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## **New Leaves: Fashionable Reading and Literary Celebrity in British Vogue (1918-1939)**

Jana Baró González



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores British *Vogue's* self-appointed role as a guide to modern fashions and manners, that is, as a cultural intermediary, during the interwar period (1918-1939). Through a close reading of its essays, literary reviews, social chronicles and portraits of writers, and in the context of the Battle of the Brows, it argues that it always counted literary practices, such as reading, writing or displaying books, as expressions of taste. From the theoretical framework of Fashion and Gender Studies, and within the fields of Middlebrow and Modernist Periodical Studies, this thesis argues that, despite its changing priorities and its move near and then away from a highbrow position, *Vogue* continually valued sophistication and playfulness and can be approached as a middlebrow text.

The first chapter introduces British *Vogue*, tracing its development as a society and fashion periodical across the Atlantic and its introduction to Great Britain during the First World War. It discusses its function as a guide to modern practices of consumption and taste and explores the interplay between those practices, individual identity and social affiliation. *Vogue* predicated that acquiring and displaying knowledge and cultural goods was a viable strategy for women to present themselves as modern subjects: those goods, of course, included books. Throughout the interwar period *Vogue* proposed “smartness” as the key to modernity, the approved expression of taste, and articulated it both on the page and behind the scenes. With *Vogue* as a seal of legitimacy, its editors and contributors could promote certain writers and approaches to literature as “fashionable”. Through practices that were both professional and personal, like hosting or introducing friends to dressmakers, they could build mutually beneficial relationships, but while they had a degree of freedom to choose which modes to support they were also expected to live according to the values of their managers.

The second chapter explains how British *Vogue* became a modernist project during the editorship of Dorothy Todd (1923-1926), as well the transition periods that preceded and succeeded her. Todd developed a network of contributors that included the Bloomsbury group, the Sitwell siblings and other avant-garde artists, writers and critics. However, *Vogue* was above all a fashion magazine with an interest in society reports, which went against the modernist discursive ideals of art as free from commercial interest and the author as lone genius. Under Todd, literature took up more space than ever: reading and discussing books was a core aspect of that all-important quality, smartness. *Vogue* promoted literary figures as celebrities even beyond its extensive critical essays and reviews, supporting different visions of modern authorship by including portraits of writers or visiting their homes. Consequently, their bodies and sartorial tastes were interwoven with their artistic creation and reception.

Finally, the third chapter locates the magazine in the “Battle of the Brows”, the debate over the value of different cultural practices that raged in the press during the less studied editorships of Alison Settle (1927-1936) and Elizabeth Penrose (1936-1939) and continued beyond the scope of this thesis, which ends with the start of the Second World War. The format of British *Vogue* changed, shaped by persistent tension with its management and widespread socioeconomic hardship, and its content shifted through its alliance with younger, glamorous writers, artists, and socialites, the Bright Young People. The space allotted to literature was reduced, and so was the attention granted to modernist texts and writers, though they did not completely disappear. Although there had always been a middlebrow aspect to its articulation of high culture for the uninitiated, *Vogue's* editorial line now leant even more firmly towards middlebrow tastes, pushing a sensible sort of sophistication front and centre, making its tone even more arch, and enclosing sartorial eccentricity into the context of the costume party. Its vision of literary celebrity split into two models: middlebrow writers, chic and proper, and glamorous society figures that happened to be writers.

**Keywords:** literature in *Vogue*; gender in fashion; sociology of fashion; cultural mediation; middlebrow literature

## RESUM

Aquesta tesi explora el rol de l'edició britànica de *Vogue* com a guia de les modes i les bones maneres modernes, és a dir, com a intermediari cultural durant l'època d'entreguerres (1918-1939). A través de la lectura en profunditat dels seus assajos, ressenyes literàries, cròniques socials i retrats d'escriptores i escriptors, i en el context de l'anomenada "Battle of the Brows", argumenta que la revista sempre va considerar les pràctiques literàries, com la lectura, l'escriptura o la presentació de llibres, com a expressions de gust. A partir del marc teòric dels estudis de gènere i de la moda, i dins dels estudis de les revistes "middlebrow" i modernistes, aquesta tesi argumenta que, malgrat que canviessin les seves prioritats i que s'apropés i s'allunyés d'una posició "highbrow", *Vogue* sempre va valorar la sofisticació i el joc i es pot considerar un text "middlebrow".

El primer capítol presenta la *Vogue* britànica, seguint el seu desenvolupament com a revista de societat i moda a l'altra banda de l'Atlàntic i la seva arribada a la Gran Bretanya durant la Primera Guerra Mundial. Parla de la seva funció com a guia de les pràctiques modernes de consum i gust i explora la interacció entre aquestes pràctiques, la identitat individual i l'afiliació social. *Vogue* defensava que l'adquisició i la mostra de coneixements i béns culturals era una estratègia per tal que les dones es presentessin com a subjectes moderns: aquests béns, per descomptat, podien ser llibres. Al llarg del període d'entreguerres *Vogue* va proposar "smartness" com a clau per a la modernitat, com a expressió aprovada del gust, i l'articulava tant dins com fora de les seves pàgines. Amb *Vogue* com a segell de legitimitat, les seves editores i col·laboradores podien promoure certes escriptores i aproximacions a la literatura com a "de moda". A través de pràctiques professionals i personals, com rebre o presentar amitats a dissenyadores, van construir relacions mútuament beneficioses, però, tot i tenir certa llibertat a l'hora de triar les modes que defensarien, també s'esperava d'elles que visquessin d'acord amb els valors dels seus directius.

El segon capítol explica com la *Vogue* britànica es va convertir en un projecte modernista durant la direcció de Dorothy Todd (1923-1926), així com els períodes de transició que la van precedir i succeir. Todd va desenvolupar una xarxa de col·laboradores que incloïa el grup de Bloomsbury, els germans Sitwell i altres artistes, escriptores i crítiques avantguardistes. No obstant això, *Vogue* era sobretot una revista de moda, interessada en el safareig d'alta societat, fet que anava en contra dels ideals discursius modernistes de l'art lliure d'interès comercial i l'autor com un geni solitari. Todd va dedicar més espai que mai a la literatura: llegir i parlar de llibres era un aspecte central d'aquesta qualitat tan important, "smartness". *Vogue* va promoure figures literàries com a celebritats més enllà d'assajos i ressenyes i va proposar diferents visions de l'autoria modern mitjançant retrats o visites a les llars d'escriptores. Per tant, els seus cossos i gustos estilístics travessaven la seva creació artística i la seva recepció.

Finalment, el tercer capítol situa la revista en la "Battle of the Brows", un debat sobre el valor de les diferents pràctiques culturals que va tenir lloc a la premsa durant l'època menys estudiada d'Alison Settle (1927-1936) i Elizabeth Penrose (1936-1939) i que va continuar més enllà de l'abast d'aquesta tesi, que acaba amb l'inici de la Segona Guerra Mundial. El format de la *Vogue* britànica va canviar degut a la tensió persistent amb la seva direcció i les dificultats socioeconòmiques, mentre que el seu contingut va canviar per la seva aliança amb les escriptores, artistes i figures de l'alta societat més joves conegudes com "Bright Young People". L'espai dedicat a la literatura es va reduir, així com l'atenció parada al modernisme, tot i que aquest no va desaparèixer del tot. Tot i que sempre hi havia hagut elements "middlebrow" en la manera com explicava l'alta cultura als no iniciats, la línia editorial de *Vogue* va començar a inclinar-se encara més cap als gustos "middlebrow", defensant una versió assenyada de la sofisticació, fent servir un to encara més cínic, i lligant l'excentricitat en el vestir al context de les disfresses. La seva visió de la celebritat literària es va dividir en dos models: les escriptores "middlebrow", centrades i "chic", i les figures de l'alta societat glamuroses que també escrivien.

**Paraules clau:** literatura a *Vogue*; gènere i moda; sociologia de la moda; mediació cultural; literatura middlebrow

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My time as a pre-doctoral researcher at ADHUC—Research Center for Theory, Gender, Sexuality at the University of Barcelona has given me an exciting environment where there is always a workshop or conference around the corner and a group of supportive peers with whom to share frameworks and gossip over wine. It has also given me the chance, as the editorial assistant at *Expressions maghrébines*, to overcome my fear of large Word documents. The Laboratori de Tesi pushed me to share this work when it was very much in progress and introduced me to Dr. Rosa Rius Gatell, whose warm support and regular calls were instrumental to find my way back into this thesis at its lowest points. I am also thankful for the kindness and technical support of the staff at the CRIC PhD program—particularly Dr. Loreto Vilar Panella, whose email about the deadline saved this project—, the university library and the Doctoral School.

Without an international stay I could never have seen, let alone studied, the pages of *British Vogue*. Dr. Lara Feigel and the team at the Centre for Modern Literature and Culture, King's College London, helped me through the administrative process, welcomed me generously and gave me enormously useful insight regarding primary sources and ongoing work in the area. Thank you, too, to the lecturers who allowed me to sit in and listen to their classes, in particular Dr. Joanne Entwistle, whose subject was so important to this project. I am thankful, too, to Dr. Hannah Murray for her doctoral seminars, to the team at the Abstract and to the students I met there, who made my time in London a true delight. Because so much of my research had to be done in the United Kingdom, I am truly thankful for my friends, Meri and Marta and George, who let me stay at their place and gave me, besides a roof, the company I needed not to feel completely lost.

I must thank the staff at the British Library for bringing out those heavy volumes every morning and especially for their assistance in my attempt at tracking down *The Patrician*. The team at the University of Brighton Design Archives, and particularly Dr. Lesley Whitworth, let me consult Alison Settle's papers even when the logistics were complicated by construction work and, most importantly, commiserated with me over Settle's diabolical handwriting. The London Rare Books School was kind enough to give me a bursary to attend a course on book history, and without that support this project would be sorely lacking. Many researchers have helped me throughout these years, sharing tips through social media, letting me see their unpublished papers and showing an interest in my work over questionable coffee at conferences. I can't name them all here, but they have all shaped this thesis.

These past five years I have had as many jobs; I have moved, travelled and been in lockdown. I would have been thoroughly scrambled, egg-like, without my friends and I couldn't be more grateful for their warmth. I want to thank the Sisterhood for their support from so far away and for the yearly Eurovision storm and Francesca, who insisted in check out *Lolly Willowes*, for her insight, pride in me, and unfailing friendship. Irina, Marina, Amanda and Laura: I would apologise for the linguistic atrocities I have inflicted upon you but, to be honest, you have been just as bad. Thank you for your daily kindnesses and kitchen dance routines.

Moltíssimes gràcies, per acabar, a la meva família, als meus pares, l'Anna i el Lluís, tots vosaltres. No són només les trucades, la preocupació i el "què tal la tesi" el que m'ha ajudat a acabar-la: són les estones junts, les recomanacions musicals, les pel·lícules al sofà, els colls de punta al coixí que ja voldrien les dels anys vint, els tupperes, el tràfic d'aliments de l'hort i del corral, les excursions, les oportunitats, els llibres. Admeto que, com als crítics literaris de la *Vogue*, sempre m'ha fet respecte semblar cursi. Per tant, ho deixo aquí: aquest projecte també és vostre.





## 0. INTRODUCTION

Many things I'd find to charm you,  
Books and scarves and silken socks,  
All the seven rainbow colours  
Black and white with brodered cloaks.  
[...]  
Or a volume of my verse. (Tree 1920 [1916]: 94)

What I enjoy the most about literary history, I believe, is the gossip. The not so reliable quotations and the biased descriptions, told years after the fact; the unexpected meetings; the flatteries and snubs, all chronicled; the tangled networks that, once drawn, could furnish the room of a conspiracy theorist; the who wore what where. I picked up Claire Harman's biography of Sylvia Townsend Warner soon after reading *Lolly Willowes*. The novel had been, Harman notes, a literary and social success upon its publication in 1926. "At a lunch arranged especially by Madge Garland of *Vogue*, Virginia Woolf asked Sylvia how she knew so much about witches. 'Because I am one,' Sylvia replied" (1991: 66). The situation immediately caught my attention: the highbrow turned pop icon, whose works, in bright matching covers, are exactly what a self-consciously bookish millennial would aspire to show off in her aesthetically-pleasing shelves; the lesser-known writer, a fantasist and stylist with counter-cultural clout; and an unknown character with a beautiful name and the tag "of *Vogue*".

Though I have always been interested in dress and costume as well as the vaguer notions of fashionable and cool, to me *Vogue* was an expensive magazine, overfilled with advertisements and unfortunately lacking in gossip, that I had only picked up once or twice. Why would it provide the meeting point for these two writers? Could it be that Warner was fashionable? I found myself returning to that adjective: I wondered about its role in the visibility of writers in the interwar press, and about the possible ways it

was affected by their gender, age, ethnicity, nationality and class. Did what writers wore in portraits matter? What about the function of clothes, fashion and taste in their works? Could eccentricity be an asset, and if so, in which cases? What degree of success, and among which type of readers, was equated with fashionability? Could a novel ever be fashionable regardless of its author?

After preliminary readings, mostly literary biographies and histories, I became interested in looking into how class, taste and celebrity shaped writers' positions in the cultural debate that took up pages and pages in the interwar press, when the prestige and legitimacy awarded to more experimental (highbrow) writing were discursively opposed to the success of more mainstream, feminised (middlebrow) texts. This debate, with the catchy name of Battle of the Brows (Woolf 1942), was not only concerned with certain genres and styles of writing but also with criticism and reading. I thought to look for literary criticism, in whatever format, that touched upon that notion in *Vogue* in order to detangle how cultural prestige and fashion informed each other. I wanted to know if clothes were believed to affect one's status; if they were described in direct, descriptive language or in a more florid way, highlighting their suggestive aspects; if they were related to a higher presence in readers' shelves.

## 0.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is concerned with a wide set of concepts—celebrity, consumption, costume, fashion, gender, modernity, prestige, taste—and it is therefore informed by the work of scholars from different disciplines, such as Celebrity, Cultural, Gender, Fashion, Middlebrow and Modernist Studies, as well as historians and sociologists.

Almost once per issue, *Vogue* brought up the idea of modernity; of living in it, of being a guide to it, of just how much things had changed in a few years. I base my

understanding of the word on Rita Felski's conceptualisation: "particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness" (1995: 9). Felski's study is interested in the conceptual limits and similarities between modernism and modernity; she discusses the work of Andreas Huyssen, who proposed that modernism had been discursively constructed as the opposite of mass culture, which was coded feminine (1986). In practice, though, neither modernist publications were free from commercial interest nor "feminine" literary practices were homogenous, much less inherently conservative. In the past decades, the field of Modernist Studies has seen expanded anthologies of texts typically excluded from their canon, proposals that crumble the notion that modernism could ever be monolithic, and scholarship on the modernist aspects of all manifestations of design, including, of course, fashion magazines. These studies do not overlook middlebrow texts but rather take into account how they were considered at the height of modernist criticism and discuss the processes of their inclusion and exclusion from contemporary scholarship.

*Vogue's* criticism can only be understood in the context of the wider debate around literary value and access to culture that developed between the wars, when critics and readers considered the relative value of highbrow writing as opposed to the more commercial middlebrow, of academic criticism against amateur reviewing, and of demanding versus relaxing reading.

Of particular interest to this thesis are the quite recent surveys of modernist and middlebrow periodicals and of interwar print culture that study the commercial aspects of their production and circulation and consider how they engaged with other cultural manifestations (Beetham 1996; Jaffe 2005; Collier 2006; Hammill 2007; Ardis and Collier 2008; Binckes 2010; Hammill and Hussey 2016; Green 2017; Clay, DiCenzo, Green and Hackney 2018; Wood 2020), as well as expeditions into the Battle of the

Brows (Humble 2001, 2011; Bingham 2004; Outka 2009; Rosenquist 2009; Clay 2011, 2012, 2018; Brown and Grover 2012; Jaillant 2014; Marshik 2017; West 2017; Plock 2018; Sheehan 2018). Though some include *Vogue*, not many do, and they seldom cover the late twenties and thirties, which I shall argue were very rich in middlebrow perspectives.

The composite form of a magazine, Penny Tinkler writes; “is integrated according to editorial policies and objectives, and it is managed through design practices which include layout, the positioning and style of captions and the use of images and colour. Magazines are not, however, necessarily coherent or tidy, in part because of their composite form. Their pages often harbour diversity, inconsistency, contradiction and tension” (2016: 31). It is not only anonymity and unreliable memoirs that make it difficult to know who was responsible for certain commissions and editorial redirections. Contradictions, of course, are to be expected from a format with multiple authors and a very long life. A book that had been criticised by one reviewer would later be recommended by another; an editorial that reminded readers, somewhat pompously, of *Vogue*’s privileged place in the Paris collection openings could be followed by an essay so pointed that it is hard to tell whether it laughed at the mere idea of fashion.

With their polyphony, coverage of society and fashion and scrutiny of what it means to be smart—in other words, well-dressed, well-connected and well-read—in the modern day, women’s periodicals are rich subjects for academic studies, as shown by the recent volume edited by Clay, DiCenzo, Green and Hackney (2018). “Rather than striving for textual complexity, uniqueness, or originality”, Barbara Green reflects in her monograph, “the materials I study are striking precisely because they embrace repetition, seriality, and conventional formulations, providing comfort through

representations of the familiar and offering the promise of transformation through critique” (2017: 7).

Though its outlook, regular sections and visual style changed over time, *Vogue* maintained a sophisticated voice and held on to its own set of conventions, such as following the fashion and social calendars:

Both fashion and the periodical’s investments in the present belie their multivalent and multivocal engagement with other temporalities: cyclic, progressive, utopian, and even apocalyptic. [...] While periodicals are often associated with the standardisation of time, I argue that representations of fashion in interwar women’s magazines—and particularly in ‘fashion papers’—draw out, complicate, and exemplify the multiple and sometimes conflicting temporalities that periodicals imagined, managed, and enacted. (Sheehan 2018: loc. 397.8)

*Vogue*’s approach to temporality was certainly complex, and I am not only referring to the vagueness of its date format during its early years. One may expect a fashion magazine to care, above all else, about the near future, as its main function is to forecast trends. For marketing purposes, it is full of promises of what the next issues will include, as well as of the immediate past, as it reports what certain people have worn at the main event of the past week. In fact, as it turns out, *Vogue* constantly referenced the present, inviting readers to visit its offices, announcing current events and describing contemporary mores; even more surprisingly, it devoted a great deal of space to the faraway past, educating readers on ancient fashions and dynasties.

In order to discuss *Vogue*’s prescription of certain reading practices as fashionable it is necessary to locate its function within the fashion industry of the interwar period—especially as it constantly reminded readers of its own influence. Before that, though, it is even more necessary to define the concept of fashion itself. During the interwar period *Vogue* very rarely mentioned fashion theory, and yet it was available, as theorists had scrutinised fashion from different disciplines and ideological positions before and after the turn of the century. There was, for instance, Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899),

with its discussion of conspicuous consumption. George Simmel, in *Philosophie der Mode* (1905), approached it from a sociological perspective, in relation to class and gender. He proposed that fashion was an expression of social distinction that, once imitated by other social groups and no longer exclusive to the elite, was reduced to imitation. Simmel was also interested in the temporal aspects of fashion, such as velocity, caducity and permanence (Lozano 2000). His notes on the subject, which also informed the rest of his work, opened the way for theorists like Roland Barthes, whose *Système de la mode* (1967) approached what he called “written clothing” through semiotics. In *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (1972), Jean Baudrillard argued that the middle class had a particular investment in fashion due to its lack of cultural legitimacy. Other theorists that have included fashion in their sociological analysis include Herbert Blumer, with *Fashion: from class differentiation to collective selection* (1969) or Gilles Lipovestky, with *L'Empire de l'éphémère: la mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes* (1987). Most helpful for my purpose are Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of distinction, field and habitus (1984, 1993).

These are all foundational works, but their understanding of fashion, particularly Bourdieu's, has been critiqued as insufficient and universalising (Rocamora 2002, 2015). Gender informs the production, circulation and evolution of fashion much more than these accounts suggest, and periodicals like *Vogue*, which explicitly addressed women, realised that. Fashion is a complex social practice, and more than a tool for distinction: this thesis therefore relies more on theorisations of dress as an embodied practice, like Joanne Entwistle's (2000). Her class on “The Aesthetic Economy and Aesthetic Markets”, which I was allowed to audit during my research stay at King's College London and which took a sociological look at the strategies of contemporary cultural industries, was truly illuminating. The concept of aesthetic labour is

anachronistic to the temporal scope of this thesis, but it is still useful, as it breaks down the ways in which corporations can turn their employees' bodily dispositions into economic capital, which, to an extent, happened to the staff of *Vogue*. Consequently, I also use sociological analyses of lifestyle and body work, particularly in relation to the fashion industry (Brown 2003, 2015; Bell and Hollows 2006; Connor, Gill and Taylor 2015; Elias, Gill and Scharff 2017). Besides these frameworks, I also rely on historical accounts of related ideas, like *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (Dyhouse 2010) and *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History* (Hammill 2010). Successful writers could become literary celebrities; if they suited its tastes, *Vogue* was happy to feature them extensively. In order to discuss literary celebrity, I turn to Janet Staiger's articulation of authorship as performance, that is, as citation of past authorship (2003), which in turn draws from Judith Butler's work on gender (1990).

Finally, this thesis could hardly exist without previous scholarship on British *Vogue*. On the one hand, there are histories of the magazine, often in the style of coffee-table books and descriptive rather than critical; memoirs from its key figures, like Edna Woolman Chase and her daughter Ilka Chase's *Always in Vogue* (1954) and Harry W. Yoxall's *A Fashion of Life* (1966); and biographies like *The Man Who Was Vogue* (Seeböhm 1982), *Condé Nast: The Man and His Empire* (Ronald 2019) or *All We Know*, with its very valuable research on Madge Garland (Cohen 2012). Though not intended as a study of *Vogue*, Sarah Knight's biography *Bloomsbury's Outsider: A Life of David Garnett* (2015) turned out to provide instrumental insight into the events of the mid-twenties. On the other hand, *Vogue* appears in most surveys of twentieth century women's and fashion periodicals, which usually approach them from historical or sociological perspectives. However, because of Dorothy Todd's intriguing connections to the Bloomsbury group and other avant-garde figures, *Vogue's* first decade has also



been the source of a surprisingly large amount of research (Mellown 1996; Cohen 1998; Luckhurst 1998; Garrity 1999; Mahood 2002; Reed 2006; Brown 2009, 2012, 2018; Lachmansingh 2010; Carrod 2015; Kalich 2018). Scholarship on Elspeth Champcommunal, Alison Settle and Elizabeth Penrose is sparse by contrast, although there have been a few studies of British *Vogue* in the thirties from Fashion Studies (Cox and Mowatt 2012; Coser 2017).

Very recently, Alice Wood has published *Modernism and Modernity in British Women's Magazines* (2020), which, like this thesis, studies the articulation of those two subjects in British *Vogue*, as well as, in her case, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Eve*. Similarly, it locates modernity at the centre of these periodicals' concerns and analyses their construction of prestige and literary celebrity. As it appeared after the first and second chapters of this thesis had already been written, I must acknowledge that, despite similarities in subject and treatment, I have not relied on it as it deserves, and I do not cite it often. Nonetheless, it is a valuable contribution to the field that has enriched my understanding of *Vogue* in relation to other periodicals.

From Christopher Reed's work I have taken the label "amusing", which refers to a visual aesthetic that was "modern" but "so different from what was later sanctioned as modernism" (2004: 236). It transgressed sex, gender, national and historical boundaries; it was highly referential but not at all reverential, as it often dislodged the value of the original work, making "new meanings from old modes" (347). It was eclectic and colourful, and not at all sleek. In her unpublished dissertation, Martha Perotto-Wills has argued in favour of using the term "camp" to refer to *Vogue's* queer sensibilities (2020). Because "amusing" suits well *Vogue's* tone and historical context, that is what I shall use, but I do not mean to elide its similarities to camp by doing so.

This is, briefly, the theoretical framework of the thesis, which serves to bind ideas regarding fashion and literature to their historical and critical context. Each concept will be introduced as necessary, with the relevant scholarship, throughout the three chapters that follow.

## 0.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This project, a literary approach to a fashion periodical, aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How did writers interact with fashion and ornament in *Vogue*, and how did different axis of identity affect that interaction?
2. To what extent did that interaction with fashion shape the presence of writers in *Vogue*, both as contributors and as figures of interest?
3. How did *Vogue* promote writers and construct them as fashionable, and what role did its editors play in the process?
4. What was *Vogue*'s position in the cultural debate around the value of literary practices, and how does the resulting analysis fit into existing scholarship of modernism and the middlebrow?

Each question will inform the main theme of a chapter, except for the fourth, which will guide my analysis throughout. Through close reading, I shall argue that British *Vogue* positioned itself as a guide to modernity, as a cultural intermediary and expert in modern fashions and manners. In the mid-twenties it proposed a highbrow approach to art and life that highlighted experiment, but then gradually moved to more firmly middlebrow ground. Nonetheless, throughout the interwar period, and despite its changing values, it always counted literary practices as expressions of taste, and it continued to value playfulness both in literature and in daily life.

### 0.3 METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

In order to answer my research questions and check the accuracy of my thesis statement, I decided that the best approach was to consider every issue of British *Vogue* and to read them cover to cover; once I had identified pieces on the subjects I was interested in, I would close read them. I had originally thought to balance *Vogue* with the feminist weekly *Time and Tide*, which I believed would provide a more nuanced understanding of the period. Neither of these periodicals could be accessed from Barcelona, as they were not available in digital form (the American version of *Vogue* is, but accessing it is not exactly affordable). As part of my PhD program I went on a three-month stay at the Centre for Modern Literature and Culture at King's College London, which allowed me to use the British Library, attend workshops, visit fashion and design collections and contact scholars from the relevant disciplines. That stay, in other words, was fundamental to the archival research I desperately needed.

Once in front of me, it became clear that twenty years' worth of issues—*Time and Tide* in microfilm form, *Vogue* in brick-like bound volumes—were simply too many. Fortunately, that same year Catherine Clay published her monograph *Time and Tide: The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern Magazine* (2018), which filled a notable gap in the existing scholarship and covered everything I was interested in and more. Thus the weekly became background reading, as were other women's periodicals such as *Eve*, *Queen*, *Tatler* and the *Woman's Supplement* of *The Times* (some luckily available online through the British Newspaper Archive), and I shifted my focus strictly onto British *Vogue*. The primary sources, then, are the roughly 480 issues published between the end of the First World War in November 1918 and the beginning of the Second in September 1939. To fill in the gaps I also consulted a handful of issues outside of this period, as well as some issues of the American version. The research,

though, is complicated by the fact that *Vogue*'s archive was established more than a decade after its launching, and consequently its inner workings were obscured. There also was, as I shall explore, accidental destruction, deliberate lies and games of telephone. Besides the magazines themselves, I have also worked with the notes kept at the Alison Settle Archive at the University of Brighton. Other studies of *Vogue* include interviews, unpublished diaries and other material, and I will draw from them as necessary.

Throughout the thesis, for simplicity's sake, I will drop the "British" from British *Vogue* unless I need to differentiate it from the original edition. I will maintain the archaic spellings of some words and even the occasional mistakes as they were typed, as well as its use of "Vogue" without italics, to better represent the source. In those days the majority of articles were anonymous, and the editors and staff were absent from the masthead: readers were encouraged to turn to *Vogue* for guidance, not to individuals. To make the list of works cited easier to consult, I will separate anonymous articles and list them by date. The format for the date will be the same as in *Vogue*: first "early" or "late" [month and year], and later [month day, year]. Though issues are now numbered and bound in volumes, that information did not actually appear in the original magazines, so I will not add it. The list of cited articles is long: I intend to quote from the magazine extensively, as it seems to me that the tone of the articles is just as important as the main ideas behind them if we are to understand what *Vogue* was getting at. Some quotes from secondary works are identified by location ("loc."), not by page number; this refers to the location of the cited passage in an e-book, a format that does not always allow other options. Though I have taken its covers, illustrations, fashion sketches and photographs, as well as layout, into account, they will

not be reproduced in this thesis for copyright reasons. They are hugely important, however, so I will describe them to the best of my ability when relevant.

*Vogue* had a block of advertising space at the beginning and the end of each issue. Most articles were cut off before the last paragraph, which was buried in the last few pages, between the ads. To get the full picture, readers had to turn forward and then back, entering a maze of subjects, characters, pictures and signatures. Through editorials, reviews and essays on literature and modernity, as well as through visual representations of writers and other literary types, *Vogue* engaged both overtly and implicitly with modernism, the middlebrow and other currents and modes. Depending on the period, literary criticism was granted its own central feature or reduced and pushed back, presenting books as another product, like an insurance policy or cosmetic powder. The format, then, reveals the changes in *Vogue*'s approach to literature and its faith in the role of books in the high life, which is precisely what this thesis is about.

Because *Vogue*'s shift in cultural preferences can be linked, though not exclusively attributed, to the departure and arrival of its editors, the thesis is divided in three chapters that cover three eras in chronological order: 1918-1922 (Dorothy Todd, Elspeth Champcommunal), 1923-1927 (Ruth Anderson, Dorothy Todd, Vera Meynell) and 1927-1939 (Alison Settle, Elizabeth Penrose).

The first chapter describes the arrival of *Vogue* and its usual features. Besides covering fashion, as expected, it paid attention to the changing quotidian lives of their readers and offered advice beyond prescribing trends. That advice, which focused on improving one's self and space, is entangled with social class: *Vogue* addressed, specifically, wealthy women. The ultimate expression of taste was to be "smart", a concept that stood for proper dress and standing, some degree of artifice and glibness in manners and humour, genuine intellectual curiosity and a constant search for aesthetic

pleasure. Readers were encouraged to learn about modern art and design, keeping in mind the ways of eighteenth-century aristocrats.

