publisher wants to associate his readers with more sophisticated, literary periodicals, and his assumptions hold some water as Bok and Sedgwick compare subscription numbers. However, Bok’s self-deprecating comments indicate that Curtis’s denials of a working-class readership may have derived from his own middle-class aspirations. Eventually, and upon purchasing the Post, Curtis accepted the middle-class status of his magazine, declaring, “[The Journal] will be in every sense a popular home magazine. . . . It will appeal to the income of the many rather than the few” (qtd. in Scanlon 14).

Nonetheless, the Journal’s middle-class position and its aspirations occasionally led to contradictory messages. A 1923 Barton Currie editorial, “American Women of Today and Yesterday,” argues that the fashionability of the leisure class has been replaced by respectable industry, declaring that “refined sloth” has at last become passé. Moreover,

THE LADIES’ HOME JOURNAL is giving all possible prominence to the new feminine democracy that has invaded every layer of American society. We are publishing almost every month articles by the great women leaders who have shown the world what a vast difference there is between fashionable uplift service and the driving energies that are demanded to construct and operate practical organizations that offer their services and benefits to all classes. (34)

However, in this same editorial, Currie promotes the “Social Ladder” series, which featured leisure-class authors depicting the various frustrations involved in being
wealthy, from the difficulty in securing good help to the tackiness of the New Money crowd. Currie’s mention of this serial within an editorial on the alleged obsoleteness of the leisure class reveals the Journal’s conflicted social class position, as who the Journal thought it spoke to and for was not always clear. The mass appeal of the Journal meant that it spoke to a large swath of readers, including those who aspired to be upper class, those who were upper class, and those who considered the wealthy as embodiments of greed and vanity. While Curtis and Currie possessed conflicting ideals on class and the Journal’s stipulated audience, the magazine’s overall content and the kind of advertisements it regularly featured reinforce its categorization as a mass magazine that spoke to middle-class needs and desires.

“Like What You Like, But—”: Barton W. Currie and Domestic Modernism

Although the Journal was largely profitable prior to World War I, Bok was forced to retire in 1919 because he refused to modernize the formula that had served him so well since the turn of the century (Zuckerman 105). When Currie became editor-in-chief in 1922, sales dipped, and Zuckerman attributes this decline to “[lackluster editing]” which “cost the Journal its huge advantage in attracting advertising revenue” (105). However, despite this momentary decrease the magazine remained one of the best-selling periodicals in this decade. I would argue that it was Currie’s more ambivalent—in contrast to Bok’s consistently reactionary—approach to changes in culture that caused the Journal to suffer a temporary identity crisis from a marketing perspective, despite the fact that their demographic had not changed from the original formula Curtis developed. Currie, unlike Bok, championed women’s suffrage and celebrated the revolutionary changes in women’s fashion (which surely shocked the more conservative Journal
readers). On the other hand, Currie vehemently criticized what he viewed as a pervasive cynicism and blasé mentality that was fashionable among young people. Currie fought for sincerity in an age of increasing irony, and the Journal’s high circulation rates indicate that he was not battling alone. Therefore, if the blame for the magazine’s minor decline belongs to Currie, he must also receive credit for the magazine’s overall success during his 1922-28 tenure.\(^8\)

Although Currie brought a new perspective to the magazine, he kept the traditional “Editor’s Letter” that appeared in each issue. These editorials show Currie’s nuanced approach to culture, as well as his assumption that Journal readers were intelligent and informed on current events going on outside of the domestic sphere. While Bok was opposed to shifts in traditional gender expectations, in 1922 Currie bemoaned the denigration of the word “flapper,” claiming that the word was “used unfairly by all the elders who want to keep youth out of the game of running things, so that they maintain an everlasting, doddering grip on modern progress” (“Eliminate Flapperism” 30). However, less than a year later he blamed New York City for the onset of “Jazz, The Flapper, The Jigolo, . . . The Immortal phrase—Make it Snappy!” (“Make it Snappy!” 28). Apparently the elder generation had succeeded in demonizing the flapper, even for a former supporter. Currie also differed from Bok in how he spoke to readers. While Bok sermonized, Currie’s tone was more conversational and intimate. At times, Currie even admitted to feelings of insecurity in his role as editor of a popular magazine. In “Are Editors Human?” Currie lists the negative connotations plaguing editors including,

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\(^8\) Unfortunately, Currie failed to modernize the Journal for its advertisers and retired in 1928. By the early 1930s advertisers had dubbed the Journal the “‘Old Ladies’ Journal’” (Zuckerman 106).
“Hard-boiled. A sphynx,” “A gleeful crape hanger. A cynic,” “A misanthrope,” and “A propagandist” (34) among others. Yet Currie insists,

Send us [editors] a line of praise and watch us beam! Lacerate us with your criticism and regard how the poor creature squirms! And we might add to these unassailable proofs that the first essential of an editor’s job is that he must be more human than humanity. (34)

Currie’s diverse range of subjects, self-reflexive style, and investment in a dialogue with his readers reveal his assumptions concerning the Journal’s multifaceted audience and their own diverse interests. For Currie, Journal readers include housewives, single working women, and working mothers, all of whom care about and are committed to social and cultural issues, including the production of the Journal itself.

There are also several editorials in which Currie calls for action on the part of his readers. He tells his female audience to travel to Europe, to go to the polls, to support American painters and sculptors, and to become a bigger part of the business world in order to “reform” men’s “static” state of fashion (“Clothes Reform” 38). These articles undermine Scanlon’s claim that “this magazine specifically encouraged [women] to read rather than act, to conform to middle-class mores rather than seek out new and possibly more revolutionary alternatives” (6). While Scanlon implies that reading is a passive activity, reading is a political act in that it educates and motivates people to action. Currie’s editorials reveal his desire for women readers to take action from what they have learned in his articles. His editorials do not pacify and coddle women readers, but instead encourage their participation in the world at large. While Currie may not be advocating revolutionary ideals, he is wholly in support of women wielding their newly gained
political power to forge change in a society that would benefit from women’s involvement.

In one such 1922 editorial, entitled, “Nobody Loves Us,” Currie describes his recent trip to Europe and his surprise at the level of contempt for America he encountered on his journeys from England to Holland. Currie went to Europe expecting gratitude for the aid America provided during the war; however, the Europeans Currie meets are rude and resentful of America. According to Currie, Europeans despise Americans because “We’re too smug and prosperous after the war. We’re too fat with possessions. We’re somehow responsible for the high prices, the grinding taxes, the unemployment. And, on top of it all, we’re sending over missionaries to promote a hysteria for prohibition” (22). Currie’s editorial expresses his dismayed surprise and bewilderment as he travels across various European countries that, as of only a couple years before, were considered allies of the United States.

While Currie’s descriptions of Europe’s resentment may seem a bit reductive, writers in various other venues discussed this issue in similar terms: America suffered minimal losses during the war and was now gloating about its economic upturn while infecting Europe with its ideology. In the same year as “Nobody Loves Us,” Vanity Fair editor Edmund Wilson published “The Aesthetic Upheaval in France: The Influence of Jazz in Paris and Americanization of French Literature and Art.” Wilson’s editorial describes the effects of America’s cultural invasion of France, concluding, “America since the war has almost a monopoly of life; now that the life of Europe is exhausted we are bound to command their attention if only by virtue of the energy and the money of
which we dispose” (49). On the other side of the Atlantic, British film critic Iris Barry patronizingly critiqued American energy in her 1926 *Let’s Go to the Movies*: “The Americans have never been a humble race; they are very pleased with themselves, very glad that they have so many motor cars, so many millions, and that everything is going on very finely for them” (219). The European response to the influx of American culture was a vexed issue during this decade, and Currie’s editorial demonstrates the *Journal’s* commitment to discussing current cultural and international issues in order to encourage readers’ engagement with these subjects.

Currie has little tolerance for Europe’s fears of an American invasion, and while in England, he responds to an Englishman criticizing America’s cheapness with a powerful retort: “We seem to have spent some thirty billion dollars and no inconsiderable blood and anguish on a war without expecting much more in return than gratitude” (22). His sentiments reflect many Americans’ feelings regarding Europe, sentiments which

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9 Contemporary scholar Modris Eksteins analyzes the Americanization of Europe after WWI, describing the European reaction:

The traditionalists frowned, complained, and sighed about the “Americanization” of Europe. America, like its films, was all brilliant energy and no substance. . . . Nevertheless, the fascination continued, indeed mounted, and America’s influence on a war-torn and vulnerable Europe, doubting itself, was not to be denied. “Our impression is that we have been colonized,” remarked a Frenchman. (270-71)

10 Leslie Kathleen Hankins describes the significant role women, specifically Barry, played in the development of film criticism in the 1920s: “An astonishing constellation of women writers, intellectuals and cinéastes debated, and helped determine, the place of cinema in cultural history. . . . Iris Barry played a role inventing film criticism in England as a founder of the Film Society (before moving to the United States to found the MOMA Film Library)” (809). Hankins attributes women’s participation in film discourse to the lack of formal (i.e., patriarchal) education on this new medium:

Perhaps because movies were at first scorned by the largely male highbrow culture industry, women were welcome to write as public intellectuals, as critics and theorists of film. As long as no elite cultural institution such as “Oxbridge” offered credentials for the study of cinema, males were not in a privileged position (813).

Since film had not been institutionalized as a field of study, it offered a unique advantage for women intellectuals, since even if they were banned from the libraries at “Oxbridge,” the cinema was gender blind when it came to ticket sales.
contributed to the country’s isolationism right before and during the Great Depression.

Yet, rather than encouraging American women to stay at home where they are appreciated, Currie calls on his readers to rectify this international issue:

> If only more American Americans who are honestly and outspokenly proud of their country and what it stands for, got across and mingled round a lot we might offset the bad impression made by the multitude of witless poseurs who are constantly tripping all over the place. (23)

Instead of returning from Europe with an isolationist attitude, Currie praises the art and culture Europe has to offer and encourages “true” Americans to travel overseas, if only to prove America’s increasingly poor reputation wrong. Instead of hysterical missionaries promoting Prohibition, Currie advocates an American invasion of Europe in the service of public relations, thereby confronting resentment face-to-face and head-on. How many women heeded Currie’s call is not known, and his suggestion may have nonetheless proved an unsuccessful and unsatisfactory solution (particularly from the European perspective); however, “Nobody Loves Us” demonstrates Currie’s tendency to juxtapose mainstream values and cosmopolitanism.

Currie’s responses to the modernism were similarly complex. Just as he defends America against a haughty Europe, he takes an equally firm stance in standing up for the middle class against literary elitists. While highbrow culture praised modernism for its avant-garde style, Currie found it vulgar and crass. Modernism’s vulgarity was a common charge against it, as the obscenity trials of Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence, and James Joyce demonstrate. For Currie, these writers possessed a perverse obsession with irony, cynicism, vulgarity, and a compulsive need to undermine what is good and pure. Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* and H. L. Mencken’s various insults toward the middle class epitomized
highbrow snobbery for Currie, as they did for the Post. In a November 1926 editorial entitled “Sneers and Thanksgiving,” Currie complains, “I notice that the pure-silk monthlies are inviting all the young British intelligentzia [sic] into their columns to compete with Sinclair Lewis and Sledge-hammer Mencken in showing up this rotten country of ours. Rotten rich and rotten vulgar they find us” (34). Currie underlines modernist arrogance through his sarcasm and by exposing highbrow posturing through his editorial to Journal readers. However, his contempt also reifies the binary between the elite and the middle class. While readers learned more about modernism through Currie’s editorials, they were also encouraged to take a particular side in the culture wars of the 1920s.

In “Sneers and Thanksgiving,” Currie also attacks more upper-class periodicals, including Vanity Fair. The editorial contains two personae—the Cheerful Boob (a jab at Mencken’s middle-class moniker) and the Young Progressionist, a representative of the enthusiastic modernist. The vulgarity of this supposed highbrow art is exposed in the Cheerful Boob’s observation to the Young Progressionist:

I noticed in a recent issue of Vanity Fair that your fellow progressionist among the dramatic critics, George Jean Nathan, listed fifty-seven managers as having produced sixty-seven plays last season dealing with lust, incest, adultery, seduction, illegitimacy, infidelity, rape, sexual promiscuity, degeneration, sex starvation, prostitution and colored mistresses. . . . The higher culture of Paris and London cannot match this record, and it is my understanding that the nastiest-minded playwrights of both those great centers of enlightenment and sophistication are swarming to the Island of Manhattan, where the ultimate in filth meets meager opposition and no censorship. (34)

Currie goes on to argue that “progressionists” like these are far more crass than any Cheerful Boob and that middle-class audiences do not appreciate or enjoy modernism because of its obscene topics, not because they lack the necessary intelligence and
sophistication required for appreciating this avant-garde style. Currie argues, “the great majority of Americans cannot stomach the cloying nastiness that prevails” and they “have little or no use for the type of overadvertised modernistic culture that is based on Rabelais and Boccaccio without any of their wit or originality to justify it” (34, emphasis added). Furthermore, modernism’s lofty reputation is unwarranted and exaggerated, as Currie proclaims in a 1923 editorial: “Books that contain the cheapest sort of sex filth as a theme are heralded as epochal achievements in modern expressionism” (“What Children” 32). The fact that the majority of people recognize the repugnance of modernism proves, for Currie, its lack of worth as an aesthetic style.

Currie’s extended critique on this cultural phenomenon is significant both in its context—a domestic women’s magazine—and in what it says about mass culture’s reception of modernism as a literary and cultural phenomenon. There are four aspects of Currie’s assessment of modernism: it is obscene, intentionally difficult, overexposed, and excessively cynical. The first two parts of his anti-modernist stance support the accepted understanding of middle-class culture’s relationship with modernism, evidenced by scholarship on the obscenity trials of such now-seminal modernist texts as Joyce’s *Ulysses* and D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*. This assumption is investigated by Joyce Piell Wexler, who argues in “Selling Sex as Art,”

> The marketing genius of modernist authors inspired them to defend erotic fiction as art and sell it as smut. . . . Once sex was aligned with art against commercial ends, it provided the money serious writers could not admit they wanted. Censorship advertised the work of Joyce and Lawrence far beyond the avant-garde audience. (91)

Thus, modernists marketed themselves from both sides of the cultural divide: they were avant-garde elitists seeking a coterie audience, while the legal dramas surrounding
particular publications became tabloid fodder for mass-market media. Class bias also
came out in the course of the legal proceedings, as Wexler points out in citing Judge
Woolsey’s 1933 ruling in the *Ulysses* obscenity trial: “Underlying Woolsey’s opinion
was the assumption that highbrow readers would consider vulgar language suitable to
lower-middle-class subjects. He allowed mimetic realism to justify any obscenity in the
novel” (93). Currie’s indignation toward the vulgarity of modernism indicates that, rather
than titillating mass audiences (and securing their dollars) perhaps modernist writers had
actually insulted potential customers by assuming and attempting to pander to “baser”
instincts associated with lower classes.

In addition to modernism’s penchant for vulgarity, Currie critiqued the
phenomenon because of its incomprehensibility, which he interpreted as a ploy to
enhance modernism’s exclusivity. In “The Diminishing Home Instinct,” Currie laments,
“[Modernists] are making a great hit on many campuses, and have the indorsement [sic]
of that new school of literary review that sees no merit in any writing that is clear and
understandable. . .” (30). His comment takes modernists to task for what he sees as
intentional difficulty merely meant to confuse, rather than a conscious aesthetic choice by
modernists attempting to depict a world ravaged by war and experiencing tumultuous
changes. In “The Metaphysical Poets,” T. S. Eliot states,

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at
> present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and
> complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility,
> must produce various and complex results. (65)

For Eliot, the quandaries of the contemporary world should be reflected in poetry, to
reflect the struggles unique to life in the twentieth century. However, for Currie, reading
modernist texts was more difficult that it was worth, and not reflective of nor necessary to
describe civilization as he saw it.

Currie’s critique concerning modernism’s intentional difficulty confronts an issue
later scholars have considered in examining modernism’s original intended audience.
Leonard Diepeveen argues that modernism’s difficulty served to separate the general
“bad readers” from the “qualified audience” that modernists such as Eliot and Pound
desired (49). Eliot argues for difficult poetry because the world is complicated and should
be represented as such; however, his desire for modern poetry to be complex also serves
his own authorial construction, since his difficulty can be read as a means by which he
could exclude less-educated readers. Nor was Eliot alone in his desire for a more
disciplined readership. Latham claims, “A work such as Ulysses . . . carves out a place for
itself in the complex structured space of culture by being difficult, trading on a form of
cultural capital that will secure Joyce’s status as a professional author who differs
qualitatively from the middlebrow hack” (120). Thus, the difficulty of modernism can be
interpreted as mirroring the contemporary world’s complexity and frustrating middle-
class desires for easy access to culture. In creating works that require a great deal of
effort and advanced education, modernists secured their place within the highbrow, or
elite, aesthetic realm. 11

11 Wexler further examines the dilemma of the modernist writer in Who Paid for Modernism?, where she
investigates the binary of professional writer versus avant-garde artist. Modernists’ desired to be perceived
as the latter while earning the money of the former:
Making their art difficult, they could not be mistaken for hacks. Since they ostentatiously refused
to court a popular audience, they could accept any profits their work brought them. This shift from
writing for a public to addressing a coterie was possible because an avant-garde audience eager to
distinguish itself from the popular audience emerged. (xv)
How is it that these texts could be too difficult to understand while simultaneously containing the “cheapest sort of sex filth”? Somehow, modernism had gained a paradoxical reputation for being elite through its difficulty and vulgar because of its predilection for taboo subject matter. This contradictory reception of modernism is related to the third aspect of Currie’s argument, one that contains a certain degree of irony: that modernism was, according to Currie, “overadvertised” (“Sneers” 34).

Modernism’s contemporary reputation as an elite, and thus not widely known, aesthetic is belied by Currie’s accusation. Furthermore, modernism’s reputation as both highbrow and lewd was a result of a two-pronged promotional strategy: modernists marketed their work to small, highbrow venues such as the *Criterion*, which would praise the work as avant-garde, and expose writers to a coterie audience of sophisticated readers. Meanwhile, the notoriety modernism achieved through various obscenity trials and the media’s depictions of modernism as crude garnered the phenomenon a controversial cultural cachet, which served to attract some middle-class readers and repel others. The purpose behind modernism’s focus on the taboo is somewhat unclear: Joyce had already encountered problems of censorship during the publication of *Dubliners*, so he had to have known that portrayals of defecation, masturbation, and sadomasochism in *Ulysses* were going to cause an uproar. While I am not arguing that shock was the driving motivation behind modernist art, it could be argued that modernists knew their works would shock the readers they were supposedly consciously avoiding, i.e., the masses and, specifically, the middle class. Ultimately, it remains ambiguous as to whether modernists really were attempting to exclude middle-class audiences, seeking negative attention from them and consequently achieving notorious reputations as a result—which would
further serve their reputations among the avant-garde—or simply portraying modern life as they perceived it. Regardless, for Currie and some of the *Journal’s* readers, the depictions of reality portrayed in modernist texts seemed overly obsessed with the ugly side of life.

Through this two-pronged marketing strategy, modernists discovered the advantages of authorial construction according to audience. As Lawrence Rainey argues, early twentieth-century writers employed “new strategies for reputation building— involving theatricality, spectacle, publicity, and novel modes of cultural marketing and media manipulation.” Furthermore,

Those strategies of authorial construction changed as authors sought to address different publics, ranging from patron-*salonnières* to mass audiences, or from patron-investors, dealers, and speculators to a broader (if numerically restricted) corpus of critics and educated readers. (4)

Modernists were able to function to a certain degree as literary chameleons. Additionally, Karen Leick asserts in her study of periodicals and mass reception of modernism:

In fact, it would have been difficult for any literate American to remain unaware of modernists like Joyce and [Gertrude] Stein in the 1920s, since their publications in little magazines were discussed so frequently in daily newspapers and in popular magazines. Dismissive and respectful commentary punctuated the lively debate about the value of modernist literature, sparking such public interest that when major presses finally published works by Stein and Joyce in 1933 and 1934, each book immediately became a best seller. (126)

Even if modernists only initially published and advertised in the little magazines, the notoriety surrounding their literature was widely discussed in mass-culture spheres and contributed to the commercial success of modernism. In fact, not only were these works commercially viable, according to Currie, modernists were over-saturating the market. Whether or not modernists intended to cause a scandal, the media attention surrounding
modernist texts led readers like Currie to assume modernists pursued infamy through vulgarity. Thus, not only was modernism more widely publicized than some scholarship acknowledges, but some members of the masses were sick of hearing about it.

The final element of Currie’s argument against modernism derives from its ironic approach to life, particularly toward nineteenth-century ideals. Currie’s “The Sundown of Love,” satirizes the cynicism of free verse, while drawing a correlation between modernist poetry and perhaps the most popular female icon of the 1920s—the flapper. In this piece, two dramatic personae, the Poet and the Philosophic Flapper, have a conversation about classical love poetry versus contemporary poetry. After the Flapper mocks the Poet’s recitation of a Shelley poem, the Poet decries “Then you don’t care for poetry? . . . It’s a burning outrage if you don’t. Why, you are poetry yourself.” To which the blasé Flapper responds, “Save it; save it . . . Unless you can put it in blank verse and make it sound like cannibals walking backward down a million flights of steps. [Poetry] musn’t make sense, but it must thur-rill you.” When asked what kind of poetry her friends read, the Flapper replies, “not the grandma sticky line. They read Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edgar Lee Masters. They pick out the hard ones with excruciatingly deep meanings and row about them And they adore Vachel Lindsay’s ‘Congo’” (26). By emphasizing the Flapper’s slangy dialect, Currie undermines the “excruciatingly deep meanings” modernism is purported to have, implying that, like the Flapper, free verse is merely the latest modern craze and not likely to have the longevity of a Shelley.

While “Sundown of Love” simultaneously mocks the flapper and modernism, Currie had defended the flapper earlier in the decade. In 1922’s “Eliminate Flapperism,
Male and Female,” Currie bemoans the shift in connotations surrounding the term “flapper,” accusing the older generation of a smear campaign against young people. While flapper’s prewar definition was “a sprightly and knowing miss in her early teens,” the word has now become associated with “the immodest passing of corsets; with cigarette smoking; . . . with one-piece bathing suits; with so-called modernism in art . . . or with anything else that the newspapers [happen] to be full of and the elder generation of the ultraconservative sort didn’t approve” (30). This editorial shows the shift in Currie’s own perceptions of the flapper, since by the time “The Sundown of Love” is published in 1926, he too associates flapperism with “so-called modernism in art.” While in 1922, the flapper “must be allowed sufficient latitude for the extravagances and enthusiasms that manifest themselves only in youth” (“Eliminate” 30), by 1926 this extravagant enthusiasm has caused the Flapper to be seduced by the “great modern epics” which “kill any thought of love, as you poets concoct it” (“Sundown” 26). Thus, perhaps modernism’s most vicious crime has been its destruction of ideals like romance through irony. Modernist depictions of “[p]rize fighters, bandits, dope fiends, and degenerate little jazz hounds wouldn’t appeal to [The Flapper] especially as lovers, no matter how noble they might be if you removed all their complexes” (26). In other words, modernism’s infatuation with crass characters of the underworld has killed the bloom on the rose of romance.

Currie reveals his own talent for irony at the end of “Sundown of Love” when the Poet’s distress mounts to alarm and the Flapper reassures him by revealing that she desires a traditional family life: “Dry your eyes, Jim . . . . You know darn well that I’m crazy about you. And all I ask after the hook-up is that you don’t call our little shebang a
love nest. Also when the babies come I want some good old Anglo-Saxon and Biblical names for them” (26). She may not go for the “sticky line” when it comes to love, but she does desire marriage and a conventional, middle-class family—one of the main critiques against the flapper later feminists have made.\textsuperscript{12} Currie uses the bluster of the Flapper to show that she really wants what most women supposedly desire, so perhaps we should not take her love of blank verse (or blank verse itself) too seriously.

For Currie, and many Journal readers, modernist irony and cynicism fed highbrow arrogance toward the middle-class, and it was perhaps modernist pretentiousness that fueled Currie’s ire most of all. In “Are Editors Human?” Currie attacks his highbrow counterparts, the “new school of editors who advertise themselves as apostles of indignation” that “[t]he modernism and progressivism of this period have brought forth” (34). According to Currie,

\begin{quote}
[Modernist editors] do not allow for an electron of humility in their make-up. Supreme in their wisdom and the magnificence of their liberalism, they hurl lethal explosives at everything and everybody. Assuming first that in our population of one hundred and twenty million there are only a few thousand in their class, they reduce all the rest of us to a common denominator labeled \textit{The American Booberie}. (34)
\end{quote}

Similar to Gilbert Seldes’s articles for the \textit{Post}, Currie’s editorial illustrates his resentment of modernist hubris and the pompousness with which the highbrow looks down upon “all the rest of us.”

Currie’s distaste for modernist arrogance stemmed from his general contempt for presumptuousness. In Currie’s November 1922 editorial, “A Golden Age for Snobs,” he

\textsuperscript{12} Critics like Elaine Showalter describe the 1920s as “feminism’s awkward age” (qtd. in \textit{Posing} 9), and Estelle B. Freedman argues that “to write and teach…that women were politically apathetic but sexually active during the 1920s is to provide sexually stereotypical historical roles for women” (26).
declares, “There are more ways of being a snob in this third decade of the Twentieth Century than ever before in the history of the human family” (30). Some examples of the various kinds of snobs follow, and many seem applicable to modernism: “The Money Snob. The Race Snob. The Intellectual Snob. The Literary Snob. . . . The Feminist Snob. The Anti-Feminist Snob. . . . The Modern Culture Snob (including that wee little group of young intellectuals about which there is so much uncalled-for excitement). The Anti-Modern Culture Snob . . .” (30). This editorial complicates Currie’s anti-modernist stance, as it is not new literature, per se, but “The Literary Snob” that he finds contemptuous. This is reinforced by his equal disdain for “The Anti-Modern Culture Snob,” a figure one would not expect to appear on this list. According to Currie, “Snobbery is worn as a cloak for class, as a garment of distinction”—it is a pose, something that can be taken off, i.e., not genuine. Therefore, if we regard Currie’s anti-modernist stance in a more nuanced light, it becomes apparent that he was not merely a member of the rearguard desperately clinging to the values and literary styles of an allegedly more genteel past. Instead, Currie regarded modernism with a skeptical eye because, even as modernist works seemed to pander to the so-called base instincts of the masses, modernist writers attempted to distinguish themselves by accessorizing their lewdness with arrogance.

Obviously, Currie was not one of modernism’s ardent supporters; however, in February 1925, Currie wrote an insightful and provocative piece entitled “Like What You

13 The Golden Age of Snobs persisted after Currie’s editorial, as demonstrated by Margaret Anderson’s modernist magazine The Little Review (which was the first to publish sections of Ulysses) with its masthead “Making No Compromise with the Public Taste,” and the New Yorker’s 1925 mission statement declaring that it was not for the “old lady in Dubuque.”
Like, But—.” The editorial reflects on how personal bias affects taste, and read in the context of Currie’s other editorials (particularly some of his more vehement ones against the new literary school), this piece reveals his ability to critically examine the reasons and consequences behind personal taste. Currie indirectly makes an acute observation on the culture wars in discussing the different reactions we have to others’ interests based on whether or not we like that particular person. When the other person is well liked, we experience shock that our tastes are not equally compatible. On the other hand,

Everyone we dislike suffers from an inferiority complex. When they dislike what we like it merely confirms our superiority. The person we dislike may possess an immensely greater wealth of knowledge and experience than is ours, he or she may be one of the world’s greats, a scholar, a brilliant leader, a recognized genius in science or the arts. The inferiority complex is just the same. Our dislike proves it. (28)

For Currie, the combination of crassness, i.e., inferiority, and pretentiousness made modernism largely unpalatable. Which is somewhat ironic given how some modernists felt towards the masses, i.e., that they were vulgar and inferior.

Currie espouses an over-generalization of modernism that mirrors the assumption some modernists had regarding the “inauthenticity of the masses.”¹⁴ As Pierre Bourdieu argues, “the social space may be construed as a structure of probabilities of drawing individuals together or apart, a structure of affinity and aversion between them” (7). The reasons behind Currie’s ire toward modernism may derive from each group’s particular “affinity of habitus, the principles of vision and division of the social world” and these

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¹⁴ Jane Kuenz also discusses the modernism/mass culture binary in terms of antagonistic relation arguing, If nothing else, the modernist emphasis on authenticity bespoke a concern with the profound inauthenticity of mass-produced cultural forms. Almost everything written in the 1910s and 1920s about “authentic” art was shaped by an unstated, because so broadly presumed, understanding of the determinant relation between mass culture and inauthenticity. Indeed, the belief that popularity guarantees the inauthenticity of art was often the one precondition for recognizing art as modernist at all. (510)
principles are “imposed by the ordinary experience of occupational, communal, and local divisions and rivalries” (7). Thus, the aversion between the masses and modernism came from a need on each side to support a particular cultural sphere and denounce other social spaces by expressing an aversion to the habitus of other groups, as opposed to the existence of large differences between the groups that could be measured in an objective way to establish a cultural hierarchy. This article also reaffirms Naremore and Brantlinger’s construction of mass and modernist culture as “discursive fields” that “partake of one another, sometimes overlapping, blurring together, or speaking dialogically—and sometimes . . . living in antagonistic relation” (8). While I view modernism’s relationship to commercial culture as being more complicated than earlier scholars who argue that these spheres were diametrically opposed to one another, Currie’s editorial demonstrates that, while some modernists may accuse mass culture of being derivative and inferior, the masses did not necessarily find modernism avant garde as much as simply lewd.

Currie’s editorial also discusses the arbitrary nature of taste, not on the basis of social class. Instead, Currie blames our fickle natures:

Of course, the fundamental futility in arguing about taste is that it is an uncertain quantity, liable at all times to change and modification. . . . You most vehemently preferred blondes until you met an alluring brunette. Emma Goldman lauded Lenine [sic] and Trotzky [sic] to the skies until she went to Moscow and found freedom of speech denied her. . . . So it was with great numbers who denounced the flapper and her short skirts and bobbed hair. When they tried it themselves and looked in their mirrors with satisfaction, it was something else again. Nor were they altogether inconsistent. They liked what they liked when they liked it and stuck to their guns, which is as it should be up to a certain point. (28)

This is an interesting moment of Currie’s insight—he may not like (or have a taste for) the modernist style, but he is savvy enough to realize that individual and collective tastes
are bound to change, his own included. Moreover, he is in tune with his readers’ interests and counts modernism among them, whether they approve or condemn the phenomenon. Currie’s editorials took on myriad subjects, but his arguments on modernism, modern women, and global relations reveal the connections a mass-market magazine made between trends in high and popular culture. Modernism has gone on to have a much longer shelf life than the flapper, but at the time its reception was similar to the controversy caused by her shingled hair. While Currie may not have been as easily seduced by modernism as the flapper was, he recognized the transiency of public taste and his own. Currie may have revised his original opinions or remained disappointed in the staying power and influence of modernism, but then, as he points out, there is no accounting for taste.

As a businessman, Currie was shrewd enough to know that, while he might have personal qualms regarding modernism, his readers were nonetheless interested in a phenomenon garnering a great deal of press. In order to maintain the Journal’s high subscription rates, Currie had to remain cognizant of his readers’ interests (or tastes), even if they differed from his own. Currie found a way to partner the Journal paradigm with a style he found largely distasteful. Currie may not have domesticated modernism, but he made sure appearances by modernists would appeal to domestic women readers. Which is how F. Scott Fitzgerald published “Imagination—And a Few Mothers,” in 1923. In this article, the man credited with the modern usage of “flapper” and whose wife Zelda rebelled against traditional gender expectations attempts to Make It New for Journal readers, the “It” in this case being motherhood.
By the time Fitzgerald’s article appeared in 1923, he had already achieved a reputation as spokesman for the Jazz Age with his hugely successful 1920 debut novel *This Side of Paradise*, in addition to his frequent appearances in the *Post*.

“It imagination—And a Few Mothers” begins with Fitzgerald stating what he considers obvious concerning the state of domestic affairs: the home is a dreary and dull place for all persons inhabiting it. Furthermore, what passes for creativity and entertainment is completely inadequate, merely a superficial attempt to break up the drudgery:

> It is easy to say that the home fails chiefly in imagination. But an imagination under good control is about as rare a commodity as radium, and does not consist of playing charades or giving an imitation of Charlie Chaplin or putting papier-mache shades on the 1891 gas jets; imagination is an attitude toward living. It is a putting into the terrific, life-long, age-old fight against domestic dullness all the energy that goes into worry and self-justification and nagging, which are the pet devices of all of us whiling away the heavy hours. (21)

Fitzgerald then compares two mothers, Mrs. Judkins and Mrs. Paxton. The former represents the housewife whose imagination manifests itself in obsessive worry and nervousness toward her husband and children. As a result, her home is dull, her husband feels that his family is falling apart, and her children feel smothered by someone they think of only as “Mother”; she has lost her personhood due to her anxiety.

In contrast, Mrs. Paxton demonstrates the kind of model for motherhood Fitzgerald advocates for women who desire a healthy, vibrant, and happy household. He also warns women against becoming overly assertive in their homes, an argument that perpetuates the expectation that a woman must be passive to facilitate a healthy home. Mrs. Paxton strikes the right balance in possessing a strong imagination and keeping in mind “that a home violently dominated by a strong-minded woman has a way of turning the girls into despondent shadows and the boys into down-right ninnies” (80). Women
readers should thus take caution that they not oppress their husbands and children by being too willful and excessively involved in their lives. Instead, mothers should be more like Mrs. Paxton, who “realize[s] that the inevitable growth of a healthy child is a drifting away from the home,” and, consequently, “keeps her distance to avoid intrusion” (80).

For Fitzgerald, imagination presupposes a degree of detachment from one’s children. His advice runs defiantly counter to the viewpoint that mothers should coddle, obsess over, and sacrifice everything for their children. In this way, his perspective can be read as feminist because he argues that a home is most successful when the mother is an individual who takes care of her own needs as well as those of her children. In describing the consequences of Mrs. Paxton’s parenting style, Fitzgerald remarks, “In return for giving up the conventional privileges of the mother, of dominating the children and endowing them with convenient, if erroneous ideas, Mrs. Paxton claimed the right that she should not be dominated, discomforted or ‘used’ by her children” (81). Fitzgerald, in his role as modernist writer, provides a perspective encouraging women to focus on their own lives in order to perform their motherly duties better—advice that simultaneously empowers women and perpetuates traditional gender roles.

Fitzgerald concludes his editorial with a powerful observation that reminds readers of something they, ensconced in familial obligations, can sometimes forget:

The home is not so much insufficient as it is oversufficient. It is cloying; it tries too hard. A woman happy with her husband is worth a dozen child worshippers in her influence on the child. And any energy spent in “molding” the child is not as effective as the imagination to see the child as a “person,” because sooner or later a person is what that child is going to be. (81)

Whatever biological lack Fitzgerald may have had in the motherhood department, his ability to observe, report, and editorialize on the subject must surely have impressed
readers. Moreover, while he had published short stories and nonfiction in other mass periodicals, those stories and articles were on subjects more obviously in line with his expertise: depicting the swanky world inhabited by flappers, the wealthy, and the literary, all drinking gin and dancing the Charleston. For Fitzgerald to write for a domestic women’s magazine on the subject of motherhood reveals the kind of diverse writing the Journal provided for its readers. His piece also demonstrates how intertwined modernism and commercial culture truly were. An article on raising children may appear thoroughly domestic, but the Journal twists the conventional to offer its readers something new: an article on motherhood penned by one of the most famous modernists of this period.

“Art and amusement—are they possible mates?”: The Journal’s Filmic Discourse

In addition to modernist literature, the explosive popularity of film was a major cultural development in the 1920s, and the Ladies’ Home Journal devoted much space (both advertising and editorial) to this new form of entertainment. Though modernism and film may have occupied opposing ends of the cultural divide, Currie incorporated both subjects in a domestic magazine, assuming a readership interested in various aspects of culture. The Journal engaged in the ongoing debate on film and its aesthetic worth, publishing articles by actors and, perhaps surprisingly, modernists that reveal the development of film’s reception throughout this decade. Famous actors such as John Barrymore and Charlie Chaplin lend their celebrity status to the magazine in the hopes of

15 The release of The Birth of the Nation in 1915 demonstrated the monetary and aesthetic potential of the movies. The Birth of the Nation broke box office records despite being the longest film ever made at that time, with a running time of three hours and ten minutes. It has become known as the first Hollywood “blockbuster,” and is recognized as the film that first utilized many camera techniques (such as the close-up) that we now take for granted in watching movies. After this film, the industry took off and movies of varying degrees of quality were quickly produced in order to capitalize on their popularity.
elevating the aesthetic reputation of film, in addition to calling upon readers to demand better-quality films. These articles read not unlike a modernist manifesto; that is, the actors present their work in the film industry as a new kind of art that should be taken seriously. However, they also acknowledge that film is still in its fledgling stages and there is much work to be done. Chaplin writes extensively on the specific changes that need to occur for the movies to improve—primarily through advancements in plot complexity and higher standards for actors. The commentary of these celebrity features in the context of a mass-market magazine, which read so differently from the typical megalomaniacal celebrity exposé one is likely to find in the Journal’s contemporary equivalents, demonstrates film’s dependence on its popular audience to spread the argument on film’s high-art aesthetics.

While the Journal championed the potential for film generally, articles published early in the decade show the controversy the onset of film caused among mass audiences. Illustrating this initial negative position is stage actor Otis Skinner’s May 1922 article, “Motion Picture Not an Art.” In it, Skinner relates his own experience in this new industry, concluding that movies are not similar to theater because “The motion picture is . . . a process or a medium. It is not an art. It is pantomime and photography, something between the two and perhaps a child of both” (89). Skinner’s article argues that because the success of a movie relies on how well the director and cameraman can splice and cut the film, i.e., its mechanical elements, film will never reach the aesthetic heights of the stage, which depends on the skillfulness of actors, i.e., the human element. The director may have imagination, but the cameraman is not an artist: he is merely part of a mechanical process. Skinner argues that, in theater, the actor creates art by bringing the
written word to life and establishing a collaborative relationship with the audience to create a singular and unique aesthetic experience. According to Skinner, substituting live theater performances for the mechanically produced and reproduced cinematic experience destroys the aesthetic aspect of drama.

However, Skinner also acknowledges particular advantages movies possess over the stage. For instance, in discussing *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) Skinner explains, “The gatherings of a great crowd, the bringing together of conflicting forces and the facility for telling the parallel stories were at once things which the stage could not do” (7). Also, flashbacks are much more effective in film, and movies lack the clunky exposition that occurs onstage, what Skinner deems “those necessary dull moments that happen in every play,” whereas “the very structure of the movie prevents them” (7). These aspects of film enhance the manner in which a story is told, but movies cannot create the same quality of aesthetic experience as viewing a play. Skinner attempts to balance his argument by stating, “I do not decry the films. They are a great source of amusement, trite entertainment and education, but when it comes to acting before the camera it is not an art . . .” (89). For Skinner, “Not only is the human element of personal appeal entirely lacking when the picture is projected, but in the acting that collaboration between the audience and the players, so necessary to make a finished performance on the stage, is entirely missing” (93). A good stage actor can adjust his acting based on the mood of the audience, whereas the actor must perform for a camera—a lifeless, mechanical thing. The unique human collaboration between audience and actor has been lost in film, and thus it is a medium rather than an art.
Skinner’s article epitomizes the misgivings people—those working for the theater and those sitting in its seats—had about the newly burgeoning film industry. While most were willing to credit movies with a certain degree of entertainment value, fewer—particularly among those in the theater—were willing to accept film as an art. The speed with which movies came out, the choppiness of silent film, and the obvious mechanical element (evidenced by flaws in the film itself that were visible onscreen, as well as early editing processes that produced uneven jumps between scenes) reinforced the perception that producers were more concerned with earning a quick profit rather than creating quality art.

Skinner’s piece in the Journal also anticipates a seminal work of cultural criticism, Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which theorizes the characteristics of film that Skinner delineated thirteen years earlier in a women’s domestic magazine. Like the Journal, Benjamin’s essay takes on the technologies of photography and film, arguing that these new methods destroy what he deems the “aura” of the art object (221), its unique and specific existence in a particular time and place. According to Benjamin,

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (221)

Through mechanical reproduction, the aura is destroyed, and along with it the authenticity—or authority—of that object. However, while Skinner decries the loss of the unique art object and singular aesthetic experience, Benjamin is more optimistic. As
contemporary scholar Kim Toffoletti argues, “For Benjamin, reproduction is a positive thing, offering an egalitarian mode of liberation from the tyranny of tradition and authenticity and authority” (44). Movies were democratic in their cost and accessibility—both in terms of content and the incredible rate with which movie theaters were built in order to meet public demand. Furthermore, Benjamin also viewed film as a technology “influenc[ing] modes of representation and how visuality and reality are understood and experienced” (Toffoletti 40). Movies changed how people constructed and experienced reality and significantly contributed to the ocularcentrism of the early twentieth century that scholars such as Liz Conor have analyzed. While Skinner bemoans the loss of the theatrical experience, Benjamin sees film as a potential political tool capable of eliminating elitism in the arts—a point later Journal writers would emphasize in discussing film.

A few months after “Motion Picture Not an Art,” a piece by famous stage and screen actor John Barrymore appeared. In “John Barrymore Writes on the Movies,” the actor takes on the cultural divide in a variety of ways: he defends film against Skinner’s

16 Douglas Gomery argues, “During the 1920s the American film industry developed into a strong oligopoly,” particularly after movie houses adopted “the strategy of the chain store” (26). This strategy enabled wider distribution at decreasing cost to “Hollywood-owned circuits.” The chain strategy also promoted rapid growth. For example, in 1925, when Sam Katz took over the Publix chain he was able to expand from 300 to 1200 theaters in just five years (32).

17 Conor also utilizes Benjamin; however, her reading of his essay differs from Toffoletti’s in applying Benjamin’s theory to visual representations of the Modern Woman. Conor describes how Benjamin genders screen actors male and that they experience a “‘shrivelling of the aura’ . . . [which] is publicly offset by the star cult” (80). However, While Benjamin’s modern masculine subjects are enunciated through a position of looking, but threatened with “shrivel[ing]” if reproduced as spectacle, his feminine types occupy a “presence” in his writing because they are looked at; they exist only because they are seen. They materialize on being apprehended, or come into being as spectacles. The commodified Screen Star did not need to rely on her status within the personality cult to offset her aura. Part of her fascination was due to the questions of whether there was any essence behind her image, and whether her mechanically reproduced image was accurate. (82)
charges and takes on the conventional privileging of tragedy over comedy to argue that films should be considered works of art. Barrymore describes his initial lack of interest in films and compares it to his experiences onstage playing comic and then dramatic roles. While at first he had considered comedy “nothing more than an opportunity to earn money” (7), after playing a few serious roles he recognizes the challenges of comedic roles. He compares this experience to his move from the theater to the screen, which was also motivated by the potential material rewards. Now, however, he recognizes film’s value in terms of its global influence, an epiphany that comes to him after a letter from an Australian woman, who tells Barrymore, “the actors of the regular theater who went into the movies could do much for the far-away places” (7). While film may destroy the aura, its widespread dissemination across the globe can act as a powerful social tool for exposing people around the world to cultures and lifestyles outside of their immediate experience. What Benjamin would theorize in 1936, an actor and film fan recognize in 1922: film is an egalitarian means of experiencing art and participating in new technologies that construct, change, and expand our views on reality.

However, the global potential of film was not always met with celebration, since America was the primary exporter of films across the globe. Many Europeans argued that film was the biggest weapon in America’s cultural colonization arsenal. British film critics like Iris Barry helped develop film criticism through her various articles in British Vogue and her best-selling book Let’s Go to the Movies. While her work tends to champion film as an important cultural advance, American films are often described as superficial fluff. However, she also qualifies the panic some felt toward the cultural zeitgeist that was the American film industry at this time:
It is true that we are much more familiar with American temperament and social habit because of the all-prevalent American films than we should be without it. . . . What it is that affects us most in American films is their acceptance of a mechanical civilization, their pride and delight in motor-cars, type-writers, lifts, skyscrapers, traffic and above all, Speed. It is no good our kicking against it: we are in for a mechanical civilization whether we like it or not, and the Americans, partly because of their unsophistication, have adopted it happily. (14-15)

Barry’s backhanded compliment to America subtly bemoans the artlessness allegedly accompanying a mechanical civilization, implying that Europe (or at least England) must relinquish its sophistication and succumb to mechanized industry. Although her comments overlook the fact that the Industrial Revolution began in the United Kingdom, they reveal how Europe continued to consider itself aesthetically superior to America. For critics like Barry, the massive popularity American films achieved overseas not only augured cultural colonization, but also meant that these films were not valid forms of high art. Ironically, Barry reflects the kind of elitism in the art world that Benjamin argues film would largely eliminate. However, Benjamin neglected to consider the international aesthetic hierarchy that traditionally positions Europe as the gatekeeper to classical forms of art while America is the birthplace of entertainment and the encroaching mechanized era. Barry’s commentary demonstrates that new technology does not greatly disrupt this hierarchical structure. Despite the technological similarities between America and Europe in creating films, America is nonetheless judged as “unsophistication” when it comes to “temperament and social attitude” by a British film critic.  

18 Barry also points out the significant economic ramifications of America’s cultural export: The English-speaking peoples of the world know that American motor cars go; they know what sort of boots and clothes American people wear. The result of all this is that when it comes to buying, they are more inclined to buy motor cars and boots from America than from the Old
Barrymore’s Journal piece parallels Barry’s point that contemporary movies are unsophisticated; however, Barrymore does not blame the American temperament for the flaws in film. According to Barrymore, the crude state of the movies is caused by producers assuming an unintelligent audience and creating their films accordingly. Barrymore critiques the film industry for assuming public ignorance, stating that producers’ underestimation of audiences has resulted in predictable plots, wooden acting, and a greater concern for the speedy release of a picture than for the quality of the product released. Barrymore also defends the public against charges of ignorance while simultaneously positioning himself as an authentic artist who eschews public approval: “I have not cared what ‘They’ [the public] might think, and have put on plays I wanted to do; and if I have not always had uniform success, it is not because the plays were above the heads of the audiences that came to see them” (7). The first half of Barrymore’s proclamation reads like The Little Review’s “Making No Compromise with the Public Taste.” However, the latter half of his comment reveals an interesting twist on the modernists’ commitment to “necessary difficulty.” Instead of criticizing the public for failing to understand the greatness of the work, Barrymore provides other reasons for his lack of “uniform success”: his performance may have been mediocre, or perhaps the

Country. At the same time, the non-English-speaking countries of the world are also being perpetually impressed by the activity of the Americans, through the cinemas. This also is no good to Sheffield, Coventry and other places where, in spite of what one might judge through the cinema, goods are still manufactured on English soil. (219)

19 Aaron Jaffe describes how modernists’ marketing was quite similar to how film celebrities marketed their star status:
The same way modernists and modernism’s literary economists fetishize authorship, celebrities and their publicists fetishize the production of self. The rhetoric of both insists on alleged indifference to consumption, studied insensitivity to existing tastes of consumers, readers, audiences, and publics. . . . The differences between one and the other should be measured in scale, not technique or ambition. (91)
production was poor. Barrymore’s assuming an intelligent audience could be interpreted as an attempt to flatter *Journal* readers, but the specific and detailed critiques he gives of the current state of film make it difficult to read his article as mere advertisement copy. On the contrary, his article demonstrates a desire to engage readers and motivate them to demand better films.

Like Skinner, Barrymore discusses the difference between performing before an audience and acting in front of a camera. However, Barrymore refutes Skinner’s claim that shifting from stage to screen diminishes one’s artistic standing, arguing instead that the shift from stage to screen is analogous to a painter moving to sculpting “either for relaxation or because he is tired of flat surfaces” (80). Similarly, the stage actor is not degrading himself in shifting from plays to movies, but rather extending his artistic reach and enhancing his thespian capabilities. For Barrymore, the transition from stage to film is a lateral move, aesthetically speaking, not a shameful endeavor a starving artist is forced to engage in to make ends meet. Furthermore, whereas Skinner laments the alleged insignificance of the actor in determining the success or failure of a film, Barrymore insists upon the importance of actors’ adaptation to this new medium and how actors impact the creation and reception of a particular movie. Nonetheless, Barrymore acknowledges,

In the theater there is a certain feeling you get through vibration from the people who record or receive your effects. It is a certain emotional reaction which is automatic. In the movies you must create all this yourself and, because you must create your own aura, you must work twice as hard. (80)

Here, Barrymore uses “aura” to describe the energy and emotion necessary to create a believable character. In contrast to Benjamin, Barrymore’s aura does not denote an
authenticity borne of a specific time and place; a film actor’s aura instead facilitates the audience’s suspension of disbelief, convincing them of the character’s personality and actions. Barrymore argues that the aura, rather than becoming destroyed through mechanical reproduction, is created by the screen actor due to the lack of collaboration between actor and audience. Obviously, Benjamin’s theory on the aura is more complex than Barrymore’s deployment of the term, but the fact that this term repeatedly appears in filmic discourse indicates a degree of ineffability to art, in this case film, and which the term “aura” seems to accurately describe according to philosophers and actors alike.

Barrymore’s article emphasizes the role actors, producers, and audiences play in the creation of film, generally disregarding the mechanical aspect of film in favor of the human element whose existence Skinner denies. In this, Barrymore retrieves the agency of the actors, while also empowering the viewing public. Nonetheless, he concludes his article by marveling at the ability of technology to capture the imaginations of the masses:

Sometimes when I sit in one of the coliseuhm [sic] like picture theaters and get the impression of the thousands of persons all with their attention enchained on a small square of white about half a block away, I still wonder at this miracle of a mechanical age and conclude that after all . . . the moving picture is still in its infancy. (82)

Like Barry, Barrymore views film as a catalyst to a new mechanical era, but instead of placing this age within a cultural hierarchy, Barrymore emphasizes the wonderment of a creation still in its infancy. Barrymore’s article represents a counterpoint to Skinner’s piece and demonstrates the multi-faceted responses to film professionals that were available to broader audiences.
Barrymore was not the only—or most famous—celebrity to write for the *Journal* on the subject of film’s aesthetic worth. Charlie Chaplin was arguably the first international celebrity and contributed more articles to the *Journal* on the subject of film than any other writer. Chaplin became a metonymic signifier for the debate on film in this era because of his immense popularity among mass audiences and the aesthetic credibility he gained in highbrow culture.²⁰ His respect within highbrow circles was known to the general public, to such an extent that it was lampooned by the modernist poet Vachel Lindsay in a 1926 issue of the *Journal*. In “The Great Douglas Fairbanks,” Lindsay positions himself as a go-between in the high/popular divide, since he is a modernist poet writing for a mass-market magazine on the subject of celebrities. Aside from his status as a modernist, Lindsay is an interesting choice for the *Journal* because he wrote “The Congo”—the poem Currie satirizes through the Flapper in “Sundown of Love.”

Lindsay’s *Journal* appearance shows him utilizing his insider status as a modernist to expose and mock highbrow conceit for the reading enjoyment of *Journal* readers:

*Writers whom I will not mention have learned to speak the name of Charlie Chaplin with a sigh. They go straight ahead and compare him to Hamlet, or somebody that has acted Hamlet. . . . Anyhow, the really proud among us breathe the name Chaplin, and then have no more to do with the movies.* (114)

²⁰ North cites 1920s popular author Thomas Burke—who accompanied Chaplin during his return to London in 1922—and his description of Chaplin’s international celebrity during this decade:

[Chaplin] is the first man in the history of the world of whom it can truly and literally be said that he is world-famous. Kings, prime ministers, and singers may be famous in the civilised world, but Charles is known in regions where Napoleon and Beethoven and Mussolini have never been heard of. He is known in the Solomon Islands, in the interior of New Guinea and the inner cities of Tibet, and in the recesses of Africa. (qtd. in North, fn. 79)
Lindsay claims that if anyone mentions the accomplishments of D. W. Griffith or actors such as Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, highbrows scoff—even though the Chaplin partnered with all three to found United Artists studio. But, according to Lindsay, the lowly celebrities will have the last laugh, as it is because of them that the intelligentsia has turned Chaplin into a high art icon: “Whenever anybody that looks like a painful highbrow gets within ten feet of Fairbanks, he begins to tell them how Charlie Chaplin is the next thing to Whistler. . . . He compares him to anything that shows that Charlie is in a class all by himself” (114). Lindsay’s barbs are not unfounded, as Barry proves in her passionate defense of Chaplin’s aesthetic worth:

I am always being told that the cinema is not and never can be high-brow. That is just nonsense (or a misunderstanding of the word high-brow). Charlie Chaplin is very sophisticated, so is Felix the Cat (both of them are popular enough) and I call them distinctly high-brow. (166)

Lindsay’s article satirically considers the aesthetic position of Charlie Chaplin, demonstrating that some modernists not only wanted to speak to mass audiences, but also enjoyed undermining highbrow pretensions for the benefit of the bourgeois.

Chaplin would remain caught in the intersection of the aesthetic debate on film throughout the Jazz Age, and his articles for the Journal reveal to some of his biggest fans his own thoughts on film’s place in culture. Chaplin’s Journal articles, like celebrity profiles today, offer readers a chance to “get to know” a major movie star; however, Chaplin’s articles are more than promotional pieces for upcoming films attempting to show how The Tramp is “just like us.” In his pieces for the Journal, Chaplin enters the film debate and forces readers to confront and engage with Chaplin the person, not his slapstick alter ego. While readers were familiar with Chaplin from his silent movie roles,
Chaplin the visual object is largely absent in these articles. The amount of text far surpasses the space devoted to photographs, which is to be expected in an opinion piece but is atypical of a celebrity feature. When visual representation is provided, it serves to reinforce the fact that the author of this text is Chaplin, the man behind the Tramp. In the 1922 “We Have Come to Stay,” published only a few months after Skinner’s article, there are two pictures of Chaplin: a small one of him as the Tramp, and a much larger one sans Tramp accoutrements, emphasizing the duality of Chaplin that Michael North claims symbolizes “the conflict between popular culture and the young intellectuals” (165). Even the byline for the article serves to further dissociate Chaplin from his role onscreen, since it reads “by Charles Chaplin,” not “Charlie”—further indication that readers are coming to a serious text; there will be no slipping on banana peels here.

Chaplin’s piece is similar to Barrymore’s in that it exalts film while recognizing its current flaws. Chaplin echoes Barrymore, but also goes further in solidifying film’s status as a permanent fixture in both high and popular culture:

The motion picture has come to stay. It is a recognized medium of art, though it has seldom been exploited that way. It has shown great possibilities of providing a cheap and almost universal amusement, and it has demonstrated that it can do certain things better than the stage. (12)

Chaplin also argues for the artistic value of comedy in more depth than Barrymore, astutely calling up names of authors who have long been established as classics, thereby placing his own work in the context of a comedic heritage: “Ideas of comedy are pretty much the same and have been for centuries. . . . Buffoonery does not die. It has come to us from the classics. There is slapstick in the comedy of Shakespeare and Molière” (61). Chaplin has a valid point: characters in Shakespeare are pursued by bears and have names
like “Bottom”; Molière’s Tartuffe is rife with sexual innuendo and physical comedy. In another context these plays might have been interpreted as crass or vulgar, but because they were written by Shakespeare and Molière they are considered part of a great literary tradition. In contrast to Skinner, Chaplin views film as not only carrying on the aesthetic heritage of the stage, but improving on it: “Comedy on the screen can be made more intimate by the enlarging of every important bit of business or character detail. Then, too, screen comedy is a jack in the box sort of a thing and admirably attuned to the mechanical grinding of the projection machine” (61). Instead of creating a choppy, artificial feel to the story through mechanics, the uneven quality of film projection acts as a spring, creating suspense until the punch-line hits the audience, which carries more force because it is blown up on screen, and no one misses it due to poor seats in the theater.

Chaplin also has some rather serious criticisms of the film industry that he feels the public, and specifically Journal readers, can help rectify. Many people at this time—from producers to moviegoers—began to feel that films had already run their course; fewer original features were coming out and it was predicted that, in the near future, original features would be entirely replaced by newsreels. But Chaplin does not concur with those who would write off the movies so soon:

I feel sure that the future of the films will take care of itself not so much because of new blood but by the demands of a tired and too long acquiescent public. The films can do much to depict actual life with its comedy and tragedy. Realism is needed, realism in the sense that there be truth and sincerity rather than forced and obvious moralizing, which we have had to satiation. (12)

His primary critique of the movies concerns the pervasiveness of “moralizing” at the expense of genuine realism. For Chaplin, as for many moviegoers, film plots had not only
become too transparent, but the “lessons” to be learned from narratives depicting the gangster whose life of crime leads to a remorseful life in prison, or the love triangle in which the wife considers divorce only to end up staying with her husband and protecting the sanctity of marriage, were mundane and overdone. Chaplin argues that comedies have garnered more success than dramas because they are not concerned with moralizing, and he advises producers to alter their canned story lines before they lose audiences entirely. Nevertheless, if the public desires a change in their movie-going experience, it is up to them to improve the current lackluster state of film. Chaplin encourages Journal readers to participate in the movie-making business not only by wielding their dollars (or by withholding them), but also by demanding better-quality films. In this way, the collaboration between actor and audience that Skinner and Barrymore both claim is intrinsic to theater has evolved into a dialogue between film producers and moviegoers, and it is up to audiences to improve their cinematic experience—through letters and through the power they wield as consumers. While the personal and immediate interaction between actor and audience member may be lost in film, a new relationship has been forged in this mechanical age. Although Skinner argues that the relationship between audience and actor has been irrevocably lost, Chaplin provides evidence of everyday, ordinary Americans calling and writing to him from all over the country offering suggestions for improving the industry. Audience participation, collaboration,

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21 This criticism is shared by Barry, who argues, “conventions are most rigid and most deadening in the American film” (146). Additionally, these rigid conventions perpetuate stereotypical gender roles, wherein “we pretend that chastity is and always has been the greatest charm of women: we don’t behave as if we thought so, but we pretend to think it all the same” (149). For Chaplin and Barry, the trite moralizing contained in most films was one of its most serious drawbacks.
and advocacy did not terminate with the invention of the projection camera; it simply became less immediate.

The relationship between the public and the movie industry is more fully explored in Chaplin’s next article for the Journal. Here, Chaplin complicates the boundary between artist and entertainer and undermines some of his claims from the previous piece. In “Does the Public Know What It Wants?” Chaplin answers his own query with an emphatic “No.” In the context of his earlier article, one wonders if he was either disappointed in the consequent lack of consumer response, or discouraged by the kind of audience input that did occur. He may have also begun to resent the kind of attention given to the Tramp at this point, as his popularity was still at a fever pitch two years after the success of The Kid (1921). Whatever initiated his discontent with the public, his tone in this article is noticeably different than in the earlier one.