During this early period cultural criticism was limited: book reviews were anonymous and brief, more descriptive than critical. Even so, everyone, readers, writers and editors included, engaged with the practices of consumption and dynamic identity building that *Vogue* was so concerned about. Writers could become fashionable, constructing a public image (perhaps through sartorial eccentricity) that made them recognisable. The editors of *Vogue* had some influence in literary celebrity, as they created opportunities for publication and debate. The final section of this chapter, then, analyses their role through the anachronistic idea of aesthetic labour, in which bodily disposition is transformed into capital. Though editors had some degree of freedom and privacy, their social life was inseparable from their work and they were expected to embody the values of *Vogue*; to be modern, sophisticated and to experiment, stylistically speaking, within the bounds of convention. As commissioners and critics, as go-betweens, they were cultural intermediaries, as they articulated and reproduced a certain set of values to their audience.

Dorothy Todd, arguably *Vogue*'s second editor, has drawn particular interest from literary and queer historians because of her links to the "Bloomsbury Omnibus", to use Sylvia Townsend Warner's term. She emerges as the protagonist of the second chapter: she commissioned features by well-known critics and writers, emphasising their personalities, teasing their participation in upcoming issues, including them in the "Hall of Fame" and featuring pictures of their homes to showcase their modern tastes. Todd virtually vanished from records after being fired in 1926, which means that this chapter must be built around her. Her role as editor required hosting parties and attending receptions; she introduced contributors to one another and cultivated working

and personal relationships. Editorial practices, then, were not only textual and material but also had an emotional aspect that left its mark in personal and business correspondence, as well as in diaries and memoirs. Because of the prominence of some of her contributors, it is possible to find references to *Vogue* and its editors in their published papers; nevertheless, though they are filled with nods and name-dropping, they do not go as far as to reveal the internal mechanisms of the magazine. There are slightly contradictory accounts of her dismissal and its fallout, and the first section of the second chapter attempts to make sense of them. Because Todd's immediate successor, for a failed trial period, was Vera Meynell of the Nonesuch Press, it seems clear that it was not her excessively highbrow tastes that were the problem. In fact, *Vogue's* amusing strand of modernism survived her editorship.

As the second chapter explores, *Vogue's* connections to the Bloomsbury group were more tenuous and complex than existing scholarship suggests. In fact, the Sitwell siblings had a much larger presence than is usually assumed, and there were also plenty of non-canonical contributors. Moreover, despite its new support of modernism, *Vogue* did not entirely break away from conventions regarding format, tone or even content. Instead, it expanded the definition of fashionable living to include a wider range of celebrities and underscored the pleasures of modernist art and writing while continuing to be highly exclusive regarding the class, nation and ethnicity of its target readership and the writers it included. Modernism was constructed as the discursive opposite of mass culture, and indeed some modernist writers were defensive about their work for a paper like *Vogue*, which had a clear commercial bent (that is not to say, though, that modernist texts sidestepped consumer culture, surface and artifice). Some contributions, as well as private papers, reveal how these writers related to the practices of dressing, writing and reading, and just how high they placed their brows. Virginia Woolf, for one,

wondered in a 1925 letter to Vita Sackville-West: “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.” (in Luckhurst 1998: 6). Unsurprisingly, their essays and reviews are dense with irony, which rather suited *Vogue*’s usual high-handed sophistication.

Literary criticism becomes more frequent and deeper during this middle period, with signed full-page reviews and critical essays. In a way, *Vogue* appeared to value this type of criticism over fashion and society journalism, as it was granted a signature. It discussed a wide variety of texts, mostly highbrow and middlebrow novels: the most reviewed author, it turns out, was D. H. Lawrence, followed by writers who were already associated with *Vogue*. Overall, despite their polyphony, these pieces defended a highbrow outlook even when focusing on classics or contemporary best-sellers. They discussed the qualities that made a book successful or enjoyable (the most appreciated were good story-telling, conscientiousness, delight, freshness, directness, credibility and smartness) and so they did not attempt to separate literature from commerce. Reviews were usually positive and often humorous, grudgingly admitting an occasional need for sentiment and gossip. While in the previous period reviews had focused on plot, they now turned to authors and their technical and stylistic abilities. Though literature had more to do with smartness than ever before, and though both Todd and Meynell had close ties with the publishing industry, books themselves were not really considered. *Vogue* paid more attention to the act of reading, which was frequently mentioned in the society column. Luckily for those who wanted to participate in intellectual conversation, as contemporary smartness dictated, there was the Hall of Fame, which collected cultural figures in a portrait gallery and functioned as a vehicle for highbrow celebrity.



Writers also made it into society reports and portraiture, especially if they were women from the upper classes. Though celebrity, and especially literary celebrity, was sustained by print media, personal appearance and glamour had an increasingly large role. Through dress, they could place themselves within a tradition or artistic movement or make a point of their individuality and creative genius. Their public perception and legacy did not depend exclusively on their body of work but also on the representations of their physical body, both in candid images and in carefully crafted shoots, where they could stage a performance of artistry. Belying the common association of dress and pose with passivity, these portraits are revealed as a tool to construct a lasting image of the self as an author through the manipulation of surface. Their physical surroundings—say, their homes, which *Vogue* sometimes visited—also served to articulate these notions. These images and their accompanying notes are somewhat repetitive, even citational: motifs reoccur, suggesting a repertoire of models of authorship that could be performed and negotiated. Readers, it must be said, were not invited to become writers after their models but to imitate them in questions of taste.

The third chapter covers the longest period, the editorships of Alison Settle and Elizabeth Penrose. In contrast to the mid-twenties, the years that followed have been quite overlooked by secondary scholarship, which tends to mention them in passing as a return to convention. It is true that the quantity and quality of literary criticism was reduced and that the highbrow outlook was abandoned, but *Vogue* did not forsake literary practices altogether, and its features reveal an even greater anxiety regarding taste, sophistication and snobbery. The Bright Young People, with their pageants and biting language, gained visibility, and some became contributors to *Vogue*.

At the core of the chapter is the Battle of the Brows and *Vogue*'s place in it. Critics and journalists expressed their concern regarding the perceived ascendancy of

mass culture: highbrows were accused of pretentiousness, and middlebrows of conservative dullness and commercial intent. As for lowbrows, they simply did not make it into the pages of *Vogue*. Taste, so tied to class and gender, was at stake, and it became even more central to the magazine. *Vogue's* outlook, by this time, was very much middlebrow, as it pushed readers to be well-read and informed for self-improvement and social prestige, and reminded them to treat highbrowism with a healthy dose of humour. Every aspect of life could be lived tastefully and with sophistication, which now meant informed judgement, including in literature.

Review columns, in a new, less frequent format, considered different positions in the literary hierarchy in a somewhat oblique way, and reviewers seldom gave truly personal opinions. For *Vogue*, fashionable reading had always been leisured, having the double purpose of individual pleasure and social connection, as a shared topic of conversation. Increasingly, though, reading was presented as something fashionable people meant to do, but seldom got around to. There was a clear split, too, between literary celebrities: socially prominent writers were welcomed to spectacular dress and glamorous lifestyles, but *Vogue* tended to prefer common sense. The lasting continuity of some contributors, like Aldous Huxley, suggests that *Vogue's* cultural affiliations did not change suddenly. It may have lost interest in formal experimentation and taken on more middlebrow values, but it always defended that a heightened awareness of temporality, informed playfulness, and a large dose of irony were inseparable from modern living.



# I. THE MYSTERY OF STYLE: TO BE IN VOGUE

(1918-1922)

At least one man among New York's famed Four Hundred did not flee "from a poet, a painter, a musician, or a clever Frenchman" (Chanler in Cohen 2012: loc. 224): an editor and bibliophile, Arthur B. Turnure, who decided to establish "a dignified, authentic journal of society, fashion and the ceremonial side of life" (Chase 2018: loc. 191). *Vogue* first appeared in December 17th 1892 as a ten-cent "mainly pictorial" weekly (loc. 199). Addressing both ladies and gentlemen, *Vogue* covered fashion, interior and garden design and the theatre, and carried some fiction and poetry: readers were entertained and also informed on aesthetics and social discernment. The "implicit purpose" of those sections, Faye Hammill writes, was "to advise readers as to which plays to be seen at, and which books to be seen reading, while art exhibitions [were] treated primarily as events in the fashionable calendar" (2007: 33).

The name *Vogue* was suggested by Josephine Redding, its first Editor-in-Chief: by avoiding words associated with women's periodicals of the time, such as "lady", "woman" or "home", *Vogue* underscored its difference in content and purpose (Carrod 2015: 34). Throughout its first decade, its main draw was the air of social exclusivity that emanated from its pages—after all, Turnure wanted his magazine to be "authentic". The venture therefore relied on the backing of a consortium that "included some Old Money names, but others that were not"; "by establishing a journal about society, [Cornelius] Vanderbilt [Jr.] and other nouveaux riches aimed to secure a place in it" (Rowlands 2005: 56). Another of the Four Hundred, and a friend of Turnure's, was art director Harry McVickar (Hill 2004: 8). The magazine continued to rely on contributors from their social circle "chosen more for their social standing and knowledge of good

form than for their literary repute” (Chase 2018: loc. 241), who would also appear inside its pages as figures of interest (Seebohm 1982: 45).

Quite soon *Vogue* was transfigured from a periodical by and about Gilded Age society into a reliable, even prestigious, fashion magazine. It took the first steps in that direction in 1899, when it began to offer garment patterns (Hill 2004: 8). Though it had always carried adverts for clothes and accessories, they were disconnected from the editorial line. Tom McCready, an advertising manager hired in 1902, convincingly argued that interest from advertisers would increase “were *Vogue* to develop primarily as a fashion magazine and a practical shopping guide” (Chase 2018: loc. 510). By his advice, space in the magazine was sold by blocks instead of by the line, which allowed for attractive, opulent advertisements (loc. 510-5). Even so, the magazine floundered.

After four years of negotiations, complicated by Turnure’s death, Condé Montrose Nast bought *Vogue* in 1909. Daniel Delis Hill writes; “for the first several months he remained secluded in his office, poring over accounting ledgers and volumes of archived back issues. When at last he was ready to act, his revision plan was sweeping” (2004: 11). His first efforts were to differentiate *Vogue* from mass circulation magazines in content—for instance by discontinuing the publication of fiction—and in readership, attracting high-end advertisers who could support the magazine while maintaining a small circulation (Seebohm 1982; Cox and Mowatt 2012). The pattern service might have been the next logical victim of this strategy, but Nast expanded it instead, wanting to address women of taste though of less means. This was the refrain that recurred throughout the magazine’s early decades: not only was *Vogue* different: *Vogue* was *distinguished*.

Despite its enforced differences from other fashion publications, and even when British *Vogue* took an avant-garde stance, its American sister would ignore “modernism

and the rise of popular culture” and remain “much more conservative in its emphasis on propriety and depictions of life among the wealthy” (Kalich 2018: loc. 150.7). Though its schedule was slowed down to semi-monthly issues, and though its focus was now firmly on fashion journalism, its copy did not become sharper. Instead, Hammill describes it as “commercials thinly disguised as news” and “anonymous in all senses” (2007: 31). The fact that Dorothy Parker’s witty copy—“brevity is the soul of lingerie” (October 1 1916: 101)—is often brought up as an exception to the grave pomposity of *American Vogue* (Hammill 2007; Reed 2006a) suggests that she was the only one worth quoting. The magazine tempted readers through its visual appeal: Nast emphasised brand identity, insisting “that the *Vogue* logo should subsequently be incorporated to become part of the colour illustration” (Carrod 2015: 50), although illustrators could choose its size and placement.

For readers with the right income, acquaintances and habitus (Bourdieu 1977), the magazine could be both mirror and key to “the ceremonial side of life”: as Hammill puts it, “the ideal *Vogue* reader would project her image through clothes, accessories, quiet good taste and correct behavior” (2007: 33). Meanwhile, the niche for less society-oriented, more cutting-edge content was filled by another publication. Nast bought the menswear magazine *Dress* in 1913 and renamed it *Dress and Vanity Fair*. As edited by Frank Crowninshield, *Vanity Fair*’s ideal reader would show “sophistication, wit, provocative opinions, and a wide cultural knowledge” (*ibid.*). While it targeted both men and women, its contributors and its fashion content skewed towards men. *Vanity Fair* would fold into *Vogue* at the end of 1936, carrying over 90,000 subscribers, which joined *Vogue*’s 156,000 (Snodgrass 2014: 622), while Crowninshield joined *Vogue* as a consultant and editor (Ronald 2019: 287). Nast’s annual profits multiplied in the

following years and he went on acquiring titles, as did his main competitor, William Randolph Hearst, owner of *Vogue* rival *Harper's Bazaar* (Cox and Mowatt 2012).

Far away from the frontlines, American fashion editors and journalists struggled when the Great War caused the French clothing industry to shut down, as the majority of their subject matter had been shipped in from Paris. Edna Woolman Chase, who had worked for *Vogue* since Turnure's time and whose rise to Editor-in-Chief coincided with the outbreak of the war, pivoted from searching for news to creating her own:

Chase solved the problem by having *Vogue* organize and sponsor the nation's first fashion show with live models displaying original American designs. Called the "Fashion Fete," it brought together New York's high society with such fashion industry leaders as Bonwit Teller and B. Altman. That 1914 fete was the first of many, for it was enormously successful and immediately enhanced *Vogue's* prestige. The magazine embarked on an era of steady circulation and advertising gains. (Gribbin 1995: 419)

Chase's leadership, added to the strength of its branding and pictorial innovation, meant that *Vogue* would "make the female readers feel that, more than a magazine, they had in their hands an object of art" (Angeletti and Olivia 2006: 98). She also commissioned artists "to design original fancy-dress costumes for publication", an idea that Nast at first disliked, though he eventually "had to admit that creating a theatrical link for the magazine was genius" (Ronald 2019: 80). These values—elegance, expertise, and the never-ending quest for prestige—would shape all editions of *Vogue* in the decades to come.

## I.1. THE DAILY MASQUERADE

### *I.1.1. "Such Knowledge Shall Be Yours": The Birth of British Vogue*

British *Vogue* was born two years into the war, on September 15, 1916, as the fighting drew out in Verdun and the Somme. Before the war, fashionable Brits had been spoiled for choice: besides national publications, they had access to magazines from the continent and from across the Atlantic, including *Vogue*. In 1914, *Vogue* sold 3,000 to 4,000 copies in Britain; two years later, *Vogue* sold four times as many (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 73), as it benefitted from being “an alternative to the previously popular French and Viennese fashion magazines which were already becoming hard to find” right before the United Kingdom entered the conflict (Carrod 2015: 73). Its British distributor, William Wood, persuaded Condé Nast that an English edition, which he could manage and publish himself, would help manage advertisement revenue and overcome wartime restrictions and shortages.

The founding editor of British *Vogue* was Dorothy Todd. No scholar so far has discovered how she “came to work for Nast at all” (Luckhurst 1998: 17). It seems that she was called to New York for training (Cohen 2012: loc. 3365), and she would travel back and forth for years. Her first tenure was so brief that it is her successor that is usually credited as the first editor of British *Vogue*: Elspeth Champcommunal, “Champco”, who according to Caroline Seebohm’s biography of Condé Nast had “a strong fashion sense” and “no magazine publishing experience” (1982: 124). Seebohm’s words are cited by Elgin W. Mellown (1996: 227) and Nicola Luckhurst (1998: 17), which shows how studies of *Vogue* have had to rely on the same handful of sources over and over, constructing a narrative from which it is difficult to stray. Lisa Cohen has noticed that Champcommunal “does not appear in Edna Woolman Chase’s résumé of the early years of British *Vogue*”, although an October 1966 issue celebrating fifty years



of the magazine “credits her as the ‘first editor British *Vogue*, 1916-22” (2012: loc. 3322), which suggests that she too was occasionally glossed over. Its advertising was managed by George W. Kettle and his Dorland Advertising Agency until 1922, when Condé Nast Publications established its own department (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 73).

The shuffling of editors behind the scenes was a concern for the management, not the readership: the names of *Vogue*’s first editors and contributors did not appear in the magazine, and changes in editorial policy were hidden from view—and posterity. Amanda Carrod points out that this had the effect “to empower the magazine rather than any single author. *Vogue* would continually be associated with presenting unswervingly professional and unquestionably expert fashion knowledge without being influenced by the taste or viewpoint of an individual contributor” (2015: 76). This uniformity extended to the writing style that was required of each editor, as staff writers were called, and even to their personal sartorial style (Hammill 2007: 39) and their social activities, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The opaque façade hid fierce competition, which sources describe in terms of defecting and poaching: there was even a 1933 anonymous blacklist titled “Staff members or regular contributors to *Vogue* who went to Bazaar” (in Cox and Mowatt 2012: 84).

Champcommunal’s *Vogue* was a venture at a relatively small scale. Madge McHarg, who would become fashion editor as Madge Garland, joined the magazine as a receptionist in 1920. In a 1986 interview with Flora Groult she recalled that “*Vogue* was very small beer in those days”: it operated from “four rooms ‘in a very dingy little office’ off Chancery Lane. The entire staff consisted of seven people”, including herself (in Cohen 2012: loc. 3270-3283). Most of the content, including fashion and society reports, was sent directly from New York. In another interview with Isabelle Anscombe in 1979, Garland recalled that the British staff only “insert[ed] into the American

magazine two photographs of ladies of title” and some designs from national dressmakers that readers could copy (loc. 3305-3318). During its early years it indeed carried portraits of American society women such as Mrs. Alexander Bache Pratt, Mrs. I. Townsend Burden, Mrs. French Vanderbilt and Mrs. W. Scott Cameron, all photographed in 1918. Nonetheless, it also covered the London stage and season, and national events and personages would grow to dominate its society pages. Garland’s recollections, in other words, may be exaggerated, perhaps to play up her and Todd’s contributions in contrast. It seems, though, that it paid less attention “to the gossip, weddings, and births of the nation’s aristocracy” than other “upscale British women’s magazines like *Eve* and especially the *Gentlewoman* and the *Queen*”, as Elizabeth M. Sheehan observes (2018: loc. 401.4); after all, though it may target as the same demographic, *Vogue* positioned itself as a cosmopolitan fashion magazine rather than a society paper.

At a shilling an issue, twice as much as most books reviewed within the magazine, *Vogue* was certainly intended for an affluent readership. Its structure was, as a whole, static throughout the interwar period. Its covers were unfailingly gorgeous and colourful, “strikingly modern and modernist” (Luckhurst 1998: 10-11). The cover art usually showed women in spectacular costumes delighting in the textures of the countryside and the beach, huddling in furs against the snow, watching the blossoms fall or floating in space: each and every cover flaunted whimsy and wealth, at least in sensorial experience. Artists—recurring signatures included Helen Dryden, Georges Lepape, Harriet Messerole, George Wolfe Plank and Ethel Rundquist—preferred “the bright, harlequin palette of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes” (Rowlands 2005: 62), which had incensed the more fantastical fashions in dress since 1909. A particularly famous cover, drawn by A. E. Marty for the January 15, 1926 American issue—and its

simultaneous British version—showed a nonchalant short-haired lady in a veiled hat and green dress riding a rearing zebra. *Vogue* went double or nothing the following year, when Plank drenched it in sugar and spice: now the zebra was a unicorn with a plumed tail, and the lady's veil dripped off stars as she raised her handkerchief in farewell or jubilant defiance. This dazzling cover showcased *Vogue*'s joyful embrace of sentiment, referential detail and comedy, all blended together in amusing or camp aesthetics, as will be explored later.

Carrod notes that “advertising in *Vogue* had religiously been placed at the beginning and at the end of each issue so as not to disrupt the main bulk of editorial content” (2015: 132), and this continued throughout the interwar period. As the quality of the paper grew in late 1919, so did the number of full-colour and advertisement pages. Perhaps surprisingly, most advertisements in *Vogue* were rather plain.<sup>1</sup> The first block focused, roughly speaking, on fashion and lifestyle: products advertised included gowns, perfumes, cars, hair pins, dressing cases, jewellery bags, corsets, cigarettes, fountain pens, other periodicals (most often Condé Nast publications, like the *Gazette de Bon Ton*), books, schools, laundry services and insurance policies for women workers and widows. The section at the end, on the other hand, included health and cosmetic products and services. There were also notices for education and professional opportunities, including in the commercial arts. The advertising department was run externally by the Dorland Advertising Agency until a specific in-house department was set up in 1922 (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 73 from Seebom 1982: 139). The main section of the magazine was indeed never disrupted by advertisements, but copy could promote

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<sup>1</sup> In her introduction to modernist consumer culture, Elizabeth Outka writes that “especially in Britain where commerce had long been viewed with suspicion” artists would attempt to bridge the gap between product, store and home in the shoppers’ imaginations (2014: 83). They might do so by not portraying the product at all and instead creating “enticing scenes” that “evoked an atmosphere of luxury or enchantment or the refinement of the classical world” (*ibid.*) or by portraying stores as places to visit, an elegant, cultivated pastime (85).

a brand. For instance, Jeanne Ramon Fernandez's "Pour être Belle" (early January 1919), supposedly advice on how to preserve one's beauty as time goes on, reads in fact as publicity for Ida Rubenstein. Despite the odd insurance and professional opening, most advertisements are about the disciplining, adornment and display of one's body and home, which underscores how *Vogue* "firmly belongs to a tradition which links fashion with status, class, and wealth" (König 2006: 205).

The very first page could be a table of contents, an introduction to the present issue, a sneak peek at the next one, all of the above, or might be skipped altogether. It did not have a title, and thus will be simply called "Introduction" in the bibliography. If this page carried an editorial note, its main function was to highlight the qualities of the magazine that made it attractive to its target readership—novelty, elegance, exclusivity—as well as to spell out the theme of the issue and underscore how necessary it was for any smart woman to acquire it. Introductions were often playful in tone, tempting the reader with what was to come. One issue was introduced in verse:

June is a generous queen, but merciless  
 To those who dare in unbecoming dress  
 To court her; and on all her festal days  
 Whereon her subjects sing—or act—her praise  
 Is meet attire appointed. ... Most of all  
 For Ascot. Crown and flower of festival  
 Is Ascot; and should you to Ascot go—  
 As go, of course, you will—then must you know  
 What Ascot's wear will be, what lines and hues  
 For frocks and parasols and hats and shoes.  
 Such knowledge shall be yours if you will read  
 'Vogue' for late May, which tells you all you need. (Early May 1921: 33)

Though *Vogue*'s approach to age could be flexible, it could be comically aggressive in insisting that it was a decisive factor in modishness. If the children's number did not convince the reader to buy toys for her young relatives: "well, we pity you. You are old, madame, monsieur—most unmitigatedly, unforgivably old" (late April 1919: 31). The format of the introduction shifted as *Vogue* tried out different ways to convey its expertise. A title was added in the autumn of 1922: "Paris Wires the Latest Tidings of

the Mode”, printed in a distinctive typewriter font. Later that year it was changed to “Seen with the Editor’s Eye”, which kept the implications of privileged perspective and bulletin format but, importantly, brought the figure of the still-unnamed editor to the fore. Once hooked, the reader would find a frontispiece portrait, fashion reports and illustration, lifestyle and travel features, an editorial essay, another portrait, theatre reviews, literary and/or artistic criticism, information for the hostess, practical dressmaking advice, and more advertising to bookend the issue.

*Vogue* covered the lives and cultivated subscriptions from the upper classes by building an aura of exclusivity. Needless to say, this delimitation was not done blindly. Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt explain that Condé Nast catalogued readers’ letters, sent out surveys and had informal discussions with staff in order to study its consumers and construct an appealing “authenticity”:

One judgement held that the readership was formed by two groups, ‘a few thousand ultra-fastidious women to whom it is important to be constantly in touch with the latest style and fashionable goings-on. The second much larger group is not of the ultra-fashionable but derives a great deal of pleasure in reading about what the first is doing’, tending to confirm Nast’s judgement that he could attract a wider readership than just the elite. (Nast 1935, Morton 1942 in 2012: 80-1)

This knowledge was exported to other branches of the company, including British *Vogue*. The voice of the magazine addressed the first group of readers, discussing the meaning and importance of good taste and positioning specific women as examples of chic, suggesting that they may be aspirational role models for the second group. In his description of interwar society reporting, D. J. Taylor writes that the “discrepancies between the profile of the average reader and the moneyed exquisites whom journalists were supposed to have ‘in mind’ brought an odd [...] focus in which readers were silently encouraged to aspire to a condition, an income and a way of life that hardly any of them could ever hope to achieve” (2007: loc. 368). Interestingly enough, the second group was never actually addressed. *Vogue* never took the role of an outsider peeking

into the workings of the upper classes, and curious readers were not expected to imitate or even aspire to an ultra-fashionable lifestyle, but rather to be drawn in through pleasure. These readers might be attracted to the sensory aspect of the images and descriptions or to the fantasy of fashion, or be moved by sympathetic or reluctant curiosity.

The most obvious way in which *Vogue* addressed women of the upper and middle upper classes as readers was through the use of the first person of the plural in introductions and editorial essays. When it described how “suddenly the Motor Touring number of *Vogue* arrives with our breakfast tray” and “we ring for our maid and send round a message to the chauffeur” (early July 1921: 25), the “we” in question is clearly wealthy Englishwomen. Similarly, paying homage in verse to the royal family, *Vogue* writes: “love lives and love thrives / In the strong English tongue. [...] For the old ways are the best ways, / And bone of our bone, / And the ways of our forebears, / ‘Tis English—our own” (late February 1922: 31). The centrality of England is underscored in the “countryside” issues, for instance in an article that states: “Scotland, that enchanted land where Beauty in strange splendour seems to hold herself mysteriously aloof, becomes the stage, and although it lies at our gates just across the border it would seem to be a thousand miles away” (late July 1922: 19). Scotland was generally described as an enchanted space that came into being only in the autumn, when “visions of purple heather and of little tumbling brooks on a misty northern moor” and “thoughts of tweeds and homespuns come to the mind of every woman” (early July 1922: 29). That is, it was a rustic, cosy and romantic land where genteel Englishwomen could spend the holidays and, unfortunately for the local wildlife, go shooting, only to fade back into mist once the time arrived to turn their sight to Paris. Scottish, Welsh and Irish ladies were occasionally photographed for the magazine—but the places themselves

hardly seemed to exist at all. Meanwhile, “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse” referred to the country—in fact suburban—woman as “she”, placing the reader in the city: “she comes in from her suburban nest, little or big, and dines and goes to the latest play; sometimes spending the night in the town house or flat, sometimes hiding her holiday apparel under out-of-door wraps and flying, like Cinderella from the ball, to catch the twelve o’clock train” (late July 1922: 49). The slightly patronising tone was balanced by acknowledging the suburban woman as a more careful dresser.

*Vogue*’s ambiguous function as both mirror and window to the social elite and its protocols of exclusion and inclusion were never revealed as clearly as in its frontispiece portraits, which came right after the introduction. This type of content, descended from the court papers of the previous century, transformed snobbery:

from an individual act into an institutional product of bourgeois modernity, as the newspapers convert the aristocracy into a collection of commodified signs easily mimicked by a middle-class public. [...] this model of social distinction is also essentially imitative, although here the ideal model is produced not by ‘big people’ but by a mass-mediated image of the aristocracy itself. Submerged in the culture of celebrity, the upper classes disappear into a completely semiotic universe in which images replace substance and the individual subject is merely the repetition of an idealized social image. (Latham 2003: 22)<sup>2</sup>

Indeed every portrait followed the same set of conventions, and, with a few exceptions, they were mostly undistinguishable. The frontispiece carried a full-page portrait of a society lady with a biographical note that stated her honorific and name, her notable family relations—usually her father or husband and their occupation—and, occasionally, her accomplishments. Even when they were notable public figures their male relations went first: the caption under the portrait of Nancy Astor named her the daughter-of-and-wife-of before noting that “she is the first woman to sit in Parliament, and has been member for Plymouth for two years” (early January 1922: 22).

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<sup>2</sup> Latham analyses the figure of the snob as developed by Thackeray in the pages of *Punch* (1846-7), later collected in *The Book of Snobs* (1848).

The frontispiece was the preserve of the highest titles, and so it was often granted to royalty—national and foreign, reigning and romantically dispossessed—usually coinciding with diplomatic visits, engagements or weddings. Only very rarely were men photographed for the frontispiece, and in those cases they accompanied women. There was another full-page photograph in the middle of the issue: its subjects were not necessarily aristocratic, but they were still women of rank or fame, or ideally both. They included many actresses, dancers and opera singers, either in evening wear or in costume, as well as prominent débutantes, brides and the odd artist and writer. Among the few women who were honoured in this way more than once was Lady Diana Manners (Cooper), who appeared in eleven portraits throughout *Vogue*'s interwar years. She was a daughter of the highest echelons of society, and was well-known for her beauty, friendships and theatrical work; she was in fact repeatedly photographed in character. The rest were roughly in the same age range—twenties to thirties—and shared her social profile: they descended from ancient British or continental families, were connected to the administrative and diplomatic structures of the Empire, and had crossed over to actual celebrity either by an impressive match—even by these pedigreed standards—or through recognition as actresses or fashion plates.<sup>3</sup> Photographs of men, stage actors or singers, were a slightly more usual occurrence in the mid-issue portrait, which led to the theatre column, “Seen on the Stage”, *Vogue*'s most regular column between the wars. After all, theatre actors and actresses were household names and they led the fashion on and off the stage:

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<sup>3</sup> The most frequently photographed women in British *Vogue* after Diana Manners, I have found, were Mrs. Dudley Coats (née Audrey James), the Princess Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge (“Baba”, Baroness d’Erlanger), the Viscountess Curzon (née Grace Elvina Hinds), Lady Louis Mountbatten (née Edwina Ashley), Queen Marie of Romania and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (before and after marrying the Duke of York). Of special significance to *Vogue*, as they often graced its society notes, were the twice photographed Daisy Fellowes (née de Glücksberg), from the French aristocracy and the Singer fortune, who would become Paris editor of *Harper’s Bazaar* and have a literary career, and Lois Sturt, another aristocrat turned actress.