Chaplin begins by describing an early film that was hastily made and for which he was offered twenty-five dollars. The film, Twenty Minutes of Love, was released in 1914 and is the first film crediting Chaplin as director, as well as the film that introduced The Tramp character for the first time. For this role, Chaplin claims that public approval mattered very little compared to twenty-five dollars the job promised. The film was a minor success, but as Chaplin makes clear, “I had a high regard for the twenty-five dollars, and my job was to please the man who had asked me to make the picture, and not the public” (40). Chaplin thus severs the correlation between appealing to the public and making money that is so often taken for granted in popular art, especially film. Of course the irony is that this film introduced the alter ego that would make him an artist to highbrows and a clown to the masses. Chaplin parallels Barrymore’s argument in his
disregard for the public, but he goes further in claiming that his only concern was for his paycheck. Why would Chaplin, an entertainer for the masses, claim indifference regarding public opinion, especially early on in his career when one would expect fame to be a top priority for a young actor? And assuming he truly feels this way, why would he broadcast this cynical perspective to *Journal* readers, many of whom were Chaplin fans?

Ironically, in his justification of monetary motivations, Chaplin takes an aristocratic, auteur-like position, arguing that the public does not know what it wants, so there is no sense in attempting to please it. Chaplin claims that plot lines are recycled over and over until, for whatever reason, the public stops buying tickets and producers have to find a new cliché with which to over-saturate the market. However, there are seemingly no telltale signs to indicate when an audience will grow weary of a particular plot or, for that matter, make an otherwise mundane narrative into a blockbuster hit. Because there is no consistency in what audiences enjoy, Chaplin proclaims, “I do not believe that the public knows what it wants. . . . There was no idea in the public mind that it wanted to see the character that I have played in so many films through so many situations until that character was revealed” (40). Although this point remains tacit, the international success Chaplin has achieved between *Twenty Minutes of Love* and this article reinforces his claim. Ultimately, the public can only indicate what it does not like through refusing to purchase movie tickets—the public can provide only negative input, which is not helpful in predicting what it wants to see prior to production, and so should not affect how actors or directors construct their art.
Chaplin also argues that, while the movie business may not be able to foretell what the public enjoys, people do not appreciate being pandered to—audiences want an authentic reproduction of the Tramp, not a Tramp simply going through the motions.

Chaplin illuminates this point by presenting *Journal* readers with a fan letter:

> I have noticed in your last picture a lack of spontaneity. Although the picture was unfailing as a laugh-getter, the laughter was not so round as at some of your earlier work. I am afraid you are becoming a slave to your public, whereas in most of your pictures the audiences were a slave to you. The public, Charlie, likes to be slaves. (40)

The fan critiques Charlie for a lack of aura, in Barrymore’s sense of the word: His performance was not a believable rendition of the Tramp. Despite the mechanization of film, audience members still experienced “spontaneity” in movies, and this fan recognizes when that spontaneity is missing in Chaplin.

As a result of this letter, Chaplin’s declares to *Journal* readers that he must follow his earlier instinct and not allow desires for public approval affect his performance. In this, he reinforces his point from “We Have Come to Stay” by encouraging public activism in the film industry:

> This letter was a great lesson to me, and I took stock, so to speak. . . . And since that letter I have tried to avoid what I think the public wants. . . . This is obviously not meant as a slap at the public, but rather at those of us who think we can tell just what “they” want, whether we are editors, theatrical managers, or business men who have commodities to sell to the public. (40)

Chaplin’s response to the fan letter shows how collaboration between audience and actor can function in the service of aesthetics. Despite Chaplin’s more cynical perspective on public participation in this article, both of his articles espouse a belief in the public’s

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22 Whether or not the fan letter actually existed, Chaplin uses this letter to emphasize the potential for collaboration between actor and audience members and encourages *Journal* readers to advocate for better quality films.
capacity to improve film’s aesthetic quality. The Journal thus provides a forum for readers to participate in an aesthetic dialogue straddling the high/popular divide, while also participating in the burgeoning celebrity industry by publishing the most famous person alive.

Skinner, Barrymore, and Chaplin discuss film’s aesthetic worth from various perspectives, but John Farrar’s 1923 Journal article “When the Pictures are Good” resists the either/or argument surrounding film’s cultural position to consider movies as both a form of entertainment and a valid art form. Farrar describes films he has found entertaining such as The Covered Wagon (1923) and Down to the Sea in Ships (1922), the latter containing “seascapes that rival Winslow Homer’s best canvases, and breathless whaling incidents that could scarcely be adequately described on the printed page by Melville or Conrad” (42). Farrar, like the other Journal writers before him, both praises and criticizes films; however, unlike Chaplin, Farrar argues that public approval is perhaps the most important factor to consider when creating a film:

After all, when such tremendous sums of money are involved, no motion picture producer can afford to do much that does not meet with your approval. . . . As such, we make or destroy art in the motion pictures. . . . Art and amusement—are they possible mates?” (212)

Farrar collapses the antagonistic relationship between highbrow and popular to suggest that film includes high-art elements even as it seeks public approval. The film industry is not inherently art or entertainment, but is capable of making and destroying art—and the same applies to its entertainment value, since, if a film fails to meet with the public’s approval, it has also failed in its capacity as a popular medium. Farrar chastises those who would deny film its aesthetic credit, claiming, “That an intelligent man . . . can adopt
a patronizing attitude toward so great an artistic medium is absurd” (42). Farrar’s article pushes the aesthetic debate on film one step further than those who came before him in arguing that film is an art form in the tradition of classical painting and literature, but also a new and exciting way for the public to be entertained. His piece shows the development of the aesthetic debate on film as it appeared in a mass-market, “domestic” magazine and demonstrates the masses’ committed engagement with this phenomenon.

As early as 1922, and for the remainder of the decade, the complexities and ambiguities of the cultural divide are pinpointed and problematized in considerations of film and discourse on modernist culture, all in the pages of a domestic magazine. With the onset of new technology comes, almost immediately, debate on its place in culture and on the artistic spectrum in a middle-class context. As modernism emerges as a cultural formation, the Journal provides editorial commentary and publishes the “modernist viewpoint” in keeping with its mission to appeal to myriad middle-class women’s interests. Investigating the debates surrounding film, modernist culture, and other cultural developments such as “flapperism” constructs a much more complex and comprehensive understanding of the Journal and women readers than has been previously considered. This mass-market periodical offered readers a cornucopia of cultural material, and whether they bought the magazine to look at the flashy new ads, to discover what cause Barton Currie had taken up that month, or to read Charlie Chaplin’s opinions on the film industry (or all three), a smorgasbord of content was available to them. Just as it was a mistake for film producers to assume the public all wanted the same thing, or that their desires were easy to figure out, so too should we take care not to
dismiss mass-market magazines such as the *Journal* and its vested interest in cultural phenomena such as “the modernist viewpoint” and new aesthetic mediums like film.
CHAPTER FOUR
MATCHING PEARLS TO SEQUINS: HOW BRITISH VOGUE COLLAPSED THE CULTURAL BINARY BETWEEN BLOOMSBURY AND JAZZ

In 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote to Vita Sackville-West describing the difference between writing for the Times Literary Supplement (TLS) and contributing to British Vogue, then under editor Dorothy Todd: “And what’s the objection to whoring after Todd? Better whore, I think, than honestly and timidly and coolly and respectably copulate with the Times Lit. Sup.” (Letters 200). Woolf’s vivid sexual imagery implies the different degrees of cultural capital, or respectability, associated with these magazines. Neither “John” is very appealing; although one might prefer the dignity of copulating with TLS, it is not a particularly stimulating experience, and in each case the writer is positioned in stereotypical feminine roles—either exploited or submissive. For Woolf at least, actively pursuing money is better than timidly demurring as one accepts payment. Woolf’s preference for Todd is reaffirmed in a letter to Logan Pearsall Smith from the same year. Woolf relates that a young writer had complained to her of TLS omitting a “mildly irreverent story from his last review,” an act of censorship she considers “bad for young writers—perhaps worse than the vulgarity, which is open and shameless, of Vogue.” Vogue’s crassness, for Woolf and the rest of Bloomsbury, derives from its “shameless” engagement with consumer culture and the commercial marketplace. Nonetheless, “Todd lets you write what you like, and its [sic] your own
fault if you conform to the stays and petticoats” (*Letters* 158). Thus, while Todd makes a whore of Bloomsbury, she at least grants writers creative freedom.

From 1922 to 1926, British *Vogue*’s editor-in-chief Dorothy Todd, a woman known for her admiration of Bloomsbury and controversial lifestyle, collaborated with romantic partner and *Vogue*’s fashion editor Madge Garland to create a fashion magazine that published Bloomsbury alongside features on American popular culture. Todd and Garland’s collaborative editorship lasted a brief four years because they failed to adhere to the *Vogue* paradigm as established by its publisher Condé Nast and American editor-in-chief Edna Woolman Chase. American *Vogue* was already considered the fashion Bible by the 1920s, and in 1916 Nast brought the periodical to England with the expectation that women’s interest in fashion was a transatlantic concern.\(^1\) However, he struggled to find a British editor with the combined business and style acumen of Chase, and Todd’s brief tenure as editor-in-chief represents another in a line of failed attempts by Nast to find the English equivalent to Chase. Eventually, Todd and Garland’s tendency to stray from the subject of stays and petticoats led to their early demise within the Nast publishing empire. Though Woolf deemed Todd “money-grubbing” and “commercial” (*Diary* 176), Nast considered Bloomsbury too avant-garde for his women’s fashion magazine. Todd and Garland’s struggle, and failure, to please either their publisher or their Bloomsbury contributors reveals the dangerously ambiguous cultural

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\(^1\) Unlike the avant-garde haute couture exhibited in today’s American *Vogue*, Chase’s *Vogue* was a rather conservative magazine that promoted traditional gender expectations, often publishing features on proper etiquette and socialite weddings alongside fashion that was for the decidedly New and Old Money classes. Chase was notorious for her emphasis on propriety and old-fashioned values, avoiding publishing pieces on the modernist phenomenon and jazz culture because they were not part of the *Vogue* formula she and Nast had created. Ultimately, Chase constructed her magazine for women of means interested in the latest lines from Paris, not its latest expatriate writer.
position of these women editors, even as they created one of the most exciting and diverse periodicals of the era.

Criticism on British *Vogue* tends to focus solely on the work of Bloomsbury and its tumultuous relationship with Todd and Garland, but these women did more than simply juxtapose fashion spreads with Richard Aldington and Aldous Huxley. My archival research on British *Vogue* during the Todd and Garland era uncovers several articles and pictorials on jazz and African-American popular culture, particularly in the work by illustrators Anne Harriet Fish, published simply as “Fish,” and Miguel Covarrubias. These works, read in conjunction with Bloomsbury’s contributions, show that what interested Todd and Garland most was everything new and shocking in culture—be it the latest T. S. Eliot poem or the newest dance craze in New York City. As *Vogue*’s editors, these women considerably broadened what fell under the umbrella of “fashion” and what it meant to be en *Vogue*. Contemporary scholars such as Aurelea Mahood argue, “*Vogue* and its disparate yet fascinating collection of contributors—not to mention the ‘Hall of Fame’ nominees—suggest the rich possibility inherent in grappling with the emergence of modernist literature as a mainstream ‘fashion accessory’ during the 1920s” (46-47). However, in addition to making modernism appealing to followers of fashion, or “The Mode,” Todd and Garland matched the pearls of Bloomsbury with the sequins of jazz; creating a correspondence between the intellectual aristocracy of
modernism and the cabaret realm inhabited by vamps and George Gershwin.²

**Condé Nast’s Upper-Class Aspirations and Bloomsbury’s Intellectual Aristocracy**

Bloomsbury’s participation in what it viewed as a commercial magazine is complicated by Nast’s own vision of *Vogue* as a “class” magazine. Bloomsbury considered *Vogue* commercial due to its dependence on advertising revenue and its public accessibility on newsstands, compared to the patronage enjoyed by modernist magazines like *The Criterion* and the limited distribution of modernist texts by private publishers such as Hogarth Press and Shakespeare and Company. In contrast, Nast did not consider advertising an indication of “shameless” commercialism. In fact, he depended on the profits made from advertising revenue to offset the lower circulation numbers he was willing to accept in order to gain a more sophisticated audience. Nast biographer Caroline Seebohm explains his strategy for seeking a niche audience:

> The popular plan of circulation building was to cater to the multitudes and to sell so many copies of one’s publication that advertisers couldn’t afford not to use it . . . Nast’s scheme was different. . . . He wanted a paper that would be authoritative in matters of taste, or dress, or whatever it dealt with, and he wanted it to appeal to people who had money but whose criterion was taste rather than mass popularity. He was not naïve, he knew that such a magazine couldn’t live without advertising, but he wanted to put advertisers in a position where they could not ignore him because of limited circulation, but instead would be obliged to appear in his pages because of the quality of his product. (66)

While Cyrus H. K. Curtis, publisher of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*, followed the popular circulation strategy described above, Nast took advantage

² In Caroline Seebohm’s biography on Nast, she explains the cultural significance The Mode had for *Vogue* readers:

> The Mode—the word alone was enough to send frissons down the spine of an ambitious young lady at the turn of the century. If one was not au courant with the Mode, one might as well stay in Hammond, Indiana, for the rest of one’s life, doomed to provincialism like Madame Bovary. The importance of the right clothes to aspiring womanhood in those years cannot be overestimated. (36)
of advertising dollars to create a magazine promoting wealth and leisure. The plan worked because, as Luckhurst explains, “the magazine could sell at less than production costs, relying instead on making a profit from advertising revenue. Even under Dorothy Todd, *Vogue* always opened with numerous pages of adverts” (17).³

Curtis used advertising revenue to maintain low costs to the consumer to aid him in the pursuit of high circulation rates, but Nast was able to earn a profit by depending on revenue from luxury advertisers that enhanced *Vogue*’s appearance as an upper-class periodical. *Vogue*’s reputation was further reinforced in 1914, when World War I disrupted the Paris fashion shows. Chase was determined to put on the first American fashion show and enlisted the assistance of society women such as Mrs. Marion Stuyvesant Fish to provide patronage and sophistication to the event, making the Fashion Fête —as Chase deemed it—one of the most memorable social events of the season. The Fête was also significant because it marked the first fashion show in the United States. Nast had initially dismissed the idea, telling Chase, “You’ll never get really smart women interested in this. . . . They wouldn’t dream of it; it has too much to do with trade” (Chase 120). But Chase’s tenacity and perseverance paid off—in terms of economic and cultural capital—and helped established *Vogue*’s upscale status.

Nonetheless, Nast’s emphasis on advertising leads some critics, such as Jane Garrity, to categorize *Vogue* as Bloomsbury did: “Although *Vogue* specifically targeted a cultivated upper-class readership . . . it would be inaccurate to assume that the magazine is therefore not a product of mass culture. . . . it consistently led all of its competitors in

³ Seebohm specifies the amount of success Nast achieved with his formula: “He saw the company’s earnings rise from $241,410 . . . in 1923 to a high of $1,425,076 in 1928. *Vogue*’s circulation rose from 16,853 in 1909 when he bought it, to 138,783 in 1928” (282).
advertising revenue throughout the 1920s” (“Virginia Woolf” 191). While Nast included ads in his magazine, it is reductive to define his magazine as merely a product or promoter of mass culture. Advertisements in *Vogue* differed from the mass-market *Journal* in that they predominantly featured products like pearls and luxury automobiles, as opposed to dish soap and Campbell’s Soup.

Furthermore, Nast sacrificed high circulation rates for a more sophisticated audience, eschewing a mass readership to appeal to a particular demographic comprised of the aspirational middle class and the upper class. As Seebohm argues, “it was the idea of class qua restricted readership that expressed most accurately his revolutionary theory” (81).

*Vogue*’s content and appearance also appealed to social climbers who aspired to be members of the upper class: “The clever corollary of class publishing was that it enabled [Nast’s] magazines to attract readers who did not yet belong to the class which he had chosen, but who aspired to it” (81). Garrity concurs with Seebohm, arguing, “. . . as Nast envisioned it, *Vogue* would appeal not only to readers who were exceedingly wealthy but also to those who actively aspired to be members of the upper class.”

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4 Seebohm also demonstrates the cultural influence Nast achieved in America through this unique marketing strategy:

   By publishing a periodical for people of breeding, he was defining—for himself, for his advertisers, and for a generation of Americans—precisely what constituted the American upper class. The fact that advertisers responded as they did is proof enough that such a class was anthropologically and sociologically identifiable, and that their behavior, manners, clothes, and customs could be accurately chronicled in the pages of a journal. (81)

5 While his stipulated audience may seem limited, Nast also imagined *Vogue* as a magazine of global consequence:

   Linking the new consumerist orientation of readers to the notion of imperialist expansion, *Vogue*’s masthead in the period between the wars proclaimed, “VOGUE KNOWS NO FRONTIERS.” . . . By cultivating an international market of “women of breeding,” *Vogue* sought to disseminate a model of femininity in which appearance and taste were central. (“Selling Culture” 33)
Therefore, it is more accurate to refer to *Vogue* as a “class” magazine, the term Nast himself employed to describe *Vogue*:

a “class publication” is nothing more nor less than a publication that looks for its circulation only to those having in common a certain characteristic marked enough to group them into a class. . . . When I say a class publication “looks” to one of these classes for its circulation, I state it very mildly; as a matter of fact, the publisher, the editor, the advertising manager and circulation man must conspire not only to get all their readers from the one particular class to which the magazine is dedicated, but rigorously to exclude all others. (qtd. in Seebohm 80)

For Nast, the exclusion of “all others” referred to both the masses and the highbrow intelligentsia. While Nast desired a wealthy, aristocratic audience, he did not want “sophisticated women readers over-doing their enthusiasm for the highbrow and buying literary reviews instead of the couture and cruises which *Vogue* advertised” (Luckhurst 17).

Nast’s strategy was profitable and also set *Vogue* apart from the plethora of periodicals available at newsstands in this era. As Seebohm notes,

By 1900, there were at least ten major women’s magazines in America that covered fashion . . . . Of all these, only *Vogue* specifically set out to interest an elite; the rest were what would now be categorized as mass-market magazines aimed at unrestricted audiences. (37)

*Vogue*’s glossy appearance, luxury advertisements, and higher cost distinguished it from magazines like the *Post* and *Journal* and reinforced its reputation as an upper-class magazine, while also appealing to members of the middle class who desired luxury outside their means.

Woolf not only labeled Todd’s *Vogue* “commercial,” but also remarked that this was “rather an exception in my world” (*Diary* 176). Woolf’s comments demonstrate the uncomfortable relationship between aristocratic Bloomsbury and *Vogue*’s world of
capitalist production. By 1928, Woolf’s interactions with Todd grew more infrequent and the insulting imagery associated with Todd when Woolf does meet her in social settings—Todd is “tapir like, & the creatures nose snuffs pertinaciously after Bloomsbury” (Diary 176)—reinforce the resentment Woolf felt toward this “exception” to her world. Woolf viewed Todd as an interloper, an aristocratic poseur. Todd, on the other hand, admired Woolf and Bloomsbury, as evidenced by her willingness to continue publishing them at her own professional risk. Woolf’s disdain for Todd aside, the editor was responsible for publicizing modernism to a larger audience, and the frequency with which members of Bloomsbury appeared in Vogue under her tenure indicate that the intellectual aristocracy appreciated the dependable pay and broader publicity.

As Nast’s and Woolf’s remarks vividly illustrate, despite shared socioeconomic positions, Bloomsbury and Nast defined themselves along different cultural lines. An exploration of the distinction between socioeconomic status and highbrow culture clarifies the different subdivisions of “upper class” that caused Nast and Bloomsbury to oppose Todd, though they were closer on the cultural spectrum than they apparently realized. Bloomsbury is associated with the upper class due to many of its members’ socioeconomic positions, but highbrow culture and the wealthy upper class are not

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6 Woolf attacks Todd because of her alleged social aspirations (i.e., her “snuffing” after Bloomsbury), but Woolf also repeatedly attacks Todd on the basis of her appearance. In the same diary entry Woolf likens Todd to “some primeval animal emerging from the swamp, muddy, hirsute” (Diary 175). Reasons given by scholars for these scathing personal attacks range from homophobia (Todd was an open lesbian and Woolf was anxious about her growing intimacy with Sackville-West) to Woolf projecting her general disdain toward mass culture onto Todd’s body. As Garrity notes, “Woolf’s language [in her diaries] exposes her elitist scorn for the masses, and reveals her tendency to hierarchize different forms of cultural production: that which is too openly commercial, too popular, and too accessible is held in contempt, whereas the art that appeals to a minority is sacralized” (“Virginia Woolf” 195). Woolf’s scorn is so extreme that Todd is described as subhuman because she represents the base masses, even though Vogue was considered by its publishers and readers as an emblem of the upper class.
synonymous. The two spheres are often conflated since modernism originated in highbrow culture and highbrow often connotes upper class. However, as Huyssen argues, “[B]oth modernism and the avant-garde always defined their identity in relation to two cultural phenomena: traditional bourgeois high culture . . . but also vernacular and popular culture as it was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture” (ix). While Huyssen focuses on modernists’ fear of “the nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the ‘wrong’ kind of success” (53), I argue that modernists regarded appropriation by “bourgeois high culture” as similarly nightmarish.

Raymond Williams described Bloomsbury as a “sociological fraction,” arguing, “the second half of the nineteenth century was a comprehensive development and reform of the professional and cultural life of bourgeois England.” Consequently,

The changing character of the society and the economy built, in fact, a new and very important professional and highly educated sector of the English upper class: very different in its bearings and values from either the old aristocracy or from the directly commercial bourgeoisie. (136)

This new group combined wealth and education, and they became known as “the intellectual aristocracy” (qtd. in Williams 127). Intellectualism set Bloomsbury apart from both the aristocracy and the commercial bourgeoisie, even as its members remained tied to both classes due to the unique socioeconomic conditions of early twentieth-

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7 Kurt W. Black further elaborates on the intellectual aristocracy:
A substantial part of England’s intellectual leadership had had not only common background and training, but actually descended from families with a long history of intellectual and scholarly achievements, to which later generations either conformed or reacted. This tradition also included a common type of upbringing for its offspring, who met each other as children, then in the Universities, and in later life in more or less intense relationships. (40-41)
century England. Nonetheless, even as they were connected, however tangentially, to the moneyed aristocracy, they were also highly suspicious of it and sought to further dissociate themselves from the wealthy through their various aesthetic endeavors.

A famous example of modernist anxiety toward the aristocratic class is embodied by Lady Ottoline Morrell, who was not only a patron to Bloomsbury artists such as D. H. Lawrence and Augustus John but was also mocked in their individual works. Lawrence created a monster out of his patron in the superficially eccentric megalomaniac Hermione Roddice from *Women in Love*. Meanwhile, John’s 1920 portrait of Lady Ottoline Morrell depicts her with lips pulled back from her teeth, her nose taking up over half of her face, and eyes looking out at the viewer with a combination of disdain and distrust. These exceedingly insulting portrayals of a woman who opened her home to Bloomsbury and other intellectuals and artists demonstrate the tension between modernists and the wealthy. Todd may have been considered commercial and an interloper, but the aristocratic class was also viewed as a potential threat to the purity of modernist art because of money. Even if patronage was treated as a relatively “respectable” means to

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8 Despite Bloomsbury’s intellectualism and progressive politics, it still conformed to certain social expectations. For example, as Williams points out, of the thirteen initial members of Bloomsbury, ten were men, and nine of the ten had gone to Cambridge (138). While Virginia Woolf became one of the most well known Bloomsbury members, in the context of the group she was in the minority. For Williams, one of the distinguishing features of Bloomsbury was “the specific contradiction between the presence of highly intelligent and intellectual women, within these families, and their relative exclusion from the dominant and formative male institutions” (138).

9 Regardless of differences in socioeconomic structures, England’s intellectual aristocracy has an American counterpart that also came about in the 1920s. David Savran examines the Jazz Age and its role in shaping American drama, in turn describing what became known in certain circles as “the intelligent minority”: Like so many champions of the legitimate stage in the 1920s, both Walter Prichard Eaton and John Emerson (like George Jean Nathan) repeatedly use the phrase *intelligent minority* to describe the audience of “the true spoken drama.” The category of intelligence functions as a decoy for these critics. For their concern is less with the mentally acute than with those fortunate enough to have inherited or acquired significant amounts of cultural, educational, and symbolic capital. (129, emphasis in original)
earn financial support for one’s art, artists still felt the need to emphasize that financial support did not influence the art. As Sean Latham argues, patrons like Morrell were viewed by Bloomsbury and other artists as “egotistical figures who offer the pleasures of social engagement but also threaten to transform art and artists alike into social capital” (131). By creating an intellectual aristocracy, Bloomsbury was able to detach itself from the negative connotations they associated with members of the socioeconomic upper class, while retaining a hierarchy that separated themselves from the commercialized masses. However, this hierarchy was considerably destabilized when many of Bloomsbury’s members began contributing to Nast’s class magazine: a magazine that pursued the wealth of the aristocracy through commercial advertising. Perhaps, wary of patronage, Bloomsbury decided to pursue multiple financial routes, while maintaining that it was not concerned with turning a profit, even as its members earned considerable money and fame through their *Vogue* appearances.

**Dorothy Todd and Madge Garland’s *Vogue***

Nast created British *Vogue* in 1916, after World War I prevented consistent exportation of American *Vogue* into Europe. In 1922, Nast hired Dorothy Todd as the editor-in-chief for British *Vogue*, a rather progressive act in a time when women

10 Latham also views Morrell’s general lack of historical recognition as a direct consequence of the contempt by Bloomsbury toward her, despite the generosity she exhibited toward its members:

Garsington Manor [Morrell’s estate] . . . should have survived in our cultural histories as an “institution of modernism” every bit as potent as Bloomsbury, Shakespeare and Company, or Gertrude Stein’s apartment at 27 Rue de Fleurus. Indeed, Woolf’s deeply ambivalent relationship with Morrell grew, in part, out of a competition between Bloomsbury and Garsington to become the center of British intellectual and aesthetic life after the war. What sets Morrell apart, however, is that the men and women who entered her coterie turned on her with startling regularity, selling out their friend and patron by retailing portraits of life at Garsington to a public eager for scandal and gossip. (129-30). Far from transcending the lure of profit, these artists exploited their relationship with the aristocratic Morrell by selling titillating and insulting depictions of her.
magazine editors were still rare. Seebohm describes the chauvinism of the magazine industry:

In 1920, the doyen of women’s magazine publishing and editor of the Ladies’ Home Journal, Edward Bok, declared that full editorial authority of a modern magazine could not “safely be entrusted to a woman when one considers how largely executive is the nature of such a position.” (150)

However, Nast “consistently and unhesitatingly hired women for most of the important editorial posts” (150), believing that women readers were more likely to trust women writers when it came to fashion.11 The profitability and cultural influence of Nast’s publications prove Bok was wrong to dismiss women’s executive capabilities.

When Todd became editor of British Vogue she collaborated with its fashion editor and her eventual lover, Madge Garland, bringing avant-garde literature and art, as well as the latest developments in American popular culture, to a magazine whose primary concerns were supposed to be fashion and high society. When Todd became editor the magazine was already in dire financial straits, and, Garrity claims, “the economic climate allowed Dorothy Todd to introduce the highbrow element more easily than would have been possible had the fashion industry and Nast’s ‘high class, high-spending’ readership not been suffering the effects of the post-war recession” (18). Nevertheless, Todd’s agenda did not go unnoticed by her colleagues across the pond. American Vogue’s illustrious editor Edna Woolman Chase remarks in her 1954 autobiography,

Naturally of a literary and artistic bent [Todd] soon became at home in that coterie of English intellectuals and artists known as the Bloomsbury Group . . . Dorothy

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11 Edna Woolman Chase’s career at Vogue began in 1895. When Nast acquired the magazine in 1909, Chase told him she had been approached with an offer by the Journal’s Bok, at which point Nast promptly promoted the savvy Chase. According to her autobiography, “that was the only time I ever brought up the question of position or salary with my employer. From then on it was always Conde who anticipated any wish I might have” (105). Chase became editor in chief in 1914, and her thirty-seven year reign is still the longest in the history of Vogue editors.
took to this supercivilized, exotic, somewhat self-conscious milieu like a duck to water, and it must be said that because of the affinity many distinguished members of what was widely referred to as the “inkyllectuals” appeared in British *Vogue*. (151)

Nast and Chase brought Todd to New York over the course of her career with *Vogue*, attempting to inculcate her with the Nast formula. In spite of these lessons in *Vogue* etiquette, Todd would return to London only to publish more articles by inkyllectual Bloomsbury, much to the chagrin of her unamused employer.

However, Todd did not act alone in constructing *Vogue* and its departure from Nast’s vision. Anne Pender describes the significance of Todd’s collaboration with Garland in creating this unique periodical:

> Over four years [Todd and Garland] transformed the magazine from a fashion paper to a journal of high modernism and the avant-garde. In presenting the work of writers, artists and designers to the British public they began a complex process of celebrating, analysing and marketing modernist art and modernist ideas, including those of the Bloomsbury group. (520)

Pender is also careful to note that Todd and Garland did more than promote Bloomsbury “in all its manifestations”; they also “introduced the public to the idea of fashion design as an integral part of art, and of fashion designers as artists” (520). Moreover, as Lisa Cohen argues, Garland in particular “became a voice for the democratization of fashion, arguing that pleasurable, well-crafted clothes did not have to be the province of an elite” (379). Todd and Garland’s *Vogue* was more than a means through which Virginia Woolf, Clive Bell, and Aldous Huxley disseminated their highbrow ideas: it turned Bloomsbury into a type of “fashion,” just as fashion designers were beginning to achieve higher levels of cultural capital in being treated as a new kind of “artist.”
Todd and Garland were firmly committed to modernism and its impact on art and culture, so much so that their investment in it extended beyond *Vogue* and into their personal lives. Though Todd often receives the most credit regarding *Vogue*’s dedication to Bloomsbury, Cohen argues that Garland’s life “was shaped by and . . . shaped modernism.” Studying Garland’s cultural contributions in this era “has meant redressing the history of modernism: paying attention to the place of fashion and decoration in that history has meant understanding the strictures and possibilities of such a life in England in the first half of the twentieth century” (373). The gender boundaries Todd and Garland broke down should not be relegated to the background in examining *Vogue*’s bibliographic code, particularly because their progressive social politics informed their decision to publish Bloomsbury for the benefit of their female readers. Furthermore, Todd and Garland viewed modernism as “not only a set of linguistic and visual experiments that centered on certain revolutionary books and paintings but also as a whole complex of experiments in living.” Just as jazz eventually transcended its denotative meaning and came to signify the spirit of an age, modernist works “provided a range of expression for, and were significantly peopled by, women who were breaking away from their families and attempting to create something new in their lives and in culture” (380). Todd and Garland considered modernism as encompassing more than

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12 Garland’s identity was quite literally shaped by modernism. As Cohen relates, “[Garland] renamed herself, at Gertrude Stein’s suggestion: discarding her less-than-euphonious family name, McHarg, and taking the floral, pretty surname of an ex-husband, whose name she refused when they married, she became Madge Garland” (372).
Ulysses and The Waste Land; it also meant incorporating the concept of experimentation into all areas of life and culture.\textsuperscript{13}

Todd and Garland’s Vogue was also notable for its deconstruction of cultural binaries. Christopher Reed points out the magazine’s tendency to invert cultural distinctions, arguing, “British Vogue at this time was remarkable for unsettling the hierarchies that, to this day, distinguish ‘art’ and ‘design’ from ‘fashion’ and ‘decoration,’ and . . . the publishing organs of the intelligentsia from mass-circulation magazines” (“Design” 378). Furthermore, “With their rendering of the magazine, Todd and [Garland] made it clear that fashion and the ‘high’ art with which they were surrounding it both depended on the idea of making it new” (Cohen 380). What is even more remarkable about Todd and Garland’s Vogue was the extent to which they inverted and displaced those hierarchies, while introducing new, American popular culture phenomena such as jazz and the flapper to a British, upper-class, and generally conservative female audience.

Todd and Garland were both fired in 1926, and there are various discrepancies surrounding their simultaneous terminations. Some attribute Todd and Garland’s dismissal to their flamboyantly homosexual lifestyles, since they met, fell in love, and lived together during their careers at Vogue, refusing to hide their relationship.\textsuperscript{14}

Seebohm contends that Todd was fired because of her tendency to make Vogue more akin to a British version of Vanity Fair, which “alone might have been enough to attract the

\textsuperscript{13} Although Chase was certainly more conservative than Todd and Garland, I would argue that she too was one of the women breaking away from traditional family roles and gender expectations in order to create something new in culture.

\textsuperscript{14} According to Woolf, “It is said that Condé Nast threatened to reveal Todd’s private sins, if she sued them, so she is taking £1,000 and does not bring an action” (Letters 295).
censorious attention of Edna Woolman Chase.” However, Seebohm concurs with those who blame Todd and Garland’s relationship for the demise of their careers: “The morally rigorous Mrs. Chase also disapproved strongly of Miss Todd’s personal proclivities, which were overtly homosexual.” According to Seebohm, these factors combined to cause a loss in sales and advertising “under the new literary regime” (76). Chase, on the other hand, claims that Todd was fired because she would not adhere to the *Vogue* paradigm: “Fashion [Todd] all but eschewed, and our service features—Seen in the Shops, Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes, the Hostess and Beauty articles—were given short shrift. Advertising fell off by the pageful and back in New York Condé Nast had to face the fact that he was losing money” (152). Chase’s argument is considerably weakened by flipping through British *Vogue*’s pages at this time. While “Seen in Shops” and “Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes” are not consistent features, the pages devoted to fashion far outweigh the one or two articles written by Bloomsbury artists in each issue. There are articles on the latest designs of Chanel, Schiaparelli, Poiret, and exposés on the interior decorating secrets of prominent members of the aristocracy. Furthermore, the financial argument is undermined by Reed, who contends that when *Vogue* began losing money,

Todd confronted this challenge by halving the cover price and inaugurating an editorial campaign, asserting, “Every page of *Vogue* shows you how to save money by spending it to advantage” (Late October 1923: iv). Circulation rose, albeit slowly, under her stewardship, and a survey of readers found *Vogue* among the top three magazines read by middle-class women in 1927. . . . although Chase claims credit for setting British *Vogue* on the road to profitability, it continued to lose money during her editorship, only turning a profit in 1929, and then not from the magazine, but from associated fashion books. . . . (“A Vogue” 61)
The truth behind their termination is most likely a combination of all three factors—magazine content, struggling sales, and Todd and Garland’s lifestyles. Even if circulation rose under Todd, it rose slowly, and Nast was not a patient man when it came to profits.

The differences between Todd and Garland’s *Vogue* compared to Chase’s *Vogue* are striking, and a brief comparison of the two highlights the courage behind Todd and Garland’s deviations. In American *Vogue*, literature, even highbrow literature, was relegated to small book review column found at the back of the magazine entitled “What They Read.” The column, as the title implies, was less about the books themselves and more about alerting readers to what books were being talked about in sophisticated circles. In the early August 1920 issue, a review of Joseph Conrad’s *The Rescue* reminds readers, “What the story is, after all, matters little. A book by Conrad has come to be a recognized event in the world of letters, and those who look forward to such events will find their expectations justified once more” (102). *Vogue*’s concerns were fashion (primarily regarding clothing and interior decorating), high society, and etiquette. American *Vogue* may have advertised the latest trends coming from Paris, but it was British *Vogue* that published articles such as “Enter, the New Negro,” “The Truth About Jazz,” and profiles on Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker. Todd and Garland promoted Bloomsbury and American popular culture, while American *Vogue* stuck to the rigid Nast formula.

However, while British *Vogue* reviewed modernists and their works more than American *Vogue* did, it also, at times, promoted those writers’ works more as subjects one should know about, or as a means of gaining cultural capital, than as great works of
Richard Aldington’s 1925 profile on T. S. Eliot is similar to the “What They Read” column in American *Vogue* because it encourages readers to familiarize themselves with Eliot due to his exclusivity: “His influence at present is restricted, for he addresses himself only to superior minds” (71). Aldington entices potential readers to Eliot by appealing to their intellectualism. Aldington promotes Eliot almost entirely on the basis of the poet’s cultural capital, employing language similar to advertisement copy:

> [Eliot] is not known to the crowd; he is not even very widely read by the educated classes; but his influence can be detected in many places. His work is incessantly discussed by those who are genuinely interested in modern literature and thought. If he chose to play the game of Fashion he might easily aspire to the intellectual dictatorship of Mayfair. (71)

Aldington notes that Eliot’s fame would grow if he chose to play the game; but he is of such superior stuff that the game is beneath him—Eliot is not a passing fad, but a lasting influence on culture, and the culturally savvy person comprehends his influence. Mahood also notes the tone of Aldington’s essay, arguing, “when Aldington concludes his essay by remarking that readers can only neglect Eliot’s work at their peril, the reader is left with the impression that it is not so much important that she understand *The Waste Land* as understand that *The Waste Land* is important” (41). While modernist literature received considerably more attention in British *Vogue* than in its American sister, the editorial tone was in keeping with *Vogue*’s overall mission to promote the latest styles. Even if readers did not know or understand modernist poetry, they could at least educate themselves on the significance of modernist poetry.

Cultural shifts, from high to popular and from English to American, are recorded in the pages of British *Vogue* along with changes in hemlines and hat making. Indeed, throughout 1920s *Vogue* change is an underlying theme in many articles, coupled with
speculation on the positive and negative consequences of such swift alterations. Seebohm attributes the preoccupation with change to post-World War I conditions, remarking,

The Great War, as well as changing forever America’s cultural isolationism from Europe, also transformed Europeans’ opinions of America. By 1918, drained of material from its own fatigued shores, British *Vogue* turned enthusiastically to things American—American cars, American parties, American mansions, American money. While American *Vogue* drooled over the cool English beauty Lady Diana Cooper, British *Vogue* breathed ecstatically over the vivacious, dashing figure of Irene Castle. . . . If England still had class, America had unquestionably—glamour. (124)

However Seebohm overstates the situation. A 1923 article entitled “The Wind from America” demonstrates British *Vogue*’s occasional reactionary responses to American glamour:

The telephone has intruded on the old privacy, the gramophone has replaced the grandfather clock and spurts out its negro melody, destroying many a family ghost. . . . Devonshire House jazzes to its death, and the skyscraper reigns in its stead. The cocktail, banished from its own land, has here ousted the port and sherry of the 18th and 19th centuries. (35)

This article (which claims no author, a common occurrence prior to the prevalence of famous Bloomsbury writers contributing to *Vogue*) vividly captures the European fear of American cultural colonization, but it also represents a viewpoint that could have been found in the more conservative American *Vogue*, which ran articles on etiquette that sought to correct the decline of good manners in contemporary society. Contrary to Seebohm’s claim, it is more precise to say that British *Vogue* articulated an ambivalence shared by many of its readers toward American culture and a deterioration of England’s class structure.

Still, the conservative attitude toward culture slowly began to alter along with everything else. The pendulum began to swing in the other direction by the middle of the
decade, when an enthusiasm for the cultural revolutions began to spread. In a 1924 article on Paul Morand, change is championed:

The elderly say the country is decadent and going to the dogs. . . . Really, the time in which we live is wildly interesting, fantastically romantic. . . . We are discarding all our prejudices, each month sees the disappearance of some once formidable taboo. . . . All the arts have branched into new forms, to which we are accustoming ourselves quickly or slowly according to the elasticity of our intelligence. Old class-distinctions are fading, and new ones taking their place. . . . All inhibitions are being obliterated. A generation has arisen which it is impossible to shock. (“Paul Morand” 61)

British *Vogue*, through Todd and Garland, exposed readers to the changing modes in literature, music, art, and fashion. These two women transformed what was an upper-class fashion magazine into a periodical preoccupied with everything new and experimental in a transitioning culture that contained plenty of both.

“. . . what I want, money”: *Virginia Woolf in a Commercial Context*

Analysis of Todd’s *Vogue* as a class magazine invested in fashion, culture, and the arts—both highbrow and popular—exposes the fraught and complex binary between Bloomsbury and what it perceived as Todd’s commercialism. Garrity argues that *Vogue* “helps us to see how modernism was popularly read and legitimated” (“Virginia Woolf” 190), but rather than limit criticism to Bloomsbury’s reception by *Vogue* readers, scholars should also take note of the effect *Vogue*’s bibliographic code and cultural capital had on Bloomsbury to better understand the effects of a commercial context on the highbrow, aside from the paycheck. While Bloomsbury signified the intellectual aristocracy and avant-garde, *Vogue* had already achieved its status as the fashion Bible, a title that may have intimidated Bloomsbury more than it was willing to let on.
Woolf is perhaps the most well known Bloomsbury contributor, but critics focus almost solely on her relationship with Todd and her ambivalence toward writing for money. As Garrity notes, “Although [Woolf] regarded journalism as ‘a beastly business’ . . . she aggressively pursued publications that would reward her labor monetarily; *Vogue* was one such venue” (“Virginia Woolf” 195). Despite her negative comments about Todd, she was attracted to *Vogue*’s high contributor fees. In a letter to French painter Jacque Raverat, Woolf cattily recalls how Logan Pearsall Smith criticized her for submitting to the higher-paying *Vogue* rather than more intellectual periodicals such as the *Nation*. Woolf defends her venue choice, stating, “Ladies’ clothes and aristocrats playing golf don’t affect my style; and they would do [Smith’s] a world of good. Oh these Americans! . . . What he wants is prestige: what I want, money” (154).

Interestingly, it is the American seeking out eminent, elite venues, while the highbrow Bloomsburian eschews them for the higher rates of *Vogue*—a telling sign of the difference in cultural capital between America and England. Woolf claims that venue cannot affect her status (just as it does not affect her style), implying that her cultural position is secure, while an American, even an intellectual, may still feel the need to establish prestige due to his uncertain position within established highbrow circles.\(^\text{15}\)

However, there are differences between Woolf’s *Vogue* contributions and her other works, differences that can be accounted for, at least in part, by investigating their bibliographic code. The advertisements and articles that surround Woolf’s *Vogue* pieces

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\(^{15}\) According to Sackville-West, “It is the fake highbrow who has given the bad name to the genuine. I need hardly remark to you that Virginia was genuine all through” (*Recollections* 132). Woolf’s highbrow status never wavered, despite her somewhat struggling finances prior to the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which sold well and established her reputation as a highbrow, yet bankable, writer.
affect her work—if not for Woolf the writer (though I will the opposite), then certainly for her readers. The experience of reading *To the Lighthouse* is different from that of reading her comparison of George Eliot and Jane Austen alongside advertisements for luxury items like Packard automobiles and Louis Vuitton trunks. Moreover, Woolf’s writing was not immune to *Vogue*’s bibliographic code, and her articles reveal a different kind of writer from the woman who penned the highly experimental *Jacob’s Room*.

Woolf’s first article for *Vogue* appears in the Late November 1924 issue and assumes a pedagogical tone. “Indiscretions” establishes a literary tradition for women writers, similar to *A Room of One’s Own*. But, in contrast to her famous feminist text, this article celebrates traditional femininity and the general woman reader rather than the aesthetic androgyny championed in her 1929 book. First, Woolf provides *Vogue* readers with insight regarding the difference between how a critic reads and how the amateur, i.e., the typical *Vogue* subscriber, reads. Despite her Bloomsbury associations, Woolf does not align herself with the critic, but instead with the amateur reader while arguing for the significance emotion plays in responding to fiction:

> The critic may be able to abstract the essence and feast upon it undisturbed, but for the rest of us in every book there is something—sex, character, temperament—which, as in life, rouses affection or repulsion; and, as in life, sways and prejudices; and again, as in life, is hardly to be analysed by the reason. (47)

Woolf appeals to *Vogue*’s female readership, not to bring them “up” to her level, but rather to share in their reading experience—using the plural first person in “for the rest of us.” She relates to readers on a personal level, but provides them with the critical insight available to her through her association with Bloomsbury. This article demonstrates a desire not only to spark a discourse with, but to position herself among *Vogue*’s middle-
and upper-class readership, a rather surprising turn given the comments she made about Todd and *Vogue* in her personal diary and letters.

“Indiscretions” goes on to compare Jane Austen and George Eliot, and the critical appraisal of Eliot is from a decidedly superficial, some might argue stereotypically female, perspective. However, Woolf attributes this judgment to the male critic, not to women readers:

[Eliot’s] reputation, they say, is on the wane, and indeed, how could it be otherwise? Her big nose, her little eyes, her heavy, horsey head loom from behind her printed page and make a critic of the other sex uneasy. Praise he must, but love he cannot; and however absolute and austere his devotion to the principle that art has no truck with personality, still there has crept into his voice . . . as he analyses her gifts and unmask her pretensions, that it is not George Eliot he would like to pour out the tea. (47)

Woolf may invest authority in her comment by attributing it to a male critic, but the language used to describe Eliot sounds more like gossip than literary theory. This is Woolf’s point: that one’s reading experience is determined by affection (or in this case, lack thereof), and even if critics attempt to intellectualize their judgments, Woolf is here to expose the ruse.

In August 1924, another article on Eliot and Austen appears, this piece written by Woolf’s Bloomsbury colleague Edith Sitwell. The proximity of these articles indicates that the Eliot-versus-Austen debate was a popular topic for Bloomsbury and one Todd thought *Vogue* readers would appreciate as well. Sitwell’s comparison is more diplomatic, but her final assessment is similar to that of the male critic Woolf describes. Sitwell’s piece demonstrates that female critics also judge writers based on adherence to gender expectations. Sitwell proclaims Austen “the woman-writer *par excellence*” because “[n]othing escaped her, and she had a clear sweet bird-like quickness and soft
malice” (32). Despite the implication of her title, “Jane Austen and George Eliot,” Sitwell wonders, “How can one compare [Austen] with poor George Eliot, trying so hard to be feminine and never quite succeeding, longing to be masculine in her art and never quite succeeding there either?” Sitwell also admits that although “the thought of reading George Eliot nearly drives me mad with boredom, when I do read her I always have a feeling of respect and a certain affection for the writer and the woman” (32). Woolf sums up the difference between Austen and Eliot along similarly gendered lines: while “it is not George Eliot [the critic] would like to pour out tea,” Austen is not only more suited for the job, but “exquisitely and urbanely, from the chaste urn into the finest china Jane Austen pours, and, as she pours, smiles, charms, appreciates” (47). Sitwell’s evaluation and Woolf’s “male critic” both prove Woolf’s point, that criticism is not devoid of emotion (Sitwell experiences boredom, then affection for Eliot), and that critics experience similar responses to literature as amateur readers do.

Woolf aligns herself with the women reading “Indiscretions,” and undermines the seriousness of literary criticism by “exposing” the male critic’s preference for a women writer because she adheres to traditional definitions of femininity. Furthermore, the animalistic imagery associated with each writer reinforces the idea that Eliot and Austen represent different types of writers based on their conformity to gender expectations. Sitwell describes Austen as “bird-like,” while Woolf depicts Eliot as having a “heavy, horsey-head,” and the animalistic associations of each writer indicate the kind of woman she is: Austen is delicate and diminutive, while Eliot is lumbering and more utilitarian than ornamental. It is odd that Woolf, who considered androgyny an aesthetic ideal in A
Room of One’s Own, describes Austen as adhering to gender stereotypes, given how she is portrayed in Woolf’s 1929 text.

In A Room of One’s Own, published just five years after “Indiscretions,” Woolf the literary critic commends Austen. Here, Austen’s talent for undermining patriarchal oppression through writing is the focus, providing a contradictory image of the writer previously described as a lovely hostess possessing a great capacity for tea pouring. Woolf also praises Austen for not allowing “the narrowness of her life” to affect her writing. Austen “was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching” (68). Between the letter to Smith and this passage on Austen, it becomes clear that Woolf firmly believed in retaining autonomy of style, that it should come from within and not be influenced by external circumstances or influences. In fact, shortly after “Indiscretions” was published she wrote again to Smith asking if he had read the article, and, “if so did you think, as an impartial critic, that it was inferior to/or in any way differed from articles I write for the Nation” (Letters 157). Woolf may have claimed that writing for Vogue did not affect her style, but her remark to Smith indicates an anxiety regarding venue and the adverse effects it may or may not have on her writing. While I am not arguing that a commercial venue negatively affected Woolf’s writing, there are notable differences between “Indiscretions” and A Room of One’s Own. “Indiscretions” exhibits Woolf as a go-between for Vogue readers, someone who can offer a glimpse of the literary-intellectual world. Conversely, the lectures to an audience of college-educated women that became A Room of One’s Own emphasize Austen’s subversiveness as essential in establishing her place in the history of women writers—the exact opposite of the kind of critical affection
Austen is said to arouse in “Indiscretions.” In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf attempts to motivate young women to partake in the establishment of a women’s canon of literature, rather than expose them to the emotional trappings of scholarship. This disparity in Woolf’s writing may have more to do with the different venues than she would have like to admit: the fact that the earlier piece was written for a women’s fashion magazine that emphasized luxury, while the book was originally presented at a women’s college indicates that Woolf’s writing was not as immune to context as she claimed it to be.

There is another reason Woolf may privilege Austen’s femininity over Eliot’s in “Indiscretions,” one that illuminates her anxiety toward *Vogue* and what it represented; a reason that has little to do with “commercialism” and more to do with Woolf’s insecurities concerning her lack of “frock consciousness,” as she called it. In a diary entry from 1925, Woolf decides to “investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness” after attending a party where Madge Garland “was superintending a display” and Woolf had felt “outside the envelope,” surrounded by “foreign bodies” (*Diary* 12-13). Garland’s remembrance of her first encounter with Woolf confirms her fear of being démodé:

There was a presence about [Woolf] that made her instantly noticeable. But what also attracted my attention was that she appeared to be wearing an upturned wastepaper basket on her head. There sat this beautiful and distinguished woman wearing what could only be described as a wastepaper basket. (*Recollections* 171)

Woolf may have been a highbrow, but stylish she was not, and her discomfort with her lack of fashion sense is described several times in her diaries and letters from this period. In critiquing Eliot’s homeliness, she may have been responding to her own feelings of
inadequacy in writing for *Vogue*, despite the bravado with which she spoke of her submissions to the haute couture magazine.¹⁶

Woolf was not only a *Vogue* contributor, but also a subject in some of the magazine’s other features. Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Common Reader* were both reviewed in the “New Books for the Morning Room Table” column, initially authored by fellow Bloomsburian Raymond Mortimer. Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* is praised for being “fresh” and “the chief agent of [the novel’s] destruction” (60). In the same way restrictive petticoats gave way to the liberating chemise in this era, Woolf’s stream of consciousness literary style revolutionizes the novel, and both subjects are explored in *Vogue* by virtue of their shocking alterations of traditional styles. However, while Woolf’s texts are commended for their newness, her 1924 photograph in *Vogue*’s “We Nominate for the Hall of Fame” presents a middle-aged woman wearing her mother’s Victorian dress. The photograph was chosen by editors from a series taken the previous year, and inadvertently exposes Woolf’s lack of fashion sense in presenting this intellectual aristocrat as ignorant of The Mode through her Victorian garb. The caption explains Woolf’s importance across literary and aristocratic realms: “she is a publisher with a prose style . . . a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen and a sister of Vanessa Bell”

¹⁶ In *The September Issue*, a documentary on American *Vogue*’s famously encyclopedic Fall Fashion issue, current *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour attributes people’s disdain for fashion to their fear of it:

> I think what I often see is that people are frightened about fashion. Because it scares them or make them feel insecure, they just put it down. On the whole people that say the mean things about our world—I think that's usually because they feel, in some ways, excluded or, you know, not a part of “the cool group” so as a result they just mock it.

Whether referred to as “frock consciousness” or the “cool group” fashion intimidates some in the same way highbrow literature intimidates others. Woolf’s insulting remarks toward Todd, including the indelible, “She is like a slug with a bleeding gash for a mouth” (*Letters* 479), may have had more to do with her insecurities about Todd’s chic world than Todd as “commercial”—especially when one considers Woolf’s confidence regarding her writing style and submissions to *Vogue* compared to her horror at the idea of shopping.
Therefore, it would appear that she is photographed in concordance with her pedigree; she is from an aristocratic family, hence the stuffy attire. However, she is also praised as “the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation” (49), a curious comment for the reader attempting to reconcile the writer’s photograph with the accompanying caption. Although the dress is meant to convey her blue-blooded background, the puffy shoulders and lace collar of the dress mark Woolf as matronly, her hair is pulled back in a sloppy chignon, and her disheveled bangs cover half of her face, which is angled down and off to the side as if shy of the camera. The woman accredited with destroying generic conventions and breathing life into a dying literary form appears, in this photo, to be trying so hard to be modern in appearance and never quite succeeding, to rephrase Sitwell.\(^\text{17}\) It is odd that *Vogue* chose this photograph to display a woman writer described as iconoclastic, but perhaps it was preferable to featuring her donning an upturned wastepaper basket.

Rather than promote the magazine’s “fantasy of femininity” as Garrity contends (“Virginia Woolf” 204), the photograph exposes Woolf’s own lack of fashion sense. She is an intellectual aristocrat ignorant of The Mode, which is practically cliché, but still somehow surprising given the circles Woolf travelled in—which included fashionable

\(^{17}\) According to Garrity, “[Woolf’s] photograph works to signal that Woolf is a modernist who is haunted by her Victorian past . . . but it also functions as a marker of antiquated femininity. (“Virginia Woolf” 201-202). Garrity also argues that Woolf’s photograph symbolizes “the magazine’s investment in reconstituting the modern woman as an object of sanctified domesticity. However, “Hall of Fame” photographs of other modernist women like Edith Sitwell feature them in fashionable and decidedly un-Victorian garb. Gertrude Stein’s 1924 picture is a reprinting of Picasso’s portrait of Stein sitting in a large chair wearing a heavy cloak or robe, hair pulled back, plain-faced, but eyes distorted in the Picasso style. While Stein’s fashion in the portrait may not be couture, the style of Picasso signifies a modern and experimental artist—hardly symbolic of “sanctified domesticity.” Moreover, *Vogue*, particularly British *Vogue*, was not invested in the woman as a domestic figure. *Vogue*, then as now, published couture—impractical clothing intended for the wealthy, fashionable women who can afford help with domestic chores. Also, unlike the *Journal, Vogue* did not often carry ads for the latest in home appliances. Thus, not only was the domestic life not sanctified, it was rarely represented.
and intellectual women like Sitwell. Nonetheless, for *Vogue* to hail the sartorially challenged Woolf as an edgy, avant-garde writer and to label her a “fashionable icon” (204) demonstrates Todd’s expansion of what constituted “fashion”—since, clearly, it is Woolf’s modernist literary style and not her attire that make her part of The Mode.

Meanwhile, Woolf’s contributions and various appearances in the context of *Vogue* exhibits a woman more influenced (and intimidated) by consumer culture than her letters and diaries indicate. As Kathryn S. Laing observes, “Woolf’s interest in the ‘frock consciousness’ was complex, stemming inevitably from inherited cultural guilt about femininity, new experiences of the erotic, the desire to make money, and from her own increasing social and literary status” (70). Woolf’s contributions to *Vogue*, her portrait in the “Hall of Fame,” and Mortimer’s reviews of her books reflect this complexity.

Consequently, *Vogue* readers actually encountered more facets of Woolf than readers who read only her individual texts.

Woolf and Bloomsbury in *Vogue* further problematize the cultural divide, as other scholars have argued. Luckhurst explains,

> The balance between *Vogue*’s traditional preoccupations and its incorporation of the avant-garde never lost its edginess, but over the four-year span of Todd’s editorship the highbrow element became more accustomed to its surroundings, in part simply because it occupied an ever increasing number of *Vogue*’s pages, in part because *Vogue* was making the highbrow chic. (*Bloomsbury* 8)

Even if Bloomsbury became more “accustomed” to submitting to *Vogue*, it wasn’t simply due to an increased exposure to consumer culture. *Vogue* may have made modernism fashionable, but Bloomsbury struggled with the somewhat foreign world of style as it continued to experience ambivalence toward an upper class, yet commercial, magazine. Luckhurst claims, “The balance between *Vogue*’s traditional preoccupations and its
incorporation of Bloomsbury & company was precarious, but, increasingly, high culture occupied an uncompromised position” (“Vogue” 78), and this is a typical critical summation of Bloomsbury’s relationship with *Vogue*. However, to argue that *Vogue*’s reputation as the fashion Bible did not affect Bloomsbury ignores the effect and influence of *Vogue*’s bibliographic code on these writers. *Vogue* was not a cultural *tabula rasa* that Bloomsbury simply filled with its own literary and cultural agenda. Instead, Bloomsbury was published along with fashion spreads, celebrity pictorials, and advertisements. The destabilization of Bloomsbury’s cultural position in the pages of *Vogue* produced a magazine that displaced the intellectual aristocracy into a commercialized context while exposing a wider public to the avant garde. As Woolf’s contemporary Rebecca West remarked, “Together [Todd and Garland] changed *Vogue* from just another fashion paper to being the best of fashion papers and a guide to the modern movement in the arts . . . . There never was such a paper” (*Recollections* 90, emphasis added).

**A Brave New World of Fashion and Romance**

While Woolf provides a multifaceted example of highbrow Bloomsbury in *Vogue*, the magazine also published Aldous Huxley, another member of the intellectual aristocracy who remained on the margins of Bloomsbury throughout the 1920s. Huxley was more than the occasional submitter, however, as he was a contributing editor and appeared in almost every issue from 1923 to 1926. Huxley wrote on a variety of subjects ranging from wedding breakfasts to popular literature to fashion, and while his editorials have failed to receive critical attention, they demonstrate the periodical’s imbrication of highbrow and popular culture, perhaps to a greater degree than the articles on and by Bloomsbury’s more central members. Like Woolf, Huxley not only contributed to *Vogue*
but was also featured in some of its columns. In fact, according to a Mortimer book review, Huxley is the spokesperson for the new style of literature. In Mortimer’s review of Huxley’s *Little Mexican,* he establishes Huxley’s role in the culture wars:

> By now all readers of fiction must be divided into two classes, those who enjoy [Huxley’s] work, and those who detest it. . . . The older generation, for the most part, detests Mr. Huxley. If you have a trace of Victorianism in you, if you have any respect for conventions, if you are a churchwarden, a member of the Primrose League, an optimist, a sentimentalist, an admirer of Mr. Galsworthy or the Royal Academy, you will disapprove of Mr. Huxley as much as of the Bolsheviks, cubism, cocktails, shingled hair and psychoanalysis. If, on the other hand, you use the word “respectable” as a term of abuse, if you hate Dickens, Switzerland, the nineteenth century, and all organised attempts to improve mankind, if you like saxophones, foreigners, Baroque architecture, the Steinbach operation and a pronounced maquillage, then it is almost certain you will be an admirer of Mr. Huxley’s writings. (46)

Huxley may have been on the fringes of Bloomsbury, but his association with modernism in all of its various manifestations marked him as a member of the progressive intellectual aristocracy.