The feeling that Hollywood was hardly respectable meant that only a few screen stars were included in the magazine, although everyone who was anyone in the theatre could be seen in *Vogue* constantly. Paris set the fashion, and the musical comedy and vaudeville actresses from London, Paris and Broadway wore the clothes to perfection. They were photographed as models if they were just beginning, as themselves when they'd arrived, and finally, when they were famous, in their own clothes from Callot and Poiret, Vionnet and Lanvin. (Howell 1978: 5)

But even if actresses and dancers could show off the clothes, Howell continues, they were not as influential as the socialites. The mid-issue portrait was eventually absorbed into the society column, shifting the focus to the younger set of the aristocracy. As if spilling out of their portraits, these figures took over the pages of *Vogue* and made space for a regular society column. Gentlemen did appear in this section and in the accompanying snapshots. Against expectations, the captions did not describe or source the attendees' clothes, but simply took note of names and titles. Taylor notes that the relationship between high society—"at best no more than a few thousand strong"—, the media and the public "was not at all straightforward": these ladies did not simply and passively accept having their picture taken, but in fact "gave interviews" and "regularly accepted commissions from advertising firms for endorsing beauty products or even foodstuffs" (2007: loc. 840). Not so in *Vogue*, though, as their appearances were limited.

*Vogue* gained prestige through its rapport with society women and their presence in studio and candid photographs, but their presence in fashion spreads could be seen to detract from its seriousness. As Madge Garland recalled, "there were no professional models, so when photographs were used (instead of drawings), the woman 'who wore the dress in the shop posed or the fashion editor's friends were persuaded to face the camera [...] with deplorably amateur results'" (in Cohen 2012: loc. 3305-3318). In the late tens and twenties, with a handful of exceptions, models were anonymous—and fashion photography was relatively rare in any case. Some society ladies did appear as women of taste whose advice should be heeded in the thirties, and this role shall be

explored in the third chapter. A satirical piece from the point of view of a doll who models hats at a smart Parisian shop describes how;

After Madame, in our court of fashion, come the models, royal princesses who display M. André's beautiful gowns [...] Then there are the serious clients, the great actresses, full of aplomb and temperament, comédiennes, tragiédiennes, moving-picture stars, before whom even Madame Eugénie is abashed, great ladies of society to whom flattery can sell anything, daring debutantes, twentieth-century *jeune filles* who wish to know not so much what they should wear as what they should leave off (Late November 1920: 38)

The cast of characters at the shop is the same that populated *Vogue*, although the magazine had to take greater care in its flattery.

Subtly undercutting its bland flattery and the boundary of its vague “we”, and notwithstanding the enforced cohesion of its guiding voice, there were signed contributions from the very beginning, increasingly making space for individual subjectivity and satire. Nonetheless, in the late tens and early twenties most written contributions were anonymous, and signatures mostly accompanied the visual arts. Perhaps the best-known of *Vogue*'s contributors in its early period was Fish, the satirist of all things modish, who took on the absurdities of fashion and the smart set. In her cartoons, Natalie Kalich explains, “the Modern woman behaved like a trickster figure, intent on securing a man's money as well as his mortification”; she was free, ambitious, mischievous, comic, dynamic and yet dependent (2018: loc. 157.5). The joke was not on her, but more often than not on the men and the discourses around her.<sup>4</sup>

Satirical commentary was also conveyed in critical essays, society columns and fashion reports, and was in fact a staple of women's periodicals. Sheehan points out that *Vogue*, like *Eve*, “established their authority and their business model in part by taking up a pose of scepticism and irony towards fashion's novelties and vagaries”, which “solicits the reader's confidence” and presents the periodicals as influential in the

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<sup>4</sup> The captions under her cartoons were anonymous, but Faye Hammill has found that when they were published in *Vanity Fair* they were “increasingly (from 1920 onwards) by a named author, often by Dorothy Parker” (2007: 36).

industry, as they can see right through it (2018: loc. 399.6). This pose “of cool indifference” that “observes without seeming to observe” was shared by all urban commentators worth their salt: as Joanne Entwistle notes, it was a trait of the *flâneur*, and akin to the *sprezzatura* of the Italian courtiers (2000: 120). *Vogue* could be sharp and cynical, but on occasion it showed a sentimental, light-hearted side. Its tone was firm and authoritative, flattering and coquettish, and grave and pompous, all at once: *Vogue* was the quintessential fairy godmother.

But its prestige and its association with wit and elegance was at this early stage supported not by its written content, but by its illustrators and photographers. The latter were often recruited from the aristocracy—or at least, that was the pretence *Vogue* held up. There was the Baron Adolph de Meyer, who signed as DEMEYER and was known for using a “veiled lens and ethereal lighting” for melodramatic effect (Rowlands 2005: 63) from 1914 on, as well as the Baron George Hoyningen-Huene, who contributed more natural portraits in which the subjects engaged with scenarios from 1925. Those without titles would establish lasting connections with the upper classes. Edward Steichen was already famous when he joined *Vogue* in 1922, where he became its chief staff photographer for over a decade and the highest-paid professional in his field (Brown 2017, Rowlands 2005). Other notable photographers included Man Ray, whose work was featured and discussed in *Vogue* from at least 1925; Cecil Beaton, whose first contribution to *Vogue* appeared in 1924 and whose relationship with *Vogue* will be discussed in the following chapters; Curtis Moffat, whose celebrity portraits appeared in *Vogue* in the mid-twenties though he was better known for his later career as an interior designer; Horst P. Horst, who began to work for *Vogue* in 1931 and substituted Hoyningen-Huene as its chief Paris photographer; and George Platt Lynes, who contributed to *Vogue* in the mid-thirties: many of these artists were gay, and Brown

describes the aesthetic that they constructed and popularised as “decidedly queer” (2017: 289-90).<sup>5</sup>

The titles, names and bodies of society women and artists, their designer gowns and costumes, their languid or aloof postures, the prestige of the photographers’ signatures, their connections behind the camera: all those elements suffused *Vogue* in wealth and glamour, but so did the images of far-away travel spots and the home interiors of the powerful. Shortly after the Armistice, though international travel must have been unthinkable for most of the population, *Vogue* showed sandy palm-lined beaches, mountain sports and quaint foreign traditions.<sup>6</sup> One could be wealthy, *Vogue* implied, but attending hunts and races at home did not make one smart; one must explore the sensorial pleasures of the world at large, especially those in contrast to metropolitan modernity, particularly attractive in a post-war context.<sup>7</sup>

Homeware was also subject to fashion, and thus another vehicle to showcase one’s worldliness and taste. There were articles on goldfish bowls, ikebana arrangements, Japanese figurines, Jacob Epstein’s sculptures and fashionable writing tables for “the most fastidious aesthete” (early August 1922: 45). Houses and gardens were also of interest, especially if they belonged to someone famous or had historical significance. Readers were invited to tours of Roosevelt’s home (late February 1919), the painter and hostess Ethel Sands’s seventeenth-century Newington House (late April

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<sup>5</sup> See Elspeth H. Brown’s research on the queer affiliations of interwar photographers (2009; 2017). Beaton, Horst, Hoyningen-Huene, Lynes and de Meyer, she writes, “defined a queer aesthetics of fashion photography in New York, Paris, London, and Hollywood in the years before World War II. The photographic work they made stemmed from an elite, transatlantic, white queer kinship network that included both male and female models, and helped define a glamour aesthetic decidedly queer in its production, circulation, and reception. Fashion was one of several aesthetic fields where queer people found some degree of social tolerance; within such industries, gay men and lesbians could make a living, build gay worlds, and shape cultural production” (2017: 289-90).

<sup>6</sup> In 1919 alone there were articles on “Picturesque Quebec” (late January), the Danish West Indies (now the United States Virgin Islands; early February), Nassau (late February), Japan, Santa Barbara and Rome (late May); in 1920 it travelled to Sweden (early June), Morocco and Biarritz (late June), Iceland and St. Kitts (early July).

<sup>7</sup> Jane Garrity has written on colonialism, imperialism and the centrality of whiteness in British *Vogue* (1999; 2003), although Christopher Reed (2006a) has argued against some of her points.

1919), Thackeray's old home in Kensington (late November 1919), the Sussex seat of the Sackville family (late January 1920) or the Asquith home (late February 1920). Those houses were photographed as empty stages, the owners' presence erased: sometimes readers were not even told their names. Interior designers were also uncredited before the rise of celebrity decorators in the late twenties. Those who could not visit these houses might still have a chance to mingle with their inhabitants in recommended restaurants, like L'Oasis in Paris and Boulestin's in London: the key to tasteful modern living was in one's consumer practices.

Reading *Vogue* may seem an indulgence for a leisurely afternoon: it certainly introduced itself as such. As the sections that follow will show, it presented a variety of often contradictory points of view, which tended to rely on banal arguments that do not hold up to analysis: this may be so because it was supposed to provide light reading, a witty and amusing companion to image. That being said, I believe that it is precisely the heterogeneous visual and textual messages that make *Vogue* an interesting case study. Its covers made a case for the more fantastic side of fashion, showing women in moments of placid fancy or dynamic leisure, and, much like shop windows, encouraged readers to try out new identities in their minds; by contrast, the advertisements that followed exposed the cost and effort required for tasteful self-presentation. *Vogue*, I shall argue, functioned as a guide to the practices of supposedly leisured women: hosting parties, attending a gallery showing or even going for a drive all required knowledge of the appropriate clothes and behaviours. At first glance, such skills and bodily dispositions might be assumed to form the habitus of the upper classes. But it was a new, modern world, and its workings could not be taken for granted.

### 1.1.2. “A Woman Shops”: Fashion, Consumption and Gender

Cutting and satirical, whimsical and light-hearted or knowledgeable and serious, fashion journalism was the heart of *Vogue*. “The lady of wisdom and discernment knows”, it declared, where she will find reliable fashion news: “You can, if you like, just sit quietly at home and choose the styles that please you best, study the new silhouette, and make important decisions from the comfortable depths of your armchair. The world of dress will spin gently around you and allow itself to be viewed from every angle” (early September 1919: 25). Reading through its interwar issues all in a row—which I should insist was *not* how contemporary readers were expected to go about it—reveals patterns that might not appear otherwise. Before delving into the values that *Vogue* constructed and supported in its fashion journalism, and the process behind its success, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by “fashion”.

Fashion theorists usually describe *fashion* as a system—in the Roland Barthes sense of the word (1990 [1967])—and *dress*, *clothes* or *garments* as the concrete items that system produces and organises. This does not mean that the former is entirely abstract; it is in fact historically and geographically located, as it “denotes a cultural condition, a mode of collective behaviour or an industry. It understands clothing in relation to broader socio-economic structures” (Plock 2018: 43). Because dressing is an integral aspect of the presentation of the self, Joanne Entwistle writes, one’s dress, body and self “are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality” (2000: 10); dress is not only the material result of textile labour, but also “the outcome of *practices* which are socially constituted but put into effect by the individual” (11). She describes dress as a situated bodily practice, “always located spatially and temporally: when

getting dressed one orientates oneself to the situation, acting in particular ways upon the body” (29).<sup>8</sup>

The origins of fashion can be traced first to the courts of fourteenth-century Europe and then to mercantile capitalism; such “collective behaviours” could only emerge in a society “where social mobility is possible” (44). Fashion was a strategy “adopted by the new capitalist class to challenge aristocratic power and status, first by openly flouting the sumptuary laws imposed by royalty and aristocracy, and second, by adopting and aggressively keeping pace with fashion in an attempt to maintain status and distinction” (*ibid.*). So far, so similar to Georg Simmel’s 1904 theorisation of fashion as a cycle of imitation and differentiation driven by the upper classes’ need to distinguish themselves from the rest. Nonetheless, theorists no longer find this explanation satisfactory. Dress protects the body and signals one’s identity and affiliations. Once there is such a thing as a fashion system, dress must negotiate “between the fashion system as a structured system, the social conditions of everyday life such as class, gender and the like as well as the ‘rules’ or norms governing particular social situations” (Entwistle 2000: 37). The outcome of these negotiations cannot be guessed, as “the *habitus* will improvise and adapt”, allowing “some sense of agency” to the dressing self (*ibid.*).

The development of a fashion system resulted not only in the multiplication of styles and meanings, but also in a discourse that allowed their critique. It is the fashion system that makes certain items and styles appealing at a given moment, and thus “weaves aesthetics into the daily practice of dressing” (43). Underscoring this point, Anne Hollander writes that fashion is “the whole spectrum of desirable ways of looking at any given time. The scope of what everyone wants to be seen wearing in a given

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<sup>8</sup> See the section “Merleau-Ponty and embodiment” (Entwistle 2000: 28-39) for a study of the philosopher’s articulation of embodiment and subjectivity in relation to fashion theory.

society is what is in fashion” (1993: 350 in Plock 2018: 43). *Vogue*, despite its deepening knowledge of the fashion industry, did not truly attempt to theorise on fashion and thus stretched the meaning of word, extending its connotations of desire, performativity and push-and-pull between “individuality” and “conformity” (44) to speak of fashions in decoration, literature, dances, manners and even romantic interests. However, it did touch on the value and ethics of novelty, attraction, vanity and consumption, relying on both past and contemporary scholarship. Therefore, while I do not mean to give a thorough account of Western fashion history, I believe it will be useful to provide an overview of its discursive and industrial development.

As Efrat Tseëlon explains, the “body-soul dualism upheld by Christianity” and the consequent need to cover the former to “divert” attention to the latter also displaced “interest in the naked body on to the clothes”, which resulted in the condemnation of vanity and excess in dress (1995: 18). Steele (1988) and Entwistle (2000) specify that it was fashionable dress in particular, and not dress in general, that was scrutinised. The birth of fashion coincided with a trend that favoured fitted styles that brought clothes ever closer to the body: the morality of following fashion has been discussed in relation to sexuality from the very beginning (Entwistle 2000: 84). Social value was increasingly located on the body (86): law and custom shaped sartorial convention to the point it was easy to locate someone’s gender, class and affiliation by their dress—which is not to say that those rules were never flouted. Two hundred years later, vanity and excess were criticised on the grounds of incompatibility “with class and duty” (93).

The codes of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French courtly fashion, with its “splendorous texture and colour”, were so rigid and complex that they “actually slowed down the pace of change in fashion” (96), reaching other courts and driving imitators. Simultaneously, “a more genuinely modern fashion was emerging in the city of Paris”,



accelerated by the interaction between dressmakers and buyers at an individual level (*ibid.*). There was also the style prevalent among the Dutch bourgeoisie, among whom Catholic “stark black and white” had shifted “into a Protestant, bourgeois and urban style” that would eventually become “the ‘uniform’ of the bourgeoisie all over Europe” (95). Despite the lasting dominance of this style, *Vogue* professed a sort of kinship with the lush fashions of eighteenth-century France. It regretted, perhaps unsurprisingly, the passing of “an era of great sociability” (96) where ladies strolled down streets and pleasure gardens, gentlemen visited cafés for “regular discussions on literature, art, theatre and politics” (97), and met each other at a salon. It goes without saying that those spaces were not accessible for everyone, but similar activities “were taking off as popular pastimes among wage labourers in the big cities” where “one’s ability to participate in such cultural activities depended not just on having the price of a ticket, but on looking ‘respectable’” (*ibid.*). These professional and leisure practices all required specific clothes, and thus what one wore in public became increasingly differentiated from what one wore in private.

Dress was understood as a layer that one puts on in order to interact with others and that can be played with, that is, as costume (103). Yet as playfulness in dress increased, so did an interest in inner reality and a desire for “truth and intimacy which ultimately results in a retreat into the private sphere” where one can be honest (104). This shift went hand-in-hand with a generalised sense that one ought to renounce artifice in favour of sober authenticity, “that dress and appearance should be related to one’s identity” (73). The notion of fashion as masquerade was also articulated in *Vogue*. Immediately after the war, it not only promoted highly theatrical and whimsical designs but also discussed theatrical costumes and fancy dress, which were often created by couturiers and well-known visual artists. Its interest in the fantastic and in historical

detail, in sensorial pleasure and shifting identities, will be discussed in depth in later chapters.

The eighteenth century was also the time of the consumer revolution: commodities were bought and sold “beyond necessity”, for social display (Entwistle 2000: 97). According to Colin Campbell, cited by Entwistle, it was not emulation that drove the consumer revolution, but rather changing attitudes that brought the middle classes to the positions of taste-setters (100). After all, emulation alone does not explain “the idea of ‘fashion’ and ‘fashionability’ extended through so much of the population in the eighteenth century to encompass all aspects of life” (*ibid.*). Campbell posits that one does not buy what others have out of a direct desire to imitate them, but rather because one can imagine different lives and experiences through the meanings associated to material items: in other words, fantasy plays a key role in driving consumerism forward (101).

Men’s dress had become quite sober by the late eighteenth century: it was seen “as a reflection of patriotic values, country and city (as opposed to court) life and enterprise (as opposed to gambling and frivolity)” (105). Women’s dress was also pared down for a time, but Romanticism brought “a profusion of lace, frill and ribbons”. The nineteenth-century sartorial divide between the genders was described as the “great” masculine or male “renunciation” by the psychoanalyst John Flügel, who in 1930 posited that menswear had valued functionality and equality after the French Revolution “to emphasize solidarity and *uniformity*” (154). The sartorial choices of men came to be seen as a straight-forward and neutral reflection of their character. This phenomenon, Entwistle notes, was related to Romantic and Protestant ideas in which the individual is responsible for his own meaning. Women’s clothes, on the other hand, were perceived

as more complex and in need of decoding: femininity, frivolity and consumerism became more entangled, as I will explore later on.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain saw ongoing debates on the value and necessity of naturalism, rationalism and uniformity in dress, resulting in actively political dress reform movements and much discourse in the press. This was the century that birthed the dandy, “a figure who emphasizes the performative nature of modernity, the possibilities it opens up for self-creation through appearance” and who signalled his distinction by referencing older, aristocratic trends of consumption and leisure (126), and the bohemian, who shared with the dandy “the ability to recreate oneself” and a “hedonistic attitude towards the world and the objects in it” but who also strove to create his own artworks and was willing to give up comfort and live as an outsider (131). Similarly, the fin-de-siècle decadents and aesthetes sought “to differentiate [themselves] from the dull mediocrity of modern society by taking refuge in the solitary cultivation of the arcane and the exotic”, thus participating in a “more general questioning of the authentic self within a culture increasingly shaped by the logic of technological reproduction and commodity aesthetics” (Felski 1995: 98). All of these figures survived into the literary and social landscape of the interwar period, shaping the discourse around artistry, fashion and gender, and certainly made a difference in *Vogue*’s promotion of certain artists and writers over others. Tseëlon notes that participation in fashion is “a form of cultural capital”; signalling in a wrong or deliberately subversive manner “itself becomes a signifier” that means that one is either “powerful enough or distinguished enough to flaunt conventions”, like one of *Vogue*’s beloved avatars of genteel English eccentricity, or “creative enough and confident enough to invent”, a bohemian genius, or else someone “marginalised enough not to care”, who of course would not make it into *Vogue* at all (1995: 134).

Though *Vogue* appreciated the theatricality and playful yet exclusive sociability of the eighteenth century, and though bohemians and aesthetes found that their use of costume underscored their influence as critics, taste-makers and artists, the very idea that one could create a role for oneself through one's clothes among the anonymous urban crowd had long been a source of anxiety. Modernity, Entwistle notes, claims to secure knowledge through appearance-based classification, all the while insisting that appearances are deceiving and could, after all, be deliberately distorted or accidentally misinterpreted (2000: 123). The meaning of clothes depends on context and access to information. Barbara Green finds an example in a suffragette periodical, in which a hat is described as useful for Sundays—not because it can be worn to church, but because it is sturdy and will not fly off at suffrage meetings. Of course, only those who attend them would catch the joke in the article (2017: 58). Therefore, though fashion may well be a cause for alarm, it could also function as a temporary symbolic solution.

As many studies of fashion theory and history explain, women have long been associated with the fashion industry, both as labourers and as consumers, to the extent that excessive interest in surface appearances is assumed to go hand in hand with femininity. Though men as well as women participated in the development and popularisation of scientific approaches to health, beauty and bodily reform in the early twentieth century,<sup>9</sup> hygiene and rationality in familial life was a core tenet, and thus these developments had a particular impact on the domestic sphere and the understanding of femininity (Vera-Rojas 2015). Appearance had long been understood to provide insight into the self, and so the shaping and adornment of the body was

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<sup>9</sup> See Tim Armstrong's *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* for an overview of the methods and ideologies through which "the body became the site of techniques which operated externally and internally to regulate and reorganize"; these techniques, which ranged from the athletically to the spiritually-oriented, included "Christian Science, New Thought, Alexander Technique, Fletcherism, the Culture of the Abdomen, colonic irrigation, electric therapies, among numerous eating and exercising regimes, gland treatments, and mechanical devices" (1998: 106)

entangled with identity, particularly as print media became more visually oriented. This, Simmel argued, was the case especially for women, as strategies for constructing and stating an identity outside of fashion were limited: “because of her lack of power, fashion served as a valve through which woman’s desire for some conspicuousness and individual prominence finds an outlet, when its satisfaction is denied in other fields” (in Tseëlon 1995: 124).

Other scholars, by contrast, have argued that women’s use of fashionable adornment in the interwar period—wearing cosmetics, shearing their hair, exposing their knees—was not necessarily a last resort for self-assertion or the consequence of being duped by illusions of power and success through beauty. Rather, it was a way for women to actively construct and present their status as modern subjects (Sparke 1995; Dyhouse 2010; Green 2018b). This was not a novel development. At the turn of the century, some women’s periodicals saw elegance in manners and dress not as contradictory, but rather as complimentary to modernity and progress. “Juno”, in a 1901 issue of the *Gentlewoman*, argued: “We were never at the same moment so luxurious and so practical, and Dame fashion would indeed have to be versatile with the woman of 1901—a creature who can lounge as effectually as she can take a fence, who is at once luxurious, practical, *feministe* and athletic, perhaps the most remarkable type of the womanhood a remarkable century has produced” (in Varty 2000: 107). After the war, women became more visible in the public sphere and increasingly earned their own wages, which meant they had more opportunities to spend them as they pleased.<sup>10</sup>

Fashion and dress were marked as feminine concerns, but so was household economy as a whole. Entwistle writes that women had been responsible for “the

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<sup>10</sup> The ambivalent relationship between fashion and feminism continued to be fruitful throughout the interwar years: Virginia Woolf famously noted in 1929 that fashion, being of interest to women, was always seen as more trivial than other arguably light-hearted pastimes like football, and her own Hogarth Press brought forth Flügel’s *The Psychology of Clothes* a year later (Plock 2018: 14). Both interests continue to be coded in this manner.

management of household expenditure” since the Middle Ages; this role, “associated with personal and social display [...] persisted for centuries as women became progressively responsible for making a home” (2000: 147) By the late eighteenth century, at the time of the consumer revolution in the late eighteenth century, those newly accessible goods and, by extension, related practices of consumption and display, were also subject to fashion: “manufacturers picked up on this, giving birth to marketing and advertising as ways of ‘adding value’ (sign value, that is) to products through fashion” (Bell and Hollows 2006: 7). Middle and upper-class women at this time could neither inherit property nor expect to find paid employment, but they could buy personal goods, and so the expression of taste became associated with them. As Amanda Vickery argues, it is not surprising that they invested in pieces, from jewellery to furniture, that could be passed down to their descendants (in Entwistle 2000: 147-8). Any fashionable object beyond dress and adornment could be used for the purpose of identity formation and expression in modernity. While Vickery’s argument suggests that the consumption and display of goods could be an act of creative expression and self-assertion, for Margaret Beetham such practices in fact showcased “the wealth and status a woman enjoyed, not in her own right, but by virtue of her husband” (1996: 29-30), while Penny Sparke remarks that:

The freedom that women have gained through their relationship with material culture is a politically powerless liberation – and indeed not even necessarily consciously recognized. While it sustains women within the framework of domesticity, allows them to form self and group identities, to express their social and cultural aspirations, to form social relationships, and to enter into the wider arena of women’s culture, it cannot in itself overthrow patriarchy (1995: 223)

I believe that these are not opposite arguments, as even if the income and status were not the woman’s own, her practices of consumption could still be productive.

Once consumerism and not necessity or convention become the driving force of the fashion and other luxury industries, their goods come to be perceived as perishable,

driving forth demand (Entwistle 2000: 218). From the beginning of the nineteenth century on domestic goods were increasingly manufactured and bought, not homemade, and “the parallel expansion of consumption extended the influence of feminine taste into the public realm and gave it an obvious and key role within economic life” (Sparke 1995: 7). Though the reality of the existence of separate spheres is questionable, as many have pointed out, they did exist ideologically and are thus useful tools for historical discussion. As more families reached middle-class status they turned to material goods to display their new identity. Most, however, saw commerce as somewhat morally tainted, and placed high value on thrift and modesty: “It was the role of the housewife to ease the tensions that were created by these conflicting demands and to create a domestic setting which fulfilled both requirements simultaneously” (18-19). Middle-class women were not merely consumers of goods, but beautifiers of the home: to balance adornment and function was a mark of gentility. In order to learn how to do so, they could turn to the many periodicals and advice books on decoration and homemaking that were published in the Victorian period.<sup>11</sup>

Sparke explains that in the latter half of the nineteenth century the display of domestic goods became increasingly professionalised, and amateur and designers were derided. There were public initiatives that aimed to better the nation’s taste, while commercial designers feared losing profits to amateurs who believed themselves experts. “The most vociferous attacks”, she points out, “were directed at the role of fashion, novelty and display in the domestic interior and at the feminine taste that valued their continual presence” (55). By the turn of the century these criticisms had taken root: housewives were now judged on the health and education of their children

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that men did have a stake in practices of domestic consumption and beautification, and they were often in charge of gardening and choosing objects that were somehow marked as masculine, like large furniture, paint, wallpaper, wine, books, pictures and musical instruments (Davidoff and Hall 1987).

and the hygiene and “rational” economy of their homes “rather than by their ability to create a high level of display in their parlours”; the former notion of domesticity “became significantly marginalised and trivialised” (77). This does not mean that consumption driven by the homemaker’s preferences and aesthetics stopped, but rather that “the idea of ‘display’ was displaced by that of ‘identity’”, and “activities such as arranging flowers became, increasingly, a means of self-identification for many women rather than a necessary social ritual” (78-9).

Consumer culture thus became inseparable from “rational recreation”, marking the origin of “the very idea of lifestyle, in terms of ways of living that utilize the sign value of commodities and connect with evaluative judgements of, or distinctions between, different socio-economic groups” (Bell and Hollows 2006: 3). The role of middle-class women as domestic consumers therefore questions the supposed separation “between work spaces and domestic ‘not-work’ spaces”, which “is in fact breached by the idea of productive ‘leisure-work’ (as well as feminine domestic labour within the home) and through the growing emphasis on the need to ‘work at’ self-improvement through lifestyle” (8). At this time, “the consumer was generally figured as a (middle-class) woman” who visited department stores and local shops, encountered all manners of advertising, and consulted magazines that advised her on what to buy (Giles 2004: 101). She was, it is worth noting, an *urban* consumer: in rural areas shopping required travelling or the existence of some kind of delivery system and thus was not a feminised activity (Sparke 1995: 87). According to Paul du Gay, “no activity is purely ‘economic’ since all economic decisions involve cultural ones; on the other hand, all ‘culture’ is ‘manufactured’ in some way, much of it mass produced, and therefore the product of economic decision-making” (in Entwistle 2000: 228). A shop, then, can be a space where culture and economics—as well as leisure and work—overlap, producing and



circulating meaning. Shop windows and advertisements encouraged consumers to think up alternative lives and identities, to remake themselves; they frequently implied that they could bring the atmosphere of a store or the class meanings of a designer gown into their own bodily dispositions (Outka 2009 and 2014).

The role that women would play after the war was unclear, and the multiform debate unsurprisingly reached fashion journalism; writers, often men, expressed a wide range of anxieties regarding artificiality, standardisation and industrialisation. “Fashion’s ephemerality, its volatility have contributed to the creation of this new kind of womanhood. Its changeability has bled into women’s being and turned them into modern subjects with all the trappings, including a significant if not fully legible relationship to the public sphere and industry that displaces men’s exclusive hold on these, at the same time it threatens the exclusivity of the sexual contract” (Parkins 2018: loc. 469.3). Some were alarmed at what they described as the uniform mass or undistinguishable crowds of modern society. The interwar shopper would encounter not only made-to-measure items but also mass-produced, prêt-à-porter and replica models, which “ensured that working-class and lower-middle-class men and women could afford to dress in very similar ways to the better off among the middle class” (Ugolini 2000: 428). These clothes, however, tended not to fit properly, as manufacturers used different scales that were based on clothing measurement and not on body size (Cohen 2012: loc. 4165). This profusion of similar-looking, ill-fitting clothes made locating the meaning of an item much more complicated. “In order to decode these signs”, Entwistle writes, “one needs to be ‘in the know’: like all signs, dress depends upon the cultural knowledge of the reader in order for it to be meaningful” (2000: 134). *Vogue’s* raison d’être was to provide this knowledge.

“Understanding fashion”, Entwistle continues, “requires understanding the interconnections between these various bodies: the discursive, the textual and the lived body and between the actions of agents who are themselves embodied” (236). By spelling out the ways in which clothes could alter the wearer’s body, its mobility and its political and social legibility and by concerning itself with the aesthetics of dress, *Vogue* articulated these connections and participated in their development throughout the twentieth century. And it was at a critical point, at a productive juncture between shifting norms—especially in such a visibly altered state as a post-war society—, *habitus* under pressure and avant-garde creativity, that *Vogue* found a fruitful ground to build its guiding voice.