A common theme throughout many of Huxley’s pieces is contempt for egalitarianism and the detrimental leveling effects of democracy. In “The Perversion of Values,” Huxley laments, “In every part of the world and at all times the vast majority of human beings has consisted of Babbitts and peasants. . . . But never, except at the present time, and nowhere but in America, have the necessary millions believed themselves the equals of the unnecessary few” (82). However, Huxley also condemned the pseudo-scientific racism espoused by “anthropologists” such as Lothrop Stoddard—which some members of Huxley’s socio-economic class supported—who sought to establish a racial hierarchy based on phrenology. Stoddard’s 1920 *The Rising Tide of Color* adopted an anthropological, pseudo-historical theoretical perspective to argue that the Nordic race is
superior to all others and is responsible for the perpetuation of Western culture, thereby appealing to the dominant white classes using a (misleading) argument based on symbolic capital.\textsuperscript{18} In Huxley’s 1925 editorial, “The Importance of Being Nordic,” he responds to the argument posed by Stoddard and critiques the popularity of phrenology and anthropology, sciences that writers like Stoddard manipulated at the time to argue for the biological superiority of the Nordic race:

> At the present time [racial phrenology] is in full spate, particularly on the American side of the Atlantic, where the political problems of immigration have stimulated the anthropological philosophers to tremendous efforts. In present-day America a handsome living is to be made by writing books about the racial characteristics of Europeans—solemn dogmatic books, full of perfectly groundless generalisations, which are immensely popular with “thoughtful readers,” because they happen to fit in with the political prejudices of the moment. . . . So the great work of enlightenment goes on. (57)

In other editorials Huxley associates the evils of democracy with American culture, but here, it is the racist tendencies of American politics that Huxley roundly condemns. This piece shows that his elitism was not founded on family names or wealth, but rather on intelligence and cultural sensibility.

Nevertheless, what Huxley considered high culture was also not always in keeping with traditional understandings of the highbrow, nor were his standards consistent from one editorial to the next. His pieces span the cultural spectrum, from promoting the greatness of mass culture icons such as Felix the Cat, who he deems his

\textsuperscript{18} Arguments like Stoddard’s fueled the xenophobic racism already prevalent in America at this time due to the influx of Japanese immigrants to California and the Great Migration of African Americans moving from the rural South to the urban areas of the North. Utilizing a scientific, pseudo-objective tone, Stoddard claimed, “Migration peopled Europe with superior white stocks displacing ape-like aborigines, and settled North America with Nordics instead of nomad redskins. But migration also bastardized the Roman world with Levantine mongrels, drowned the West Indies under a black tide, and is filling out its own land with the sweepings of the European east and south” (253). Public support for arguments like these led to the Immigration Act of 1921 that severely restricted the number of immigrants permitted to migrate to America.
“favourite dramatic hero” (“Where are the Movies” 76), to lamenting the growing influence of the masses on culture. In “The Perversion of Values,” Huxley asserts that there has been “revaluation of values, a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards” (84) now occurring in the States. While Europe, and specifically London, re-evaluated values in response to scientific and technological advancements that troubled previously held spiritual beliefs, America has simply inverted, or perverted, societal values:

What was previously held to be high is now disparaged. The mental and moral qualities, the occupations and diversions of the greatest number are regarded as the best, the sole permissible; the qualities and occupations of the few are condemned. Stupidity, suggestibility and business are held up as supremely precious. Intelligence and disinterested activity—once admired—are in process of becoming evil things which ought to be destroyed. (84)

This statement reifies traditional social hierarchies that, according to Huxley, threaten to spread from America across the Atlantic. Thus, his anti-American rhetoric makes his love of American cinema surprising, to say the least, especially when he elevates the movies above highbrow culture:

The aim of the [French] super-realists is to free literature completely from logic and to give it the fantastic liberty of dream. What they attempt to do—not very successfully—cinema achieves brilliantly. . . . Think, for example, of those hilarious and subtle nightmares invented by Charlie Chaplin; think of the adventure films of Douglas Fairbanks. (“Where are the Movies” 76)

For Huxley, art can transcend its cultural status in a way that the people associated with that culture cannot.

On the other hand, not all aspects of commercial culture are celebrated, and fashion becomes Huxley’s cultural sticking point. Unlike the many American middle-class women thrilled by their Sears Roebuck catalogues which gave them greater access
to fashion trends, Huxley refers to fashion as a form of “delightful slavery,” arguing that, combined with the latest technology, it has led to an unfortunate breakdown of class distinction: “Ease of communication has brought it about that practically all men and women in Europe and the two Americas dress exactly alike. . . . The distinctive uniforms of classes and trades are disappearing under the influence of democratic ideas” (“Chains” 43). For Huxley, it is not that fashion makes consumers a slave by dictating what to wear, but that fashion, combined with the middle class’s ability to acquire aristocratic-looking clothes, destroys individuality through its lack of distinction. This editorial demonstrates the creative freedom Todd allowed her contributors, since Huxley condemns, of all things, fashion while writing for *Vogue*. However, it also shows Todd’s cultural savvy, as the kind of fashion Huxley critiques is mass-produced, not haute couture designers like Chanel or Poiret. Thus, this editorial appeals to readers’ sense of fashion elitism: distinguishing oneself through original attire has become more difficult to achieve due to the mass production of fashion. Only the hautest of the haute couture can hope to achieve distinction through fashion in our assembly-line era.

Huxley also makes the unintentionally comic claim that democracy and the current emphasis on youth have led to older women masquerading as younger women. Huxley blames this trickery on the uniformity of contemporary fashion:

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19 Huxley also uses this opportunity to expose the invasion of American democratic ideals, which extends beyond clothing into all facets of culture: But it is not only in the world of fashion that we have arrived at uniformity in slavery. All our conventions of thought, of social habit, of pleasure, are becoming standardised. Gone, for example, are the local dances, the people’s songs. The gramophone has imposed on the whole world the same fox-trots, the same American tunes. . . . The cinema gives us all one brand of drama, the penny press one set of ideas. Providentially, we still speak a number of different languages; otherwise the whole of Europe would be reading only American literature. (“Chains” 43)
There was a time when one could distinguish at a glance and from a distance, by the clothes alone, the grandmother from the mother and the mother from the daughter. To-day we have changed all that; grandmother and granddaughter wear the same sack frock, the same round hat pulled disguisingly down over the eyes. (43)

The word “disguisingly” indicates a kind of resentment: Huxley is upset because he has to look closely in order to determine what “kind” of woman he is looking at. Apparently, fashion in the 1920s was not only controversial because of the shorter hemlines and lack of undergarments, but also (perhaps even primarily) because it frustrated the male gaze—a man may think he is looking at a beautiful young woman only to realize with a shock that he has been ogling an old lady.

Huxley was not alone in his ageism. Liz Conor discusses the ridicule middle-aged women faced due to the obsession with feminine youth in the 1920s, arguing that more mature flappers “unwittingly infringed on [their younger counterparts’] symbolic meaning” (221). Furthermore, “The most pernicious threat posed by the older Flapper was that she might seduce young men through visually deceiving them about her age. . . . Because she constituted herself as spectacle, the Flapper was deceptive, illusory, and sexually manipulative of men” (222). Huxley, in his role as a male intellectual writing for a women’s fashion magazine, criticizes this manipulative masquerade, but the emphasis on looking younger came, in large part, from fashion magazines like *Vogue*. Huxley’s article is surrounded by advertisements for items like the Cyclax Chin Strap, which promises to “banish double chin, eliminate the lines round the mouth, rejuvenate sagging and flabby tissues and rest and revivify tired muscles” (76). Furthermore, the cloche hats Huxley condemns are featured in many issues of *Vogue*, all of which sends a conflicting message to *Vogue* readers and consumers of contemporary fashion. Women of a certain
age found themselves in the fraught position of negotiating between advertisements promising everlasting youth through cosmetics and gizmos and being told they were pathetic and manipulative for clinging to youth by the intellectual aristocracy who were, apparently, paying close attention to women’s fashion.

Huxley pursues another stereotypically feminine topic in a later editorial, “A History of Some Fashions in Love.” The man most well known for his social and political philosophies takes on one of the most feminine topics: romance. Where one might expect for him to warn against the irrationality of love and emphasize the psychological underpinnings of the phenomenon—in keeping with his role as an intellectual aristocrat and with modernism’s interest in psychology—Huxley actually finds himself at a crossroads, rejecting the repressiveness of Victorian love, but dissatisfied with the over-intellectualized status of romance in the twentieth century. Huxley argues that Victorian notions of love were “unique” because “neither the Platonic-idealist nor the puritanic convention had ever been pushed so far before.” The Victorians were also unique for having “imagined that their queer fashion was the natural form and that the fashions current in every other age of history and pre-history, since the creation of man, were entirely unnatural and wicked” (72). Despite Victorian hypocrisies and misguided moralizing, the twentieth century has not necessarily improved on love:

The twentieth century has seen a very considerable reaction away from the erotic fashion of its predecessor. We are freer in speech and action than our fathers; we admit the facts of nature with less reluctance. But our frankness differs from the frankness of past ages in being largely medical and scientific, instead of cheerfully and spontaneously animal. . . . It is, to my mind at any rate, a rather dingy kind of frankness; better, no doubt, than the reticences it has superseded, but symptomatic of that general over-intellectualisation of all our normal life which Mr. D. H. Lawrence so rightly deplores. We are becoming rather too self-conscious about our instincts. (72)
Self-consciousness is a common marker of modernism, and for modernist Huxley to voice his (and Lawrence’s) weariness of “over-intellectualisation” as early as 1924 demonstrates the ambivalence some modernists already felt toward the self-reflexive style, even as they viewed it as a reaction against their literary predecessors.

Huxley then connects romance and literature, conflating the two in a vague prediction of next season’s romantic trends:

What the next fashion in love will be it is difficult to foresee. Perhaps, to counteract the medical view and to rescue love from the tediousness with which the scientific and pseudo-scientific investigators have invested it, we shall have a new reaction towards romanticism and prudery. Perhaps, after the endless analyses of Proust, we shall demand a briefer, a hardier, a less self-conscious literature. (72)

Between “Chains” and “A History of Some Fashions in Love,” Huxley reveals his ability to write within the *Vogue* context and take on feminine issues, while remaining ever the intellectual aristocrat. In a letter to Robert Nichols, Huxley encourages Nichols to write for *Vogue* and advocates for Todd, remarking, “[she] is trying to ginger up the paper and turn it, from an exclusive fashion paper into a something slightly more interesting” (*Letters* 216). Huxley was instrumental in creating a “slightly more interesting” *Vogue* in his role as contributing editor and overall commitment to the magazine throughout

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20 This less self-conscious literature would be the subject of a later editorial. In “Popular Literature,” Huxley initially champions the popular author’s superior capacity for self-expression, but then argues that, in order to be popular, literature must eschew anything intellectual:

The heroes and heroines of best-sellers feel, but never think; thinking is a chilly, uncomfortable process—it is essentially “inhuman.” The all-too-human themes of popular novels are the instincts of reproduction, self-preservation and gregariousness, with their dependent emotions, love—sacred and profane—and the parental emotions; anger, fear, the love of danger, acquisitiveness with its corollaries; conscience, the sense of honour, pride, ambition, emulation and all the other emotions we feel because we live in herds, like dogs, and not, like cats, in solitude. (57)

This passage reaffirms the subjective selection process through which Huxley either condemns or celebrates an aspect of popular culture—while he supports the instinctual when discussing love, he considers emotion brutish in his consideration of popular literature.
Todd’s tenure. His editorials, combined with the kind of cultural capital he represented and which Todd rigorously pursued, demonstrate the extent to which *Vogue* successfully created a dialogue between the commercialized world of fashion and the intellectual aristocracy of modernism.

**Sketching Out Cultural Identities: Fish’s and Covarrubias’s Jazz Age Pictorials**

Bloomsbury and the intellectual aristocracy’s considerable contributions to *Vogue* in this era produced a class magazine invested in modernism. However, the newness and shock appeal that drew Todd and Garland to Bloomsbury also attracted them to aspects of popular culture such as jazz and the flapper. As David E. Chinitz states, “Jazz stood at the intersection of so many axes of cultural conflict that by the early 1920s it had become a symbol of practically all that was perceived as new and modern in twentieth-century culture” (“Dance Little Lady” 320). Between its experimentalism and its notoriety, jazz naturally held appeal for Todd and Garland. Compared to the substantial critical discourse surrounding Bloomsbury’s relationship with *Vogue* and the former’s misgivings concerning mass readership, however, *Vogue*’s portrayal of the Jazz Age has not been thoroughly investigated. *Vogue*’s depictions of jazz culture were an inverse of the Bloomsbury relationship: articles and pictorials on the Jazz Age demonstrate *Vogue*’s attraction to popular culture icons such as the flapper and the New Negro, while also revealing aristocratic voyeurism and exploitation of the era’s bright young things.

*Vogue*’s articles on jazz also provide textual evidence that clarifies our understanding of the intellectual aristocracy’s initial reaction to this new form of music. In 1921, Bloomsbury art critic (and occasional *Vogue* contributor) Clive Bell had prematurely rung the death knell for jazz, declaring, “Jazz is dead—or dying, at any
rate—and the moment has come for someone who likes to fancy himself wider awake than his fellows to write its obituary notice” (214). Bell’s snobbery supports criticism on modernism that argues for an antagonistic relationship between the intelligentsia and popular culture. Even so, only four years later in an interview with George Gershwin, the author, named only as a “Highbrow,” dismisses Bell’s presumptuous claims: “Mr. Clive Bell tried, a year or two back, to stem the tide [of jazz]. In vain: our books, our clothes, our life, as well as our music, grow each year more definitely syncopated” (47). Instead of dying off, jazz has infiltrated all aspects of life and culture, eventually signifying the spirit of the age rather than remaining contained as a musical form. Gershwin also acknowledges the significance jazz has for elevating the status of American popular culture: “For years popular music has been despised in America: at last they see it has character. And it took Europe to tell America that. It was in Paris that musicians and writers first gave serious attention to jazz” (47). Ironically, according to Gershwin, European high culture is responsible for America recognizing the value in its popular culture.

Jazz culture was also represented by the pictorials of Fish and Covarrubias that appeared in Todd and Garland’s *Vogue*. These pictorials were often first published in Nast’s other periodical *Vanity Fair* and then reprinted by Todd—which confirmed Chase’s fears that Todd simply wanted to create a British version of the more irreverent *Vanity Fair* when she should have been focusing on acquiring more appropriate *Vogue* fare. Fish’s jazz-infused illustrations appear in several *Vogue* articles and pictorials during the Todd era. Fish’s humorous cartoons depict the Modern Woman as light-hearted, constantly in motion, and either oblivious or apathetic to the frustrations of her
male counterparts. These pictorials are a visual representation of Pamela Caughie’s
description of the Jazz Age as the moment when people became conscious of cultural
identity production:

The increased mobility and new permeable borders of the early-twentieth
century—made possible by new sound and visual technologies as much as by new
modes of transportation—made people aware . . . of the production of cultural
identity, the way identity is mediated through various cultural forms. (403)

Fish’s work certainly emphasized the Modern Woman’s mobility in the public sphere,
but it could also be argued that the light-hearted manner in which Fish drew flappers and
vamps undermined their construction of an emboldened cultural identity.

One of Fish’s earliest works on Jazz Age women appears in a piece explaining the
difference between a “High Heel” and a “Low Heel,” as determined by the article’s
author Sydney Tremayne. According to Tremayne,

[Low Heels] score on the tennis court, approach nicely on the golf course, and
reach the mark when they are sailing. They are generally “bobbed,” and a little
brusque. They pride themselves on being “good fellows.” They are a little apt to
slouch about, cigarette in mouth, booted and breeched, some time after the
morning ride is over. It is not unlikely that they answer to such names as Billy,
Tommy, or even Peter. . . . They drive their own cars. (20)

The Low Heel constructs her femininity in alignment with traditionally masculine
behaviors and characteristics. Somewhat surprisingly, Tremayne does not exhibit the
shock toward this new femininity one might expect, lamenting only that “they are likely
to get really sunburnt” (20) and that “their ‘stance’ in the ballroom is not so effective as it
is on the tee” (66).

Meanwhile, the High Heels, while not as sporty, are no more traditionally
feminine than the Low Heels. These women have no curfew and “come into their own
when the moon dethrones the sun, the coloured lights are switched on, and the jazz band
begins to play” (66). Nor are they enemies of the Low Heels; rather the High Heels
“languish in long chairs under amazing sunshades and generously applaud the Low
Heels’ heated athleticism, knowing that when evening comes and they enter the
restaurant or dancing room . . . it will be the ‘sport’s’ turn to look on” (66). Low Heels
and High Heels are capable of sharing the spotlight, whether it comes from the sun or the
moon.

Fish’s illustrations accompanying Tremayne’s article underscore the new kind of
femininity the Low and High Heels represent and the change in gender expectations
between men and women of the previous generation. The cartoons visually, and
emphatically, demonstrate Chinitz’s assertion that “By rejecting cumbersome dress,
modest language, sexual passivity and other ‘feminine’ conventions, women were
challenging and altering the very notion of femininity” (320). Fish’s sketches of modern
women are a stark contrast to the somber tone struck with the “Hall of Fame”
photographs: both Low and High possess extremely thin, and seemingly boneless, limbs,
further emphasizing their large round heads. Each hand gesture is languid, and eyes are
often drawn with the gaze upward or down—to indicate both demureness and ennui—and
every figure has the same delicate, bow-shaped mouth. Men are either stiff in their tuxes
or just as languid as the ladies, implying a certain feminine fopishness. Older women,
when they are portrayed, are stereotypical Victorian matrons—round, lacking a
discernible chin, and with hair piled impossibly high on top of their heads—a stark
contrast to the loose and whimsical curls of the younger Fish women.

Fish’s illustrations are humorous representations of the Modern Woman’s world.
Whether Low Heels are on the golf course in the presence of confused men, or High
Heels shock a Victorian matron with the latest fashions, the humor comes from the reactions to these feminine types, and not from ridiculing the women themselves. Fish’s sketches add humor without becoming caricatures, unlike those of another famous illustrator at this time, John Held. Held’s flappers appeared on the covers of *Life* magazine and became an iconic representation of the flapper. However, in contrast to Fish’s light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek depictions of modern women, critics such as Carolyn Kitch point out, “In Held’s cover work for *Life* . . . the flapper was certainly a form of political backlash, a way of making fun of assertive women by showing them as immature and vapid” (132). Parodying the flapper made her non-threatening since, as Chinitz explains,

> The trope that renders mass culture feminine and inferior provides a way of attacking and containing the perceived threat mass culture poses to social hierarchies, to the “fortified and stable ego boundaries” of the unified (masculine) self, and to the standards of high culture. (“Dance Little Lady” 321)

Making a cartoon out of modern women contained their threat to the status quo: those pencil-thin limbs would be too weak to stand up to the patriarchy or seriously threaten the intellectual aristocracy also featured in *Vogue*. While Held made the flapper appear ridiculous, or at the very least silly, Fish’s illustrations make everyone else around the Modern Woman appear foolish. She is the “heroine” of the caricatures, while the members of the old money aristocracy are mocked. Rather than depicting a flapper with legs akimbo, dancing with a much older, but very wealthy, gentlemen—as depicted in one of Held’s most famous *Life* covers—Fish draws an athletic woman thwacking a tennis ball at her male opponent (who is of similar age). For Fish, modern women can
play the same games as men, while reconstructing their own cultural identities and a new femininity.

In her own time, Fish was famous for her humorous sketches that resisted mocking their subjects. As Frank Crowninshield wrote in his preface to a 1920 collection of Fish’s work:

Miss Fish has created, on that miraculous drawing-board of hers, a complete human society, as original and amusing as the worlds of George Du Maurier and Charles Dana Gibson. It is a world populated by young-old matrons, astoundingly mature young girls, Victorian lady remnants, . . . yearning young lovers, swanking soldiers, blank and vapid bores, bridge-playing parsons, and middle class millionaires. But, for all its sophistication, it is a world of innocence. . . . Fish is one of the only caricaturists who has ever done this sort of satire without malice—who has ever treated the poor, misguided children of this world as if they were really children. (Parker)

Unlike the austerity of the Dana Gibson’s girls or the mocking tone of Held’s flappers, Fish’s modern women are portrayed through light-hearted satire—the cartoonish antics of her characters are balanced out by a sense of fun, not vindictiveness. Fish may have constructed a humorous cultural identity for the Modern Woman, but readers were not necessarily laughing at the Low Heel. Instead, for Fish, it was the outdated traditions and gender expectations of society that were rendered foolish.

Fish takes on the most famous type of Modern Woman in the Early March 1926 issue, in a pictorial entitled “A Complete Set of Flappers: Types Without Which No Party Is Complete.” In this pictorial, Fish draws on the public’s simultaneous fascination with and vilification of the flapper that Conor describes:

More than any other type of the Modern Woman, it was the Flapper who embodied the scandal which attached to women’s new public visibility, from their increasing street presence to their mechanical reproduction as spectacles. . . . Like other modern feminine types, the Flapper complicated the picture of the Modern
Woman—and the status of the woman-object—by associating agency with her visibility. (209)

Here, Fish’s illustrations feature much more prominently than the text, emphasizing the ocularcentrism that surrounded the Modern Woman. The captions underneath the cartoons educate *Vogue* readers on both flapper types and the contributions flappers make to any significant social event. Kenneth A. Yellis describes the etymology of the flapper: “The term ‘flapper’ originated in England as a description of girls of the awkward age, the mid-teens. The awkwardness was meant literally, and a girl who flapped had not yet reached mature, dignified womanhood” (49). Yet, if Fish’s sketches are any indication, the flapper has grown out of her awkwardness, even if she still lacks the Victorian characteristics of “dignified womanhood."

For example, an illustration of “The Cut Up” is accompanied by a caption reading:

one of those little devils who start out to be the Life of the Party and is almost the death of it. After the fourth Bronx, she breaks into a Charleston which lasts, with intermissions for refreshments, until she is laid on her side in a dark room, usually in her hostess’s bedroom. She has a dreadful time trying to explain it all to The Man Who Thinks Her Sacred. (44)

Meanwhile, a “Low Heel” type is re-labelled “The Tennis Fiend”:

She leaps, she breathes, she hath her being—and he who would win her must return stroke for stroke, chop for chop, and twist for twist. The double-edged flaming sword of the angel who protects maidens is a charred poker when compared with the mean tennis racquet of this lady. (44)

Another type, “The Collector,” is also referred to as “the gimme girl” because “Everything she sees she wants, especially if it is expensive, gems particularly” (44). The illustration depicts The Collector intently gazing at jewelry in a storefront window, while her male companion looks heavenward, as if seeking some kind of supernatural aid in
this predicament. Again, Fish depicts these women in comedic fashion—the Tennis Fiend seems to intentionally smack the ball into her suitor’s face, the Cut Up’s legs are positioned in impossible angles as she dons a top hat, followed by an “After” sketch of her explaining to her gentleman suitor how it is that she happened to fall asleep on the hostess’s bed. While these are not necessarily “positive” depictions of women, the absolute disregard each type pays to her accompanying male is empowering—The Tennis Fiend knows how to hit the ball better than her male opponent, and The Collector is too focused on what she wants to notice her date’s distress. The illustrations are funny because the women are so oblivious to the havoc they wreak upon the men. They are selfish, ambitious, competitive, and childish, and yet, despite the indirect warning *Vogue* offers its readers through these illustrations and the title’s ironic “Without Which No Party is Complete,” the men do not appear turned off by these headstrong ladies. These women are mobile and, while not independent of men’s wallets, are certainly independent of men’s judgments. The Modern Woman’s cultural identity was significantly shaped by the illustrators of this era, but Fish’s pictorials reveal her identity to be more playfully mischievous and dynamic than Held’s somewhat jaded flappers.

Later, in the combined Early & Late June 1926 issue (the fact that it was a combined issue indicates the dire financial straits Todd’s *Vogue* was experiencing at this point) the pictorial “Those Killing Charms or Why Do Men Marry Murderesses?” appears. This page investigates one type of woman: the vamp, otherwise known as the femme fatale. The femme fatale in question is Aholibah (her name immediately indicating exoticism, mystery, and, apparently, danger), who has gone through four husbands and has just married number five. Fish depicts the various ways Aholibah
disposed of her previous husbands and how she escapes imprisonment because of “high-souled motives” ranging from the uncovering of repressed childhood memories at inconvenient moments to ideals she holds on the subject of love, thanks to “enlightened” juries acquitting her of her crimes (62). What begins as an interrogation into the femme fatale turns into a satire on the popularity of Freudianism.

One sketch shows Aholibah shoving her third husband’s head underwater, the caption explaining, “severe mental strain had given a nasty jolt to Aholibah’s subconscious.” As a result, her honeymoon “was quite spoilt for her by the obsession that once in infancy she had been compelled to swallow some Tapioca” (62). Aholibah is acquitted of all charges by an “enlightened jury” (62), who understands the trauma caused by a repressed subconscious, and that it is not fault of the newly widowed if her id suddenly took hold of and she lost control. As with the previous Fish pictorial, it is not the woman who is mocked, but the modern craze of psychoanalysis. While the High Heels and the Cut-Ups triumph over the Victorian matron, the Murderess is able to outwit a changing legal system that has yet to adequately incorporate psychological terminology into its proceedings. As Michael North explains, “the enthusiasm for things psychological was so extreme, both in the United States and in Great Britain, that it might quite reasonably have seemed a psychological symptom itself” (66). This fanaticism for popular psychology corroborates Huxley’s claim that twentieth-century sciences caused people to be “too self-conscious about our instincts” (“A History” 72). Fish’s pictorial humorously parallels Huxley’s comment, since the femme fatale capitalizes on this societal self-consciousness to avoid capital—or, indeed, any—punishment.
The public’s familiarity with psychoanalysis was, in some part, due to this new science’s difficult conceptual terminology. According to North, psychology became popular by virtue of its “supposed inaccessibility” which made it “almost ubiquitous” (65). Psychology, like modernism, became a cultural phenomenon in part because of the challenge involved in comprehending the various psychoanalytic terms Freud created. Nonetheless, while Freud’s text and theories may have been too difficult for the layman, Fish’s pictorial boils down Freud’s complex concepts into language any *Vogue* reader can understand. Similar to the “What They Read” column, Fish’s sketch demonstrates that it was more important to understand that psychology was fashionable than to understand psychology. Furthermore, according to Fish, by 1926 people like the vamp had already learned how to manipulate this new science and the public’s superficial comprehension of it to their own advantage.

The Modern Woman, in all of her manifestations, was not the only Jazz Age icon depicted in *Vogue*. Miguel Covarrubias’s pictorials depicted the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance for British *Vogue* readers. However, while Fish was playful in her pictorials, Covarrubias’s illustrations demonstrate the problematic manner in which whites were engaging with black popular culture. In the Late February 1925 issue, a pictorial entitled “The Negro de Nos Jours” depicts cartoonish African Americans in various states of exaggerated movement: some are dancing wildly, the women with their skirts swirling high enough to expose their underwear, and the men with prominent white teeth beaming out of otherwise almost featureless black faces, wearing top hats and white gloves. There are three captions surrounding the drawings, telling the “history” of the African in America, and three short poems describing various aspects of jazz culture such
as how to “Charlestone [sic]” and do the “Scronch.” One caption read, “In the 18th century we made money out of the negroes. In the 20th they make money out of us. We used to send them missionaries; we now send them telegrams” (53). This caption claims that the economic tables have turned, which has resulted in a shift from exploitation to communication between the races, as well as increasing African-American cultural capital. For whites, “The accessibility of the primitive in the form of jazz encouraged the practice of slumming,” as Chinitz notes, “in which whites would patronize black jazz cabarets to soak up the primitive atmosphere—and often to engage in some mildly primitive antics of their own” (“Rejuvenation” 63). Although whites may have viewed jazz as an opportunity for a few hours of unbridled fun, Harlemites worried that the primitivism associated with jazz would further perpetuate racism and exploit black culture—as most whites thought Harlem a nice place to visit, but they wouldn’t want to live there.