*Vogue* educated its readers in the history of fashion and its related moral and philosophical discourses, for instance by pointing out historical references in contemporary design trends: it traced the modern bob and fashionable ringlets back to the Regency period and found medieval lines in 1921 designs. The most relevant expression of *Vogue*’s interest in the history of fashion is an unfinished, unsigned series of long illustrated articles that was published from early February 1921 until late November 1926.<sup>12</sup> Beginning with “The Début of the Mode”, these essays traced the development of Western fashion—though also covering the Byzantine Empire (early May 1921), “The Gifts of Western Asia to the Mode” (early June 1921) and the “Fashions of Arabian Nights and Days” (early May 1922)—that combined simple sociohistorical explanations with anecdotes of royal personages. While monthly at first, they were reduced to appearing at irregular intervals—there was only one in 1924—until petering out upon reaching the twenty-first, “The Mode of Marie Antoinette and

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<sup>12</sup> Midway through the series it was announced that it would “be published by *Vogue* in book form” (early May 1922: 54). This note was dropped in later essays, and it seems that the book never materialised. I believe that Madge Garland may have been the author, as the series matches her time at *Vogue*, having joined it in 1920 and being fired in the autumn of 1926, when the series had its unceremonious end. Moreover, she was the co-author of *A History of Fashion*, published in 1975.

Louis XVI". The signature cheeky tone was noticeably absent from these essays, which were descriptive and quite serious. They took into account the position of women in the sociohistorical contexts they discussed and educated the reader with a relative degree of feminist sensibility, explaining that "technically, the Roman woman, like her Greek contemporary, was the chattel of her husband or her father. In actual practice, however, she was a very independent person, owning and controlling her own property, even when she was unmarried, and, in later periods, exercising the right of divorce with a freedom not to be surpassed even by the Roman husband" (early April 1921: 69). By contextualising fashion, they encouraged readers to see it as an art in progress.

*Vogue* also referenced tradition and historical anecdotes in order to legitimise contemporary events, to add to their mystique and to tie them to deeper rhythms. This was done for royal weddings and the seasonal practices of the upper classes, like the presentation of *débutantes* or the races: for instance, the wedding of Princess Mary and Henry Lascelles took over the late February 1922 issue, which included "Royal Weddings, Real and Ideal", describing historical and fairy-tale ceremonies, and "Bridal Attire of Yesterday", with illustrations of couples across the decades drawn by Lepape. I do not mean to imply that modernity was not the central tenet in *Vogue's* discussion of fashion and society, but that it looked for echoes of contemporary life in the past: "To those who find cause for foreboding in the present chaotic state of the world, there may be consolation in the thought that the world saw close upon a thousand years of chaos after the fall of Rome, and yet civilization—and the mode—survived" (early July 1921: 46).

In its fashion journalism, *Vogue* used descriptive rather than critical language: it commented on the value of everything from manners to art, but when it passed judgement on new collections or what someone was wearing it picked up on their

elegance, shapeliness or novelty, never dismissing a piece. Throughout its first years, *Vogue* often relied on the idea of fashion as fantasy: not only in the sense that dress was a strategy to project identity, desirability and social mobility, but metaphorically. Some styles of fashionable dress, it said, had magical powers, glamour in its older meaning. One could present as a variety of mythological figures with the adjective “modern” thrown in: “the modern Eve”, “the modern nymph”, “the modern Undine”, “a very chic and entirely modern Diana” (late December 1919: 44), the “modern Circe” or “the modern sea-maiden”. Designers and milliners were wise wizards and fairy godmothers:

Magic, for instance, is not dead, nor are spells. There is the magic of the glad eye and the roving foot, and as for spells-what woman is not susceptible to the spell cast by a new hat? Not simple magic either, achieved by the mere waving of a wand. First comes Merlin’s part, the work of creation, genius, and nimble fingers; but the spell is not complete until Vivian the enchantress adds the final charm by posing the seductive bit of frivolity at just the right angle to set off her piquant grace. What man, or woman, can hope to withstand a spell so subtly cast? (Late September 1919: 71)

Jenny, Reville and Lucile all were noted spell-casters, and clothes and cosmetics could be inherently magical or by association. Unsurprisingly, the language of prophecy and forecasting was consistently used to characterise *Vogue*’s efforts to tell the future of fashion with every new season.

Though it had existed for decades, it was during and immediately after the war that “glamour” was associated with an Orientalist vision of escapist fantasy that manifested in all sorts of cultural works, elite, mass and in-between. As Carol Dyhouse points out, the fashionable objects, perfumes and “rich, embroidered fabrics, encrusted with beads and glitter” of the tens and early twenties had been influenced by the sets and costumes of the Ballets Russes and by the designs of the couturier Paul Poiret (2010: 14), but they also “evoked the harem-girl fantasies filling the pages of women’s weeklies, and the dusky charms of Valentino in the desert” (19). In other words, the notion of “glamour” was informed by fantasies of romance represented in a wide range of media. Drawing from Alfred Gell’s technologies of enchantment, the set of tools

through which one's perception of social reality can be manipulated (1988), Brian Moeran finds that when models and celebrities endorse products in women's fashion magazines, they imbue them with magical qualities that can seemingly bring the consumer closer to an achieved goal, appealing to "desire, fantasy, vanity" (2010: 499): these marketing strategies use ritualistic, suggestive language. Though Moeran discusses late twentieth and early twenty-first century periodicals, the *Vogue* of the interwar period relied on the same language. By layering lush imagery, baroque descriptions, odd or playful grammar and references to mythological and fairy-tale plots and characters, *Vogue* transferred the connotations of wealth, culture, beauty and adventure from the items to the readers and, most importantly, to the magazine itself. At its most purple, the *Vogue* of the post-war years was as gorgeous as fun to read.

Nevertheless, glamour was not all-powerful. For all its references to magic, it seems that adjectives like "piquant", "graceful", "wise", "practical", "reasonable" and above all "smart" were more frequent and carried more weight. Dyhouse reasons that the notion of glamour "didn't sit easily with more traditionally feminine virtues of innocence and modesty" (2010: 45) or "daintiness" (72). As before, these adjectives could refer both to the specific items of clothing and to the woman who wore them. Though they may not carry the dashing, potentially boundary-crossing implications of glamour, they connoted consideration, sophistication and knowing playfulness. "Smart" often stood for the very idea of being fashionable, and was thus the core value of *Vogue* if there ever was one. The new decade brought simpler styles, as bobbed hair and a narrower silhouette, created by "bias-cut gowns" that "emphasised slender curves unrestrained by corsets, with crêpe and satin flowing down the body" [...] came to epitomise the modern girl" (14). Though this fashionable silhouette was often described as "boyish", it was still considered feminine: "mannish", a word regularly used in

*Vogue*, did not mean the same thing. Entwistle, drawing from Steele, concludes that this fashion was a manifestation of the “cult of youth” of the period rather than a display of androgyny (2000: 170-1).<sup>13</sup> Though I agree that “boyish” had as much to say about age as it did about gender, it must be pointed out that “girlish”, which could have also suggested a trim, prepubescent body, was barely used to refer to contemporary fashions, as it rather recalled sentiment and long pigtails, not schoolboy dash.

When *Vogue* proposed menswear for women, it always meant specific items for limited contexts; pyjamas, for instance, were meant for very informal and leisurely occasions, and they were not daring but rather playful. Tailored clothes began to be favoured even outside of sporting contexts, and *Vogue* recommended them for their proper manufacturing and down-to-earth neatness. “Mannish” did not have negative connotations, but rather suggested crispness and sharp tailoring. Though boyishness continued to be associated with smartness well into the twenties, by 1926 *Vogue* began to qualify its position on “mannish” styles. In a piece about shingled hairstyles illustrated by Benito, *Vogue* said of the Eton crop “that so masculine a coiffure should never surmount an other than feminine face—so feminine that one couldn’t wonder, ‘Is it a man?’ Such wondering destroys the piquancy of contrast which is its chief charm” (late February 1926: 60). In early November the magazine decided that “the hard-finished mode is a thing of the past. No longer are we all young boys, dauntless and uncompromising Sir Galahads whose one object is elimination [...] But we are feminine before everything—supple, rounded a bit, slim as young birch trees, with a very real attempt at a return to that old half-forgotten word, ‘charm.’” (50).

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<sup>13</sup> While *Vogue* did satirise a certain perceived effeminacy in modern young men, fashions in menswear did not pursue more gender-bending lines. For more on fashionable men’s styles in the interwar period see Ugolini (2000) and Hoare (2005). Ugolini locates a highly stylised approach to fashion among the Oxbridge aesthetes of the 1920s, but remarks that they seemingly disappeared in the next decade. Hoare focuses on military-through-camp styles among interwar English dandies, and proposes that the precise tailoring of uniforms can be read as an answer to mass-produced clothes.

A wide range of leisure activities, from hunting, skiing, golfing, skating, riding and dancing to going out for cocktails, driving and flying were covered in *Vogue*, and of course the women who practiced them must dress for each occasion; in fact, these activities were often discussed through the lens of fashion first and foremost. In a particularly striking piece, though, the expanding worlds available for women to explore were likened to the view from a soaring airplane until the bodies of the two merged: “You used to crawl. But now you’re flying. You’re a steel-souled, one hundred and fifty horse-power Valkyrie with a thirty-six-foot wing-spread. You can travel a hundred miles an hour and you’re doing it. And you’re going to Paris! Life to-day has experienced the thrill and the consequent expansion due to the addition of a fifth direction” (late June 1920: 44). Comparing or identifying women with vehicles—most often the motor-car, but also the steamer—was a common trope at the time.

However, readers were advised to be careful and present a certain type of femininity that was free from artifice, but also from threatening masculinity. The dashing Diana who smoked and surpassed men in sports was said to be passé as early as in 1921, when “real manhood”, returning from the war, “demands the complement of real womanhood” (early November 1921: 35). This “real” woman was neither vapid nor self-absorbed: though comparable to “the rulers of the salon”, she was not a lady of leisure but a working girl (84): “She feels when she speaks! She thinks when she speaks” (*ibid.*). She was still energetic, lively and candid, but she read and allowed herself to be carried away by sentiment. “Womanliness” in style and manners had long been a concern for middle and upper-class women who wanted to be considered respectable, especially in times of visible changes in gender roles. Because dress and bodily dispositions are so linked to gender, they become central to its performance. Dress, as Entwistle sums up, “works to imbue the body with significance, adding layers

of cultural meanings, which, because they are so close to the body, are mistaken as natural” (2000: 141). Consequently, “while distinctions of gender drawn by clothes are arbitrary, they often become fundamental to our ‘commonsense’ readings of bodies. In this respect, fashion also turns culture into nature, it *naturalizes* the cultural order” (144).<sup>14</sup> Anxiety about gender roles went hand in hand with anxiety about sexual mores, which were also read into clothing, especially into women’s clothing. Entwistle notes that men’s suits, though endlessly reinvented, do not carry more implications than professionalism and respectability, which reveals a tendency to read men’s bodies as uninscribed (173). The eroticism of their bodies and relationships is confined “to the private, affective sphere” (Collier in Entwistle 2000: 174), meaning that masculinity, as the norm, is seen as neutral and even disembodied. Women’s sartorial practices, on the other hand, are saturated with meaning. Heterosexuality “informs common understandings” of both sex and gender (145), and thus of fashion as the vehicle of their performance: for instance, a woman wearing trousers in the nineteenth century would be seen as not only improper in her crossing of boundaries but also as sexually licentious (168). The “sex symbolism” of dress was a topic of debate in the early twentieth century: highbrow readers of *Vogue* would be familiar with the works of Flügel, who posited that the fashion system was driven by the necessity “to reconcile the contradictory desire for modesty and exhibitionism” (186-7).

While acknowledging the historical and geographical specificity of gender, *Vogue* argued that there were fundamental differences between men and women. The

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<sup>14</sup> Gender differentiation through clothing is certainly not universal. Until at least the seventeenth century, clothes were a better identifier for class than for gender (Entwistle 2000: 152): it was when middle and upper-class men and women worked in increasingly delimited spaces during the Industrial Revolution that dress became more marked by gender (155-7). This is not to say that men’s and women’s dress were completely different (158), especially among the working classes (168), or that the profusion of adornment in middle and upper-class women’s styles went unchallenged (164). In the late nineteenth century, women entering the business sphere “often adopted elements of men’s clothing, for example suits and neckties, to appropriate some of the symbols associated with masculinity”, but this ought not to be equated with economic and legal emancipation; rather, it was “more likely the result of cyclical change *within* fashion”, turning away from previous ornament (*ibid.*).



essay “The Modern Rosalind” began by stating that “men and women are becoming every year more indistinguishable” as the latter borrowed their dress freely from the former and as the manners and fashions of both had blurred as the result of changing expectations:

The distinction between the sexes has been discovered to be grossly exaggerated. Weininger, a German psychologist, now much out of date, pronounced that male and female were imaginary extremes rather than actual beings. [...] A look round the streets shows that Weininger was largely right, and that the fact, like most other important facts, is being reflected in clothes. [...]

To-day man is reverting to the habit of Nature which makes the drake more gorgeous than the duck, the peacock than the peahen. Male clothes grow brighter and brighter. [...] Pink-trousered and purple-hatted, in waisted coats, silk collars and suède shoes, the modern young man is as different from his whiskered grandfather as that grandfather was from his wigged and ruffled ancestors. And the girl has changed equally, in the other direction. Ever greater simplicity marks her appearance. [...] With her short hair, her close hat, her straightly cut suit, the modern woman presents a silhouette so boyish that if she is seated sometimes you can hardly tell she is not a boy. [...] All this, it may be argued, is a passing phase, one more example of feminine obedience to the capricious decrees of Fashion. But these decrees are only capricious in their details. The general tendencies of Fashion changing not from season to season but from reign to reign, reflect in clothes, as they do in literature or architecture, the feeling of the Age. The difference between a modern girl and her grandmother is just as marked in the brain as in the hat above it. For a woman who runs an office, performs surgical or stockbroking operations, sits in Parliament or on the Bench, to wear Victorian clothes would be as incongruous as it is for a railway station to be built in the style of a Gothic cathedral or for a factory to imitate an Adam mansion. Unluckily such women do not always realise how much their existence has changed the course of fashion, and they sometimes dress as if there were no alternative between the impractical voluminous garments of thirty years ago and a sort of policewoman’s uniform. Silly women, on the other hand, are often *chic* enough to look intelligent--and disguise the worst sort of Victorian mentality in clothes that suggest good sense as well as good taste.

But these are only incongruous survivals. The clothes of the modern woman on the whole express her personality. Whalebones round the waist and feather bone supports round the neck have disappeared with the taboos that forbade women to smoke, to travel alone, or to read adult literature. Women do the same work as men, and play the same games. And until they cease doing so the present tendency in their clothes is likely to continue. [...]

No doubt there are some who regret the good old days. But the old days were not good in themselves: it is merely that those who regret them were young then and better able to enjoy them. It would be paradoxical to pretend that the clothes of the ‘nineties were aesthetically better than what are worn now. Contemporary fashions are more beautiful as well as more convenient. [...] We shall not see a return to the old fashions in clothes until we are prepared also for a return to the old fashions in decoration. [...] But unless our whole civilisation falls to pieces, this is inconceivable. The woman of the future cannot wear clothes that are incongruous with aeroplanes. [...]

Men’s clothes are likely to go on growing brighter. [...] It is as natural for the young to enjoy gay colours as it is for the old to prefer wearing sober ones. And men are young, as well as women. Convenience rather than custom and elegance rather than elaboration are bound increasingly to govern our clothes as well as our houses. [...] It is possible for clothes to be hygienic without being hideous, convenient without being dowdy. And men and women will probably continue dressing more and more like each other as their minds, their habits, their work and their pleasure become increasingly alike. [...] Immodesty is not to attract men, but rather...]

Short skirts are worn for the same reason as short hair: they are enormously more convenient. The attraction of opposites is largely a delusion: the idea was invented by men to make themselves feel superior. It is more civilised to share a point of view than to

impose one. It is also more enjoyable. And if a man and a woman have a similar outlook, it is natural that they should wear similar clothes. (Early September 1926: 63-5)

In just a few pages, *Vogue* touched upon various ideas at once, some strikingly contemporary, others now dismissed: the dangers of nostalgia, fashion as a phenomenon that responds to sociohistorical phenomena, and gender as performance.

There were many essays on the relationship between gender and fashion; though their conclusions differed, they tended to naturalise women's interest in fashion and their more common and deliberate use of adornment. In an account of the sartorial imbalance between the genders, half-based on evolutionary theory and half-meant, I want to believe, as a joke, *Vogue* argued that nature meant for the strongest sex to be simpler in its attire: "it is the weaker who has to be helped out with frills and furbelows" (early March 1921: 55). In most animal species, it is the male who has to strive and thus is more decorated. In humans, though, that rule applied only until the industrial revolution, which vaguely displaced nature: "It is now woman who has to do the work. She has sold her birthright for a mess of ornaments [...] Men and women are creatures who love toys—and machinery is the toy of modern man, as luxury is the toy of modern woman" (*ibid*). In this very strange way, which reads as banal and conventional, *Vogue* suggested that the long-established equation of masculinity-technology and femininity-nature contradicted the similarly enduring equations of masculinity-authenticity-depth and femininity-artificiality-surface. In this essay, both genders were said to love the artificial, but for women, this was the cause, not the consequence, of their oppression.

*Vogue* regularly noted that the way a woman dressed—every stylistic choice that she made, in fact—revealed what she was like. In a single issue (early April 1919) it was stated that "nothing reveals character more than the dressing of the hair" (55) and that "it is universally admitted that a woman reveals her personality in her dress, but even more definitely does she disclose her innermost self in her house" (59). Sartorial

styles were sometimes matched quite specifically to personality types and lifestyles, especially in the down-to-earth limited income section, where *Vogue* took care to explain that it would select “a wide variety of clothes, suited to many types and temperaments” (early November 1920: 29). Despite its acceptance of identity as stable and unitary, *Vogue* acknowledged that dress could be used to play a role. In fact, it occasionally encouraged readers to see life as a play and dress as costume, using surface to see life with new depth:

Consciously playing a part deepens the sense of contact, of the inevitable drama of relationship with a diverse world of actuality which even the most individualistic person cannot escape. The mystery of personality, the subtlety of suggestion, the power of unobtrusive equanimity impress themselves upon the actor. He is able to be more sincere, because he appreciates the reality in order to assume the disguise. [...] Masquerading in leisure moments, and especially when unpleasant or unprofitable moods pursue one, adds immeasurably to the interest and appeal of the ‘straight part’ of one’s natural self. (Early January 1922: 47)

One manifested the spirit of the times through dress, and in turn dress shaped one’s mindset and lived experience.

Ultimately, however, who was fashion for? *Vogue* never quite explored why and how dress linked the individual to their community. It did deny that women engaged with fashion with men in mind. “Men are almost unanimous in assuming that in these matters their likes and dislikes are the chief consideration”, an editorial mused, yet men consistently complained about the ugliness of contemporary women’s fashions, and they had never succeeded in forcing fashion to change (late April 1922: 57). A handful of women were secure in knowing what suited them, and others had “enough individuality to be the accepted pioneers in new fancies”; these two types of women could thus be said to “dress to please themselves” (*ibid.*). But the majority of women, *Vogue* revealed, dressed “if not for, at least because of other women in their particular circle”, driven by “the gang spirit”: “Why else do they insist upon wearing what every woman of their acquaintance wears, without question of its suitability?” (*ibid.*) Fashion

thus was said to depend on the social practices of women, but they could also result in uniformity and bad taste.

Through *Vogue*, the magazine claimed, “your eye will be trained to see and your taste to select the best from the great designers of Paris, for the discrimination of the most highly trained fashion experts has been exercised in their selection” (early October 1920: 33). Modish readers of means might want to see Paris for themselves: they were “invited to make *Vogue*’s Paris Information Bureau their first port of call. Charmingly decorated rooms at 2, rue Edouard VII offer every convenience for writing, telephoning, resting between appointments, or meeting one’s friends” (late July 1922: 73). By adding the function of tourist bureau to the French office, *Vogue* legitimised its status as the expert in everything Parisian. Conveniently close to shops and other services, this office would “advise visitors [...] will assist madame in her shopping, give useful introductions, and perform every service that a personal friend in Paris could give to the stranger” (*ibid.*). *Vogue* did not forget those unfortunate souls who could not afford to hop over the Channel or to order Parisian models and presented itself as a shopping guide for a variety of tastes and needs.<sup>15</sup> In fact, readers could order models from the sketches in the magazine (Howell 1978: 9). A regular section under different variations of the title “Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes” existed since at least early January 1919, when *Vogue* offered “suggestions to the woman of fine tastes and fastidious desires who is curtailed in her expenditure by a limited income” (60), which at the time was still referred to as a “war income”. This section included the prices of each model, which reveal that what *Vogue* considered a limited income could still afford to spend over 10 pounds in an individual item. *Vogue*’s function as a shopping guide was amplified every Christmas, when it categorised gifts according to gender (women and

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<sup>15</sup> Penelope Rowlands notes that American *Vogue* began to name stores in 1922, coinciding with the rise of mass-produced clothes—though it seemed no boutique outside New York was worth shopping at (2005: 63). British *Vogue* also assumed this function in the early twenties.

men), social status (débutantes), function (hostesses), age (children, older women) and so on, naming brands and prices and even inviting the reader to contact *Vogue* to do their shopping. Later in the decade Nast pushed further in this direction, and the section “Seen in London Shops” was added in order “to focus not only on the essential content on haute couture, but also on practical, everyday fashion information” (Coser 2017: 17).

Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt note that “developing an appeal within the UK required a strong degree of adaptation on behalf of British *Vogue*. In this respect, an understanding of its strategic customers – i.e. its advertisers – as well as its readers is what marks out *Vogue* from the myriad of British-based women’s magazines” (2012: 82). The editors and managers of *Vogue* made an effort to build relationships not only with haute couture designers and boutiques but also department stores and local businesses. Entwistle writes that “before production can be translated into consumption, income has to be generated, habits formed and products marketed” (2000: 209); the list of cultural intermediaries who shape these habits and transmit the image of a brand include fashion designers, buyers and retailers as well as journalists and editors (210). The editorial voice of *Vogue* made it clear that its object was to train readers in good taste, which included picking up trends and references to art and history. By prescribing what one should buy, display and wear, and by gaining enough weight in the fashion industry that those prescriptions were perceived to be legitimate, *Vogue* became one of those cultural intermediaries: it not only reflected debates on the relationship between gender and consumption, but also drove them.

A man buys clothes; a woman shops. Between these two activities there is a great gulf fixed—the gulf that separates a necessity from a luxury, a trade from an art, the gregarious from the individualistic impulse, male from female. [...] A woman’s shopping, on the other hand, is a pursuit of the ideal [...] Hence woman’s necessity to shop much and long and often—that necessity on which shallow and ignorant men have whetted a good deal of unnecessary wit. [...] The dream that is woman’s outlet, her artistic contribution to the universe; the dream of adding, in her own person, a new and attractive note to the colour and the grace and the seemliness of life. (Late January 1921: 49)

As this passage shows, *Vogue* took for granted and in fact promoted the identification of women with the consumer force, which was marked as feminine since way before the interwar period.

The aforementioned possibility of imagining different positions for oneself through material items came, of course, at a price: shop displays and advertisements “always suggested that the viewer was lacking, producing a never-ending loop of desire, buying, and dissatisfaction” (Outka 2009: 137). *Vogue* mused on the appeal of shopping—even of *thinking* about shopping—and described it as a particularly feminine yearning comparable to a prey drive: “Admittedly there is a certain thrill in shopping, and, as far as most women are concerned, it is a form of hunting in which they excel. It is a form of hunting [... that] may be enjoyed by anyone who delights in pretty things and who has the wit and the wisdom to seek and find them” (early October 1922: 70-1). Still, it acknowledged that the desire to shop could not be satisfied by a purchase: “It is the way of fashion to be forever elusive, as it is the way of woman to be forever in search of something new” (late April 1919: 76). In a roundabout, contradictory way, it also argued that women were unfairly accused of loving luxury to excess and suggested that men, being the creators of said luxury, were the ones who were restless: “He creates because he has to, while woman selects those things that most appeal to her and demands more. [...] Woman indeed is much too interested and too busy preserving the beautiful (or useful) things that man lays at her feet to bother her head about fresh ones, while man is always bored with what is completed and wants new worlds to conquer” (late September 1921: 63).

At a time when women’s consumer practices were seen as a leisure activity as much as productive homemaking, “a desire for commodities was closely associated with moral laxity and the transgression of sexual mores” (Felski 1995: 72), resulting in

widespread anxieties regarding all sorts of ruination that were projected both onto middle and upper-class consumers but also—especially—shop employees.<sup>16</sup> *Vogue*, too, discussed women’s interest in personal adornment in terms of vanity and temptation, using phrases like “unable to resist” (early April 1919: 55), “the wardrobe rules the woman” (62) or “privileged inconsistency” to refer to women’s interest in new clothes for the season (late July 1922: 17). Side by side with moral panic, scholars have found examples of feminist consumption practices at the turn of the century. Following Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green writes that “it was precisely through an engagement with commercial culture that suffragists and suffragettes created their counterpublic spheres” (2017: 44). They sold merchandising and advertising space in their publications, which ran “against the grain of the notion that the rise of a (feminized) commercial market and the capitalization of the press indicated the demise of the public sphere” (*ibid.*).<sup>17</sup> Some women’s pages, like Julia Dawson’s in the socialist *The Clarion*, suggested that practices of consumption and embellishment could result in “a new attitude to the daily operations of domestic life” in which “the ordinary becomes event, non-being becomes being when daily routines are respected and given value. Work is transformed as well as leisure activity when one ‘pretty thing’ is positioned properly” (122). There was political as well as aesthetic potential in these practices.

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<sup>16</sup> Other contemporary theories of fashion and consumption also condemned the women who engaged with them but did so through different arguments. In his 1908 *Ornament and Crime*, Penny Sparke notes, Adolf Loos argued “within a framework of Darwinian evolutionary theory which defined man’s progress as a move away from the word of nature towards culture” and, in turn, away from ornament, which of course characterised women and non-Western civilisations as backwards (1995: 106-7).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in the suffragist paper *Votes for Women* (1907-1918) “advertisements, articles about street-selling, shopping, fashion culture, and other engagements with consumer culture jostled against articles regarding imprisonment, self-denial, and feminist sacrifice. This vibrant visual and textual mixture produced new meanings by insisting that ‘feminist consumption’ be thought together with feminist renunciation” (Green 2017: 42) that was articulated in practices like “self-denial week” (52). *The Consumer in Revolt*, a 1912 book by Teresa Billington-Greig, “lobbied for an understanding of the rituals of daily life as deeply political” (71). Its author “saw socialism, feminism and shopping as intimately connected, and recognized that through a focus on woman’s central role as consumer the feminist movement could broaden its scope dramatically and work collectively with other progressive organizations” (*ibid.*).

The consumer practices of the interwar period complicated the distinctions between public and private, labour and leisure in a myriad ways. Periodicals, stores, fairs and exhibitions made “homemaking, beauty and personal relationships visible and public while at the same time demonstrating that these ‘private’ areas of life were inextricably enmeshed in the social and economic changes that constituted modern life” (Giles 2004: 119). *Vogue*, by underscoring the importance of fashionable dress and domestic goods and by taking the role of informed guide to consumer and leisure practices, offered its readers a range of strategies to be modern.

## 1.2. TURNING OVER NEW LEAVES

### 1.2.1. “Brisk and Burning Times”: The Modernity of British Vogue

British *Vogue* had enough of a success that an effort was made to carry over the more cutting-edge *Vanity Fair*. It is possible that this was part of a strategy to prevent British *Vogue* from becoming a “hybrid” and lose its specificity as a class publication; in 1919, Edna Chase travelled to London “to bring British *Vogue* into line with the successful class publication ideal, which in-housers called ‘the Condé Nast formula’” (Ronald 2019: 126). The editorial essay for late November 1919, “A Necessary Alias”, announced the arrival of *The Patrician*, as there already was an ongoing British periodical titled *Vanity Fair*. Gentlemen, it was felt, might feel insecure in their status if they had to turn to women’s periodicals for light reading:

It should be particularly acceptable in a house where the male element predominates, for a man is often discovered reading his wife’s special papers, rather shamefacedly admitted, in search perhaps for the light-hearted beauty his favourite reading generally lacks, and which he hesitates to admit he thoroughly enjoys. Yet, even while he snatches such brief refreshment, he is not quite content—the fare is perhaps too meringue-like for his taste—and he feels a craving for salted almonds and, possibly, some bread and cheese to follow. *The Patrician*, we can assure him, will satisfy this need. (Late November 1919: 69)



Though short-sighted and lacking in subtlety, the characterisation of *The Patrician* as a nutritious, hearty and thus masculine snack serves as an illustration of the motif of reading as consumption that will be explored in later chapters. It was also described as “amusing, witty, thoroughly impenitent”; “a good antidote to taking life and art too heavily”; it would be “all things to all men, not forgetting the women” (*ibid.*). Another advertisement made much of Fish’s involvement in this “magazine of individuality for men and women of individuality”, “America’s smartest, most beautiful periodical” (early January 1920: xxiii), as she was one of Britain’s star satirists. A few months later there was a full-page advertisement in which a flapper talked on the phone,<sup>18</sup> framing modish young people with its cord. The copy read:

*Hello! Wake Up! Read*

THE PATRICIAN

*The most wide-awake of all magazines*

These are brisk and burning times

The world is whirling faster than it ever whirled before. If you want to keep up with the times you have got to keep awake and read a wide-awake magazine.

The PATRICIAN is the English version of the liveliest, smartest, wittiest periodical in America. It prints pictures! Lots of them. More than any other magazine. The modes, morals and manners of the moderns are satirized by the best and most unconventional artists and writers. Modern life is viewed and reviewed pertinently and impartially.

If you want to become a Busy Bertha on Life’s battlefield and stop being an insular littler bore, read The PATRICIAN and let it keep you in constant touch with all the social, literary, dramatic and artistic skirmishes on both sides of the Atlantic.

Don’t expose yourself to the bombs of boredom! Don’t be stifled by the poison gases of ennui! Keep behind the barrage of the biggest of all the rapid-fire magazine guns.

EVERY ISSUE of The PATRICIAN CONTAINS

*Modern Thoughts on Timely Topics*

Being a collection of impressions on men and things of the moment.