Covarrubias’s illustrations participate in the primitivization of African Americans that occurred during the 1920s with the onset of jazz and the ongoing Great Migration. The tom-tom drum, by both blacks and whites, became associated with the rhythm of jazz but the ramifications of associating jazz with the jungle (and by extension blacks with savages) were dubious for many Harlem Renaissance writers. W. E. B. Du Bois criticized Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* and Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* for perpetuating racist stereotypes of lower-class African Americans in their depictions of Harlem as a place preoccupied with sex and intoxication. Other Harlem Renaissance writers praised McKay’s and Van Vechten’s texts as realistic portrayals celebrating jazz-infused Harlem. Langston Hughes viewed primitivism as a celebration of African
heritage, declaring jazz “one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world” (“The Negro Artist” 95). According to Chinitz, Hughes, at this stage, “was satisfied to assume that blues and jazz were essentially primitive so long as traditional hierarchies could be inverted and the primitivity of African-American music be seen as a positive distinction” (“Rejuvenation” 64). Despite the potential positive elements of primitivism, Covarrubias’s illustrations visually demonstrate the problem of primitivism when it occurs in a white magazine aimed at the upper and middle classes. The primitivism in “The Negro de Nos Jours” depicts blacks in a derogatory way, indicating that the tom-tom is not part of a proud racial history but a way for whites to continue to view present-day African Americans as savages.21

A few months later, another Covarrubias pictorial appears, “Enter, the New Negro, a Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Jazz Spirit of Their Own Making.” Just as Fish exposed *Vogue* readers to various Flapper types, Covarrubias offers readers a glimpse into different “Negro” types. Covarrubias’s pictorial demonstrates the extent to which white commercial culture appropriated black popular culture and turned it into spectacle. This pictorial also features Harlem Renaissance writer Eric D. Walrond as the caption writer, an indication to *Vogue* readers that they will receive “authentic” depictions of the New Negroes. Collectively, Walrond claims, these types have eradicated the previously derogatory African-American stereotypes, including “the

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21 Covarrubias was not the only *Vogue* staffer to contribute to primitivism. In a 1926 article entitled, “The Truth About Jazz,” the unnamed author explains to readers, And it is the negroes who have revealed what Jazz really is, a return to Nature; not the elegiac Nature of benevolent milkmaids and languishing goatherds which our eighteenth century ancestors believed in, but Nature red in tooth and claw, the Nature of the jungle and the swamp, where spotted lianas strangle the trees and death is the penalty for a moment’s negligence. (45)
Coloured Crooner of Lullabys, the Cotton-Picker, the Mammy-Singer and the Darky Banjo-Players, who have now Happily all Died of Ingrowing Sentimentalism” (62-63).

These new types include “That Teasin’ Yalla Gal,” who is “seen in Paris in a cabaret or a ‘dancing’ between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.” She is also a “lady of mystery. Unescorted. Unesortable. Likely to have a greyhound at home. Impossible to tell the exact colour of her skin” (62). The mulatta was a popular Jazz Age trope and the ambiguity of her race heightens her exoticness and sexuality, which is reinforced by Walrond in labeling her a “lady of mystery” and “Teasin’.” While she became a signifier for sexual promiscuity, the mulatta also represented the breaking down of racial boundaries, as the flapper did with gender boundaries. However, the plethora of mulatta representations in literature and culture limited real-life women of color. As Cherene Sherrard-Johnson explains, “Ultimately, the idealization of black women as mulattas, madonnas, teachers, or socialites in Harlem Renaissance literature, visual art, periodicals, and aesthetic discourse established parameters that restricted artistic expression and agency for black women” (11). Initially, the flapper and the mulatta symbolized the new permeability of identity boundaries, but through constant repetition they became commodified stereotypes and caricatures.

Another illustration in the pictorial also focuses on the sexuality of African-American women as it rephrases a Hughes poem and labels a hip-thrusting young woman “2 A.M. at ‘The Cat and the Saxophone” (63). In Hughes’s “The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)” a lovers’ conversation is interwoven with a jazz band’s song:

I’m your

BUT MY BABY
sweetie, ain’t I?

DON’T WANT NOBODY

Sure.

BUT

Then let’s

ME,

do it! (18-26)

In both the pictorial and Hughes’s poem, sex and jazz go together, but in the former the woman becomes the site of sexuality and jazz. While other types are categorized in humanistic terms, she becomes conflated with the jazz club as the caption asks, “You wanna be happy? Den watch dis kid!” (63). Her spectacularization is further enhanced when the caption repeats, “Watch what she’s fixin’ fo’ to do. Dance? She can’t do nothin’ else but! You sho ‘em sister!” (63). Covarrubias and Walrond show that The Cat and the Saxophone is not just a place where one listens to jazz and sips a cocktail, but a place that offers its customers ocular delights as well.

In addition, “2 A. M. at ‘The Cat and the Saxophone’” reinforces the connection between the cabaret space and the sexualization of black women found in other Harlem Renaissance poetry such as Hughes’s “To Midnight Nan at Leroy’s” and Claude McKay’s “The Harlem Dancer.” Midnight Nan has a “Strut and wiggle” and the speaker admiringly calls her a “Shameless gal,” unable to get a “good fellow” (1-3). Chinitz argues, “The attractions of the female jazz archetype provoke little discomfort in Hughes because he is not particularly troubled by what she represents: modern social codes, female sexuality, mass culture, the primitive, the Other, jazz itself” (“Rejuvenation” 331).
Nonetheless, not all Harlem Renaissance writers were so untroubled by the implications of this feminine archetype. In McKay’s “The Harlem Dancer,” the dancing woman is portrayed as a victim of visual consumption as the audience “Devour[s] her with their eager, passionate gaze” (12). The same could be said of *Vogue* readers looking at Covarrubias’s cartoons of black women dancing wildly across his pictorial. Thus, while the Cotton Picker and the Mammy-Singer may have met their demise, the Yalla Gal and the cabaret girl have taken their place.

Walrond was known for using black dialect in his fiction, and the exaggerated nature of these captions indicate that he may have intended them to be read ironically. Furthermore, Covarrubias’s illustrative style was satirical, and his pictorials for *Vanity Fair* show that African Americans were not the only victims of his caricaturizing. Nevertheless, given that Todd only published Covarrubias’s pictorials on African-American popular culture and that many English readers would probably not have had much actual experience with Harlem and jazz culture with which they could compare reality to these pictorials, it remains uncertain as to how many readers would have interpreted the captions ironically. Analyzing this pictorial’s appearance in *Vogue* shows the effects of interpreting a work based on its bibliographic code—if this work had been published in *The Crisis*, its parodic elements would have been much more apparent to the magazine’s predominantly African-American readers. However, in the context of a magazine that featured aspects of white, upper-class culture and which was constructed with white British readers in mind, the satire of the pictorial, or, at least, Walrond’s conscious participation in the satire, becomes more difficult to determine.
The extent to which *Vogue* readers understood Walrond’s captions as ironic is made more doubtful when they are compared to other *Vogue* articles on the origins of jazz. In another Covarrubias pictorial entitled “Enter, the New Negro,” one caption reads, “them Broadway stars do come on uptown where [the New Negro] is at, and see him do he stuff, and den go on back downtown and struts his stuff as if they jess got it natchely” (63). Here, Walrond indicates that African Americans do not mind if white performers steal the dance styles of Harlem and act as if they came by the moves “natchely” because the New Negro is accommodating—there is no need to give credit when credit is due to African-American popular culture. While his exaggerated dialect strongly indicates parody, one wonders if *Vogue* readers got the joke. The implications of this caption are confronted in other *Vogue* articles that attribute the origins of jazz to white musicians. In “The Truth About Jazz,” the unnamed author argues, “How far syncopated music derives from the negroes is doubtful. But certainly they are its best interpreters” (45). This demonstrates the resistance some white authors had to attributing the origin of such a powerful cultural phenomenon to a marginalized group. Also, in Gershwin’s interview with *Vogue*, he asserts,

> The negroes sing it well, and have the inspiration to write it, but not the technique. When they get the technique, they lose the inspiration . . . sometimes I have got an inspiration from negro spirituals. But it is doubtful if they are negro at all. Paul Whiteman says they are mostly old English tunes. (88)

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22 The reluctance to acknowledge the black origins of jazz is consistent with Stuart Hall’s argument concerning America’s resistance to acknowledge its “ethnic hierarchies.” According to Hall, “America has always had a series of ethnicities, and consequently, the construction of ethnic hierarchies has always defined its cultural politics. And, of course, silenced and unacknowledged, the fact of American popular culture itself, which has always contained within it, whether silenced or not, Black American popular vernacular traditions” (256).
For a white band leader to divert jazz’s roots in New Orleans and Chicago to England is practically laughable, but it also speaks to a larger problem of white culture’s attempt to appropriate the origins of jazz. Furthermore, to deny that African Americans are capable of creating form and technique reaffirms the primitivization of black culture, i.e., black culture is not advanced enough to impose form on art.

While it is commendable that Todd and Garland sought to expose Vogue readers to the revolutionary jazz culture coming from America as they had with the avant-garde intellectual aristocracy of Bloomsbury, the tone in Covarrubias’s work differs a great deal from Huxley’s editorials and Richard Aldington’s profiles on prominent modernists. Covarrubias’s illustrations are more in line with Fish’s depictions of various kinds of Jazz Age men and women: ridicule in a tongue-in-cheek manner, but with accompanying captions indicating the cultural significance of these Jazz Age types. However, the circumstances are different regarding the racial pictorials, since the cultural identities of the New Negro are constructed for an upper class, white audience. While Fish’s illustrations of white women in upper-class scenarios would have been readily recognizable as satire, Covarrubias’s sketches, particularly in the pictorials with Walrond, may not necessarily have read as exaggerations. Instead, Vogue readers discover the latest fashion in African-American stereotypes, trading in “the Cotton-Picker” for the “Coolie” who has lived in New York “gwine on to twenty years now” and who “ain’t nevah had no job” (63). Some Harlem Renaissance writers may have perceived the fashionability of primitivism as a way for African Americans to earn respect, but, as Chinitz argues, “the price of this newfound respect was the perpetuation of the old stereotypes. Atavistic conceptions assume and imply an inherent disparity between whites and blacks, dooming
the latter to an irrevocable, if supposedly enviable, Otherness” (“Rejuvenation” 64). This Otherness is visually emphasized by Covarrubias’s cartoons and absent in Fish’s depictions of (white) modern women. Despite the significant conflict that arises from Covarrubias’s depictions of African Americans, publishing a male Harlem Renaissance writer in a British women’s fashion magazine further demonstrates Todd’s commitment to exposing readers to new fashions across the cultural spectrum.

Although the gap between the intellectual aristocracy of Bloomsbury and American jazz may have seemed considerable, Todd and Garland incorporated both under the pretext that both were new cultural phenomena of interest to savvy *Vogue* readers. Gershwin draws more specific parallels between modernism and jazz in his interview, stating, “[Jazz] is ironic, too, and at the same time poignant . . . sceptical and sensual, like so much of our most characteristic literature. It is full of innuendoes, it plays on our nerves, and teases our memories: it becomes inextricably associated with our love-affairs” (47). Moreover, according to Chinitz,

In 1920s criticism, jazz was perceived to be so deeply implicated in avant-garde aesthetics that what we now call *modernism* could usefully be termed *jazz art*. And modernist writers were not necessarily resistant to this label, for often they found in jazz a musical analogue to the aesthetic revolution they themselves were attempting to mount. (“Dance Little Lady” 322)

It may be hard to imagine Virginia Woolf categorizing herself a jazz artist, but clearly Todd and Garland were invested in jazz art as defined above. Todd and Garland’s *Vogue* contributed to the deconstruction and displacement of these cultural binaries, publishing articles and pictorials on Bloomsbury and Jazz Age black popular culture because they were fascinated with the new and experimental in the arts. While Todd and Garland’s editorial experimentation with Bloomsbury and jazz brought their *Vogue* careers to an
early end, their work demonstrates a cultural inclusivity unique to class magazines in this era. Rather than creating a niche periodical focused only on the fashion interests of the wealthy, or a mass magazine only interested in celebrities and jazz, Todd and Garland combined the elite with the popular under the title *Vogue*. These women editors reinvented “The Mode” while exposing readers to the latest trends in literature, music, art, femininity, race relations, and, of course, fashion.
CHAPTER FIVE

“THE COCKTAIL WITHOUT A PADLOCK!”: VANITY FAIR ’S INTOXICATING
ARTICULATION OF MODERNIST CULTURE

“MODERNISM is sweeping the intelligent world” declares a Vanity Fair ad from
the June 1929 issue of Vogue:

You find it in music, in the arts, in literature. You can’t ignore it. Yet, what do
you know about it? What do you think of it?
You won’t always understand modernism. But you should at least be able to
appreciate it.
There is a way, an easy way, to know and enjoy the newest schools of modern
thought and art. . . . A forum where the most brilliant minds of two continents
exchange their ideas.
This forum is the magazine Vanity Fair. (68)

Vanity Fair, staying true to the origins of its name, promises to expose readers to every
flavor of the modernist smorgasbord, keeping them up to date with the latest in culture,
even if they don’t understand it. Similar to Vogue’s “What They Read” book review
column, the ad suggests that it is not as necessary to understand modernism, as it is to
understand its cultural significance. However, as this ad indicates, Vanity Fair goes much
further than Vogue in its promotion and articulation of modernism—it was not just an
advocate, but also a forum for modernism. The ad includes a list of “Distinguished
Modern Contributors”: Robert Benchley, Heywood Broun, Walter Lippman, Paul
Morand, Carl Van Vechten, Marie Laurencin, Pablo Picasso, and Edward Steichen, to
name a few. These contributors establish the magazine’s commitment to modernist
criticism, literature, painting, and photography. Moreover, both the ad itself and its
appearance in *Vogue* indicate that *Vanity Fair*’s intended audience is not the hoi polloi, but instead a readership interested in the intelligent world, if not already part of it. *Vanity Fair*’s primary function during the 1920s was to articulate modernity in literature, music, and the arts to its readers, while emphasizing the importance of being “modern,” i.e., sophisticated. *Vanity Fair*’s approach to modernist culture destabilized antagonistic binaries of masculinized high and feminized mass culture, which, as Michael Murphy argues, differed from “the avant-garde’s militant clashing of high and low, which always ends up only reifying those categories.” In *Vanity Fair*, “these categories are mixed in a more significantly provocative way” (82). Instead, *Vanity Fair* created a binary between those in the know about au courant culture and those ignorant of the tremendous cultural shifts of this era. As Michael North observes in his examination of Gilbert Seldes’s work, “*Vanity Fair* made popular forms like burlesque intellectually fashionable while also introducing to a larger public difficult works from the avant-garde” (153).

During the rapid transformations occurring across economic, aesthetic, and political spectrums, *Vanity Fair* took advantage of the chaos to establish itself as the how-to guide for mastering the modern era. In its expansive understanding of what constituted modernism, early promotion of elements of popular culture as such, and uniquely humorous approach to culture that was pedagogical as much as mock-

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1 For *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield and publisher Condé Nast, art and life imitated each other. Nast’s parties became the event of every one’s year—from the very upper crust of New York to the latest Ziegfield girl. A typical Nast party might include Josephine Baker and Lady Astor as attendees, and this enviable guest list was due to Crowninshield’s connections across the social and cultural spectrum. In his 1947 *New York Times* obituary, Crowninshield was lauded as “one of the true founders of cafe society” because “he . . . started, at a time when lines were much more firmly drawn, to mix society, old style, with members of the arts” (17).
pedagogical, *Vanity Fair* was a modernist text. Additionally, I argue that *Vanity Fair*’s style and approach to culture problematizes the gendered cultural divide and demonstrates the definitional instability of “highbrow modernism,” or academic conceptions of modernism, and “mass culture,” which modernists often dismissed on the basis of its commercialism. A 1926 advertisement for the magazine reads “Prohibition has made drinking illegal, BUT” *Vanity Fair* is “The cocktail without a padlock!” (119).

This chapter examines the magazine’s role as cultural bellwether, while investigating its satirical and irreverent take on changes in gender expectations and relations, the disruption of traditional constructions of social class, and the periodical’s inclusive understanding of modernist culture as a cultural formation comprised of T. S. Eliot, George Gershwin, and Frank Crowninshield. Ultimately, *Vanity Fair* distinguished itself as a magazine that gave its audience what it thirsted for: culture with one part sarcasm, one part play, and, despite Prohibition, shaken, not stirred.

*Vanity Fair*’s wit, sophistication, and extensive reach across the cultural divide set it apart from both modernist mouthpieces like the *Egoist* and mass-market magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*. *Vanity Fair*’s content and style reveal not just a murky cultural binary, but also no divide between high and popular culture. Unlike Todd’s *Vogue*, which revered Bloomsbury but approached jazz and African-American culture from a voyeuristic perspective, *Vanity Fair* celebrated modernism in all of its forms from a playful, modernist angle. As Murphy claims,

*Vanity Fair* cut an unmistakable cultural figure—in the mannered, all-gods-dead high civility of its staff writers, in its dedication to a leisure at once both gentlemanly and decadent (encompassing both Josephine Baker and golf), in the striking sleekness of its layout, in the bold over-stylization of its paid advertisements, in its dramatic and technologically innovative use of color, and so
on. That is: *Vanity Fair* would market modernity not only by transcribing it, but by embodying it as well. In a sense, the magazine simply became modernism for many of its readers. (64)

Modernists’ experimental and provocative approach to literature, music, and art, in addition to their desire to create something new in an era skeptical of convention was consonant with *Vanity Fair*’s mission to go beyond the conventional and provoke its readers with all that was new and exciting in this modern era. Editor-in-chief Frank Crowninshield promised readers he would provide them with a magazine unlike any other on the newsstand:

> We are not going to print any pretty girls’ heads on our covers. . . . We shall publish no dreary serial stories. No diaries of travel. No hack articles on preparedness. No gloom. No problem stories. No articles on tariff, or irrigation, or railroad rates, or pure food, or any other statistical subject . . . The world is moving, moving on all eight cylinders—some folks are even moving on twelve—and you might just as well move along with them. (qtd. in Seebohm 119)

Crowninshield’s desire to Make the Magazine Industry New also meant incorporating modernist characteristics into his periodical: irony, self-reflexivity, an emphasis on urban life, and interrogation of cultural binaries. Furthermore, while the other periodicals I analyze incorporated modernism into their particular paradigms, or, in the case of *Vogue*, simply ignored the paradigm to publish modernists, for *Vanity Fair*, modernism was the paradigm: From the magazine’s inception Crowninshield and Nast wanted to construct a periodical concerned with the arts and culture and designed with a sophisticated reader in mind. As a result, *Vanity Fair* promoted and published now-canonical modernists such as T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and D. H. Lawrence early in their careers, thereby establishing itself as the magazine moving on all eight—if not twelve—cylinders.
The Beginnings of a Beautiful (and Profitable) Friendship: Frank Crowninshield and Condé Nast

Vanity Fair’s investment in and commitment to modernism was due to the considerable aesthetic know-how and networking capabilities of its editor Frank Crowninshield. As a life-long art collector, Crowninshield made his reputation in the art world as the publicist for the famous Armory Art Show of 1913, which exposed American audiences to Cubist works such as Marcel Duchamps’s “Nude Descending the Stairs.” The Armory show and Crowninshield’s savvy promotional techniques publicized the sea change happening in the arts, despite (or because of) the shock registered by many of the show’s attendants. Crowninshield brought his eye for art and style to Vanity Fair when Vogue’s publisher Condé Nast offered him the editor-in-chief position in 1914. Crowninshield was initially hired to fix the challenges Nast had not predicted when he purchased the periodical in 1913. When Nast bought Dress, a potential rival to his beloved Vogue, he renamed it Dress and Vanity Fair, but the magazine flailed due to an unclear focus and Nast’s lack of connections in art and society. As Caroline Seebohm remarks,

What Condé Nast conspicuously lacked, a long list of contacts, Crowninshield provided. What suited Crowninshield most, an agreeable platform for his interests and opinions, Nast willingly provided. The mutual benefits were both financially and artistically gratifying. (115)

Crowninshield belonged to several gentlemen’s clubs and his upper-class connections enabled Nast to move from the “new money” business world to the realm of the high society. But Nast and Crowninshield’s relationship with the wealthy was also mutually beneficial. As Seebohm explains,
[Nast] assimilated the feelings, interests, and desires of a rich, privileged elite in order to provide them with the correct images of fashionableness, and to feed the aspirations of those yearning to compete. In so doing, as though by osmosis, to all appearances he had joined that elite. (292)

Crowninshield agreed to the position on the conditions that the magazine get rid of “Dress” in the title and he be given a great deal of leeway in the magazine’s content and layout. This partnership brought together business and artistic expertise, catapulting Nast into the world of high society he coveted, while providing Crowninshield with a canvas on which he could paint the cultural landscape as he saw it. Under Crowninshield’s leadership the magazine became popular among the upper- and aspirant classes, because of “(1) an extremely stylish and elegant layout; (2) an eye for the artistic avant-garde; and (3) some of the best writing being produced anywhere in the world at that time” (Seebohm 107). Through Crowninshield, Vanity Fair earned its reputation as a magazine that stood apart from the multitude, thus appealing to the aspirational middle class as well as those interested in the aesthetic avant garde.

Vanity Fair’s appeal for a particular demographic was also due to its irony and wit. Crowninshield’s 1914 inaugural editorial declares, “Vanity Fair has but two major articles in its editorial creed: first, to believe in the progress and promise of American life, and, second, to chronicle that progress cheerfully, truthfully, and entertainingly” (13). Here, optimism is not presented in the nineteenth-century sense, that is, from a genuinely optimistic perspective that believes in the inevitability of man’s progress. Instead, optimism is the same as “mock cheerful”—irony has replaced the genuine:

[Vanity Fair] will print humor, it will look at the stage, at the arts, at the world of letters, at sport, and at the highly vitalized electric, and diversified life of our day from the frankly cheerful angle of the optimist, or, which is much the same thing, from the mock-cheerful angle of the satirist. (13)
Crowninshield’s editorial indicates that we are all cynics now; the difference is between those who playfully mock and those who are more malicious. Furthermore, Crowninshield’s promise to record American progress cheerfully is itself ironic, since the idea of progress as automatic was a subject often derided by *Vanity Fair* writers, particularly in the case of Prohibition, which they judged a considerable step backward. Crowninshield’s emphasis on ebullience stems from his devotion to the spirit of an era that would eventually become the Jazz Age. In the same editorial Crowninshield observes,

> Let us instance one respect in which American life has recently undergone a great change. We allude to its increased devotion to pleasure, to happiness, to dancing, to sport, to the delights of the country, to laughter, and to all forms of cheerfulness. . . . For our part, it seems a bright sign in the heavens, for it argues, we believe, that we, as a nation, have come to realize the need for more cheerfulness, for hiding a solemn face, for a fair measure of pluck, and for great good humor. (13)

During its heyday, *Vanity Fair* became internationally recognized as a chronicler and signifier of American culture. Christopher Reed argues,

> *Vanity Fair*’s self-described “cheerful” blend of saucy cartoons, modern graphics, poems by the likes of Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein, articles on avant-garde music, art and literature, along with regular features on theater, cars, golf, and men’s fashions, had made it the preeminent Journal for and about the American avant-garde and its patrons. (42)

Reed labels the magazine’s cheerful tone the “Amusing Style . . . [a] critically neglected mode of modernism developed within burgeoning urban subcultures: the racial mixing of jazz clubs, the gender mixing of boyish flappers and their androgynous consorts, the ‘camp’ mixing of high and low associated with homosexuals” (43). Indeed, the

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2 Reed arrives at his definition through early twentieth-century interior design terminology, combined with Ann Douglas’s urban, interracial concept “mongrel Manhattan.” Douglas takes “mongrel” from the title of
magazine offered a plethora of material that undermined traditional gender expectations, racial prejudice, and what constituted art—and its appeal among the urbane was a result of presenting controversial material in such a way that to reject or condemn it meant one was out-of-date and on the way to being obsolete. Above all, for *Vanity Fair* readers, it was important to be modern, to be knowledgeable on the latest cultural events, and to always be on the lookout for the Next Big Thing. *Vanity Fair* enabled readers to follow cultural shifts by appealing to their craving for the latest in literature, film, music, and the fine arts. In other words, *Vanity Fair* successfully promoted modernism by appealing to readers’ desire to be perceived as modern.  

**Vanity Fair’s Place among Commercial and Modernist Contemporaries**

While *Vanity Fair*’s dependence on advertising revenue makes it a participant in commercial culture, it was much more innovative than other mass-market magazines such as *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*. To compare circulation rates, while the *Journal* boasted a monthly readership of two million by the mid-1920s, *Vanity Fair*’s monthly circulation peaked at 96,500 in 1922. Nast and Crowninshield constructed their magazine with a more exclusive readership in mind, a goal emphasized in Nast’s 1913 letter to advertisers declaring that *Vanity Fair* would “strictly [limit] its appeal to Dorothy Parker’s never-written, but apparently self-deprecating, autobiography and uses “mongrel” to describe the “racially and ethnically mixed” demographic of 1920s Manhattan (5). While Douglas admits to focusing her argument more on whites than African Americans, “it should not be forgotten for a moment that in the 1920s Manhattan was, to appropriate the title of a sketch Parker published in the late 1920s about the new racially mixed social scene, an ‘Arrangement in Black and White’” (6).

3 As Caroline Keyser observes, “*Vanity Fair* is a good historical test case for the modern popularity of urbane humor. Its publication dates from 1914 to 1936 encompass the metropolitan outlook of the late 1910s, the fabled sophistication of the 1920s, and the waning zeitgeist in the early 1930s due to economic crisis and political upheaval” (*Playing Smart* 2). *Vanity Fair* was both of and for its time, and its 1936 absorption into *Vogue* was also tragically fitting, as America found it harder to hide its solemn face during the Great Depression.

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Dorothy Parker’s never-written, but apparently self-deprecating, autobiography and uses “mongrel” to describe the “racially and ethnically mixed” demographic of 1920s Manhattan (5). While Douglas admits to focusing her argument more on whites than African Americans, “it should not be forgotten for a moment that in the 1920s Manhattan was, to appropriate the title of a sketch Parker published in the late 1920s about the new racially mixed social scene, an ‘Arrangement in Black and White’” (6).
men and women of known means, and inferred high breeding and good taste” (qtd. in Seebohm 118, emphasis in original). As a savvy businessman, Nast would have expected to attract those who wanted to be “of known means” as well as those who were, and Nast marketed both of his magazines to the upper- and aspirant classes by tailoring the content and advertising with his ideal niche audience in mind. Nast’s specific stipulated audience lead scholars like George H. Douglas to categorize *Vanity Fair* as a “smart” magazine:

Smart magazines were written and edited for the leisured classes . . . for the sophisticated urbanites, for the kind of person who was well traveled, well read, well acquainted; for people who wanted to be entertained, but on an exalted plane; people wishing to sidestep the bromides and sugar-coated confections being dished out to standardized middle-class culture by the mammoth mass-circulation magazines. (9)

Middle-class readers who desired to be included in that niche also read *Vanity Fair* to increase their levels of sophistication and ability to pass as upper class.

Nevertheless, *Vanity Fair*’s considerably smaller circulation rates when compared to the *Post* and *Journal* indicate that Nast was successful in appealing to a group comprised of those with good taste and those attempting to achieve it. *Vanity Fair*’s success in achieving an upper-class audience is further demonstrated by its popularity among the same kind high-society gentlemen’s clubs of which Crowninshield was a member. However, its appeal among upper-class men faltered when it was absorbed into *Vogue*. As Seebohm relates,

an elderly New York club member, finding himself unable to lay his hands on a copy of *Vanity Fair*, irritably ordered a club servant to bring him the current issue at once. “Why, that’s a female magazine now, sir,” stammered the servant. “We just throw it away as soon as it comes in.” (326)

While *Vogue* also pursued the upper class, it was fairly conservative in its editorial content and targeted a female audience. *Vanity Fair*, on the other hand, promoted avant-
garde artists and the latest movie star with equal amounts of admiration and satire to both genders. This difference in tone and approach to business also caused considerable tension between the *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* offices. Douglas describes *Vanity Fair* as having “no management style . . . only style itself. Mrs. Chase and her staff believed that *Vanity Fair* people were frivolous, spending all their time on extended lunch breaks and writing risqué articles” (103). On the other hand, *Vanity Fair* regarded *Vogue*’s sober and serious treatment of fashion as “silly and offensive.” As Douglas relates, “A typical *Vogue* headline, such as ‘Why not spend your summer under a black sailor?’ was always ripe for a *Vanity Fair* parody, or at the very least some unrestrained hilarity in the office” (103). Despite the staff’s apparent lack of organization, Crowninshield was nonetheless successful in creating “the magazine people talked about, included in their conversations, displayed at their parties” (Douglas 101).

Although *Vanity Fair* did not seek the highest circulation rates possible, its rates nonetheless towered above those of the little modernist magazines—its 96,500 readers per month were ten times that of *The Dial*’s with its readership of 9,500 in 1922 (Rainey 96). Yet circulation rate is not the only factors to consider in establishing a periodical’s cultural position. Examining marketing strategies creates a fuller picture of *Vanity Fair*’s relationship to modernist magazines. As Lawrence Rainey observes, the advertising strategies of these magazines were surprisingly similar, since both *Vanity Fair* and *The Dial* “stressed publicity, advertising revenues, and street sales (as opposed to subscriptions)” (95). Though the strategy may have been similar, execution was markedly different:
[The Dial’s yearly] $9,100 in advertising revenue was tiny compared with the $500,000 per annum generated by Vanity Fair. Paid advertising occupied less space; in the November 1922 issue that included The Waste Land, 27.5 of 156 pages (or 18 percent) were taken up by advertising. Compare this with the July 1923 issue of Vanity Fair, which contained Eliot’s poems: of 140 pages, 76 were devoted to paid advertising (54 percent), and many articles offered fashion and automobile reviews that were advertising thinly disguised. The Dial, like The Little Review, segregated its paid ads in sections placed only at the beginning and end of the Journal; most of its ads came from publishers, all were printed in black and white, and few made conspicuous use of visual imagery. Vanity Fair, in contrast, handsomely displayed its arresting and splashy ads, many in color and set among editorial contents. (96)

While Vanity Fair and The Dial pursued and published similar contributors and modernist works, the former was considered less highbrow to some modernists due to its greater, and showier, emphasis on commercial advertising to maintain profits.