*Literary Hors d’Oeuvres*

A potpourri of amusing, instructive, and literary articles of all kinds.

*Art and the Stage*

Photographs, reproductions, and reviews from the Worlds of Art and the Drama.

*Miscellaneous*

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<sup>18</sup> Harriet Anne Fish was an English illustrator who became immensely popular after 1914, when her work began to be featured in *Tatler*, particularly in the society columns, “The Letters of Eve”, which included what would become her most famous character; there were Eve books, exhibitions and merchandise. Her fame only grew, and her illustrations appeared in American *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. According to William Connelly: “Fish’s success was, perhaps, because she was also able to bring with her contributions, an element hitherto lacking—gentle irony. Helen Dryden, George Plank, Georges Lepape etc. in their illustrations for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, created, described and confirmed an elegant world, but posed no questions and certainly did not invite readers to laugh at themselves” (1999: 61). When the publishers of the *Sphere* and *Tatler* launched a women’s periodical in 1919, they named it *Eve* after Fish’s creation (Sheehan 2018).

Essays and the current criticisms on sport, fashion, and the world at large. (Early June 1920: lxx)

Priced at one shilling sixpence, it was even more expensive than *Vogue*. Above all, it was more modern, more strident and younger. Though almost two years had passed since the end of the war, *The Patrician* used its vocabulary for its rapid-fire, alliterative appeal, turning the violence, speed and noise of modern times to its favour. Another advertisement illustrated by Fish used the imagery of romance and Romanticism instead. It asked: “Are you in love with the stage?” “Are you in love with youth?” “Are you in love with the opera?” “Are you in love with literature?” (late June 1920: xx). The latter caption accompanied a young man of the Shelley type—although in modern evening dress—passionately reciting from a long roll of paper and offering a flower to a young woman.

Next to Being in Love  
the most absorbing thing in the world is reading  
THE PATRICIAN

the magazine of leisure interests

Next to being in love, *The Patrician* will provide you with more thrills than anything life holds for you. Its articles and reviews are nearly as brilliant as Her eyes. Its photographs and drawings are almost as startling as Her tantrums.

Its humour and satire are almost as funny as Her golf. Its talk about music, art, letters, is nearly as delightful, as pleasant, as clever, as the way She says, “Leopold, how wonderful you are!”

But—She may quarrel with you. Or—you may dislike Her family. A flare of temper—and She’s gone for ever! But *The Patrician* is always faithful—always constant. And far less expensive! Life isn’t so full of good things that you can afford to miss *The Patrician*. (*ibid.*)

While indisputably a luxury, *The Patrician* presented itself as a necessary investment, for one had to be shocked out of mundanity.

Biographer Nicholas Murray credits Aldous Huxley with proposing the publication. At this time a writer at another Condé Nast venture into the British market, *House & Garden*, “Huxley took advantage of the publishers’ buoyant mood to propose that he edit a paper of his own called *The Patrician*. ‘I now see that the only possible papers are those with pictures: nothing else can hope to pay.’ The first issue of *The Patrician*”, which Murray mistakes for “the English version of *Vogue*, appeared in

December 1919” (2009: 130). Unfortunately, the yarn of *The Patrician* goes nowhere. It seems that despite repeated advertisements, *The Patrician* was never a success; there is a passing mention to it in a 1922 issue of *British Vogue* that implies it did materialise, but it has somehow disappeared from all archives. I have found a single reference to *The Patrician* in modern scholarship: Christopher Reed writes in a footnote that “A 1920 publication by Condé Nast’s staff lists, along with *British Vogue*, another magazine, *The Patrician*, described as ‘the English edition of *Vanity Fair*’ (Parker, Chappell, and Crowninshield, n.p.), but there is no record in Condé Nast’s London archive of this publication” (2006a: 64). The catalogue of the British Library has an entry for *The Patrician: a monthly pageant of life, literature, drama and art... The British edition of... Vanity Fair* dated 1919-1946 with a note that says “Destroyed in World War II”, underscored by obsolete shelf marks. Only one physical copy is listed, an issue from spring 1946. However, this single remaining issue is in fact from an entirely different publication also titled *Patrician: a one-off or discontinued fashion “booklet”* that “deals with English women and English beauty” (1946: 1) published in London by Globe Illustrations Ltd. and printed by Ash & Company, Ltd. that had nothing to do with Condé Nast or *Vanity Fair*.

The most likely explanation is that Nast’s *The Patrician* was launched but discontinued so soon that no issues have survived. The fact that the British Library has an entry for it, albeit mistaken, suggests that it progressed far enough for Condé Nast to formalise its launching. Though the story of *The Patrician* is a frustrating and confusing one, it reveals a gap for its sort of publication in the British market. It was introduced as different from *Vogue* in gendered terms, illustrating how the latter was marked as feminine but thought to be somewhat attractive to men, modern but not cutting-edge.

*The Patrician* never reached its public, and so it would fall to *Vogue* to fulfil its mission. As for Huxley, he too would cross over to its sister publication.

Readers of *Vogue* may not need encouragement to follow developments in sartorial fashion, but they found that it also eased them into modern art and design. The timid among them had to be mollified into appreciating modern furniture, and gallery visitors were given its blessing to fake it until they made it: “Ultimate relief must take the form of an Official Phrase Book for Use at Modern Exhibitions” (early January 1920: 55). Even in forward-thinking Paris, Jeanne Ramon Fernandez wrote, “the public, as a whole, fears to express too openly what it really feels. We may quite often not approve of certain new ideas, of strange phases of art, yet it is considered smart to appear indulgent, even sympathetic with some incipient movement without pausing to consider one’s own impressions or a knowledge of creative arts and of their fine old traditions” (early May 1920: 64). In essays like “The Alleged Decay of Manners” (early May 1920) *Vogue* referenced the most visible products of modernity, like jazz music and aeroplanes, and satirised its prophets, avant-garde pedants, bohemians and eccentrics. Indeed, Georgina Howell points out that “*Vogue*, appealing to the mothers, found a tone of voice that combined tolerance with disapproval” (1978: 4). Articles such as this seem to confirm it:

Everybody goes to teas. [...] In everything else, serious or otherwise, one has some personal choice. [...] Some erratic souls prefer, above all else, those glad, gay, turbulent affairs called by the uninitiated, Bohemian tea-parties-which is merely to state that they are tea-parties for Cranks. Such artistic specialties seek to gather unto themselves who’s who, what’s what, how’s how, and, for that matter, when’s when. Celebrities are their first love, worshippers their second. [...] One can pose on a lilac couch, smoking cigarettes or sipping tea, while a pallid youth, swaying rhythmically to and fro, reads a poem which mixes up a good many startling things about orchids, plumbers, crystalline heights, and blue fish scales. All this, he will explain, is symbolic. Only the truly great will understand it. [...] A summer tea-party in a garden is, of course, a cup of a different colour. One cannot imagine the ponderous utterances of hungry dreamers or the sad sallies of disappointed and unrecognized geniuses mingling with this gay and debonair atmosphere. (Late July 1919: 39-40, 72)

Except that mingle they did, though it would take a few years for *Vogue* to acknowledge it. During Elspeth Champcommunal’s editorship, it backed a hardy modernist version

of modernity. But while *Vogue* kept poking fun at the ultra-modern, it soon began to try out the first person of the plural with a dash of frivolity: “We are the tyrants of Time, no longer his slaves. If we have not yet learned the old trick of making the Sun stand still, we are, at any rate, fast teaching him to jazz” (early March 1921: 63).

*Vogue* presented itself as an authority on and participant in modernity, which Rita Felski conceptualises as “particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness” (1995: 9). *Vogue* expressed its awareness of temporality by looking backwards as much as forwards; through its series on fashion history, by contextualising trends, celebrating anniversaries and never dislodging itself, despite its claim to cosmopolitanism, from the rhythms of court, town and country life. Structured by the seasons, and with its reliance on novelty, imitation and perishability, fashion alters the present by interrupting it with the future: “Fashion orders the experience of self and the body in time [...] This moment of reflection on the presentation of self is a moment when the internal *durée*, the internal flow of time, is halted or disrupted and the self as experienced in the ‘now’ has to reflect upon the ‘old’ presented self” (Entwistle 2000: 32). The consciousness of living *now* emerges as the shared aspect of these theorisations of fashion and modernity. Judy Giles points out that “certain discourses of modernity, however, offer the possibility that the mundanity and monotony of everyday life can be transformed or transcended” (2004: 31). *Vogue* proposed to do so through the cultivation of taste.

Fashion magazines displayed ancient stately homes as often as they discussed modern hobbies and inventions that relied on speed and a sense of expanding space. As D. J. Taylor writes, and as the early novels of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh reveal, fashionable upper-class Brits inhabited “a world of whistle-stop journeys through Home Counties back lanes, frenzied telephone calling and constant changes of plan, all-day

drinking and physical exhaustion, dominated by the search for novelty; the latest fashionable restaurant, the newest Thames-side resort” (2007: loc. 2049). Their breakneck lifestyle was reflected in their “boyish” fashions, which as I have mentioned said more about age than gender, and indeed *Vogue* associated modishness with youth and novelty. Nevertheless, it did not look down on older readers. Soon after the war, *Vogue* started off with a common enough phrase to say something altogether more poignant: “The future has always belonged to the young, but now that youth has realized the vast importance of the present, to-day, no less than to-morrow, has been seized by its gay impetuous hands” (late October 1919: 51). While Fish’s young flappers were characterised as “preternaturally clever”, extending the author’s wit onto her creations (late December 1920: 35), *Vogue* praised the elegance and sartorial experience of older women, sighing that débutantes do badly to ignore their advice (late April 1921: 45) and describing grey hair as a “luxury”; “the grey-haired woman isn’t any older than anybody else—only more independent, often, indeed, much lovelier” (late October 1919: 45, 88). Youth, deeply entangled in the discursive articulation of modernity, did not depend on one’s age: for *Vogue*, it was about openness of mind.

Modern practices of dress and homemaking were understood to focus on practicality, suitability and efficiency, and therefore one’s sartorial choices must be considered holistically and individually. Though one’s dress and living space ought to suit one’s personality and station, readers were asked to be daring: the “modern” qualities of a proudly displayed object would be associated to the person. “If, through the fault of some eccentrics who are preoccupied with the idea of astonishing the world, modern furniture frightens you a bit, be confident and say to yourself that in all epochs new things have frightened the timid”, soothed Paul Iribe: “It is in you, Annabel, who synthesize the elegant woman, that all modern artists put their confidence and their

hope. Who better than you can understand and aid them?" (early July 1919: 70-1) Women were explicitly and repeatedly addressed as the beautifiers of the body and the home: "It is the privilege of womanhood to break the hard lines of life with curves curious and fantastic which preserve our purblind vision the tradition of Pleasure and revive again our all-but forgotten faith in Providence" (early July 1919: 67). Pompous flattery and almost religious fervour underscored their role as consumers-modernisers.

A variety of styles could be fashionable at once, as, after all, "modern women are less obedient to the dictates of a few designers than their mothers were" (late January 1919: 57). Actually, the abundance made information more necessary than ever. Throughout the period, *Vogue* attempted to define the *je ne se quoi*—alternatively called *elegance, charm, style* or *taste*—that conformed the right way to dress and carry one's body, and the only answer it landed on was that the wearer ought to know what suited them. "The woman of taste", a step above "the smart woman", "has the skill to select those things in the mode which become her, and the wisdom to reject those things in the mode which do not become her, interpreting innovations and working a complete transformation, while keeping her own personal and distinctive quality" (Boutet de Monvel 1920: 93). Beauty was unchanging, but "charm is more subtle and is dependent upon a taste formed by each period in turn", and thus must be learnt: "Eve, for instance, was no bluestocking, and yet she was the first woman to acquire knowledge" (early March 1921: 44). By contrast, the modern young girl was said to have reached an impasse: she was a "strange, innocent, unignorant, cynically-minded, baby-faced, painted, undressed, bedizened little semi-woman" whose "artificial sophistication and the real simplicity of her outlook on life" were hard to imagine, but real (82).

The absolute incorporation of modishness, individuality, sophistication and simplicity was therefore the highest ideal: "There is a charm of nature and a charm of

art. What matters is the charm” (late April 1921: 51). It was, of course, undefinable beyond a string of abstract concepts, and thus impossible to pin down. *Vogue* never decided whether it was enough to achieve it through study and practice. Even among the most talented in “the art of life” there is a chosen one, who has “something, a *nuance*, a nothing, which sets her apart”, and which revealed her as “the quintessence of the exquisite”, not by expertise or outside help but by “genius, that incalculable and incapturable thing” (early July 1921: 55). Fortunately, readers were reminded that talent was important too, and it did not depend on income:

A woman may be poor and yet have very good taste. She will instinctively choose what is suitable to herself in colour and design, for if she has genuine style she has studied herself. [...] She is] the woman who knows where to go, what to get and how to put it on with a dashing touch. She cares for every detail as much as for the general effect. She selects her clothes with common-sense, wears them appropriately and with an air of authority. (Late July 1921: 43)

Knowing what was appropriate for one’s station and setting, and thus understanding dress as a tool for social performance, was a necessary aspect of sophistication. *Vogue* acknowledged that “tastes differ so much, and so many people have them nowadays, that it would be difficult to lay down many fixed rules” (late March 1922: 53). The belief at the core of the magazine, all in all, was that:

It is as conspicuous to be out of line with the modes, as to be too much in bondage with them. The happy medium, the adaptation of costume to character and condition (always with an eye to the prevailing trend or trends of the times) is safe, smart sanity, and wise vanity to boot. [...] No novelty is worth creating simply because it is a novelty. One must have studied with real reverence the beautiful designs of past centuries and familiarized oneself with the meanings of line, and colour, and ornamentation, before one should dare to pit one’s crude productions against the accumulated learning of the older artists in older countries. (*ibid.*)

Though *Vogue* delighted in costume and defended curiosity and playfulness over aesthetic conservatism, its use of the word “bondage” is central to the imagery that warned women of the risks of following every novel trend. Fashion “has to be considered—not slavishly obeyed” (late January 1921: 49); one should take care not to be one of “those slaves of fashion whose only interest is the search for the new and unexpected” and who “in their desire to shun the familiar principles of aesthetics, they



achieve results which inevitably are merely absurd” (J.R.F. [Fernandez] early June 1920: 87).

Every aesthetic choice shaped how one was perceived, and so readers were advised to apply the same thought process to other practices. A woman’s car “is the part of her personality that she leaves standing at the curb, often for hours at a stretch, for all the world to see, and it is the silent testimonial of her taste” (early January 1922: 21). The same was said of her rooms: “They must have originality, character, and charm; and so she takes her own ideas [...] to an artist in house decoration, and he, for it is generally a man, creates for her the setting that her modern, complex, colour-loving nature needs [...] Be daring and make mistakes, perhaps, says the modern enthusiast, but, anyway, live dangerously” (late June 1919: 89). The latter quotation also highlights the importance of expertise and, by extension, of *Vogue*. Its warnings, however, were more mundane than the aforementioned discourse on the moral dangers of excessive consumption may suggest. Time could be inadequately used, that is, “lost”, in an unplanned action. The purchase itself was not the problem—if done right, it could have been a productive investment of the shopper’s time—but the lack of thorough knowledge: “To wander in the wilderness of shops without some leading idea is weary work, and takes up time; and time, at this season of the year, is precious” (early June 1921: 21). The ignorant shopper also risked wasting her money, or her husband’s. Knowledge is necessary to spend sensibly, be it in clothes, furniture or décor, and especially in art and antique objects, the intrinsic value of which was unquestionable, as they “can never be extravagant provided they are good” (late July 1919: 21). The fact that *Vogue* was training its readers in discernment is made explicit in one of the few competitions it organised in the interwar period: in late December 1922 there were six

sketches of new designs by prestigious couturiers, and the reader who could name each one would receive a dress allowance for the upcoming year.

Even if one had the income and taste to acquire the most modern objects, they were not enough to be admitted into modern social life: one must also be accomplished in modern manners, that is, in the right way to engage with those objects. *Vogue's* editorial content, its introductions and critical essays, usually debated modern mores and behaviours, revealing a concern about status—and by extension about gender, class and wealth—that underpinned the magazine. These pieces often expressed a sense that society had changed, sometimes in exultation, others in alarm.

Immediately after the war, *Vogue* expressed relief but also incredulity over peace and its possibilities: “The habits of four years are not destroyed in four days. The war is so big that it dwarfs the emotions, and so customary that the changes from defeat to victory and from victory to defeat tend to be lost in the monotonously oppressive fact that it still continues” (early November 1918: 67). Although its essays rarely took an explicit political stand, “Convalescence” worried over the “‘bad blood’ between the classes” and “the deadly germs of Bolshevism” (early April 1919: 51), while “The New Economy” faced the moral and aesthetic costs of the war and, most importantly, talked of disillusionment rather than optimism: “Our first reaction from the war was to eat, drink, and be merry. Our second reaction is to count the costs, not merely in pounds sterling, but in brains, imagination, social security, and all the invisible possessions which the war has threatened or actually destroyed. We are beginning to face the facts instead of trying to forget them” (early July 1920: 55). These essays focused on the ways in which life had changed for middle and upper-class women, especially in regards to their education, familial and romantic relationships and leisure habits: actual direct discussions of women’s rights were, by contrast, rare. *Vogue* did not showcase

activists or suffragists, except for the occasional society portrait or passing mention, and at this point it did not actively encourage its readers to find a profession. *Vogue* argued for demobilization, arguing that:

Women, in particular, have faced such novel experiences, entered upon such interesting work, will they ever consent to return to their old ways? [...] Common sense and serious thought are needed in this unprecedented situation, or the evil will overbalance the good of the change. Novelty is a very nice thing to begin with, but nothing remains a novelty very long. It would be wise for women to stop and think just what the novel things they are doing now will be when they become a routine. [...] Inevitably, it would seem, the work of woman must return to woman. And the erstwhile woman of leisure has learned in these years to employ leisure to advantage. She will use in the conduct of her household, in the training of her children, and in all her widened interests, the sane, broad outlook upon life which she acquired when rank and personality were merged in common service. (Early June 1919, p. 41)

*Vogue* did acknowledge the complexities of the labour of homemaking, reflecting that the middle and upper-class woman could be as much at risk of a nervous breakdown as her overworked husband if she allowed “her household conscience and her social duties to become her tyrants” (early September 1922: 65). Tellingly, while women in professions were sporadically discussed, that particular essay did not spare a thought for overworked women with a job outside the home, which were not uncommon.

Soon after the Armistice of November 11, and immediately before the general elections of December 14, *Vogue* made a ponderous statement about women’s new role: “She is the mistress of her fate, and of her country’s. The rebuilding of the old Home is in her hands. [...] Now that the war is over, a new character had entered the cast, and the scene will have to be changed. It rests with Women to decide how the next Act will proceed” (early December 1918: 65). This was the first time that all men over 21 and women over 30 who met certain property conditions, meaning two thirds of all women, could cast their vote in the United Kingdom. *Vogue* soon qualified this jubilant beginning with what can be read as its signature disdain, and switched back to the singular: “Woman has made her triumphant entry into the fortresses of politics. [...] Looking back, it seems pathetic that she should have had so hard a struggle for such a

right, and the first impression may well be one of disenchantment. It sometimes seems as if, after all, the ballet interests her more than the ballot” (*ibid.*). This was a double dismissal, first of the process to acquire that right, and then of those that were about to make use of it. The magazine would continue to present politics as complicated and unpleasant: to “woman” would fall the responsibility of rebuilding, but it was not clear who would be in charge of modifying the foundations of the nation. In 1922, when David Lloyd George’s coalition government collapsed and a general election was called, *Vogue* criticised all the candidates, qualifying the situation as a “mess” and crying: “We feel very small and very helpless!” (early December 1922: 59). While it is not clear whether it was speaking for the nation or for women unused to voting, the title of the essay, “Confound Their Politics”, distanced both the voice of the magazine and the reader from the political situation.

*Vogue* acknowledged contemporary debates around changing roles and imbalances of power, but it did so in a simplistic, blithely glib and contradictory way. This could happen in the most unexpected of sections: a collection of veil designs, for instance, was accompanied by verses bride that would not vow to obey. When the tone of an essay was comic, the joke usually was that women had the brains, moral superiority and power in marriage, while men were gullible, lazy, or, poor souls, just *like that*. Husbands, sighed *Vogue*, used work as an excuse to leave all travel arrangements and household logistics to their wives:

Oh, what a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in—resource—the idle, incorrigible rascal! How does he escape whipping? Protector and provider! The sly, cunning villain! The master of the house! The incomparable mollusc! Sometimes it would seem better to take a strand out of the spider’s web. We all know what happens to Mrs. Spider’s husband. Or if there is any woman who doesn’t, let her consult Encyc. Brit. Vol. SHU-SUB. It is one of the things that every woman ought to know. (Early October 1922: 65)

An essay on men in love presented them as helpless, even masochistic: “Man, in all his relations with the fair sex, is easy prey, a submissive and well-trained victim, a creature

of habit”; even when he pretended otherwise, “the poor wretch, you see, is incurably naïf, horribly sentimental and romantic” (Boutet de Monvel early April 1920: 64). Even more to the point, the illustrations showed men crying while women hit them with chairs. But even if women had authority in their relations with men and men were too foolish to notice, it was still men who had the income. *Vogue*’s modern woman chose her own car, but it was her beleaguered man who paid for it: “This pathetic-and prominent-figure at the [Olympia] Show may often be located by his air of unimportance at all moments save that of writing the cheque. Then the lady regards him but slightly less affectionately than her new car” (early November 1919: 68). This type of flattering humour was also used in marketing, as an essay introducing the Condé Nast publication *House & Garden* joked: “Three things of primary importance in every woman’s life are her husband, her house, and her garden [...] The much-needed periodical dealing with the care of the husband, and how to make the most of him, whether he belongs to one of the ‘show’ or ‘utility’ varieties, has yet to be produced” (early June 1919: 67).

*Vogue* tended to trace developments in women’s access to professions and education back to the war, meaning that social movements and activist groups were hardly ever acknowledged. A comic piece by Dorothy Parker argued that the sweet, simple and homely pre-war girl “is no more”: she had changed her wardrobe and taken a man’s job (early April 1919: 31). Parker addressed the mistress who couldn’t find a female servant, as no matter what they were offered—even one’s first-born would not do—most girls now preferred to be conductors, housepainters, pharmacists, reaching the comical point of claiming that “such gracious and womanly positions as those of cook, nurse, laundress and maid” are “considered positively unfeminine” (*ibid.*). Part of the appeal of these new positions was wearing a “severe, sensible” (78) uniform, but

another reason was that these jobs kept them “out in the open air”. “It looks as if the only man’s profession that is safe from feminine invasion”, the article concluded, “is that of female impersonator” (*ibid.*). The post-war “servant problem” was a recurring source of comedy: Fish illustrated “the unfortunate plight of a lady” struggling to unfasten her gown; the power balance had shifted so that now “all the best Registries are making it clear that unless a mistress agrees to wear the Standard hookless overhead dress no maid will engage her” (late October 1919: 62).

Despite the jokes about what the world was coming to, *Vogue* did write in favour of giving young girls an education and confidence. It considered the need for better, more imaginative schools that could turn out not only “good, capable housewives” but also “shrewd secretaries and clerks” (late August 1922: 54). In a serious editorial on “Women and Education” the magazine reminded readers that women’s colleges were in need of funds, and explicitly appealed to readers to contribute: “The new powers and liberties, which women are claiming and have already won for themselves, cannot be used to their fullest advantages unless women have every possible educational opportunity” (early February 1921: 51). It further underscored that these colleges needed equal curricula as well as equal funding: “For men Oxford is an university; for women, it is still (though happily less completely than it was) a sort of super girls’ school. [...] The women’s part of the university will never possess the spirit which alone justifies Oxford’s existence, until it has acquired the same freedom, intellectual as well as social” as the men’s (*ibid.*). Later that year, *Vogue* acknowledged that even after accessing education, a wide range of professions and the vote, the possible life paths for women were still limited, and placed the responsibility on women themselves:

Women still lend themselves, both instinctively and with awareness, to the Procrustean methods—they will continue to adapt themselves to men, to pretend, event actually to make themselves, the type that men demand. Any wife will still continue to prune

herself here, to stretch herself there, to meet the moods of her husband. [...] The bed nowadays is another bed, but woman, if she be wise, will still let the man think he made it, so she is content to lie upon it (early November 1921: 63)

Femininity, or at least conjugally successful femininity, seemingly must involve a degree of subterfuge.

In a light-hearted essay, *Vogue* asked mothers of young women to remember their own times as *débutantes*, to be more empathetic, and to not be over-eager to see them married off. “I must see that she learns to be gay, attractive, and adaptable, and finally I must never let her forget that there is no happiness for women outside of marriage” (late October 1921: 50), they might be tempted to think, and thus they might force party after party and convention after convention on their daughters: “Conform we must, for the alternative is outer darkness, unless we are so fascinating that we can make a virtue of our non-conformity” (88). Their daughters would, of course, rebel against such tyranny and go to the other extreme. Instead parents—as it is not only mothers that were addressed in this section—should inspire them to think of themselves “as an individual, not a commodity”. A daughter “who appreciates that she can capitalize her brains, her talents, or her abilities just as a boy can, is going to enjoy social life infinitely more than she ever did under the old system” (*ibid.*). This specific article, it must be said, did not actually specify what the self-actualisation of a young woman would mean in practice.

Despite acknowledging the limited status of women in Britain, *Vogue* compared it positively to that in other countries in Europe, where women were said to view the outside world not through the window, but as reflected in a mirror; “a survival, doubtless, of the hoary old tradition that woman’s place is the home” (late January

1922: 43). Those modern-day ladies of Shalott had passively accepted “the shadow instead of the substance”, and, again, the responsibility was placed entirely on them:<sup>19</sup>

The world has at last opened the windows wide for women, wider in some countries than in others; yet in all a slight opening is perceptible. Of what use is it if women still prefer their mirror, as some do? Others, of course, lean out all too boldly; some even get over the sill, for it is a little difficult to adapt oneself just at once to the frankness of open windows without either drawing back behind the curtain in virtuous horror or going to the other extreme.

Home is still the best place for the majority of women, but it should be a home where the air enters freely; where the windows are opened wide and where the inmate can gaze unrestricted and without shame on the pageant of life that passes her way. [...]

The day of the mirror is over, and those people who remain still sitting behind their curtains and peering into it will gradually die out. (*Ibid.*)

It is the middle paragraph that problematizes *Vogue*'s position: who, exactly, composed the minority of women for whom the home was not the best place? Was it working-class women, whose agricultural, industrial, and service labour was nothing new, or was it middle and upper-class women, only recently educated, leading in politics or the arts? If home was the best place for most women, why insist on characterising them as inmates? Was the air that entered freely meant to represent culture, social interaction, or legal rights? Was *Vogue* itself such a gust of fresh air, as it allowed readers to peek into the pageant of high society? Vague as its position was, it seems clear that the magazine whole-heartedly believed—as far as it did anything whole-heartedly—in the importance of knowledge and self-determination for women.

### 1.2.2. “Turning Over New Leaves”: Cultural Criticism

Browsing through *Vogue*'s gorgeous images, glamorous personalities and cultural criticism, one may achieve the informed attitude to modernity it recommended. The focus of this thesis is literary culture, but before 1922 *Vogue* did not emphasise books as much as it did the theatre and the visual arts: therefore, in this section I will consider

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<sup>19</sup> Alfred Tennyson's ballad, first published in 1833, tells the Arthurian story of the Lady of Shalott, who must see the outside world only through a mirror. Having fallen in love with Sir Lancelot from afar, she looks directly through her window. Having broken the terms of her curse, she dies in the river trying to reach Camelot.



cultural criticism as a whole in order to better pin-point the magazine's original position on modern cultural production. From the very beginning there was "Seen on the Stage", a regular theatre section; critical essays on the visual arts, and especially gallery reviews, were frequent though not regular. Both sections were anonymous, although some gallery reviews were signed "X", "Y" and "Z" at least in 1919 and 1920. Searching for Aldous Huxley's contributions to British *Vogue* and *House & Garden*, where he wrote at since at least November 1, 1920, James Sexton has found that "given the presence of numerous stylistic fingerprints and other evidence found in the more than sixty essays in the London editions" of these two magazines;

it is reasonable to contend that all or, at least, most of them were written by Aldous Huxley. Unfortunately, there is no simple way to determine Huxley's authorship of the unsigned Condé Nast magazine essays, since during World War II the 'marked files' (complete runs of journals in which the editors kept records of anonymous contributors and their remuneration) of British *Vogue* and *House & Garden* were shredded as a paper-saving measure. (2005: 1)

Sexton identifies a wide variety of articles as Huxley's; many are critical essays on the visual arts, but they also include editorial essays and "Confound their Politics", discussed above (5).<sup>20</sup> In the late tens or the very early twenties Huxley had "opted to put his growing critical skills into service as staff writer for Condé Nast" (8), and at some point became its art critic and chief staff writer.<sup>21</sup>

During Elspeth Champcommunal's editorship "*Vogue's* reception of contemporary painting was far from adventurous. Modigliani, Matisse, Picasso and Vlaminck were found 'disappointing', but clearly worrying. [...] All the leading painters and sculptors appeared in *Vogue*, and the more academic their approach the better reviewed they were" (Howell 1978: 7). Indeed, "The Royal Academy and its Pictures"

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<sup>20</sup> A number of anonymous features from *Vogue*, James Sexton finds, "contain ideas and even whole sentences which [Huxley] published in subsequent essays" (2005: 9). Some of them also appeared in American *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*.

<sup>21</sup> Madge Garland wrote to Sybille Bedford in 1969 "that Huxley was 'inappropriately, considering his eyesight, [...] the ART critic of *Vogue*'" (in Sexton 2007: 14). The unpublished letter is kept at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.