Some modernists felt Vanity Fair’s engagement with commercialism negatively affected the highbrow status of their art and avoided publishing certain works in the magazine. Rainey reveals the intriguing publication history of The Waste Land and Eliot’s reasoning behind choosing to publish in The Dial instead of Vanity Fair:

Eliot, it is clear, wanted his poem to be successful, yet not too successful. For the prospect of immediate publication by a commercial firm raised prospects that were largely unimaginable within the logic of modernism. And similar considerations must also have influenced the discussion concerning Vanity Fair as a possible venue for the poem. . . . Still, it is clear enough not only that Pound and Eliot considered Vanity Fair a potential publisher but also that Vanity Fair considered itself a serious candidate. (104)

Eliot nonetheless rejected the offer, because, as Rainey explains, “Vanity Fair represented a degree of commercial success and popular acceptance that would have undermined the status he was trying to establish for the work” (105). Eliot eventually published poems and criticism in Vanity Fair, but none came close to achieving the cultural coup Vanity Fair’s editors sought in being the first periodical to publish The
Despite publishing several modernist and avant-garde works, including Eliot’s later poetry, *Vanity Fair* was not considered one of the little modernist magazines, in large part because of its dependence on advertising revenue.

*Vanity Fair*’s active pursuit of an intelligent, sophisticated audience while publishing modernist and avant-garde works in a commercial venue makes it a fulcrum between the high modernist periodicals and mass-market magazines. Because of *Vanity Fair*’s $500,000 in yearly advertising revenue (Rainey 96), it was able to offset its smaller circulation rates when compared to more mass-market periodicals. However, this reliance on advertising revenue did not influence *Vanity Fair*’s content, nor did fear of negative reader response deter Crowninshield from publishing controversial works. Unlike the *Post* and the *Journal, Vanity Fair* not only applauded the iconoclasm of modernism, but was willing to risk shocking its readers in its promotion of the phenomenon—a strategy that runs counter to most commercial magazine business models. Nast later recalled that the magazine was “ten years too early (1915) in talking about Van Gogh, Gaugin, Matisse, Picasso, etc” (qtd. in Douglas 99). Despite Crowninshield’s progressive tastes, Nast ultimately trusted Crowninshield’s editorial capabilities, acknowledging,

At first (1915 to 1925), people took the ground that we were (presumably) insane, and even as late as 1929 and 1930, our readers were still confused by the paintings we reproduced. Our advertising department, too, was greatly concerned

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4 In securing *The Dial* prize money ($2000) prior to its editors having read the poem, Eliot avoided the appearance of compromising his aesthetic ideals for money—he earned the money from a prestigious award rather than a paycheck. The sum total Eliot received for *The Waste Land* ($2150) was more money for one poem than any other *Dial* contributor had previously earned. To compare, the highest amount *Vanity Fair* ever paid for a work was $100 for an F. Scott Fitzgerald short story. Furthermore, $2150 was almost twice as much as Crowninshield’s executive secretary Jeanne Baillot’s yearly salary—$1,144 (Rainey 202 n69). *Vanity Fair* matching *The Dial*’s offer would have been viewed by the fiscally conservative Nast as outlandish for one poem, especially a poem still sight-unseen. Even silver-tongued Crowninshield would not have been able to justify that expense to his more cost-conscious employer.
because our advertisers . . . thought the paintings distorted, and, as they said, decadent. In time, however, as the movement grew, we derived a very considerable benefit from having published such pictures. (qtd. in Douglas 99, ellipses in original)

Despite the risk posed to sales by publishing modernist works to a broader audience, Crowninshield rarely caved in to pressures from advertisers, and, as Nast notes, his prescience regarding aesthetic trends ultimately paid off for *Vanity Fair*—both literally in terms of sales and in establishing the magazine’s cultural cachet. Advertisers soon capitulated to Crowninshield and “mimicked the magazine’s curatorial function as tastemaker” (Murphy 70). For example, an ad for Steinway pianos portrays a Cubist rendition of a large group of people and figures with the proclamation: “Steinway, The Instrument of the Immortals” (February 1929). The ad’s Cubist style indicates that, by 1929, modernism is already established in the immortal realm as well. Furthermore, it shows advertising companies already identifying and making the connection between modernism and consumer interest in this cultural phenomenon.

The Steinway ad’s incorporation of modernist culture further distinguishes *Vanity Fair* from the typical mass-market magazine. While Steinway appeals to readers’ craving for high culture, other advertisers appealed to the upper-class status, or desires, of *Vanity Fair*’s readers. One Packard automobile advertisement announced it was “Serving

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5 There is one noteworthy exception to Crowninshield’s otherwise steadfast support of his writers. From 1917-1920, Dorothy Parker was *Vanity Fair*’s drama critic and was famous for her candor and wit. In one piece, Parker ponders whether “the dizzy whirl of modern life has made us cold and blasé” or if the plays “are just naturally poisonous.” Parker concludes, “Somehow, I cannot feel that the dizzy whirl of modern life has anything to do with my intense suffering during the performance [of *Tiger! Tiger!*]—I hold the play itself directly responsible” (“Plays of War and Peace” 33). This kind of candidness contributed to Parker’s termination after theater producers (including Florenz Ziegfield) complained to Crowninshield about the detrimental effects her reviews were having on ticket sales. However, Parker’s treatment was a rare occurrence; perhaps in part because the incident led to Robert Benchley’s subsequent resignation from *Vanity Fair* and public outcry by writers like Franklin P. Adams and Edmund Wilson who criticized Crowninshield for sacrificing smart writing for staff writers’ open access to Broadway. In addition, even after Parker’s termination, Crowninshield continued to publish her in *Vanity Fair*, both her poetry and her captions for Fish pictorials.
America’s Aristocracy” composed of “cabinet members, senators, ambassadors, and congressional leaders who consistently favor Packard with their patronage” (83). Here, capitalism and the aristocracy are conflated, as these political figures are described as “patrons,” not consumers. Thus, Packard’s ad is not only about cars, but also describes what it means to be a member of the upper class in America. And, even if you are not a senator or cabinet member, you can achieve this aristocratic status by purchasing a Packard—you can be upper class by proxy through consumerism. Thus, while *Vanity Fair* participated in commercial culture, the ads conformed to the *Vanity Fair* formula: appeal to moneyed readers interested in both the avant-garde and the finer things in life.

Despite earning considerable revenue from luxury advertisers, Crowninshield’s lavish publishing tastes diminished *Vanity Fair*’s potential profits. He insisted on using expensive glossy paper, color photographs (a new and costly technology at this time), and had a propensity to pay top dollar for big name contributors. Nast would repeatedly remind his editor that the goal of the magazine was, ultimately, to gain a profit not barely stay afloat—admonitions Crowninshield consistently ignored. Crowninshield also fought against some of Nast’s ideas when it came to content, initially balking at the idea of a men’s fashion column because, as he once remarked to Chase, “a gentleman knows how to dress” (qtd. in Amory 7). Crowninshield eventually relented, and, contrary to his assumption, “The Well-Dressed Man” column became one of the magazine’s most popular features. Crowninshield’s approach to the construction of his magazine is akin to a modernist’s attitude toward his/her art in that Crowninshield rarely sacrificed his aesthetic standards for financial gain, which caused tension with his boss but resulted in a
beautifully constructed magazine. As a result, *Vanity Fair* was able to Make It New in the magazine business through its high aesthetic standards and efforts to push the boundaries of conventional magazine fare.

Because of the similarities *Vanity Fair* had with its contemporaries across the cultural spectrum (the highbrow content of an *Egoist*, but a dependence on consumer culture via advertising), critics have struggled to categorize this periodical in socioeconomic and -cultural terms. Recent critics like Faye Hammill, Caroline Keyser, and Daniel Tracy categorize *Vanity Fair* as a middlebrow magazine, because of its “preoccupation with style, taste, imitation, and social performance,” positioning it between highbrow and popular culture (Hammill 5). However, this cultural positioning elides the middle-class aspect of the middlebrow, that is, that middlebrow culture is inextricably linked to the middle class, and that there are economic factors involved in the composition of middlebrow culture. Keyser discusses *Vanity Fair* as smart in terms of its style and appearance and employs “middlebrow” to describe its readers’ desires, claiming, *Vanity Fair* “targeted a middle-class audience and presumed that this readership longed for luxury and elite social status” (*Playing Smart* 5). Keyser’s description of these desires is limited to the middle class’s aspirations to the upper class, which, given the rare appearance of luxury items in middlebrow magazines like the *Journal*, reduces the complexity of the middle class to the level of poseurs. The middle

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6 One thing Nast and Crowninshield consistently agreed on was avoiding publishing fiction because, according to Nast, it led to “indiscriminate appeal” and was “a [circulation] builder whose constant tendency is to dilute ‘class’ circulation” (qtd. in Seebohm 118). Using fiction to boost circulation rates was the business model followed by Cyrus Publications, so it follows that Nast would do the opposite in order to maintain a more discriminating audience.
class was also interested in practical items such as canned food and new technologies for running an efficient household, items that rarely, if ever, were advertised in *Vanity Fair*.

Categorizing *Vanity Fair* as middlebrow and arguing that it “targeted a middle-class audience” presumes that the upper class was not interested in cultural events (or assumes that they already knew about them) and that they did not participate in consumer culture. The inaccuracy of this assumption can be proven by considering the logic of advertising: Packard automobiles were out of the price range of many middle-class readers, and Packard would not have paid for ad space to simply play along with middle-class readers’ fantasies—Packard bought the ad space because its marketers knew upper-middle- and upper-class people read the magazine and would potentially buy Packard automobiles. Given *Vanity Fair*’s circulation rates, it is safe to assume that middle-class readers were part of the magazine’s audience and that their interest included a desire for luxury, but basing their interest primarily on longings for luxury, as Keyser and Hammill do, assumes that middle-class readers had no interest in or could not understand modernism—an assumption greatly problematized by my work on the *Post* and the *Journal*.

Sarah Churchwell, like Keyser, also emphasizes consumerism in categorizing *Vanity Fair* as middlebrow. In an effort to avoid what she perceives as Joan Shelley Rubin’s failure to “recuperate the middlebrow while keeping the distinctions alive,” Churchwell defines “middlebrow” as “[a]dmitting the commercial into artistic

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7 In 1920, a Packard Single 6 was $2975, while a 1924 Ford Runabout was priced at $265. The average salary in this decade was $1236, and even with the advent of consumer credit, it is unlikely that even the most aspirational middle-class consumer would spend almost three times his salary for a luxury car.
consideration” (160). Understood in this way, *Vanity Fair* could be considered middlebrow, if we ignore the kind of commercialism *Vanity Fair* engaged in, especially when compared to more mass-market magazines. However, the label “middlebrow” does little to inform us of the magazine’s approach to culture and function as a text committed to the avant-garde and developments in popular culture. *Vanity Fair* considerably problematized the commercial/artistic binary by shaping and redefining what it meant to be “cultured” and “sophisticated” in the 1920s—a characteristic of the magazine that does not adhere to critical definitions of “middlebrow.”

Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith, in their examination of middlebrow culture as it was understood in the 1920s, argue that “middlebrow” was inextricably tied to “middle class,” and that, for critics such as H. L. Mencken, George Jean Nathan, and Alexander Woollcott the middlebrow is:

not quite “vulgar” and real enough to be deemed low culture, nor sophisticated or experimental enough for high culture. . . . Just as deleterious, according to Mencken, is the appeal of the middlebrow to sheltered, unoriginal consumers—the “money-in-pocket” masses—which is enough to disqualify them from “true” art. (3)

These writers’ contempt for the middle class may not have been as pronounced in Nast and Crowninshield, but *Vanity Fair’s* focus on sophisticated culture and experimental art was in keeping with its desire to attract a more exclusive audience. Hammill, in her argument on *Vanity Fair* as middlebrow, concedes, “Crowninshield and his staff would doubtless have rejected any association with the middlebrow, as the term was understood at the time” (52). Indeed, and they constructed a magazine that greatly differed in content and style from other periodicals of their time in order to differentiate *Vanity Fair* from the middlebrow. It seems, therefore, an unfair rhetorical move to change the definition of
middlebrow in order to justify categorizing *Vanity Fair* as such, especially if scholars like Tracy seek “to be true to historical and contemporary readers’ experience of literary abundance” as it applies to modernism (58). It would seem to follow, then, that we should also stay true to the historical definition of the middlebrow as associated with middle-class taste when categorizing commercial periodicals of the Jazz Age.\(^8\)

Hammill, Keyser, and Tracy also use “middlebrow” to account for critiques of the aristocracy that appear in magazines like *Vanity Fair*. This claim ignores the fact that modernism was also critical of highbrow, popular, and especially middle-class, or bourgeois, culture. Eliot’s “Marie Lloyd,” Woolf’s “The Leaning Tower,” and Huxley’s “The Perversion of Values” in British *Vogue* are just some examples of modernists critiquing class—particularly the middlebrow. While *Vanity Fair* satirized the stuffiness of the old aristocracy and their reluctance to join in on the fun of the new, it was not because the magazine wanted to be a voice for the rapidly growing middle class. Rather, *Vanity Fair* expanded the requirements for being sophisticated and wealthy. For Crowninshield, it was as important to become a member of a gentlemen’s club as it was to be familiar with the works of Charlie Chaplin and Ezra Pound. Money and family lines represented the old, pre-Jazz Age way of determining “class,” but Crowninshield (who came from a wealthy, old-money family) introduced the upper and aspirant classes to the importance of cultural acuity in an era when social hierarchies were increasingly blurred.

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\(^8\) Hammill justifies changing middlebrow’s historical definition to allow for “a productive place from which to reflect on the commerce between high and popular culture, a place of intellectual curiosity and cultural aspiration combined with a healthy skepticism about pretension,” but this says more about contemporary criticism on the middlebrow than *Vanity Fair*’s purpose behind publishing modernist pieces and articles on jazz.
During the 1920s, the socioeconomic hierarchy became problematized not just because the middle class was expanding and beginning to breach traditionally upper-class territory through increased purchasing power, but also because the rich were more willing to venture into lower-class realms like speakeasies and Harlem. Tracy’s definition of “middlebrow” emphasizes the magazine’s pedagogical function for middle-class readers, but ignores its pedagogical function for the upper class:

“Middlebrow culture,” here, includes the increasing number of apparatuses for learning “high culture”—the literary and other artistic productions designated as legitimate, as well as the reading strategies needed to understand them—that appeared in the United States from the 1890s forward. . . . This new middlebrow culture was not synonymous with mass culture but used the productive capacities of mass culture to capitalize on the new and growing obsession with cultural legitimacy. (39-40)

In only focusing on how the aspirant middle classes benefited from Vanity Fair, Tracy ignores the interest modernism and jazz held for the wealthy classes, and it was this audience that Nast and Crowninshield explicitly sought. While other middlebrow groups such as The-Book-of-the-Month Club (a group Tracy compares to Vanity Fair) gave its middle-class readers access to texts that were bestsellers or established classics, Vanity Fair exposed its readers to new works that even highbrows had yet to see. The “obsession with cultural legitimacy” was not a purely middle-class endeavor—the upper class was also pressured into making the transition from the mores of the Gilded Age to

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9 Tracy calls on Joan Shelley Rubin’s definition of “middlebrow” throughout his argument, using the Book-of-the-Month Club as an example of mass culture’s ability “to capitalize on the new and growing obsession with cultural legitimacy” (40):

The contrast between culture and work in turn further eroded the understanding that cultivation resulted from disciplined study. “You can now subscribe to the best new books—just as you do a magazine,” one advertisement announced; an “Outstanding Book Each Month,” declared another, would be “Sent to You Like a Magazine”—and presumably required as much effort to read.

(Rubin 106)

While Vanity Fair ads emphasized the ease with which readers could gain access to “the intelligent world,” the fact that these ads only appeared in other class magazines such as Vogue indicates that only certain people would be able to gain this kind of access.
those of the Jazz Age. The contributions Nast and Crowninshield made to the dissemination of modernist works to a larger audience that included upper- and middle-class readers undermine traditional understandings of commercial culture as only ever able to mock or imitate highbrow culture. *Vanity Fair* is an example of a commercial periodical participating in and contributing to the development of avant-garde art and should be considered as a modernist text rather than a middlebrow magazine.

Although *Vanity Fair* was pedagogical in its articulation of modernism and jazz, it also took on characteristics of modernism by teaching its readers the tenets of modernism from a decidedly ironic and self-reflexive perspective assuming a readership at least somewhat aware of the latest cultural developments. In the 1924 “On Not Being Up to Date,” the author, a “well-known English novelist . . . who prefers anonymity,” espouses the pleasures of remaining ignorant of the latest trends in culture, thereby undermining *Vanity Fair*’s raison d’être. In a particularly bold statement, the author proclaims, “The reason why I feel that I can afford to be out-of-date is this: I have ceased to care two pins what these people—the intellectually smart, the leaders or follow-my-leaders of mental fashion—think of me, or indeed of anything else under the sun. I find it more agreeable to be, not fashionable, but myself” (70). Similar to modernism’s penchant for self-referentiality, this article lampoons *Vanity Fair* as the leader in “mental fashion” and reveals its ability to poke fun at itself, while also implying that the true sophisticate is more concerned with being him- or herself, not superficially fashionable.

*Vanity Fair* also satirized traditional magazine forms, such as the book review and advice column. In a playful twist on the traditional book review format, Robert Benchley’s 1919 review of Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* appears in an
article entitled “Dullest Book of the Month.” Here, Benchley remarks that the book is “a good work, hastily done” (39) but points out that Veblen has made a huge mistake: “He has presupposed, in writing this book, the existence of a class with much more leisure than any class in the world ever possessed—for, has he not counted on a certain number of readers?” (39). This snarky conclusion undermines Veblen’s evisceration of the leisure class—i.e., the class many Vanity Fair readers either aspired to or were already a part of—and encourages Vanity Fair readers to strike a snobbish pose in turning up their noses at such a dull book. In 1920, another book review appeared, entitled, “The Most Popular Book of the Month” features a faux-review of the telephone book. The byline reads “Vanity Fair’s Book Reviewer,” which is itself a parody of other magazines’ treatment of book review columns since Vanity Fair typically published its esteemed contributors’ names. In its parodies of the book review format, Vanity Fair indirectly marks its adherence to modernism’s “Make It New,” and the magazine’s satire stems from the belief that in this era of experimentalism, dullness is a more egregious crime than being “Not Up to Date.”

In the opening article of Vanity Fair’s ten-year anniversary issue, a comparison between 1914 and 1924 declares: “The great difference is that 1924 is an era, while 1914 was only a point of time. . . . Happy the year may be which has no annals; but it will probably be dull” (25, emphasis in original). However, even eras contain moments of dullness, as an August 1923 piece entitled, “The Ten Dullest Authors: A Symposium” highlights. A note from the editor describes the article as a parody: “We have had so many symposiums lately on the Ten Greatest Books in the Last Fifty Years, on the Ten Books One Has Most Enjoyed Reading, etc., etc., that Vanity Fair . . . thought it might
be interesting to reverse the investigation” (58). The article features writers such as H. L. Mencken, Elinor Wylie, and Carl Van Vechten listing writers they believe over-rated and/or obsolete. D. H. Lawrence and Gertrude Stein (both contributors to *Vanity Fair*) are included in Mencken’s list. Stein also appears on Wylie’s list, and Lawrence shows up on Van Vechten’s along with Sigmund Freud and James Joyce. In fact, Lawrence makes it onto five of the eleven contributors’ lists—in effect achieving the distinction of being the dullest writer of all, according to some of his contemporaries. In keeping with the modernist spirit, *Vanity Fair* plays modernism against itself through satire, publishing writers critiquing their contemporaries using relatively superficial criteria, while also publishing those featured in the Dullest Authors Symposium.

Although *Vanity Fair* promoted modernism, it also stuck firmly to its mantra of “cheerfulness” (i.e., mock cheerfulness) and focus on fun. In the 1919 “Culture” column, a “Five Star Extra Edition” piece appears, entitled “How to Make Sure that You are Enjoying Paintings and Verse of the New School” and promises to provide “a few elementary principles” (55) regarding this rather difficult, unorthodox style. The article parodies the confusion of senses avant-garde painters sought to create in referring to their works as “a symphony or a scent.” The author describes his friend, a member of the “Younger Grubbist School,” who produces pictures that “must be eaten to be understood. His masterpiece was done in pistache [sic] ice cream and sauce Bernaise. It made a lasting impression on the man who bought it” (55). In addition to satirizing the avant-garde, this description of the Grubbist’s work also implies the ephemerality of art trends by ironically remarking on the supposed “lasting impression” created by ice cream.
The self-consciousness and irony in the Symposium and the “Five Star Extra Edition” piece reaffirm that *Vanity Fair* was itself modernist, but Tracy argues that *Vanity Fair*’s parodies should not be read as “iconoclasm” or “an adoption of modernism” because “to describe the smart magazines as aesthetically modernist would be to overlook the extensive debunking of modernism that also played out in their pages” (47). Not only does this claim disregard the several modernist poems and articles published without editorial remarks, but it also misapprehends *Vanity Fair*’s formula. If we understand modernism as an aesthetic style that sought to question conventional idols and ideologies, it is appropriate that *Vanity Fair*, in its preoccupation with irreverence, would treat modernism’s status in the art world with a degree of irony to undercut the phenomenon’s already burgeoning loftiness and thus reinforce *Vanity Fair*’s cutting edge reputation—i.e., *Vanity Fair* is so progressive that even new aesthetic styles are treated as practically passé.

While Crowninshield was devoted to the arts and modern life, that did not mean that arts and life always had to be taken seriously. *Vanity Fair*, like so much else in this age, sought to undo the austerity of the Victorian era and the heavy psychological toll of World War I, achieving both by maintaining a playful tone. The magazine’s multi-layered humor is reinforced by analyzing a 1919 feature entitled, “How to Study this Number,” which offers readers “helpful” quizzes on the contents of this issue. One quiz is on an article entitled “The Futurist Theatre” by Mildred Cram. According to *Vanity Fair*, the reader should first consider the purpose of the article—a deceptively simple request. Subsequent questions include “Show in what respects this article differs from Article 10 of the Rough Draft of the League of Nations (first and limited edition).” A supposedly
straightforward direction, “Show how Miss Cram emphasises [sic] her point” is followed by “Which point?” (23). These questions comically connect avant-garde Futurism with an international bureaucratic document—presumably because both are equally difficult to understand—and Miss Cram, regardless of journalistic merit, can do little to illuminate Futurism’s (or perhaps even her own) points. In offering a quiz that only serves to confuse the naive reader rather than clarify the contents of this issue, *Vanity Fair* mocks its role as mentor to its readers.

Tracy’s argument is also problematic in that it implies that *Vanity Fair* reserved its satire for modernism. In actuality, *Vanity Fair* considered no subject safe, including the magazine itself. In a 1924 pictorial entitled “Love According to the Artists of *Vanity Fair*” William Bolin (who created many *Vanity Fair* covers in the 1920s) parodies the various styles of the magazine’s pictorial staff. The pictorial features caricatures of the styles of Fish, Charles Martin, and Eduardo Garcia Benito, all of whom published a great deal in *Vanity Fair* and who were known as satirists themselves. The pictorial is a commentary on the jadedness of some artists and the over-idealism of others. Fish’s parody includes “Proud Percy” and “adorable Dora,” the caption remarking, “He is all ardour, she all innocence, yet he cannot resist displaying the necklace intended for his affianced; nor can she withhold her eyes from its glitter” (36). The caption plays up Fish’s tendency to reveal the buffoonery of her heroes and the ulterior motives of her innocent-looking heroines. This pictorial is, in effect, a meta-parody, as it is makes fun of an illustrator known for her parodies of romance and the realm of the upper class. This pictorial is not a “debunking” of *Vanity Fair*’s cartoonists, but reveals the extent to which the magazine was committed to irreverence and irony. The periodical’s willingness to
make fun of itself set *Vanity Fair* apart from the mass-market magazines like the *Post* and *Journal*, as well as the little modernist magazines such as *The Dial* and *The Little Review*.

**Vanity Fair Complicates the Gender Divide**

Unlike its sister publication, *Vanity Fair* not only appealed to both genders, but approached the increasingly fraught subject of gender in the same light-hearted tone in which it approached all other cultural issues. Reed accounts for the different tones set by *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* as being “strongly inflected by gender, though these dynamics were more complex than a simple opposition of conventional femininity and masculinity” (42). Although *Vogue*’s Edna Woolman Chase appeared to represent old-fashioned values due to her emphasis on propriety, her ambition and ability to succeed in a largely male-dominated business (including the women’s magazine business) revealed a desire to break free from expectations of feminine passivity and submission.10 Meanwhile, “*Vanity Fair*’s avant-garde attitude was not the machismo of Hemingway’s novels, Mies van der Rohe’s buildings, or other manifestations of what became canonic modernism” (43).

Faye Hammill describes the gender differences between *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* according to each magazine’s “ideal reader”: “The ideal *Vogue* reader would project her image through clothes, accessories, quiet good taste, and correct behavior, and the *Vanity Fair* reader through sophistication, wit, provocative opinions, and a wide cultural

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10 The relationship between Crowninshield and *Vogue*’s Edna Woolman Chase was one of barely masked contempt. Chase, in keeping with her adherence to propriety, briefly alludes to her disdain of Crowninshield in her autobiography, remarking only, “Dear Frank, he was such a darling and on occasion such a damned nuisance” (99). Additionally, Crowninshield was known for “stealing” *Vogue* staffers by enticing them with jobs at *Vanity Fair*, promising a greater amount of creative and social freedom. His most famous acquisition was Dorothy Parker. However, it is not surprising that Parker, one of the few women at the Algonquin Round Table (along with playwright Edna Ferber), felt more at home bantering with *Vanity Fair*’s Robert Benchley than with the fashion editors of *Vogue*. 
knowledge” (33-34). Hammill’s description helps account for the content of each magazine, but Reed’s complication of gender conventions as they pertain to *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* prevents easy categorizations of the former as simply conventionally feminine and the latter as overtly masculine.

Far from promoting machismo, Crowninshield promised women readers that his periodical would do something in a noble and missionary spirit, something which, so far as we can observe, has never before been done for [women] by an American magazine. We mean to make frequent appeals to their intellects. We dare to believe that they are, in their best moments, creatures of some cerebral activity; we even make bold to believe that it is they who are contributing what is most original, stimulating, and highly magnetized to the literature of our day, and we hereby announce ourselves as determined bigoted feminists. (13)

This was much more than Chase promised her readers. Despite her immense professional success, Chase’s feminism did not extend to her readers. *Vogue* adhered to traditional gender roles during an era when many women possessed the same drive for a successful career as *Vogue*’s editor. As Elizabeth Majerus argues, magazines like *Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair* “affirmed that modernism was to a great extent about women’s large-scale entrance into public life and culture” (623, emphasis in original). Chase, somewhat ironically and despite her traditional views on etiquette and social graces, was ultimately of her time period in her refusal to stay at home.

Crowninshield’s ironic tone regarding women “in their best moments” as having “some cerebral activity” is a jab at other magazines that underestimate female intelligence and women’s desire to participate in the world outside of the home. Nevertheless, other critics interpret Crowninshield’s appeal to women readers as condescending. Keyser claims Crowninshield’s remark concerning cerebral activity
“patronizes in its promise to address [women].” Keyser also asserts, “This editorial recruits female readers through their desire to be mentally superior to the herd. At the same time, the magazine often depicted women as anti-intellectual and primarily sexual and hedonistic” (*Playing Smart* 28). However, *Vanity Fair* recruited readers of both sexes through their intellectual aspirations, not just women. A 1925 ad features an illustration of a man in a top hat surrounded by men and women fawning over him with the question, “Could This Be You?” hovering above. The ad assures the reader that a *Vanity Fair* subscription can teach him the “14 points of assured popularity.” Through *Vanity Fair*, he can “respond to the ideas of the thinkers who mould [sic] this curious age”: “The new books are open to you—together with the reputations and points of view of their authors” (102). Moreover, Crowninshield’s claim that women are making valuable contributions to culture (both high and popular) is not patronizing, but is in fact supported by the several women featured in *Vanity Fair*—from writers like Dorothy Parker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Richardson, and Elinor Wylie to features on actresses like Gloria Swanson and Lillian Gish. In the 1927 “Hall of Fame,” Gish appears not as a symbol of sexuality and hedonism but in modest attire and smirking, as if to mock the assumed male gaze. In the caption, Gish is credited with having “inspired such cinema cynics as Joseph Hergesheimer and George Jean Nathan to praise in the public prints” (69). According to *Vanity Fair*, Gish has overturned the highbrow, male bias against a perceived feminized commercial culture, and not through overt sexual seduction, as her photograph attests, but because of her considerable ability as an actress.

While there were articles such as the March 1925 “Confessions of a Man-Eating Débutante” and Fish pictorials humorously depicting female types, those illustrations
need not be read as evidence of *Vanity Fair*’s misogyny. Rather, in a magazine committed to playfulness, women and men were caricaturized for comedic purposes. A Benito pictorial entitled “Deadly Types of the Male Flapper,” includes male types like “The Jazz Baby” and the “Left End.” The Left End appears on the football field as a “typical gridiron hero,” but when “stripped of forty-eight pounds of pads . . . looks more like the gridiron itself.” This type is further emasculated by the concluding perfunctory remark, “Tomorrow, Harold will be photographed for Mother and Edith” (36), implying that a tough exterior on the football field is mere masculine performance—Harold is ultimately ruled by the women in his life. Thus, far from being “deadly,” these male types are rendered just as silly as the pictorials on different types of vamps portrayed in Benito’s “The Vamps of Yesteryear.” Historical women such as Cleopatra and Madame du Barry are drawn with an emphasis on their voluptuousness to contrast the boyishness of “The 1925 Model” who “obeys the modern mandate, ‘Let them be light’” (43).