(early May 1919) defended a pro-institution, anti-clique position. This is not to say, however, that *Vogue* ignored contemporary debates in art criticism. Christopher Reed writes that “Bloomsbury's formalist aesthetic theory”, which rejected “mimesis in favor of concentration on the play of abstract form”, “extended its influence far beyond the immediate circle in which it developed. Throughout the English-speaking world, the writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell opened the way for the creation and reception of modern art in the first decades of this century” (1992: 20). *Vogue* discussed the work of these critics with a degree of familiarity but also with hostility, as shown in essays like “Frith or Fry: A Modern Artistic Problem” (late August 1920) or “Post-Impressionism”, which argued that the English public was not opposed “to the movement itself, but to the interpretation of life which some of its exponents from abroad try to force upon us in their paintings” (early September 1919: 50). Instead of this French imposition, *Vogue* would rather keep beauty and realism. The production of the Omega Workshops, founded by Fry in 1913, was featured but hardly embraced (early April 1919). In a more light-hearted way, a satirical essay illustrated by Fish advised readers on “The Art of Appearing at Ease Before the Puzzling Masterpieces of the Moderns”:

On no occasion do words fail one more coldly than when, confronted by the latest canvases of the latest ‘Post’ painter, the Uninitiated Innocent looks to his vocabulary to help him out. [...] opportunity urges a Slight Strand of Safe Sayings, a timid but friendly cable woven from such comments as are known to produce a pleasing effect in our joyous galleries of contemporary art. ‘Modernists’ shows fall thick as autumn leaves-without being anything like so quiet about it-and who knows when he may find himself standing, unprepared, before Another New Genius—with the ear of the world upon him? (Early January 1920: 55)

*Vogue*’s interest in the modern visual arts and their theories, then, was tempered.

Interestingly enough, Álvaro Guevara’s portrait of Edith Sitwell was praised and reproduced in the magazine. Despite his association with the Bloomsbury Group, *Vogue* did not mention Fry and Bell’s theories of art but simply praised his technique: “Here is the younger generation knocking at the door” (Y early November 1919: 73). *Vogue* also championed artists like Anna Airy, Laura Knight, Ethel Sands and above all Marie

Laurencin, who was described as “A Woman Artist of Genius” in an essay that presented her as an exception among all women artists:

To describe the character of woman’s contribution to literature and to assess its value are comparatively simple matters; we can easily see, for example, how much the modern novel owes to her sensibility and her delicately sharp instinct. But when we come to the visual arts, this process of assessment is not so easy. There have been much fewer woman-artists than woman-writers, and the few that there have been are comparatively less important; their influence is less easily traceable, their contributions to the art are less definite. (Early July 1922: 60)

As a whole, *Vogue* was quite dismissive of women painters. A review of the Women’s International Art Club exhibition mused on what might be missing from their work: they may have taste, instinct and emotion, but they lacked intellectual drive (late April 1920: 70-1, 101). An essay on Ethel Sands began by stating: “To generalize about the ‘typically feminine’ in art or literature is as dangerous a sport as the enunciation of great truths about national characteristics and the souls of races. [...] But still, in spite of all the exception, we are probably justified in saying that there is something that can be described as typically feminine art” (early March 1922: 56). This “feminine” style, the type of art Sands produced, showed: “Delicacy, tact, good taste, a feeling for the small, immediate, domestic things which make or mar the elegant amenity of life” (*ibid.*). All of these qualities, unsurprisingly, were extended to women in all disciplines.

“High Art and Tediousness” is the most relevant manifestation of *Vogue*’s early criticism for this thesis, and I shall return to it in later sections. Sexton attributes this essay to Huxley on the grounds that it praised the same “amusing” artists he later commended in an essay for *Vanity Fair* (2007), and indeed the points it made are coherent with his other, signed articles. Subtitled “A Plea for the Amusing in Art in Place of the Ponderous Tediousness of the Sham-Great Men”, it declared that good art ought to be pleasurable as well as interesting, and that gravity was not necessarily quality:

The life of the truly good, these people [preceptors, pedagogues and puritans] argue, is necessarily painful, mortifying, full of discomfort and dull. Those who lead any other kind of life are truly bad.

This conception of goodness as synonymous with the unpleasant, the boring and the disagreeable has slopped over from the sphere of ethics into that of art; and there are a great many people—especially among those pathetically earnest suburbanites who aspire towards Culture and the Higher Life—there are many people who cherish the notion, though perhaps they never put it precisely into words, that the best works of art are the most boring, that tediousness, length and ponderosity are the final and convincing signs of true merit in the arts. (Early June 1922: 57)

After brutally characterising Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and Wagner's *Parsifal* and *The Ring* as “fearfully dull”, *Vogue* praised young continental writers, especially those that it would champion in the following years:

Cocteau's ballets, the novels of Morand, the poems of Marinetti or of Miss Edith Sitwell may not represent the highest possible achievements of the human spirit. But they are at least finished works of art, eminently enjoyable, unpretentious and amusing. They are the best possible antidote to the pretentious ponderosities of the sham-men of the nineteenth century. For it is only the sham-great artists who produce dull things. The real-great ones are never tedious. (*Ibid.*)

Here were the conflicting views that *Vogue* hid under its unifying anonymity: it was harsh on modern art and relied on gender essentialism in quite tired terms while simultaneously appreciating the minor pleasures of spirited, ironic, creative—in other words, *fun*—works.

British *Vogue* had some degree of literary coverage since its beginning in 1916. “Turning Over New Leaves”, a title that would change and reappear throughout the interwar period, was more or less a monthly section, though it was far from regular. While every year between 1919 and 1922 saw twelve or more review columns, they appeared in contiguous issues as often as they left long gaps in between: for instance, there were no reviews in August 1920, between May and August 1921 or in April 1922. As Amanda Carrod notes, this section “was not given a large amount of space and indeed could have been overlooked due to its rather dismissive placing amidst the advertisements which followed the main editorial content” (2015: 74-5). The fact that book reviews were placed among cosmetics and insurance policies suggests that books were considered objects for sale, meant for one's daily entertainment, and not at the

same level as other cultural goods. Another difference from the more important art and theatre criticism was length; book reviews were written in a descriptive style, more similar to a publisher's blurb than to a critical essay. Moreover, they were chopped and dispersed throughout different pages. Most significantly, they noted how much each book cost.

These early reviews were unsigned and somewhat impersonal: they only allowed a glimpse of the person behind them once, as at one point they started with the sentence "To the present writer, who flatters himself..." (early September 1922: 88). This pronoun, however, may have been used for anonymity. Though the allotted space did not allow for extended critical reflection, they occasionally mused on style and gender, as did the aforementioned gallery reviews. Gender was the common thread among the books reviewed in early November 1918, and so there were sub-sections titled "Eminent Victorians described by a Distinguished Woman Novelist – Some other Women Novelists Discussed – A Story about Women by a Woman..." (78, 80, 82). As *British Vogue* has not yet been digitalised, it is not possible to do quantitative analysis to draw conclusions from word frequency. My read-through does suggest, however, that the fact that certain writers were men was mentioned only when their work was about women, as was the case of R. Brimley Johnson, whose *The Women Novelists* caused the reviewer to suspect him of feminism (*ibid.*), or when discussing the plausibility of their characters, as with Michael Arlen, whose male characters in *The Romantic Lady* "are not so convincing as his women" (late December 1921: 64). Similarly, the gender of women writers was noted when it was felt to be relevant to their subject or characters; however, it was a much more frequent cause for comment. E. M. Delafield's *The Pelicans* was characterised by its "preponderant" feminine elements and "malicious humour", and her dry and flat male characters were contrasted to the lively women

(early November 1918: 80). F. Tennyson Jesse's *The Sword of Deborah* showed that “she has sympathy and a sense of justice, with a flair for the right word, and with a wide outlook which sees at a glance exactly what things have called for the greatest tenacity of spirit in these achievements of women” (early July 1919: 100). *Latchkey Ladies*—and, by extension, the author Marjorie Grant—was criticised precisely because of its focus on women:

But if *Latchkey Ladies* is not a very distinguished novel, it has a significance which is sociological rather than aesthetic. Miss Grant is a member of a school of woman writers—Miss Rose Macaulay and Miss E. M. Delafield are notable among her colleagues—who are, to coin an ugly word, feminocentric. They put men in their books, it is true, but they do not attempt to portray them in the round. They have no existence for their own sakes, but are merely tolerated because they are necessary to help the story along. [...] She is not a feminist of the old crude sort, however; at least, she does not seem to have a very high opinion of the latchkey life. This is rather surprising, for she is curiously old-fashioned. One had supposed that women who have to work for their living took the fact, and their consequent life in clubs and diggings, for granted nowadays. But Miss Grant's young women don't. They talk about little else, discuss it up and down. One gets rather tired of the subject, and welcomes the irruption into their refined, intelligent, mildly bohemian circle of the vulgar little vagabond, Petunia, with her lies and her boys, and her preference for face-powder to soap and water. (Late January 1922: 58)

Nonetheless, the same issue reviewed Raden Adjeng Kartini's *Letters of a Javanese Princess* and had nothing but sympathy and praise for her struggle for education and emancipation, titling the section “A Javanese Feminist” with no negative connotations and consequently separating her from “the old crude sort” (*ibid.*).

The word “authoress” was commonly used during and between the wars, and it did not mark the writer by quality or social class. The protocol around honorifics, however, was not that simple. Faye Hammill finds that the press of the period treated women writers differently depending on the aspect of their lives under discussion—their celebrity as writers or their domestic lives—and that “this split was symbolized through an alternation between [their] married and maiden names, according to context” (2007: 139). Unfortunately, *Vogue* was more chaotic than that. Men were referred to as “Mr.” or by their military or aristocratic rank—with the exception of Max Beerbohm, whose popularity was such that he was simply “Max”. In most cases, women were called

“Miss” regardless of marital status and of whether the title was followed by a legal or pen name, as in the case of “Miss Delafield”.<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward was called as such, as she used her married name for publication. Anne Douglas Sedgwick’s married name, Mrs. Basil de Sélincourt, was used next to her maiden name in one review (early June 1920: 136) but not in another (early November 1920: 85). Mary Frances Dowdall was called “the Hon” (late April 1921: 74), while Vita Sackville-West got the short end of the stick, repeatedly being referred to as “Miss” and even once misnamed “Violet” (late August 1921: 62). On occasion, despite *Vogue*’s repeated insistence on its aristocratic connections in other sections of the magazine, it used no honorifics at all. Exactitude in titles was not as important as calling authors by recognisable names.

During this period *Vogue* did not express much interest in literary celebrity or even in literary trends and movements, rarely discussing authors as individuals, debating shared “fashionable” elements in their work, or describing them in terms of appearance or lifestyle. However, it did favour some authors over others: the most reviewed authors between the Armistice and late December 1922 were John Galsworthy and F. Tennyson Jesse, with four reviewed works each, followed by John Middleton Murry, with three. Other recurring authors were the already mentioned Max Beerbohm, E. M. Delafield, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Mrs. Humphry Ward and Vita Sackville-West, as well as Sheila Kaye-Smith and Fish, the illustrator. Overall, the reviews did not look for stylistic innovation or for the representation of individual consciousness. Instead, they focused on whether the story was good, whether the characters and plot were believable, and whether reading it was an aesthetically and sensually pleasing experience: positive reviews often included words like “exquisite”, “sensitive” and

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<sup>22</sup> E. M. Delafield was the pen name of English writer Edmée Elizabeth Monica Dashwood, née de la Pasture (1890-1943). When *Vogue* reviewed her book *Consequences* she would have been Mrs. Arthur Dashwood. Though “Miss Delafield” sounds proper, her maiden name had never been Delafield, and her signature as E. M. Delafield existed regardless of marital status.

“skill”. Tellingly, Vita Sackville-West’s *Heritage* was described as “an extraordinarily vivid story” that “brings the same clean shock of delight and subsequent glow as does a refreshing plunge into deep sea-water on a day of enervating mildness” (late June 1919: 126). *A Lost Love*, by Ashford Owen—the penname of Anne Charlotte Ogle—was delightful because of “the beautiful development of the quiet theme, and especially the sure and exquisite characterization. Those hidden reactions which so exercise our modern psycho-analysis were matters of course to this girl of twenty. She needed no Anatole France to tell her that irony and pity were the glasses through which to view the world” (late March 1920: 108). Similarly, Eden Philpotts’ *Orphan Dinah* was pleasant because it was “a really well-knit story” in contrast to “our most characteristic authors” of “these days”, who “let plot and form go by the board, intent only on portraying the inner consciousness or sub-consciousness in all its natural fluidity” (early December 1920: 118).

It would be inaccurate to say that *Vogue* did not recommend modernist literature before Dorothy Todd’s editorship, but it certainly was not enthusiastic about it. Virginia Woolf’s *Kew Gardens* and T. S. Eliot’s *Poems* were possible Christmas gifts in late December 1919, but they were described as beautiful objects rather than praised for their literary value. Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party and Other Stories* made the reviewer state that “Miss Mansfield has done nothing so far which gives her rank with the very great short-story writers, which is perhaps the most select company in literature. But her work is very admirable, and still more interesting. It would appear to be popular, too; for her first book, besides provoking the enthusiasm of reviewers, has already been thrice reprinted. This is rather surprising, and very encouraging” (late May 1922: 64). They went on to compare her technique as a writer to that of Monet as a painter, and in fact she came out the winner.



The most thoughtful literary criticism was not found in the review section, but in the regular editorial essays. As discussed, each issue carried a page-length essay that explored different aspects of modern life, and often reflected on taste and its manifestations. It was in these essays that *Vogue* considered literature as subject to fashion and reading as a fashionable practice. Lytton Strachey's biography of Queen Victoria inspired an essay that mused on "The Mutability of Reputation" (early June 1921). The same essay that proudly announced that we, the moderns, "are the tyrants of Time" also stated that "there was a royal and ancient poet who once said that there was a time for doing everything—and for not doing it. But to us that is mere foolish grey-beardry. He would never have been allowed to contribute to *Wheels*" (early March 1921: 63). *Wheels* was a series of poetry anthologies edited by Edith Sitwell that were published yearly between 1916 and 1921, and has been considered "primarily a vehicle for Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell Sitwell's entry into the modernist literary scene" (Cotsell n. d.). *Vogue* referenced *Wheels* and its editor more often than any other publication outside of Condé Nast, apparently as shorthand for everything modern. The modernism of the Sitwells showed "visible roots in French decadent literature, positioned against the more wholesome and traditional Georgian anthologies of Edward Marsh", while the visual elements of this project revealed "connections to Futurism and Vorticism" (*ibid.*). Defying expectations, *Vogue* did not disparage of *Wheels* or *Façade*, another loudly modern project by the siblings, as it did of other modern productions: all three siblings in fact became contributors some years later, as shall be explored.

One of the critical essays that discussed reading in relation to modernity and taste was "On Reading Novels". Working out what was hinted at in some reviews, this essay articulated a stronger position on what made good modern literature. Introspection was commendable as long as it was expressed skillfully and made for a good story:

Now the modern novel is the mould into which is cast a great deal of the very best thought of the day. Modern novels are drenched with philosophy and psychology, and made intelligible and warm by being expressed in a concrete form and not in the anaemic formularies of text books. Every tendency of thought can be detached, every growth of emotion and sentiment that is taking root in the modern mind finds expression there (late February 1921: 59)

The problem was that these worthy novels were not properly enjoyed, as people nowadays read too fast: “Reading a novel in fact should be not a motor, but a walking tour. Listen to any table-talk about novels. How vapid, how superficial, how trite it generally is! That is the result of reading at sixty miles an hour” (*ibid.*). The idea that the public was not reading as they should, slowly and actively, would be a serious topic of discussion throughout the following decades, though at this point *Vogue* did not anticipate the finer points of the approaching debate. It proposed that readers ought to buy books instead of borrowing them, “for the lending library habit causes too much literary blood pressure. We are not asking alms for authors, and we have mentioned no names. We are only urging you to enjoy and remember what you read. *Take the speedometer off*” (*ibid.*).

In other essays *Vogue* paid closer attention to writers as celebrities, naming them and participating in the construction and perception of their public persona. In the following section I shall explore how the editors of *Vogue* performed a labour that had emotional and aesthetic aspects and bridged their professional and personal lives, how that work gave legitimacy to the magazine and thus allowed it to promote certain authors, and how it encouraged readers to do the same by using cultural consumption and the display of taste.

### 1.3. SEEN WITH THE EDITOR'S EYE

#### 1.3.1. "Seen in Paris": *Vogue at the Heart of Fashion*

*Vogue* expressed concern about the standardisation of women's fashions and praised individualism in style throughout the period, and yet it had no qualms about classifying people in types. On the one hand, readers could identify with the provided archetypes, a lasting trope in fashion periodicals; on the other, stereotypical representations of gender, class, nation, ethnicity, age and lifestyle were used for comedic purposes. As in fairy-tales, archetypes were used to guide readers, for instance in "The Fable of the Woman Who Shopped Early" and "The Fable of the Girl Who Had Everything" in early December 1919 or "Simple Susan and her Cousin Caroline", a serialised story that ran in the autumn of 1920 in which Susan's silly and unsophisticated ways caught the attention of the handsome Paris. Men were also classed according to their choices in dress and manners: Roger Boutet de Monvel proposed a categorisation of men as lovers, the options being "nice", "Platonic", pretty yet conceited, "tactless", and "the beloved of the gods" who showed tact and propriety (early June 1920: 99-100, 122).

The most interesting manifestation of this trope were *Vogue's* Parisian "friends", who appeared for the first time in early August 1922 and were recurring characters until fading out later in the decade. They read like an iteration of the nineteenth-century Parisian "physiologies", that is, character types that "alleviated the anxieties triggered by the modern emphasis on 'purely visual social interaction' [...] by supporting the idea that one's identity could be read on one's body and therefore captured by others during the fleeting moments characteristic of encounters between strangers in urban space" (Rocamora 2009: 13). Heroines of an etiquette textbook for the modern era, these "friends" were portrayed in moments of leisure or glamorous domestic labour, going on vacation or arranging a get-together, in beautiful illustrations accompanied by a

character sketch; the text seems written to match the illustration, the whole feature an excuse for *Vogue* to showcase its artists. Sophie, Sylvie, Toinon, Rosine, Palmyre and Françoise were introduced as fine exemplars of “that exquisite and ephemeral creature, the young Frenchwoman of the present day”, who has “that grace, that unerring elegance, which never makes a mistake, which plays with such amazing sureness among the many snares laid daily for good taste and, for that matter, set in the path of good sense and good breeding, as well” (early August 1922: 31). The friends were not presented as beautiful strangers one might glimpse at a social event, but rather the first sign of a shift in tone from a superior, all-knowing guide to a magazine that, like these fictional women, “charms and wins a cordial admiration” and might become a confidante (*ibid.*).

While all six women were modish in some way, they showed a range of attitudes towards fashion, from informed interest to love of novelty. Sophie was said to love “elegance, old houses and old furniture, animals, books (of which she never speaks), and the arts (*idem*)” (32), while Rosine “always travels alone, finding company in her only friends, books” (35); Françoise, on the other hand, fished at her château, reading one of her favourites: “His name? It hardly matters, for what is really important is that the cover is in violet leather tooled in gold, and the margins are very, very wide” (late October 1922: 62). A seventh friend, Dominique, introduced herself as the perfect flapper: “My type—tall and very blonde, of course—is distinctly characteristic of modern times, a type which the great majority, the ‘crowd,’ strive for without success. Their efforts are in vain, for when they think they have grasped my essence, it escapes them, and when they imitate my creations of yesterday, they find that they have yet to achieve what I do to-day” (late November 1922: 40-1). She moved too fast to be painted, liked sports and smoked cigarettes—and she too was characterised by her

choice in books, as she preferred “the novels of Elinor Glyn” (40), thrilling and glamorous, if not highbrow. These characters, then, qualified *Vogue*’s approach to literature: it was pedantic to discuss it seriously, but it must be familiar. Most importantly, books signalled one’s personality as much as one’s dress.

Readers were invited to follow their example in fashion and manners because, above all, they were Parisian. In her study of the material and symbolic construction of Paris in the fashion industry, and citing David Gilbert, Agnès Rocamora argues that the lasting prestige of Paris “is not simply dependent on advertising and the media’s ability to build an attractive city, it is also an outcome of the city’s ‘credibility [...] as a centre of fashion consumption and particularly as an embodied experience of fashion’” (2000: 9 in 2009: 34). *Vogue*’s was interested in the work of Parisian couturiers, but also in what Parisians were wearing, where they walked to be seen, what artists they chose to endorse and how they carried themselves, and thus it gave credence to Paris as a site of fashion. Its informed discussion of Paris fashions, especially through direct reports from its Paris offices, was its principal source of prestige. In American *Vogue*, “Paris is mentioned almost as often as New York. [...] There were so many venerable Gallic titles in *Vogue*’s pages that it seems inconceivable that the French Revolution ever took place” (Rowlands 2005: 64). From the inception of the British edition to “at least the mid-twenties the most important feature in any issue of *Vogue* was the ‘Seen in Paris’ fashion lead, and it was the great French designers whose clothes were drawn, photographed in the Bois, and seen on actresses, film stars and socialites the world over” (Howell 1978: 9).

According to Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt, the company’s direct tapping into Parisian names and trends was the key to be perceived as “authentic”, that is, reliable, and thus to build a competitive advantage. In 1915, a year before the creation

of British *Vogue*, Condé Nast “formed a working relationship with the highly-regarded French high fashion magazine *Gazette du Bon Ton* published by Lucien Vogel”, who “was also instrumental” in Nast’s rebranding of *L’Illustration de Modes* as *Jardin des Modes* (2012: 74). The *Gazette* was advertised in British *Vogue* as “the most beautiful and expensive of all magazines [...] printed in Paris, and in French. The elegance that drifts along the Avenue des Acacias is painted in its pages. In its articles, the wit that flashes across the little tables under the café awnings at the hour of the aperitif murmurs a sophisticated word” (early July 1922: 28), reinforcing the link between the two magazines, bridging their audiences and allowing the latter to benefit from the former’s perceived exclusivity and continental sophistication. Nast’s French strategy was cemented in 1921 with the launching of a French version of *Vogue*. Significantly, its official name was *Vogue Paris*, which made it the only edition to be named after a city, not a country (Rocamora 2009: 67). The advertising market was not as strong in France, which meant French *Vogue* did not turn a profit, but that was not the main goal of the venture. Instead “it provided American *Vogue* and *Brogue* with content and endowed them with cultural authority, particularly with its studio serving as a breeding ground for new illustrative talent” (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 74). It also gave its Paris staff direct access to the heart of the fashion industry, allowing them “to exert direct influence on developments” (Cosser 2017: 16).

Paris first became the centre of the fashion industry during the reign of Louis XIV, when Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Minister of Finances, brought fashion into policy by inviting experts and favouring national companies and products (Rocamora 2009: 25). By the late seventeenth century fashion “began to be referred to by its French name, *la mode*, and to be considered something inherently and indisputably French” (DeJean in Rocamora 2009: 25); one century later, when it became associated with feminine

frivolity, “there was an intrinsic link between fashion, frivolity, Frenchness and femininity” (Jones in Rocamora, *ibid.*). Even when the court moved to Versailles fashion was still produced and sold in Paris, and thus “Parisian figures such as courtesans, actresses, *grisettes* and *marchandes de mode* emerged as influential fashion trendsetters” (Rocamora 2009: 27). Parisian fashion plates and dolls were circulated around Europe, facilitating the strong pull of French styles (*ibid.*).

The nineteenth century saw the creation of couture houses, led by Charles Frederick Worth’s *maison*, and the establishment of the *Chambre syndicale de la confection et de la couture pour dames et fillettes*, also led by Worth. Supported by the *Chambre*, couture houses established the “new rituals and rules constitutive of the modern fashion system” (29), organised in “a strict calendar for the seasonal presentation, twice a year in Paris, of couture collections, which participated in the institutionalization of the city as the ‘privileged place’ for their display” as well as the use of live mannequins and of branded labels (*ibid.*). The centrality of Paris was thus constructed and supported by deliberate policies and real institutions, but *Vogue* preferred to mystify it for dramatic flair. The “carefully dressed woman yearns” to know what the new season will bring and the answer is something “which Paris knows by instinct” (early April 1922: 37): Paris was personified as creator and prophet. Presenting the city as “a thinking being, the ultimate creator of fashion” (Rocamora 2009: 71) became a recurring trope of fashion writing.

Nast’s office at 2, rue Edouard VII, mentioned in the first section of this chapter, though chronically understaffed, was the base of operations from which fashion and society reports were sent to the main office in New York (Rowlands 2005: 85): at the heart of all *Vogues*, Elizabeth M. Sheehan writes, was “a commodified, cosmopolitan version of contemporary life” (2018: loc. 397.8-399.6). The fashion editors of each

*Vogue* travelled to Paris for the collection openings, which they attended with illustrators. Sketches and reports were done in a hurry and in secret, and the thrill and exclusivity of the process added to the value of the magazine. In early August 1922, the introduction teased: “at present *Vogue* finds itself in the position of the man who stands at the tape-machine, slipping yards of paper ribbon through anxious fingers which follow the nervous fluctuation of his pet stock. [...] News of the last mode from Paris would bring Patience herself down from her monument” (28). In early October of the same year, the main piece of the issue was loudly titled “Croquis! A Collection of quick Sketches from the early Paris Openings showing the salient Points of the Day Mode from LANVIN, WORTH, PATOU, MOLYNEUX, POIRET, MARTIAL ET ARMAND, BERNARD, ROLANDE, DRECOLL, ETC.” It was followed by a rare editor’s note, which announced over fifty sketches “reproduced direct from our artists’ sketch books in order to present them to you at this early date”, assuring readers that despite the rush, they were quite accurate(35). Indeed, “journalists were not allowed to sketch or take photographs during a showing (they could, discreetly, take notes) and embargoes enforced by the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, the industry’s governing body, meant that members of the press had to wait for six weeks to publish what they had seen” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3615). To prevent copies and espionage, models were instructed to walk faster, but some learnt to disguise themselves as buyers to sneak in and work. After the showings came the photo sessions, where “the models were usually imported from the States, traveling on their own dimes and earning next to nothing” (Rowlands 2005: 85).

Penelope Rowlands describes the work undertaken at the Paris offices in her biography of Carmel Snow, who, as fashion editor, stayed after the openings “for three weeks at a time, and sometimes longer, as other detours and duties piled up” (84). The



most important of these duties was to “review hundreds of garments, discern which ones might appeal to her readers” and find the best way to communicate them (*ibid.*). She would “select the best shots for the magazine, arranging for them to be sent first by train to the northern French ports of Cherbourg or Le Havre, and then by boat across the Atlantic to the editorial offices in New York” (86). The point, according to Grace Mirabella, who was fashion editor in the 1950s, was to “‘edit’ that ‘text’ of reported material not just by choosing words, but sorting through racks of clothes, and then picking the clothes that fit together to make a coherent story in pictures” (83). In this fashion editors would be helped by assistants, who were tasked with choosing “the clothes to be photographed as well as the model who would wear them” (77). The function of fashion editors, then, was to select pieces and construct an appealing narrative both in Paris and in their home office, as well as to meet different agents of the fashion industry, including designers, manufacturers and distributors, in order to report on developments.

The importance of receiving “word” from Paris was constantly highlighted, even—especially—during the war, when British *Vogue* carried features like “Uncensored News from the Fashion Front” (early January 1918). Unlike in fashion journalism, where the only names that mattered were those of the designers, Paris correspondents usually signed their society pieces. J.R.F. and M.H.<sup>23</sup> commented on fads and high society events attended by aristocrats and celebrities from the stage, often with a subjective, even humorous touch. Jeanne Ramon Fernandez’s account of the

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<sup>23</sup> M.H. signed contributions as early as late June 1919 until about late October 1924. In her thesis, Amanda Carrod studies Mary Hutchinson’s contributions as “Polly Flinders”, which began in late December 1923 and ended in early January 1926. She also notes “that there are several articles from Late August 1922 that appear under the initials of M.H. Given that Clive Bell and a citation from *Vogue* itself both identify Flinders as both a ‘civilised’ and a ‘witty’ ‘lady of fashion,’ it is also interesting that the articles by M.H. are related to the fashion, style and society subject matters of the type that *Vogue* readers pre-Todd were accustomed to. [...] M.H continued to write these particular kinds of features for British *Vogue* well into the final year of Todd’s tenure” (2015: 312-313). I agree with her suggestion that M.H. could well be Hutchinson, but I would note that her contributions predate Todd’s editorship and focus on Paris. Hutchinson’s contributions as Polly Flinders will be explored in the next chapter.

Peace Conference, charmingly titled “Paris Frocks that Bewitched the Conference”, described the hectic feel of the city, the extremely short and transparent gowns of its visitors, their slender silhouettes and the dancing: “Corsets? None whatever!” (late March 1919: 38) In Paris, M.H. wrote, women managed to stay young by keeping their clothes simple and practical, responding to the new world that had only recently dawned: “Those who consider clothes as an indication of the spirit of the times, as a reflection of its psychology, rather than as a mere necessity or a vehicle for agreeable extravagance, begin to realize that something of a revolution in the art of dress has taken place of late” (late December 1920: 42).

In fact, fashion and modernity fused to the point that it was impossible to tell which one drove the other: “All Paris dances, and half of Paris wears fringes; but whether Paris dances because of the fringes or wears fringe because of the dances, who can say?” (de Miomandre early March 1919: 43). Surrounded by changing fashions, or causing them to change, the *Parisienne* had a taste for novelty.

[She] admires and possesses great *souplesse d'esprit*, consequently one is never quite sure that her most emphatic tastes and decisions of to-day will not have evaporated into a fresh idea by to-morrow, and all her views may be completely changed. That is a thing which sometimes happens when the whim-some woman of fashion seizes upon something else which pleases her, a ‘something else’ which she likes, selects, and impresses upon the mode. It seems to me unlikely that there is among us at present any woman of sufficient prestige to accomplish this, and, on the other hand, there is an inexhaustible variety in this season’s mode to satisfy every taste. (J.R.F. early March 1919: 61)

*Vogue* admitted that no living woman could influence fashion on her own—except for the *Parisienne*. Unlike *le Tout-Paris*, that is, the Parisian *beau monde*,<sup>24</sup> the *Parisienne* is not a more-or-less identifiable collective but an abstract: she is “the apex of fashion. The incarnation of Paris, she is the model to follow, a visual and written metaphor,

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<sup>24</sup> Agnès Rocamora locates the origin of the term *Tout-Paris* in 1820 and explains that it did not literally mean all Paris, but an elite, which included wealthy businessmen and politicians but also artists and writers, that is, the same cast of characters that populated the Paris columns of *Vogue* (2009: 28).

therefore, for the high symbolic value that has long been attributed to the French capital” (Rocamora 2009: xvi).<sup>25</sup>

Though the *Parisienne* existed as an artifice, *Vogue* also reported on the doings of flesh and blood Parisian women; the ambiguous interplay between rhetorical image and real character was already felt before the interwar period. In 1916, recalling an encounter with a French woman, Rebecca West wrote that she “was an achievement as delicate, as deliberately selective of the soft and gracious things, as difficult a piece of craftsmanship, as a Conder fan” (in Scott 1990: 580). She found her somewhat lacking, and yet the meeting caused a crisis in her sense of worth, as she did not feel as vital:

She had trained like an athlete for this elegance, and her feats deserved more than a moment’s attention. It was strange that in spite of her tremendous and successful concentration upon her person she aroused no interest in her personality. One found in her that association of vividness of presence and absence of individuality which one finds in non-Europeans. [...] one forgot the soul that doubtless inhabited the Frenchwoman, that doubtless knew ardours and loneliness, in her fitness and conspicuousness as part of the system of the *chic*. [...] And I—I was a black-browed thing scowling down on the inkstain that I saw reflected across the bodice of my evening dress. I was immeasurably distressed by this by-product of the literary life. It was a new evening dress, it was becoming, it was expensive. Already I was upsetting the balance of my nerves by silent rage; [...] that in the end I would probably write some article I did not in the least want to write in order to pay for a new one. In fact I would commit the same sin that I loathed in these two women. I would waste on personal ends vitality that I should have conserved for my work. [...] I perceived suddenly that in every woman there is just such an instinct [for elegance] which urges her, just so far as it is not resisted by her intelligence and education, towards an existence such as that of the Frenchwoman. (580-3)

*Vogue* was not as troubled by the *Parisienne*, and in fact referenced her constantly, as she articulated modish femininity in a way that readers could follow. Her elegance was eternal, even when that contradicted orthodox accounts of fashion history. In medieval times, the *Parisienne* already comprehended “the essential fact that the aim of the mode should be to supplement natural beauty by refinement of costume”, and developed “a subtle and unerring sense of the just relation of the costume to the mood and the

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<sup>25</sup> A recurring figure since the development of the fashion plate, caught in the feedback of material and discursive realities, the *Parisienne* is said to be alluring, witty, rebellious and bold. Though an ideal, one might just come close to her by owning, wearing or displaying certain commodities that are associated with her. As a figure, she has been commodified herself, naming products from perfumes to chocolates. See Rocamora (2009) for an in-depth study of the construction, dissemination and development of the figure of the *Parisienne* in the arts and in fashion media.

individuality of the wearer, its power to emphasize or to nullify completely the expression of a given mood” (early October 1921: 80). Her “innate good taste and sense of beauty and fitness” survived into the Restoration period (late March 1925: 68). She invariably knew the importance of head-dresses, hats, water-proof rain-coats, mannish suits, pyjamas, bath-suits, or whatever item was being discussed. Through “corporeal signs” conveyed by material goods “and other discursive means” modish women could construct and display the “fabrications” that Judith Butler calls “performative” enactments, turning the *Parisienne* into an attainable identity (in Rocamora 2009: 123). Such a proposition “characterizes fashion media discourse and consumer culture more generally” (*ibid.*), and indeed throughout the interwar period *Vogue* would spell out the signs that readers ought to incorporate into their self-presentation, often arguing in favour of an experimental and playful approach to dress.

A foothold in Paris gave *Vogue* authenticity and prestige, but the local fashion industry also gained from its presence, as *Vogue* provided its couturiers “with a crucial link to the wealthy consumers of America and Britain” and pioneered “the use of fashion shows with professional models” (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 82). *Vogue* underscored its own importance as an intermediary between Paris and the rest of the world, stating that “it would be virtually impossible for any woman living anywhere outside of the comparatively few acres of earth that comprise the city of Paris, to be fashionably dressed this winter without having perused the next issue of *Vogue*—the Paris Openings Number” (early October 1922: 33).

### 1.3.2. “Snobisme and Opinion”: *Taste and Habitus*

The *Parisienne* was as elegant as she was smart: “intellectual distinction is the ideal today of all women, even those least fitted to aspire to brilliance” (J.R.F. late June 1919: 63). That meant knowing the right people, wearing the right clothes, embodying the right values and reading the right books as prescribed by *Vogue*. The shifting discourse around the legitimacy of the consumption practices of middle and upper-class women, their status as leisure activity or productive labour and their moral value or lack thereof, was held together by one concept that I have done my best to sidestep until now: taste. The concept of taste was what legitimised women as creators and managers of the respectability—and thus social position—of their household in the nineteenth century. As the values of rationality, efficiency and design gained ground, it was their taste that was put into question: homes were too fussy, too cluttered, and women were too distracted by soft, pretty things. *Vogue*, then, was not only a leading fashion magazine but one in a long tradition of guides to taste; consequently, it approached women both as capable, interested participators in modernity and as frivolous, irrational beings in need of close guidance.

The terms *style* and *taste* are somewhat tangled—even more so if we also consider the *lifestyle*, which further ties the two together. All three refer to a set of preferred practices, that is, a manner of doing things that a group holds in high esteem, and all three are commonly used in discussions of fashion. Lisa Cohen refers to style as “rhetorical, sexual, sartorial”, and describes it as:

a riddle of unconscious excitements and conscious choices, [...] a way to fascinate oneself and others—and to transform oneself and the world. It is an attempt to make the ordinary and the tragic more bearable. Style is a didactic impulsion that aspires to banish doubt, a form of certainty about everything elusive and uncertain. Style is at once fleeting and lasting, and it has everything to do with excess—even when its excesses are those of austerity or self-denial. It is too much and it is nothing at all, and it tells all kinds of stories about the seams between public and private life. As a form of pleasure, for oneself and for an audience, and as an expression of the wish to exceed and confound expectations, to be exceptional, style is a response to the terror of invisibility and isolation—a wish for inclusion. Above all, it is a productive act that, although it

concerns itself with the creation and experience of brilliant surfaces, is powerful because it unsettles what we think we know about the superficial and the profound. (2012: loc. 59-72)

This definition, though somewhat nebulous, is appealing in that it mirrors the way in which fashion writing tends to underscore dynamism, imagination and fractal engagement with temporality; that is, modernity. To be stylish, then, is to display a taste that is idiosyncratic and grounded in now-ness.

Twenty-first century critical definitions of taste, meanwhile, are usually either based on or responding to Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of the concept. Famously, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (1984: 6). Aesthetic experience can only be explained "as a socially and historically constituted disposition" (Rocamora 2015: 241), and thus taste is "a marker of class [...] the social arbitrary that informs cultural practices" (242). Bourdieu, Agnès Rocamora writes, seems to rely on Georg Simmel's trickle-down theory of fashion, according to which "trends emanate at the top of social hierarchy" to be emulated by those below (243). When the latter catch up, the former establish new trends to differentiate themselves.<sup>26</sup> According to Bourdieu, taste is learnt from one's social background and naturalised through the habitus, that is, one's unconscious dispositions and preferences, which include one's aesthetic tastes, values and "ways of thinking" (Bell and Hollows 2006: 10), as well as one's embodied behaviours and dispositions, "ways of talking, moving [and] acting [...] Therefore taste is carried by the body, which helps explain the emphasis on body discipline and bodily transformation in contemporary lifestyle discourses and practices" (*ibid.*). The habitus "provides a link between the individual and the social: the way we come to live in our bodies is structured by our social position in the world but these structures are reproduced only through the embodied actions of individuals" (Entwistle 2000: 36-37).

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<sup>26</sup> This explanation has its shortcomings, and many scholars have criticised Bourdieu for repeating it without considering other more complex contemporary understandings of fashion. Rocamora (2015) points out Crane (2000), Edwards (2010) and Rocamora (2002).

In other words, one's bodily dispositions and practices, one's "mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu and Wacquant in Rocamora 2015: 241) are limited and conditioned by one's position and society. Importantly, individuals can adapt their dispositions and practices to reshape the society they live in—to an extent. As Rocamora clarifies:

The notion of habitus is aimed at bypassing the opposition structure/agency [...] Structured by their habitus, agents always seek to maximise their profit and follow the strategy most appropriate to their interest. It is a strategy, however, without a conscious strategist as it is the habitus itself that shapes agents' positions and position takings. Their feel for the game is an incorporated disposition dictated by their habitus. (*ibid.*)

Just like his understanding of fashion, Bourdieu's theorisation of the habitus has received some criticism: "his analysis ends up veering somewhat to the structuralist and deterministic side of the opposition, with habitus a conduit for reproduction rather than agentive transformative power" (243). Moreover, his agents are "fuelled by the quest for profit" and are thus purely "calculative strategists, with little room made for disinterested practice and affects such as emotion or pain".<sup>27</sup> This critique will be particularly relevant to my discussion of the aesthetic and emotional side of the labour of *Vogue* editors, who I will argue used their position as taste-makers not only for the benefit of the magazine and their own career but also out of personal friendship and beliefs about artistic merit and progress, even to the detriment of the former.

The fact that one's social position is articulated through one's body as much as through one's consumer practices was certainly manifest in *Vogue*. It recommended clothes to wear, sports to play and spaces to see and be seen in, but it also discussed the changes in manners after the war, gave its blessing to wear short hair and make-up, and praised values and dispositions such as daintiness, dynamism and curiosity, and thus can be defined as a taste-maker, as it designated what was tasteful for a specific group of readers, the urban, wealthy Englishwomen that *Vogue* appealed to as "we". Its

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<sup>27</sup> Rocamora (2015) follows Devine (2010), Lamont (1992), Reay (2010), Rocamora (2001) and Skeggs (2004) in her criticism of Bourdieu's conceptualization of the habitus.

“symbolic codes of stylized behaviour, adornment, taste and *habitus*” were thus shared by “affective groupings” and can therefore be collectively described as a “lifestyle” (Shields in Entwistle 2000: 225). Its target readership would not have found the idea of using fashionable material goods to mediate their presentation and engagement with modernity at all strange, as they were already used to “assert their positions as arbiters of style and taste” (Giles 2004: 103). Moreover, many communities and groups beyond the nebulous section of society made up by wealthy women with an interest in fashion had long used consumption practices to define and present themselves. Jennifer Wicke understands the circulation of Omega Workshop products as a sign of the Bloomsbury group’s “coterie consumption”, “a group activity meaning both ‘the consumption of art by a coterie’ and the ‘marketing and consumption of their art (and thought and lifestyle) as produced by a celebrated coterie’” (in Green 2017: 61). Though the editors of *Vogue* tended to move in the same social circles as the artists, critics and writers they commissioned, their affiliations tended to shift and to vary in intensity, and so I would not describe their practices as coterie consumption. Nevertheless, they did repeatedly point to specific artists and coteries as producers of tasteful goods.

Through sartorial practices, one can signal social position, profession and even political or religious ideology: “Dress operates between individuals as an inter-subjective experience as well as a subjective one” (Entwistle 2000: 35); on meeting a stranger in a social setting, one of the first things we do is attempt to “read” their clothes and the “taste” or lack thereof they reveal. If the stranger’s dress is wholly unconventional, it may be that it is “consciously oppositional to fashion” and thus still readable through “its relationship to the dominant aesthetic propagated by fashion” (48) or simply opaque, which is always disquieting.<sup>28</sup> Dress was a marker of class before

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<sup>28</sup> Entwistle writes that there is cultural capital but also “subcultural capital”, which is often articulated through style in a way that signals membership both to insiders and outsiders “to the extent that the



gender. Efrat Tseëlon writes that this demarcation “grounded certain sartorial practices in moral values” (1995: 127). In the nineteenth century, the “genuine” landed gentry could distinguish themselves from the pretensions of the nouveaux-riches not only through lineage, but through gentility: “This code held that to be a *lady* was a standard of conduct which included rules of etiquette, elegance and subtlety”, that is, a habitus, an inherited know-how that went beyond wealth (*ibid.*). A true lady would know not only what to wear, but also how to wear it. For the middle and upper classes, being adept at complex codes of protocol and exhibiting proper bodily dispositions—having manners—was of key importance. Class was associated “with breeding, elegance and restraint; for the middle classes, respectability and keeping up appearances were governing concerns in matters of dress and social comportment” (Dyhouse 2010: 3). By contrast, the flashier glamour of Hollywood “had a more limited appeal” (*ibid.*).

“Daintiness” was a particularly gendered quality. *Vogue* reflected that although “constant pernicky attention to neatness” may hamper efficiency or chill genius, “in the ordinary affairs of ordinary people, a little thought concentrated upon how they might spare their fellow mortals a great deal of trouble by taking a small amount themselves, would tend to make the world go round more smoothly” (early April 1922: 67), siding with unambitious neatness and common sense even against prestigious artistic creation. *Vogue* commended eccentricity as often as it did propriety, but only when supported by lineage. Perhaps because bourgeois values were perceived as boring and passé, good taste was said to be the preserve of the true aristocrat:

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commodity becomes shorthand for the group itself” (2000: 51). While the term “subculture” is more commonly used to describe youth movements of the late twentieth century, it can still be applied to loosely-defined groups of the interwar period that were often portrayed in *Vogue*, like the Bloomsbury group or the original Bright Young People. In the case of the former, *Vogue* showcased them as individual creators and rarely explored their affiliations behind the scenes, showing the stylistic choices that brought them together but only occasionally spelling them out by name. In the case of the latter, it was their lifestyle rather than their individual personalities that occupied their appearances in the magazine. Though *Vogue* was somewhat interested in the lifestyle and artistic manifestations of some (upper-class) subcultures, it was less interested in why they developed or what their ideologies were. See the chapter “Fashion and Identity” in Entwistle (2000: 112-39)

Never before in the world's history has public opinion ruled so tyrannously and over such vast masses of humanity. The newspapers, the cinema, and now the wireless telephone, combine to create a uniformity of opinion that is continent-wide. And the more democratic and middle-class a country is, the more tyrannous is this opinion the more slavishly do people desire to conform, the more bitterly they hate those who are different. [...] The only people who are free from this tyranny and who do not feel the passionate desire to be and do and think exactly like their fellows are the aristocrat and, possibly, the tramp [...] A powerful aristocratic class, such as is constituted by the 'good families' of England, is one of the surest guarantees of personal liberty that a country can possess. [...] The aristocrat is not merely eccentric himself; he is generally prepared to protect the eccentrics of other classes. The aristocrat, for instance, is the natural protector of the artist—than whom no one is more odious to the bourgeoisie. He is even ready to defend those with unpopular political opinions and to adopt them with a strange disinterested passion himself. From Shelley and Byron to Scawen Blunt the English aristocrat has been the apostle of personal liberty, the sworn enemy to popular prejudice. Let us thank heaven for his existence. But for him we might find ourselves to-day in the position of the citizens of a certain great republic on the further shores of the Atlantic. (Early November 1922: 69)

Some pages ago *Vogue* had asked the reader to become a patron of the arts; therefore, following the logic of this article, one was to imitate the aristocracy. Eccentricity was commended over self-possession; after all, only some can afford to be truly singular in style, and so eccentricity is exclusive. Significantly, this essay appeared early in *Vogue's* modernist period, and indeed manifested a deprecation of mass culture. However, it did not ask the reader to become an artist but rather to rebel against uniformity in taste through practices of fashion and patronage; that is, through consumption or, at least, spending. In "Snobisme and Opinion", locating Britain as some sort of stylistic mediator of continental know-how, *Vogue* attempted to define "what 'is done' and what 'is not done' at any given moment of the human story [...] taste, opinion and custom" (Late May 1922: 55). By-passing "snobbery", it landed on the French *snobisme*, which;

possesses this strange paradoxical attribute, that while its influence is continuous and steady, the opinions, tastes, habits and ideas which it imposes so ruthlessly and incessantly are perpetually changing [...] As a general rule, of course snobisme is based on the practice of the 'best people'; but what it is that influences the 'best people' is another problem. In most cases, one supposes, it is a few individuals or a single powerful mind expressing itself personally or in a book [...] But in a democratized American world it is likely to draw its force more and more from the practice of the great middle class for whom the daily papers are written. (Late May 1922: 55)

*Vogue* predicted a grotesque future for *snobisme* when the masses and not creative individuals became the taste-makers.

Faye Hammill explains that “sophistication” was “associated with a degree of hedonism, an unshockable attitude in sexual matters, a distrust of bourgeois values, open-handedness shading into extravagance, and a focus on the pleasure of the moment”, as well as with “social aspiration” and “detachment” that undermined its potential for subversion (2010: 4); by the twenties, while retaining those connotations, it was discussed as a positive quality (7). It also connoted a degree of artifice, which “certainly connects camp to sophistication, though sophistication fluctuates between exaggeration and restraint” (15), as well as distinction and urbane glibness all tangled with nostalgia and aesthetic experimentation.<sup>29</sup> *Vogue* manifested all those qualities, though laced with contradictions. On the one hand, it celebrated the return to modest modes, which it argued meant a return to proper manners and not the other way around; on the other, its characteristic tone always left room for ironic readings. In any case, while it never wholly committed to a progressive position regarding women’s rights and formal education, it always underscored intellectual pursuits and a sensible yet open mindset as key to social success. Always returning to the eighteenth-century salon as referent, *Vogue* advised readers to keep up with the arts and to cultivate their conversational skills: to be seen at the opera wearing the right clothes was not enough, as they ought to be able to discuss what they saw. Therefore, sophistication tinted all daily practices beyond buying and dressing.

As most studies of British *Vogue* in the interwar period have focused on the editorship of Dorothy Todd, they have found that her version of the magazine “sought to foster the idea that clothing was not the only manifestation of fashion: there were also fashions in cultural practices and thus the magazine promoted the very modern notion that an intellectual woman was a fashionable woman and vice versa” (Carrod 2015: 87).

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<sup>29</sup> For a study of the complex meanings of “sophistication” during the interwar period, see the chapter “Melancholy, Modernity and the Middlebrow: the Twenties and Thirties” (Hammill 2010: 113-63).

By discussing fashion and high culture in equal terms, the former's charge of frivolity was somewhat neutered by the latter's driving force of "intelligent curiosity and knowledge" (126). Todd's *Vogue* not only bridged these two aspects of modernity: it made informed modishness its *raison d'être*. Though high culture was not as frequently showcased under the editorship of Elspeth Champcommunal, it is important to note that her version of *Vogue* praised those same qualities. J.R.F. reflected on the "smart severity" of Parisian women in early July 1920:

It seems to me that this restraint is not the result of chance; it is, honestly and actually, a thing well thought out and intentional, which indicates that the firm and serious poise of our women is fundamental. We are living now in a period most propitious for intellectual cultivation; there are lectures, concerts, and visits to the studios of painters. As many moments as we care to pass may be spent among the serious things which form taste. [... There is] an alliance which is being established between art and the women of our modern society. There is not a house, not a drawing-room, large, or of any importance at all, where all phases of modern art are not discussed. (45)

The necessity of engaging with a wide range of cultural goods and attitudes, therefore, predated Todd. "Education", Carol Dyhouse notes, "is also about dreams and aspirations (not just the targets and skills of contemporary policymakers), and fashion, cinema and magazines, like educational institutions, offer glimpses of different worlds, different models and different cultural understandings about ways of being female" (2010: 6). *Vogue* did not limit modish womanhood to elegant aloofness, but made a case for curiosity and candour. An essay on post-war manners argued that: "it is the differences of superficial fashion which mislead the hasty generalisers—prophets, professors, and pedants. Without question, we are freer in our language, our gestures, our dress, than some generations have been. But such freedom does not necessarily spell depravity. On the contrary, it may be indicative of the candour of innocence" (early April 1921: 63). In other words, it was fashionable to be open-minded and receptive, to answer the call of adventure.

To be smart, then, was to consciously acquire and exhibit knowledge and cultural experiences, including but not limited to modish clothes and proper bodily

dispositions. It was through smartness that sartorial and other consumption practices could become strategies for women to engage with modernity, but smartness could also be used as a refuge from modern life. After all, there was pleasure in studying things in depth, acquiring expertise, and doing them well. In fact, it seems, that could stop the rush of contemporary time.

With her crowded schedule of work and play, the modern woman seems in danger of losing a certain reposeful grace born of leisure hours and peaceful solitude. It is a grace which contributes to her own happiness and also to the pleasure of those about her, and so is doubly worth the saving. And its survival does not in any sense imply the sacrifice of the charm of vivacity and alertness. On the contrary, with the multiplication of feminine interests and diversions, there have developed a hectic haste and an all but fretful gaiety which often suggest frayed nerves rather than healthful effervescence. An irritating brusqueness comes from this sense of perpetual preoccupation. In doing a multitude of things with superficial cleverness, one forgets the fine art of doing anything with perfection. Quantity rather than quality becomes the standard. Yet the simplest action, the most casual conversation reveals either finesse or crudity. With real breadth of life, there should come poise as well as nimbleness.

Somewhere amid her feverish activity, the wise woman will preserve a kind of intangible No-Man's Land where vagrant thoughts may steal upon her and where she may possess her soul in peaceful isolation. Some people are able to keep this individual calm in the midst of the seething multitudes. Indeed, the blithe indifference of the crowd may provide the very seclusion desired. Yet whether one chooses a solitary walk at sunset or a fire-lit hour in the library, the entertainment of one's personality should not be overlooked. Otherwise, the depth which adds its lure of reserve and mystery will be lacking.

Occasional solitude encourages the leisurely tasting of life which marks the [sic] connoisseur. Fragrance, colours, lights, shadows, all shed their full value upon the person who stops to look and listen. Like Wordsworth's daffodils, these rare moments, wistful or gay, enrich the changing fabric of experience and feeling. One gracious woman, whose activity in clubs, politics, and social life is so complicated and exacting that one marvels at her seemingly exhaustless energy and enthusiasm, has confessed that she goes periodically to a strange environment in order to recover from the demands of her position and to 'find herself.' At some quiet hotel or pension she sleeps as late as she pleases, with no telephone calls to disturb her, no luncheons or dinners to accept or refuse. She walks about unfamiliar streets or country ways, and in her incognito is able to breathe the air of indolence and leisure. The dullness of fatigue and the strain of continual occupation drop away. She loses a tendency to cynicism which grows upon her if she neglects this habit of occasional seclusion, and she returns to her busy round of interests with an engaging buoyancy which is balanced and enhanced by a cool reservoir of strength and self-knowledge.

The elusive charm of individuality needs this spaciousness of occasional removal, as well as the stimulus of social contact. Conventional holidays are now apt to be crowded as full as the busiest season in town. Not all of us can flit secretly to a remote spot to recuperate, but every one may evolve some sort of spiritual withdrawal from which to return refreshed and whole. One may have hours upon hours of isolation and yet lack the restful loneliness that enriches and recreates. Or, instead, one may steal transient pauses in the daily whirl and exclude the press of distracting trivialities.

There are people who say they cannot endure to be alone. And there is something of the human parasite about such personalities. They are continually sapping the vitality of others and contributing nothing in return. They are like showy plants without roots of their own, or like echoes, existing only through the repetition of what they hear. But the leaders, the originators, those who have the most attraction for their fellows, feel the solid earth under their feet and speak something beside mechanical

imitations. It is, after all, a selfish world. But the old grace of consideration, of giving one's best in terms of living, is as gratefully received as ever. And, logically enough, the man or woman who has most to give receives the highest dividends.

Love of simple things, delight in exquisite gradations, an appreciation of beauty, whether in roadside weeds or royal gardens, and the ability to reflect those individual responses easily and unobtrusively come to the wise woman who finds time to enter her own secluded sanctuary. Her repose of spirit forms a beneficent background for the gayest of moods. It gives something of the benign mellowness of fine old tapestry or the exquisite flexibility of rare lace. So with all her modern efficiency, her frank camaraderie, her eager joyousness, every woman should cultivate the enduring grace which outlasts mere youthful freshness and physical magnetism. Its lure is as old as Sheba and as new as the latest coiffure. It will fascinate when cheeks have lost their bloom and eyes their sparkle. And it will add immeasurably to the happiness of the possessor, from the cradle to the grave. (Early February 1922: 51)

Few essays articulate Rita Felski's conceptualisation of modernity as the awareness of living in modern times as clearly and suggestively as this one. Its imagery is that of time sped up to confusion, threatening one's sense of self: the life of the "modern woman" was a "daily whirl" among the "seething multitudes" with a "crowded schedule", "a hectic haste"; its superficial gaiety was in fact "fretful" and had a negative psychological impact, "frayed nerves" and "irritating brusqueness" that could lead to "cynicism". To defend herself against the onslaught she must replenish her stores in solitary leisure, ideally somewhere where she had no obligations, significantly called a "No-Man's Land"—an image of course suggestive of Virginia Woolf's room of one's own. Excessive stimuli from outside could be countered by reflection and, importantly, cultural consumption. This essay did not suggest topics to reflect on or the types of books she should turn to. Moral and intellectual edification were implicit, but it was more important that she turn to aesthetic or sensorial pleasure. Only when she knew herself could this modern woman display the qualities that make up smartness: she was an individual, one of "the leaders"; "wise", "mellow", "flexible", tranquil of spirit and with the "gayest of moods"; graceful, truly alluring.

### 1.3.3. “Graceful Living”: Cultural Capital and Aesthetic Labour

After Dorothy Todd was fired, it was argued that her highbrow preferences and Bloomsbury affiliations had turned off readers and caused a downturn in sales (Reed 2006a and 2006b; Cohen 2012; Carrod 2015), relying to an extent on the narrative that the Bloomsbury Group itself was also a coterie, elitist and disengaged. The truth of that claim and the construction of said narrative will be explored in the next chapter: what I want to highlight now is that this explanation for *Vogue*'s falling sales lays the blame at the feet of an individual, the editor, and more specifically on her taste, on her championing the *wrong* cultural goods and bodily dispositions for the target readership. Studies of the early years of *Vogue* have described the success or lack thereof of its editors in similar terms. Elspeth Champcommunal's strong suit was said to be fashion, her weakness publishing; Todd was known for her advocacy of modernism, but was said to neglect business. Accounts of the frantic labour at the Paris offices and of Condé Nast's shrewd understanding of the fashion industry have shown that *Vogue* built its prestige as a reliable, influential publication by working in close proximity with couturiers, distributors and advertisers. Therefore, the editor could not concern herself exclusively with the aesthetics of the magazine; she also had to tend to its commercial side through economic as well as personal management. As Ilaria Coser writes, the editor must have “the ability to establish strong, authentic relationships with all *Vogue* customers” (2017: 15). She cites an illuminating insight from Harry Yoxall, the business manager: “the editor ‘does not need to be able to write or design herself’ but, like a conductor, her job is ‘to evoke and direct’ the talents of the players in the orchestra” (in Coser 2017: 15). Such talents had to be nurtured, but before that they had to be found.

Coser also notes that, in “disseminating and validating the mode to the wealthy social elite and to those aspiring to join it” and training readers in its ways, *Vogue* was in fact participating in the construction and perpetuation of that group (2017: 12). However, “this required the magazine itself and the people employed by it—particularly its fashion editors—to *continuously* construct and maintain appropriate social personas as authentic and undisputed arbiters of taste” (*ibid.*). Neither Edna Woolman Chase nor Todd and her successor Alison Settle had been born to aristocratic circles. Instead, they had to work their way into them; they were considered professionals and “were well remunerated financially” (18). Condé Nast himself, wealthy in money, married someone with even better connections. His wife’s perceived chic allowed Nast to become “known for serious refinement—in his dress, his way of entertaining, his very aura” (Rowlands 2005: 58), and the magazine itself benefitted, as Mrs. Nast, née Clarisse Coudert, was an accomplished decorator and “gave *Vogue* the rarefied environment it deserved” (*ibid.*). The relationships between *Vogue* staff members were varied and shifting, ranging from suspicion to romance, and, more conventionally, rivalry and mentorship. Penelope Rowlands notes that despite Chase’s reminiscences of *Vogue* as “an integrated, affectionate family” (in 2005: 80) she was “feared, even respected, but hardly universally liked” (68). Carmel Snow would not turn to her for mentorship, but to Nast or Frank Crowninshield, but she, in turn, overworked her juniors as well (80). The success or failure of their careers therefore depended on a tangled web of economic power, social and professional ability and personal preference.

Meanwhile *Vogue* counted on the contributions of young upper-class women of the type that was often reported on as *débutante*, who “were paid low wages for more irregular and insubstantial content, but added chic by reporting on the ‘in’ places, and doubled as upper-class models” (Coser 2017: 18). The figure of the society reporter was



recognisable during the interwar period, a trope of fashionable novels, and was not necessarily a young woman. Like a related figure, the lady interviewer, the society reporter would have “obtained access” to her objects of discussion “not through skill but through social position” (Roach 2018: loc. 549.7). They included Ankaret Jackson, Nancy Mitford, Eleanor Smith and Patricia Ward, of whom Chase wrote in 1938 that “she knows the right sort of people – young, well-bred and sport-loving” (in Cox and Mowatt 2012: 82). *Vogue* also cultivated relationships with older aristocrats renowned for their engagement with the arts, like Marthe Bibesco, Nancy Cunard, Ottoline Morrell or Vita Sackville-West, as well as children of prominent political or theatrical families. Its men contributors, by contrast, tended to have more diverse origins; lords and princes were noticeably absent.