Clearly, *Vanity Fair*’s mockery was not exclusive to women, and, overall, shifts in gender expectations were acknowledged and celebrated in *Vanity Fair* because they were part of the new, “curious age.”

*Vanity Fair* also promoted the emergence of women in the public sphere and their contributions to culture. The magazine had a large number of women writers on staff, like Parker, whose position was also significant because it marked her as the first female drama critic in the magazine business. In addition, Parker’s employment supports Majerus’s claim *Vanity Fair* created a more “inclusive” modernism:

*[Vanity Fair’s] more inclusive version of modernism created unusual opportunities for a wide array of women artists and women readers, since much of the art and culture that high modernism defined itself against was associated with a feminized*
mass culture or with past traditions that were similarly feminized. As a result, many women contributors to *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set*, and the *New Yorker* were able to combine modernist formal strategies with domestic, social, and/or political concerns that drew on forms of feminine or traditional culture that was marginalized by elite modernism but embraced in the popular modernist context of these glossy magazines. (621)

Parker’s ironic tone as she articulated the dilemmas facing women in this decade—wanting romance but too jaded to expect it, treating lovers as disposable rather than soul mates, and chafing under society’s obsession with youth—made her both famous and a perfect fit for *Vanity Fair*. Moreover, her sardonic capabilities were not limited to gender issues, but also included her employer. In, “Our Office: A Hate Song,” Parker critiques the “Cover Hounds” (4), who “are forever discovering Great Geniuses; / They never fail to find exceptional talents / In any feminine artist under twenty-five” (8-10). But cover artists are not half as bad as the “Editorial Department,” also known as, “The Literary Lights,” who are “just a little holier than other people” (18-20). Parker, through her wit and insight into the working woman’s complex position, both embodied and expressed the anxieties surrounding the Modern Woman. Nina Miller claims, “The success with which Parker maintained the tension between old and New made her an extremely appealing figure to a public ambivalent about women’s sexual freedom and the modernity it stood for” (767). Although Andreas Huyssen claims that turn-of-the-century highbrow art was gendered masculine and “the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse . . . consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine” (47), *Vanity Fair* discovered the opportunity available by engaging both the feminine and the masculine, thereby destabilizing the denigration of mass culture through an elevation of the feminine. Because of its more inclusive understanding of modernism that took into account women’s contributions to this cultural phenomenon, *Vanity Fair*
published a wider variety of modernist writing and enabled these women to gain a wider audience, which included the highbrow set.

Edna St. Vincent Millay was another female modernist who was published substantially in *Vanity Fair*. However, Millay, like Eliot, experienced some anxiety in publishing certain material for a commercial magazine. In Millay’s case, her qualms did not stem from publishing epic poetry, but in publishing satirical, playful articles that exhibited a lighter side to the Greenwich bohemian. While Millay submitted poetry to *Vanity Fair* under her own name, her parodic prose appeared under the byline “Nancy Boyd.” Keyser explains the pseudonym as Millay’s method for separating her two writing styles:

The playful persona of Nancy Boyd represents Millay’s direct engagement with the ramifications of professional humor writing for a magazine, for Millay published the majority of her satirical magazine prose under this nom de plume, to the consternation of Crowninshield who thought these pieces could garner a greater audience if he could confess the identity of the celebrity who produced them. (“Edna” 72)

Here, it is not the male editor hesitant to publish a female poet, but Millay experiencing anxiety over publishing humor pieces in a commercial magazine. Crowninshield wishes to profit from the cultural capital attached to the name “Edna St. Vincent Millay,” but she, as in Huyssen’s account of her male counterparts, resists this commodification. To publish poetry was one thing, since she could retain her reputation as a serious artist, but prose pieces such as 1921’s “The Implacable Aphrodite” have Nancy Boyd in the byline, presumably to dissociate the “serious” writer from her “light” output.

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11 In Huyssen’s depiction of the male modernist artist and the “specter of a loss of power,” he asserts, Thus the nightmare of being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the “wrong” kind of success is the constant fear of the modernist artist, who tries to stake out his territory by fortifying the boundaries between genuine art and inauthentic mass culture. (53) As Millay’s relationship with *Vanity Fair* indicates, this fear was not particular to the male modernist.
In “The Implacable Aphrodite,” Millay creates a vignette starring Miss Black and Mr. White. This piece reveals the position of the bohemian woman artist confronted by men posing as modern, but still perpetuating traditional gender roles. Initially, Mr. White praises Miss Black for her “intrepid mind” and the fact that she is “not all the time considering just how long it will take [him] to propose to [her]!” (29). Yet, when Miss Black reveals that she is to set sail for Europe to increase her abilities as an artist, Mr. White discovers a sudden love for her and makes several vain attempts to keep her stateside, presumably by his side. When she rebuffs his entreaties, he calls her “cold” and repeatedly whines, “What will happen to me?” to which she answers “I’m sure I don’t know. It hadn’t occurred to me to consider” (84). Mr. White then proceeds to undermine her work as less important than he should be to her: “Your work! . . . All you think about is those damn little putty figures! And here am I, flesh and blood,—and what do you care?” To which Miss Black, in adherence to her cold nature, “icily” states, “Less and less” (84). The situation devolves further, until Mr. White finally gives in to Miss Black’s suggestion that he leave. Upon his exit he melodramatically pronounces, “Very well. Of course, I’ll go if you want me to. But my heart I leave here.” The clever Miss Black responds, “Pray don’t. I have room for nothing more in the apartment” (84).

Ironically, it is the man who becomes hysterical, right before he resorts to childish name-calling. Why Millay felt the need to use a pseudonym for this and her other Boyd articles remains unclear, since this work is no less an example of her unique insight and cheeky way with words than her sonnet “I Being Born a Woman and Distressed.” Perhaps Millay
wanted to preserve the poetic persona of the bohemian from Greenwich Village and denied the part of her that was the street-smart gamine Nancy Boyd.12

*Vanity Fair*’s female illustrators also took on the complexities of Jazz Age gender relations. An April 1925 Fish pictorial entitled “Girls He Won’t Marry—and Why” stars Rumsen, a bachelor who is “no longer the lightsome lad he once was” because he has yet to find the right girl to marry in these contemporary times of flappers and women golfers. Furthermore, “Rumsen blames his gradual disintegration on women alone, and he doesn’t care if the whole world knows how he hates them” (54). The pictorial ostensibly describes a “Few of the Nastier Phases of American Girlhood” only to undermine its misogyny by concluding, “do you burn to know the real, real reason why Rumsen will not marry any of these dreadful little girls? . . . It’s because—sh!—none of these little girls will marry Rumsen!” (54). This pictorial satirizes the warnings given to young women regarding marriage proposals and adherence to traditional gender stereotypes, perhaps telling them to avoid being “The Out-Door Girl,” who loves the “heady autumn air” and golf. After all, the end result of her relationship with Rumsen is that “Rumsen remains at the end, as at the beginning a bachelor” (54). The pictorial’s conclusion, combined with Fish’s depiction of young, attractive women juxtaposed against the snooty, squinty-eyed Rumsen, highlights the irony of the title—which sounds like the title of a cautionary tale for young women. In actuality, it is Rumsen who is left out and left wanting, not Ethel the “Speed Queen” who has eloped three times “only to find, when slowing down for Greenwich, that the lights of Quebec were two miles behind”

12 For more on Millay’s Nancy Boyd articles see Catherine Keyser, Nina Miller, and Elizabeth Majerus.
Like other young women of this era, Ethel’s need for speed, in her car and her life, makes men like Rumsen a momentary pit-stop in the raucousness of the Jazz Age. *Vanity Fair*’s treatment of gender issues and promotion of female artists problematizes the gendered cultural binary that Huyssen argues existed between modernist and mass culture. According to Huyssen, modernism marked mass culture feminine and high art masculine, and gendering mass culture as feminine “always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions” (62). In contrast, *Vanity Fair* illustrates a different conception of modernism, one in which Gertrude Stein can just as easily represent the avant-garde as Charlie Chaplin represents mass culture. The only constant is that old gender binaries no longer apply, and if a man desires to participate in the modern world, he must rethink his assumptions regarding gender roles. A 1919 ad describes the Tired Business Man as knowing “all about the bank-statement, the corn crop, the freight-car shortage, the liquidation of Smith-Jones, Inc., and the drop in Moss preferred” (82). In other words, he knows everything about the traditionally masculine world of business. But this knowledge is no longer sufficient for the modern man, as *Vanity Fair* makes clear in its delineation of the Business Man’s vast social ignorance: “He is lost at a dance; swamped at a dinner; helpless when confronted with hostesses, buds, dowagers, visiting French generals, literary lions, Hindu musicians, Japanese dancers . . .” (82). Not only must the business man venture knowledgeably into traditionally female spheres such as the world of parties and hostesses—as opposed to simply attending dances, he must gain expertise in the Turkey Trot—he must also become more worldly and well-read. The new social scene is not only more feminine, but
decidedly cosmopolitan, and woe to the man who finds this world “as incomprehensible as the dodo” (82).

Conventional notions of masculinity are further undermined by D. H. Lawrence’s 1924 article “On Being a Man.” Here, Lawrence focuses on the inner life of men, referring to World War I in differentiating between physical acts and mental processes: “It is still harder, and bitterer, after a great encounter with life, to sit down and face out the result. Take the war. . . . Many men went out and faced the fight. Not a man dared face his own self afterwards” (33). Lawrence uses shell shock to highlight the mind-body divide, but this also describes the post-war crisis of masculinity depicted in other modernist texts, such as Mrs. Dalloway and its portrayal of the shell-shocked soldier Septimus. Although this article does not adhere to Crowninshield’s call for cheerfulness, it shows the magazine’s commitment to modernist criticism. In considering the role of the mind in the modern man’s life, Lawrence dismisses associations of thinking with passivity. Instead, he proclaims, “Man is a thought-adventurer” (33):

Today, men don’t risk their blood and bone. . . . Whatever they do, they perform it all in the full armour of their own idea of themselves. . . . All the time, the only protagonist is the known ego, the self-conscious ego. And the dark self in the mysterious labyrinth of the body is cased in a tight armour of cowardly repression. (34)

The modern world and Sigmund Freud have caused a shift from a focus on the external world to the exploration of the inner labyrinth, but Lawrence insists, “thought-adventure starts in the blood, not in the mind” (33)—it is something more primal than cerebral. For the modern man, it is the realm of consciousness or the inner life that provides the greatest challenge. Furthermore, and contrary to modernism’s correlation of self-consciousness to alienation as with Stephen Dedalus or J. Alfred Prufrock, he insists on
the importance of interpersonal relationships, specifically marriage, for the thought-adventurer claiming, “There is always risk, for him and for her. Take the risk. Make the adventure. Suffer and enjoy the change in blood. And, if you are a man, slowly, slowly make the great experience of realizing. The final adventure and experience of realization, if you are a man” (34). Women do not share the same kind of self-realization as men because, according to Lawrence, women experience “the strange, slumbrous, serpentine realization, which knows without thinking” (34). Lawrence, despite considering the unthinking intuitiveness of women to be a positive thing, relies on feminine gender stereotypes in order to discuss the increasing feminization of the modern man. Despite Lawrence’s modernist literary style, he reveals rather unmodern (perhaps even dull) gender expectations when it comes to women. Although the modern man experiences a shift from an emphasis on physical perfection to explorations of one’s psyche, the gender hierarchy remains intact, with women able to achieve little more than a deeper kind of intuition.

*Vanity Fair*’s appeal to and for both genders increased its symbolic capital and undermined traditional assumptions regarding the gendered cultural divide. *Vanity Fair*’s articles on golf, modern masculinity, and men’s fashion appealed to the still-elusive male reader and consumer. Meanwhile, its consistent employment of women artists and articles on women’s issues demonstrates that, regardless of his tongue-in-cheek tone, Crowninshield was sincere in his assertion that women were making significant contributions to culture in this period.
Vanity Fair’s Interpretation of “American Noises” in Jazz and Poetry

Vanity Fair’s treatment of jazz and African-American culture reveals the ambivalence surrounding the emergence of black popular culture into mainstream, or white, culture. On the one hand, jazz was celebrated by Vanity Fair as a form of high art, and African-Americans were credited as the originators of this form—something that was not always acknowledged in other venues or by other musicians. In pieces such as the 1923 “Jazz: A Brief History,” Samuel Chotzinoff attributes the origins of jazz to African American spirituals, calling them “the musical expression of a great group of American peasants, who became identified with the native soil through a century of compulsory labor on it” (69). Chotzinoff distinguishes African-American spirituals from “the negro paraphrases of Stephen Foster” which have “charm and a certain simplicity” but “are pure white” (69)—thus, it is the marginalized American “peasants” who are foregrounded in a discussion of America’s obsession with jazz, which was not usually the case, particularly in other commercial magazines like Vogue. According to Chotzinoff, black spirituals led to jazz and he affirms, “the negro genius has been chiefly responsible for whatever musical development America can boast. It is that genius which has produced the American jazz, the only distinct and original idiom we have” (106). While Chotzinoff is not totally accurate in attributing a direct line from black spirituals to jazz (What about ragtime?), his article is important in that it defies the tendency to “whiten” jazz’s history in an effort to appropriate its roots. Instead, Vanity Fair writers emphasize the African-American origins of jazz as they celebrate a genre that revolutionized music and popular culture.
Vanity Fair was also progressive in its consideration of jazz as a high art style, but some writers were hesitant to celebrate the institutionalization of jazz for fear it would lose its improvisational, spontaneous elements. Gilbert Seldes illuminates this dilemma in his 1924 Vanity Fair article “American Noises: How to Make Them, and Why.” Seldes, in lamenting how much jazz has moved from subculture status to the mainstream complains, “At the present rate, it will become impossible to mention the subject of jazz by the middle of next December” (59). In The Seven Lively Arts, Seldes claimed that, “the pretentious intellectual is as much responsible as any one for what is actually absurd and vulgar in the lively arts” (294-95), and this belief is revisited in his Vanity Fair piece on jazz. While Seldes exhibits concern over the institutionalization of jazz, he ultimately argues that jazz’s contributions to the world of music reaffirm its status as a lively—and high—art.

Seldes also provides Vanity Fair readers with his understanding of where jazz is and where it is going:

It has been suggested, already, that the highbrows are ruining jazz. The fact is that jazz is converting itself: its principal conductors are musicians; its arrangers pride themselves on their classicism. In the process of conversion, some of the old snap is bound to be lost—the Negro band will preserve it longest. (86)

Seldes then tentatively supports the evolution of jazz from Jelly Roll Morton to Paul Whiteman, in other words, the move from a more raw and spontaneous musical experience to an arrangement of music with more orchestral instruments included. Here we see an inverse of modernism’s relationship to the cultural divide: where modernists feared the contamination of their art via mass consumption, jazz, according to some critics, should be wary of its appropriation by the highbrows. However, Seldes opts for a
more expansive perspective: “It is the musical world at large which will ultimately
gain by the coming of jazz, for it will have its effect on the make-up of orchestras and on
the works of composers, both in America and abroad. This is the ultimate good” (86).
Seldes determines that fears of appropriation are largely exaggerated, and that the
revolution jazz has made in the music world will be its crowning legacy. Jazz and
modernism may have feared contamination from opposing sides of the cultural divide,
but their methodologies were similar: both sought to reinvent traditional forms in order to
defamiliarize the familiar. For Seldes, jazz has irrevocably changed approaches to music,
and its long-term effects outweigh any fears of the highbrows somehow “ruining” this
experimental style via institutionalization.

As progressive as *Vanity Fair* may have been in its consideration of jazz, its
support of black writers and artists was not as direct and explicit as it was for women
writers. Contributors and staff were overwhelmingly white and the magazine only
occasionally published work by Langston Hughes, Countée Cullen, and Eric Walrond.
Furthermore, it was readily apparent that African Americans were not part of the *Vanity
Fair*’s stipulated audience. The magazine’s advertisements never featured a Tired
African-American Business Man or a black woman surrounded by an adoring crowd with
the words “This Could Be You” over her. In Simone Weil Davis’s investigation into
advertisements and Jazz Age literature, she states that most periodicals in this era
consciously avoided appealing to a black readership “due to their assumed lack of
purchasing power” (127). Nevertheless, in a period when African-American culture was
increasingly en vogue and as Harlem became a hotbed for whites interested in
“slumming,” it is surprising that *Vanity Fair* did not promote the Harlem Renaissance as much as it did other aspects of modernism.13

Walrond’s March 1925 article, “The Adventures of Kit Skyhead and Mistah Beauty,” gives an insider’s perspective into Harlem cabarets for the benefit of *Vanity Fair*’s predominantly white readership. The article is also accompanied by a Miguel Covarrubias drawing of a crowded club, and an Editor’s Note:

> The *Vogue*, within the last few years, of the all-Negro reviews on Broadway, like, for instance “Shuffle Along” or the more recent “Dixie to Broadway,” naturally raised the question as to the source of these dancers and comedians. Then some of our artists, and notable among them Miguel Covarrubias, began exploring the Negro section of Harlem; and there on the sidewalks and in the clubs and cabarets, they found springing up, the folk songs, the exotic jazz rhythms, the dances and gesturing that form the basis of the current Negro shows, and also furnish the motifs of the popular songs and musical compositions of famous jazz organizations such as the Whiteman orchestra. This article, on the cabarets of Harlem, is written by the Negro writer, Eric Walrond, who knows the scene he writes of intimately. (52)

In keeping with its position as cultural guide for its readers, *Vanity Fair* presents investigative reporting regarding the sources of the New Negro phenomenon. Walrond, is promoted by editors via his “insider” status, i.e., because he is a black man living in Harlem.

“The Adventures of Kit Skyhead and Mistah Beauty” is another example of the magazine’s pedagogical function, but instead of an ironic perspective, readers are offered a glimpse into the “exotic” realm of Harlem. Walrond’s piece is a fictionalization of a night out in Harlem, and the narrative is written in black vernacular, even including a helpful definitions for words such as “kopasettee,” “jigaboo,” and “ofay” (52) for *Vanity

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13 The effects of the Great Migration were most concentrated in Harlem. As Leon Coleman reports, “The [1920s] decade would see the population of Harlem alone more than double from 82,248 in 1920 to 203,894 in 1930. It could truly be said that Harlem, an area of less than two square miles, contained more African Americans per square mile than any other spot on earth” (11).
Fair readers unfamiliar with contemporary slang. Kit and Mistah Beauty go out to various clubs, beginning at the Cotton Club, which they soon leave because they are the only African-Americans in the audience. They move on to a “dickty” club off of a side street, which contains a more diverse crowd. Not only are “High society folks” in attendance, but also “a welter of bronze folk. High yellows, medium browns, low blacks” (52). Walrond’s story espouses the correlation between class and race, providing Vanity Fair readers with an essentializing classification of different “types” of African Americans. Mistah Beauty and Kit’s final stop is Sonny Decent’s “the ‘openest’ cabaret in Harlem” in which “you’ve got to be part of the underworld pattern to fit in” (100). According to the narrator, Sonny’s “is a sort of laboratory for song and dance. Here it is that most of the jazz steps you see on Broadway, whether by Ann Pennington or Florence Mills are first tried out” (100). With Sonny’s, Walrond’s “tour” is complete, as he has taken readers from the whitest cabaret to a more genuine Harlem nightclub from which mainstream theaters steal performances. This article demonstrates that Vanity Fair’s pedagogy also crossed the color line to expose readers to African-American culture, even if it did so somewhat problematically.

Thus, it is perhaps fitting that a Harlem Renaissance writer who was a controversial spokesman for African Americans in both his time period and our own came to write many articles for Vanity Fair—Carl Van Vechten. In addition, on the few occasions Vanity Fair published Harlem Renaissance writers, Van Vechten provided introductory notes to promote this aesthetic movement. For example, when the magazine published Cullen in 1925, “A Note by Carl Van Vechten” appeared in the middle of the page, declaring that Cullen’s 1924 poetry collection The Shroud of Color “created a
sensation analogous to that created by the appearance of Edna St. Vincent Millay’s *Renascence* in 1912” (62); thereby comparing Cullen to a highly-esteemed *Vanity Fair* contributor and establishing Cullen as “in the front rank of contemporary American poets, white or black” (62). In his role as white advocate for black culture and author of *Nigger Heaven*, Van Vechten became *Vanity Fair*’s expert on African-American culture. Van Vechten was an apt contributor for *Vanity Fair* as he was well known in the art world and, like Crowninshield and Nast, was famous for his lavish parties that mixed figures from high society with jazz musicians and Harlem Renaissance writers. Leon Coleman describes Van Vechten’s purpose in writing for commercial magazines during this decade and the effects his pieces had in publicizing Harlem Renaissance artists:

> In his writing upon Negro topics, Van Vechten followed the same pattern that is observable in his earlier efforts to promote the works of little-known writers and musicians. He sought to share his enthusiasm for his discoveries with the public; and by publicizing black artists’ works, he attempted to create an audience for them. . . . These articles became newsworthy in themselves because they were written by a literary celebrity at a time when . . . literary figures occupied a position just vacated by opera stars and not yet usurped by movie stars. (83)

While some black Harlem Renaissance writers such as Alain Locke and Langston Hughes welcomed Van Vechten as a publicity agent for Harlem, others, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, believed he exploited the salacious aspects of African-American culture for his own gain and to the detriment of African Americans.\(^{15}\) In spite of the criticism Van

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\(^{14}\) Van Vechten’s celebrity status was further enhanced in his *Vanity Fair* series on Hollywood. In “Hollywood Parties,” Van Vechten undermines stereotypes regarding starlets and their allegedly backstabbing natures. On the contrary, the actresses Van Vechten encounter offer up “encomiums, not modest or casual, but as a rule, whopping, expansive, exaggerated” when talking of their peers (47).

\(^{15}\) Du Bois’s review of *Nigger Heaven* attempts to undermine what he views as an exploitative depiction of Harlem: “I find this novel neither truthful nor artistic. It is not a true picture of Harlem life, even allowing for some justifiable impressionistic exaggeration. It is a caricature. It is worse than untruth because it is a mass of half-truths” (106). For Du Bois, Van Vechten is particularly dangerous for African Americans because he is white and his depictions of African-American culture will be taken seriously by other whites.
Vechten received in his own time, I argue that Van Vechten’s work for *Vanity Fair* revealed a world that was largely unfamiliar to its readers in order to promote African-American artists.

In a February 1926 article entitled, “‘Moanin’ Wid a Sword in Ma Han’: A Discussion of the Negro’s Reluctance to Develop and Exploit his Racial Gifts,” Van Vechten calls for African Americans to take advantage of the public’s apathy toward song recitals by performing spirituals and folk songs onstage. The article praises Roland Hayes for being the “first Negro” to successfully put on “a conventional recital program” but adds that he is an “exception” and that other African-American singers should move beyond the conventional (61). In making his case for black artists to forego appealing to white audiences and instead promote their culture to all audiences, Van Vechten takes a moment to plead his own case as a promoter of African-American culture (while savvily neglecting to name names):

> There has been, in fact, a determined protest on the part of the Negro against the exploitation in fiction of his picturesque life. This distaste is largely based on the fact that white writers about the Negro have chosen to depict the squalor and vice of Negro life rather than its intellectual and cultural aspects. This proclivity is likely, however, to remain permanent, for the low-life of Negroes offers a wealth of exotic and novel material while the life of the cultured Negro does not differ in essentials from the life of the cultured white man. (100)

In creating a racialized Tolstoyan argument that the black lower classes are different and “exotic,” while all cultured people are the same, Van Vechten claims that being poor is more interesting due to an alleged richness in squalor. His argument goes against the goals of racial uplift as espoused by Du Bois and his “Talented Tenth” and reveals a line

Ultimately, Van Vechten’s perspective is an inaccurate portrayal of Harlem, and one that Du Bois seeks to correct: “To [Van Vechten] the black cabaret is Harlem. . . . Such a theory of Harlem is nonsense. . . . The average colored man in Harlem is an everyday laborer, attending church, lodge and movie and is as conservative and conventional as ordinary working folk everywhere” (107).
of thinking that would have understandably provoked other African-American writers because of Van Vechten’s romanticization of poverty.

This article was published in the same year as *Nigger Heaven* and it seems likely that Van Vechten is referring to himself as a victim of Negro contempt for his depictions of Harlem’s seedier elements. However, Coleman argues,

The majority of the Negro Renaissance writers responded positively to *Nigger Heaven*, both publicly and in their correspondence to Van Vechten. James Wheldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Walter White, George Schuyler, and Charles S. Johnson, wrote at length defending and praising Van Vechten’s presentation of Harlem life. Their consensus was that the book was an honest and objective depiction of African American urban society, and more importantly, that it revealed facets of African American life which had been unknown to the majority of white people. (129)

Depicting Harlem in all of its gritty realism was part of Van Vechten’s overall goal of promoting black culture to white audiences.16 His intentions are reinforced in *Vanity Fair* when he states that black artists need to get over their “sensitiveness” regarding the way in which their culture is portrayed in fiction, insisting, “Until novels about Negroes, by either white or coloured writers, are regarded as dispassionately from the aesthetic standpoint as books about Chinese mandarins, I see little hope ahead for the new school of Negro authors” (102). Van Vechten’s focus on the importance of realism in advancing racial tolerance is commendable, but his idealization of lower-class African Americans and emphasis on Harlemites as muses for novelists is problematic in its neglect of the lived experience of impoverished blacks.

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16 Coleman also lauds the novel because, *Nigger Heaven* represents a departure from the traditional mode of the white man’s writing about the Negro. Neither patronizing nor eulogizing, it is the first novel of black urban life written by a white author from a first-hand knowledge of the subject. Almost single-handedly it made America and the world conscious of the existence of the New Negro and of many little-known aspects on Negro life. (158)
Later, Van Vechten addresses the economic opportunities available to black artists in pointing out that instead of trying to become part of white culture, the black artist should “capitalize” on “his beautiful Spirituals, his emotional Blues” in order to overturn the dominance of white culture in the arts, while also benefiting economically from depicting “the sordid but fantastic existence of Lenox Avenue” (102). Van Vechten urges black writers to take ownership of their culture and prevent writers—ironically, writers like him—from profiting off of African-American culture. While Van Vechten’s article is certainly problematic in terms of essentializing lower-class black culture as “exotic,” he champions diversity in aesthetic output in calling for blacks to participate in depictions and expressions of their culture. Moreover, he emphasizes the rewards and benefits available to potential black writers and artists, and the need to take ownership of their culture to thwart white appropriation.

In addition, Van Vechten promoted jazz across racial boundaries while never denying its African-American origins, particularly in his March 1925 article, “George Gershwin: An American Composer Who is Writing Notable Music in the Jazz Idiom.” Here, Van Vechten credits himself for orchestrating Gershwin’s “initial appearance as a performer on the serious concert stage” (40). Van Vechten discusses the creation of *Rhapsody in Blue* and his association with its development, establishing his expertise regarding jazz and his close relationship with one of its most popular composers. In tracing Gershwin’s development as a musician, Van Vechten describes him in terms that highlight Gershwin’s crossover capabilities:

[Gershwin] is unusually prolific in melodic ideas; his gift for rhythmic expression is almost unique; he has a classical sense of form. His gay music throbs with a pulse, a beat, a glamorous vitality rare in the work of any composer, and already
he has the power to build up a thrilling climax, as two or three passages in *Rhapsody* prove. Even his popular music is never banal. There is always something—if it is only two bars, as is the case in *Rose of Madrid*—to capture the attention of even a jaded listener. (78)

Van Vechten makes a modernist out of Gershwin in his description of the composer as one able to reinvigorate classical forms, while also creating an element of surprise in his popular works. At the end of his article, Van Vechten names “Negro spirituals, Broadway, and jazz” as “Gershwin’s musical god-parents,” remarking, “Whatever he does, or however far he goes in the future, I hope that these influences will beneficently pursue him” (84). Van Vechten’s acknowledgment in *Vanity Fair* of the black origins in Gershwin’s music and his plea that these influences not leave Gershwin as his career progresses demonstrate the magazine’s interest in preserving the history of jazz as it became more mainstream and accepted among whites.

In its preoccupation with what was new, sophisticated, and exciting, *Vanity Fair* embodied the energy and spirit of the Jazz Age. If other parts of the world viewed America as reactionary due to Prohibition, *Vanity Fair* stood out as avant-garde and cosmopolitan. In its role as cultural Master of Ceremonies, *Vanity Fair* was the ever-present host of the Jazz Age soiree. As one ad proclaimed, “When the world is moving to Charleston time, you’ll never find *Vanity Fair* doing a one-step. It is the look-liveliest and step-quickest magazine in all America” (November, 128). The magazine’s approach was consistently witty and satirical, in keeping with Crowninshield’s promise of cheerfulness and its inclusive understanding of modernism highlighted the contributions women writers, jazz musicians, and Harlem Renaissance writers made to this cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, considering *Vanity Fair* as a modernist text highlights the
collaborative efforts of editors, publishers, and artists in developing and promoting modernism and furthers our understanding of this aesthetic as it appeared in a commercial context. *Vanity Fair* enthusiastically depicted the multi-faceted cultural shifts in the 1920s for urban sophisticates and those who wanted to be urban and sophisticated, creating an intoxicating text that portrayed the fast-paced world of modernism and life during the Roaring Twenties.


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VITA

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