Despite “the illusory sense that taste is individual”, it is significantly informed by the habitus and “by the class trajectory of individuals seeking to reposition themselves by acquiring a cultural identity consonant with a desired class position” (Brown and Grover 2012: 14-5). What allows an individual to reposition themselves in terms of class Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital”: the “dispositions we bring to our everyday practices, demonstrated by, for example, the goods we choose to consume. Those who are rich in cultural capital not only legitimate their own dispositions as *the* legitimate dispositions (they have the power to do so because they possess symbolic capital), but also pass on these cultural resources to their children” (Bell and Hollows 2006: 9-10). The taste of *Vogue* must be perceived as thoroughly reliable, and thus its staff, regardless of their origin, must acquire and display a considerable amount of cultural capital. Said capital, as articulated, disseminated and ratified in *Vogue*, had much in common with the aristocratic tastes of centuries ago, though brought over to modern times. As conceptualised by Bourdieu, one’s capital—economic, social,

symbolic or cultural—determines one’s position in a field, “and field struggles are also struggles to determine the legitimate forms of capital and their composition” (Rocamora 2015: 240). “Economic capital” is self-explanatory;

social capital refers to the strength of their contacts and their network, symbolic capital to the amount of status they hold, and cultural capital—renamed ‘information capital’ in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996) – to the set of cultural resources, whether embodied, in bodily manners for instance, objectified, such as in books or works of art, or institutionalized, in diplomas for instance, which allows one to gain social power and distinction (*ibid.*).

It is not only the legitimate form of capital that is at stake in these struggles, but also its distribution: “Capital is unequally distributed amongst a field and this unequal distribution participates in the structuring of the field whilst in turn a particular field determines the force or value of the kinds of capital that may circulate in it and be drawn on and accumulated to establish one’s position” (*ibid.*).

Agnès Rocamora writes that “cultural capital displayed through appropriate, in-the-know outfits, itself dependent on economic and social capitals, is key to one’s membership of the field of fashion”, as can be observed in events like Fashion Week (2015: 240). Information and acquisition of fashionable clothes functions as “fashion capital”, allowing the wearer “access to such news and big names [...] to key events such as the shows, an access which in turn allows one to consolidate one’s capital and further settles one’s position in the field” (245). Fashion capital can be worn or otherwise displayed, but it can also be built through business. The reliability and influence of *Vogue* depended on its staff accessing the spaces where fashion news were made, and thus on their successful display of fashion capital. In fact, a degree of fashion capital was required to work for *Vogue* in the first place: the “strict dress code” imposed by Edna Chase was famously “costly, despite the fact that she paid her hirelings a pittance” (Ronald 2019: 154). Fortunately, once acquired, fashion capital became easier to maintain and accumulate: “When she shopped for herself, Carmel [Snow] was no

doubt offered the minuscule prices, known as the ‘prix de jeune fille,’ offered to the young and socially prominent or, even better, the more-or-less nonexistent ones, reserved for ‘mannequins du monde.’ (Women in either category gave a fashion house enormous cachet.)” (Rowlands 2005: 87). *Vogue* staff could acquire fashionable clothes at cheaper prices precisely because they were key players in the fashion industry, which added to their prestige at an individual level while feeding back into the magazine and the couturiers that provided them. Coveted items might circulate in the office, facilitating access to certain circles and events to those who had not amassed enough economic capital: Rowlands writes that Snow would lend copywriter Lois Long “her all-important Chanel—an impossible acquisition on a copywriter’s salary—as needed for social events” (82). Alison Settle, editor of British *Vogue*, received about “£250 per annum” as “a dress and entertaining allowance [...] out of the annual salary of £2000 stated in her contract” (Coser 2017: 14).<sup>30</sup>

Social capital, that is, the editors’ networks, was also integral to their legitimacy as professionals. The staff of *Vogue* accessed the most influential agents in the field of fashion—and made their magazine one of them—by building alliances within the industry as well as with individual taste-makers, the leading figures of modern art and design and their high society patrons. These alliances could only be built through the editors’ acquisition and display of cultural capital, including fashion capital. Starting off from Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of bodily dispositions, Anne Witz et al. describe aesthetic labour as the process through which corporations mobilise and objectify employees’ bodily and aesthetic dispositions to convert them into economic capital (2003). While the notion of aesthetic labour results from the analysis of neoliberal practices and is thus anachronistic, it is still useful to describe the work of *Vogue*

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<sup>30</sup> Ilaria Coser compares that allowance with the price of “five-bedroom flats in South Kensington”, “advertised for rent in *The Times* in January 1935 for £200–300 per year” (2017: 23).

editors, who were expected to articulate the values of the magazine—modernity, elegance, experimentation within the habitus of the middle and upper classes—in their personal presentation, especially when interacting with the social and cultural elite the magazine was supposed to appeal to.

*Vogue*'s position on the avant-garde visibly shifted during the interwar period from doubtful to modernist to middlebrow, and so its editors must have had a degree of freedom in their choice of aesthetics. Despite their differing perspectives on culture and taste, however, they all aimed to articulate a language of smartness and to set the “fashions of the mind”, and so they must network with the cultural and social elites. What changed with each editor, then, was the elite group that shared their vision. Other than that, their strategies were similar. The accumulation and use of social capital was an all-day job, as editors were expected to represent the magazine outside the office by hosting parties, displaying the right dress and décor and facilitating correspondence and mutual reviewing. Madge Garland's relationship with Virginia Woolf is an illuminating example of such a professional relationship, in which work is commissioned during leisure hours and cultural capital is exchanged for social capital. In her recollection of Virginia Woolf, collected by Joan Russell Noble, Garland remembered that “she, Dody Todd and I sometimes lunched together when they were in the process of being commissioned”; Todd “had an extraordinary gift for making people feel that they, and only they, could write about a particular subject. She had the ability to approach the right person in the right way and managed to persuade most of the literary figures of the day to contribute” (1972: 173). As fashion editor, Garland managed Woolf's photoshoot at Maurice Beck and Helen Macgregor's studio, meeting her there. There were no lines between professional and personal relationships, or working and leisure hours. She reminisced:

The luncheon parties involved with commissioning the articles always provided the most pleasant part of our day. Dody studied the likes and dislikes of her guests very carefully; she remembered that Virginia hated going into restaurants and much preferred to have lunch in a house or flat with people whom she knew. While thinking how best to overcome this unusual situation, she mentioned Virginia's dislike of restaurants to a friend of hers, Marcel Boulestin. At this time Marcel was music critic for the French newspaper *Le Temps*; he had a flat in Southampton Row, where he cooked his favourite French dishes in his own kitchen. He disliked English food—saying it was badly cooked and so dull.

When Marcel heard about Virginia's antipathy towards restaurants he suggested he should arrange the whole meal and that the luncheon party should be held in his flat. It was a marvellous idea. Dody knew that the food would be superb and the surroundings suitable to the occasion. In the end, Marcel produced some splendid dishes and his friend Robin Adair waited on us. Alan Walton, who was a well-known and talented artist, and the novelist Leo Myers were there too. The party was a great success and Virginia enjoyed herself enormously. After this happy luncheon party we said to Marcel that it would be wonderful if he owned a small restaurant to which all of us could go just to meet and enjoy meals arranged by him. And this is what happened. Leo Myers, who was rich, put up the money, Marcel took over some small premises in Leicester Square, and Alan Walton did the decorations. It was just for French food and was so small that it was really like a club; we never went there without knowing everyone, which was one of its great charms. And so it was partly owing to Virginia and her dislike of restaurants that Marcel started his own unique restaurant, Boulestin's, which was to become so famous in later years. (*Ibid.*)

Therefore, Marcel Boulestin's small restaurant, which served elegant French food, was created and frequented by artists: most importantly, it had an affective affiliation with *Vogue*, as its editors had planted its seeds, and was thus was the perfect nexus of cultural and social prestige, modern consumption and tasteful display. It became a favoured space for the editors to work, and in turn they commissioned Boulestin himself to write numerous columns about food and wine between 1923 and 1924. It was at Boulestin's that Woolf, again lunching with Garland, praised the latter's outfit:

The ensemble which Virginia Woolf particularly admired was a jumper suit and loose, long coat of flowered silk by Bianchini in a pattern of rose-pink and black on a white ground. Both garments and the wide-brimmed hat to match were edged with a plain scallop of matching pink.<sup>31</sup> This was copied for V. W. in blue. I took her measurements, phoned Paris to give the order and confirm that the material was available in blue, and a week later a vendeuse came over with the garments, and embryo hat, for a fitting, and the following week the entire outfit was delivered to V. W. who said to me if only you would look after my wardrobe I would have the time to write another book—which I would dedicate to you. (Garland in Mellown 1996: 228)

This was precisely one of her chosen reminiscences of Woolf for Noble's collection, suggesting it was a moment of pride in her work and position among the cultural elite.

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<sup>31</sup> "Madge Garland wore this outfit when Edward Wolfe painted the portrait of her that is now owned by the Geffrye Museum, London, and that was reproduced as the cover for *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 7 (1983)" (Mellown 1996: 229). Garland was probably not expecting her choice of outfit to represent modern literature for students in the decades to come.

There are small discrepancies in her accounts of this scene, as she told Elgin W. Mellown it happened in 1926 or 1927 and in Noble she said that it “occurred early in 1925”, after the publication of *The Common Reader* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, when she “had become even more of a literary figure than she already was” and “she was beginning to lead – perhaps against her wishes – a fuller social life”, and asked Garland “to choose clothes that would be suitable for her to wear at special dinner parties and to the theatre” (1972: 173). In any case, she noted that Woolf’s new dress was designed by her friend Nicole Groult and that it had been brought over from Paris in both accounts, highlighting her own prestigious connections.<sup>32</sup> Boulestin’s remained a meeting place for Woolf’s circle: when John Lehmann agreed to become the manager of the Hogarth Press in 1938, she proposed “a good dinner (not English) at Boulestin or some such place” (Lehmann in Noble 1972: n. p.) to celebrate.

Todd and Garland not only developed their own friendships with artists, but also introduced them to one another, solidifying a modish network:

There is one other anecdote that I remember in connection with Virginia [Woolf]. Again it was at a luncheon party. Virginia wanted to meet a friend of mine, Sylvia Townsend Warner, so I invited them both to lunch at my home in Chelsea. Sylvia’s novel about ghosts, witches and warlocks, *Lolly Willowes*, had just been published and I thought that it would probably provide an interesting topic of conversation. As I think most people know, Virginia always greeted anyone she did not know well with a barrage of questions. She fired several at Sylvia and then asked, “How is it that you know so much about witches?” To which Sylvia replied, “Because I am one!” For a moment I thought that my arrangement for them to meet had been a ghastly mistake, but Virginia, having looked rather disconcerted for a second, suddenly laughed – one of her characteristic hoots of laughter – and the awkward situation was overcome as quickly as it had arrived. (Garland in Noble 1972: 173)<sup>33</sup>

Significantly, this meeting did not take place at Boulestin’s. The editors knew both writers well enough to know their shyness, so “they asked the restaurateur Marcel

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<sup>32</sup> Decades later, when both were in their eighties, Madge Garland accompanied Rebecca West to buy a mink coat and “advise on the purchase” (Dyhouse 2010: 120), suggesting that this was a role she enjoyed playing.

<sup>33</sup> This scene is also referenced in Claire Harman’s 1989 biography of Warner. Nevertheless, Woolf and Warner had already met at least once, as the latter wrote to David Garnett on June 16 1925: “I met her [Woolf] the other day. She is so charming that I had the greatest pleasure in stifling my scruples and telling her how much I admired it [*Mrs Dalloway*]” (Warner in Garnett 1994: 23). It is possible that that first meeting did not allow for much further interaction, and thus they may not have counted it as a formal introduction.

Boulestin to prepare the food but serve it at their home on the Royal Hospital Road” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3593), bringing them into their own home: both writers contributed to *Vogue* that year. Citing a 1997 interview with Chloe Tyner, Lisa Cohen writes that “treating the magazine as a kind of salon over which they presided, Madge and Dody courted contributors and entertained friends at home and at their favorite restaurant. It was the beginning of Madge’s lifelong practice of connecting people she admired with one another—a habit she pursued to the point that she was ‘almost like an agency’ for bringing people together” (2012: loc. 3589-3592). During their time together, their guests included Florence Mills of *Lew Leslie’s Blackbirds*, socialite and photographer Olivia Wyndham, actress Brenda Dean Paul, writer and editor Allannah Harper, and socialite and Left Bank frequenter Dorothy Wilde (loc. 3607). It was important for the labour of editors to be perceived as untainted by commerce, and thus the figure of the society hostess, part friend, part patron, part modern *salonnière*, was extremely useful.

In her diary, Alison Settle listed her all-consuming list of social engagements with artists and the smart set.<sup>34</sup> Coser underscores that she participated in that world “as *herself*, that is, as a *legitimate* member of that world, not on a professional assignment as ‘editor of *Vogue*’” (2017: 14): the connections of the magazine to the world it described had to be perceived as “authentic”. Thus her “professional life [...] merged with her public life” (7) and with her own leisure; visits to well-known friends and acquaintance could provide amusing and glamorous material for her (unsigned) society column. Coser describes the editor’s role as that of a “cultural businesswoman” (11-12), someone who has acquired enough cultural capital to be perceived as an important

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<sup>34</sup> Alison Settle’s social life was populated by her colleagues at *Vogue*, but also “well-known artists, interior decorators, and writers like Jan Juta, Marion Dorn, and Michael Arlen, young fashion designers like Victor Stiebel [...] Settle’s social activity was mostly situated in central London, and frequently also in Paris, in the places frequented by the fashionable set of society” (Coser 2017: 13-4).

figure beyond fashion reporting, into fashion production and whose prestige was one and the same with that of the magazine.

The fact that *Vogue* editors mingled with public figures of their choice and acted as their patrons, and thus chose the styles and artistic movements the magazine would promote, does not mean that they had complete control over its contents. On the contrary, they had to work and actually live according to the values of its American management. As shall be explored in the following chapters, both Todd and Settle saw their lives uprooted—though to different extents—because of the demands of their positions as *Vogue* editors, not only in terms of conventional sexual mores but also in terms of aesthetic labour. It is important, then, to break down what constitutes aesthetic labour. As said above, the concept refers to the ways in which corporations mobilise, objectify and economically benefit from their employees' bodily and aesthetic dispositions (Witz et al. 2003), from the attractiveness of their bodies to their sartorial choices. The editors of *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* state that beauty requires a multiplicity of labours, from cultural to psychological (Elias et al. 2017: 4). They argue the debate around its politics often becomes “stuck in an impasse between polarised positions, stressing—for example—oppression by beauty norms versus pleasure and playfulness, female agency versus cultural domination, entrenched suspicion of the beauty-industrial complex versus hopefulness about women's capacity to resist” (5), mirroring the debates around fashion, consumerism and feminism. Aesthetic labour is inextricable from neoliberalism, as it manifests beyond cultural industries, just like neoliberalism “involves the extension of market principles into all areas of life”, “including subjectivity” (23).<sup>35</sup> The neoliberal subject can easily

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<sup>35</sup> Their state of the question includes studies of aesthetic labour in the late twentieth and twenty-first century workplace, especially in retail and service, and cite Brown (2015), Dardot and Laval (2013), Mudge (2008), Shamir (2008) and Springer et al. (2016).



be imagined as a young woman, as she is associated with consumption and self-invention.

The notion of aesthetic labour is surrounded by related terms, such as body work (“the unpaid work people do on their own bodies”), its subset beauty work, display work (“performed in jobs that require a high level of bodily display—for example, modelling or stripping”) and bodily labour (“paid work on the bodies of others”) (36). Elizabeth Wissinger’s ethnographic study of New York City models expands the notion of “display work” and renames it “glamour labour”, explaining that it is not only concerned with creating, sustaining and displaying an appealing body but also an attractive image, an aura of “cool”, a perception of being in. “Glamour labour involves all aspects of one’s image, from physical presentation, to personal connections, to friendships and fun” (in Elias et al. 2017: 37), and, most importantly, “it is always unfinished and in a state of becoming” (38). Glamour is not achieved in the present, over and done, but one must work at it to sustain it in the future.

I have considered describing the labour of *Vogue* editors as “glamour labour”, as the term is not so anachronistic and emphasises the individual’s idiosyncrasies, which *Vogue* certainly valued, as shown in its recurring defence of charming eccentricity. However, I decided to use “aesthetic labour” instead, as they had to act not only on their own bodies but also on their domestic spaces and daily practices. Witz et al. highlight its role in forming a corporation’s image and even its very structure: “Aesthetics and organization are inseparable. Most obvious are the aesthetics *of* organization. These expressive forms, which signify the identity of an organization, are manifest in the ‘hardware’ of organizations, such as marketing material, product design and the physical environment of workspaces or offices” (2003: 41-2). This “hardware” uses aesthetics to affect customers and workers emotionally, creating an illusion of

uniqueness. Extending the metaphor, the “software” would be the bodily dispositions, the behaviour and style, of the employees, who, “as software”, “are configured by organizations both as part of the surplus-producing process of the organization and in order to be the *embodiment* of the organization’s identity” (43):

In other words, the performance of aesthetic labour entails the manufacture of particular stylized, embodied performances that comprise the animate components of the aesthetics of a service organization. Hence, the materialization of the corporate aesthetic entails the stylization of inanimate *and* animate components of the scenography. The aesthetic labourer is a figure in this scenographic aesthetic of a service organization experienced by the customer. (45-6)

The *mise-en-scène* at the *Vogue* offices, while perhaps not as calculated as the corporate office and store plans of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, was carefully thought out to represent the magazine. While I have not been able to find a description of the London offices, the New York offices certainly said something about the work undertaken within: “Carmel [Snow] was right to describe the magazine as la-di-da. Its office resembled a hushed, well-run Fifth Avenue apartment, complete with antique furnishings and its own servant class. Even its reception area, Snow recalled, ‘was bound with leather-bound books (fakes)’” (Rowlands 2005: 56). Once she stepped inside she found a colourful scene:

Chase presided over her fiefdom from an ornately furnished office; her desk was pale yellow, its vertically grooved legs were highlighted in blue. [...] Maidenly secretaries typed discreetly in niches. A starched-uniformed maid went over the editors’ offices daily with a feather duster; for a time, her duties also included wheeling a trolley through the halls each afternoon at half-past four, proffering tea and cookies, until Chase banned the practice as being too disruptive. (58)

Though charm, according to *Vogue*, could come from intuition, beauty was a laborious duty that readers must study and undertake in order to be considered smart: fortunately for them, the section “On Her Dressing-Table” explained how. “The modern woman—unlike the heroine in a fairy romance, who leads a nice, quiet, reasonable life—has a very strenuous time with her yachting, motoring, golfing and tennis [...] Nothing is more fatal to beauty than that lack of radiance and youth which may be noticed in women still in their twenties” (early November 1922: 79). A life occupied

with sports and travel was central to the presentation of the youthful, modern woman, but the physical consequences of those activities must not show. To prevent looking tired or dull-eyed, she was advised to visit salons and parlours. For the season of 1924, *Vogue* predicted “a smooth beauty of line, a perfection of detail, a logic, and fitness about them that satisfy the modern soul. They are the inevitable expression of supreme sophistication” (late April 1924: 41). Sophistication in these terms required effort and maintenance, and, above all, it required self-surveillance. “In these days of stark simplicity, an extra inch, an extra ounce, an extra wrinkle may render the whole effect null and void. She must study herself—compare herself with *Vogue*’s sketches. Eternal vigilance is the price of smartness” (*ibid.*).

Perhaps surprisingly, the modern woman was not expected to hide her efforts: she ought to be “ready enough to share a valuable discovery with any or all of her acquaintances” without outdated reservations (Earle early October 1922: 74). Body and beauty work were to be openly and knowledgeably discussed; in fact, she *should* be seen performing them. A piece about boudoirs that “Graciously Reflect and Intensity the Charm of Their Owners” and bathrooms that “Strive for Self-Expression” described these most private spaces as “the office where small personal business is enacted and yet the setting intimate where flowers and cushioned chairs, favourite books, and photographs are assembled, and one’s dearest—or most interesting—friends are received” (early April 1920: 36). The compartments of a desk “will disclose powder, puff, rouge—if one is very modern—and other toilette necessities” (*ibid.*). The modern woman would make sure to tastefully arrange aesthetic and cultural goods to create a pleasing sensorial experience and to cultivate social relationships in this setting, which implicitly signified her identity. The fact that the space where she took care of her skin, face and hair was described as an “office”, meanwhile, suggests an understanding of the

role of supposedly leisured women as hostesses in almost professional terms, what Bell and Hollows describe as “leisure-work” (2006: 8).

Aesthetic labour was not only performed on the body and its immediate surroundings. An article that jokingly commented the growing number of interior decorators among the upper classes argued that: “it is not enough to love and search for beauty in your house. It must record something beyond good taste and an assured income. It must express in some degree the personality of the people who live in it” (early August 1921: 29). After all, these same skills were central to *Vogue* itself:

Vogue has always led in all matters that appertain to the art of graceful living, and since the decoration and adornment of the home is one of the most vital of these matters Vogue naturally indicates where, and to what, fashion is tending. The house, with its infinite detail, is really a background for its *chatelaine*, and should be considered as such. [...] Apart from the impression given to the outer world, there is also an ever-present pleasure in living surrounded by beauty on every side. (Late March 1924: 51)

The smart reader would express “herself” in every aspect of her presentation and interaction with others, down to her workaday note-paper. An essay on “The Revelations of a Sheet Paper” mused that women had developed elegant yet impersonal handwriting in order to hide the “deepest secrets of their temperaments and characters”, which may still be revealed by their choice of paper (late December 1921: 37). Indeed, *Vogue* was known for its careful consideration of every daily practice that could possibly be aestheticized. Two friends and *Vogue* contributors, David Garnett and Sylvia Townsend Warner, joked about it in a letter: “Dearest Sylvia, I was glad to see your hand, though the grey-bordered notepaper portended a sorrow—a death? An animal’s death? Or stolen from *Vogue*?” (c. 24 November 1927 in Garnett 1994: 35).

The social benefits of being perceived as beautiful and flawlessly modern were rarely spelled out in full. Nonetheless, they often manifested in its essays and advice columns on the art of hosting, as it was understood that a successful hostess must be just as proficient at constructing an appealing self. The *salonnières* of eighteenth-century

France—the women who gathered “the Parisian *beau monde* for the display of one’s *esprit*, expressed in the art of ‘savoir-parler’: *la conversation*” (Rocamora 2009: 73) were repeatedly referenced in *Vogue* as positive examples. “In the life of every woman of fashion”, *Vogue* stated, “there comes a time when she is no longer satisfied with the successes which her beauty brings her, however flattering they may be, and when her dreams turn towards a salon of her own” (early June 1921: 46). The would-be modern *salonnière* was warned that once she begins to host she “is no longer her own mistress” (*ibid.*). She was advised on who to invite and what to offer: “The first ingredient for most successful salons is a celebrity, chosen from the pages of ‘Who’s Who’ and mixed with other less important parsonages with care [...] Casting one’s pearls before the cook is not so profligate as it seems, if one has a literary salon, for literary lions are as hungry for filet mignon as for knowledge, and a cook is to be prized above rubies” (*ibid.*). Aided by Fish’s satirical illustrations, *Vogue* revealed that most salons were mere excuses for the hostess’s satisfaction: even in Paris, the genius in attendance was, in fact, not important at all. “The focal point of every salon is a famous man. This piece of furniture is even more necessary than the fireplace, than the excellence of the tea, than the very sofa. He is the bait. Once you have him in hand, the rest is simple. [...] These great men love adulation, and it is impossible that all of them are already centres of salons. On the contrary, many of them do not know what to do with their time” (47). According to this piece, salons could be musical, political, literary or spiritual. The best kind of salon, however, was the kind where nothing happened and the hostess became the true centre. The figure of the eccentrically-dressed artist that made a salon worthwhile also appeared as one of “the Qualities That Make or Mar a Hostess”. According to the author, “A Critical Bachelor”, “artists and writers of genuine talent, who moreover actually know how to dress, [...] means exceptional success, for most of

the artists who really work are content to dress very negligently, which those who devote attention to their toilette, make, all too often, a sad muddle of their canvases or books” (early August 1922: 64-5).

A significant example of the hostess as protagonist was Palmyre, one of *Vogue*'s Parisian friends: “Everybody who exhibits the least character, intelligence, or force, must be attracted to her, must be hers” (Astruc late March 1923: 49). Her guests were said to include “the real celebrities of the modern artistic and literary schools; for Palmyre is greedy to know the glory of both” (87). Her efforts were somewhat self-aggrandizing, as if this fictional society woman had something to prove. She hosted a very modern salon and went to the cabaret, where “the women of the great world can contemplate in these places of a certain other world. [...] Palmyre will make it evident that she is very much at home” (*ibid.*). “Hostesses and hosts”, proposed an essay in this same line by Agnes Jekyll, “are born, not made, yet perhaps some of the gifts natural to these favoured ones may be observed and acquired by their humbler followers”; the gift in question, she underscores, is personality (late April 1923: 69). Hostesses could also be a figure of fun, like in a satirical piece by Osbert Sitwell (late September 1925).

The hostess was central to one essay in a series by the actress Cécile Sorel on women in modern society. In “Madame la Diplomate”, Sorel repeated an old, terribly condescending belief in the temperamental superiority of women:

Those foolish ones who permit themselves to be alarmed at the rapid rise of feminism, at the important position which women now occupy in public life, demonstrate their ignorance, not only of psychology, but also of history. For, truly, what is feminism but an avowal of that which has always existed, an order of things which has flourished for centuries? [...] Man proposes, yes—but woman disposes [...] Man may rule affairs of state, but woman, in her turn, rules man; and so it seems only reasonable that he should openly make use of what he has long had recourse to behind tapestried doors and curtained closets—woman's talent for diplomacy. (Early July 1923: 41)

Superficial as her analysis was, Sorel deliberately pointed to salons as a historical example of men profiting “by a woman's wit and versatility”, as “she already possesses by instinct” what he must learn (68). “And these same feminine personalities will

double their strength if, joined to their diplomatic gifts, they possess other talents as well. Is not the perfect diplomat the woman artist?" (*ibid.*). As if to drive her point home, the accompanying portrait showed Sorel in a Second Empire costume for *Princesse d'Amour*, wearing plenty of feathers. The role of hostess, though it naturalised the role of the mistress of the house and was bound by many conventions, was a prestigious one, and readers were invited to try it out. And, of course, their work had much in common with that of editors, though the latter's was more formal and financially remunerated.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1.3.4. *Vogue and its Editors as Cultural Intermediaries*

British *Vogue* encouraged its readers to strive for "a special kind of beauty, a very civilised, sophisticated, subtle kind of beauty, worked out and applied by brains" (early December 1924: 74); to keep up with modernity in all its manifestations and to delight in their potential for transcendence. In order to consider the creation of a work of art, Pierre Bourdieu looked beyond the material process and into its symbolic production, that is, the production of its perceived value. This value, he argued, was not necessarily produced by the artist but by "the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such" (1993a: 37). These agents were critics, curators—and also magazine editors. By training readers to recognise what was tasteful and modern, *Vogue* participated in the consecration of both

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<sup>36</sup> In "Spinster to the Rescue", a *Sunday Telegraph* article on Harriet Shaw Weaver, patron and then editor of the journal that would be called *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist*, Rebecca West mused: "Of course there ought to be unearned incomes. They are in harmony with the random universe, and allow our eccentrics to go hither and thither, picking up this and that, and occasionally finding something that is, near enough, the philosopher's stone" (November 11 1970: 12 in Scott 1990: 580). While Weaver was decidedly literary and *Vogue* preferred more worldly wit, the latter encouraged readers to channel their wealth into collecting and displaying artists as they did with works of art, and often made similar arguments.

specific cultural works and wider trends, from Marie Laurencin's Cubist paintings to bobbed hair.

Editors were able to consecrate works and trends, but first they had to introduce them to the readers. *Vogue* favoured a modern smartness that went beyond sartorial elegance to include literary and artistic know-how, and so its staff, and especially its editors, acted as cultural intermediaries. This term, drawn from Bourdieu's *Distinction*, is used by Agnès Rocamora to refer to trend-setting bloggers (2015: 245) as well as by Anna Gough-Yates to refer to editors of women's magazines in the nineteen-eighties (2003: 118-131). In Bourdieu's analysis, cultural intermediaries were a section of the petite bourgeoisie, "distinctly separated from the closest fractions, the primary teachers, medical services and art craftsmen" and "opposed to the small shopkeepers or craftsmen and the office workers", mirroring the split in the dominant class that opposed "higher-education teachers and artistic producers" to "industrial and commercial employers" (1984: 39). This group belonged to a new petite bourgeoisie that had "a strong cultural inheritance and relatively low educational capital" and rejected "academic routine", devaluated because of its familiarity (91). It aimed to:

'liberate' itself from a traditional 'petit bourgeois' 'morality of duty': based on the opposition between pleasure and good, [that] induces a generalized suspicion of the 'charming and attractive', a fear of pleasure and a relation to the body made up of 'reserve', 'modesty' and 'restraint', and [which] associates every satisfaction of the forbidden impulses with guilt. According to Bourdieu, the 'new petite bourgeoisie' seeks to replace this with 'a morality of pleasure as a duty', which brands it 'a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to "have fun"'. This ethos makes the 'new petit bourgeois' the 'ideal consumer', a figure free from the moral 'constraints' and 'brakes' to consumption held by older 'petit bourgeois' groups. (Gough Yates 2003: 125-6)

They were fascinated "with self-expression, bodily expression, communication with others, and 'search' for identity" (126), and thus particularly successful in occupations "concerned with the production of symbolic goods and services" (122-3) like "sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth" (Bourdieu



1984: 359).<sup>37</sup> A significant number of this new group were women, who now could benefit from their “socially inculcated dispositions” professionally (361-2). A group within this group, the new cultural intermediaries were late twentieth-century figures such as “youth organizers, play leaders” (Bourdieu 1984: 91), “producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of ‘quality’ newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalists-writers” (325-6) who;

Assigning themselves the impossible, and therefore unassailable, role of divulging legitimate culture—in which they resemble the legitimate popularizers—without specific competence of the legitimate simplifiers, they have to make themselves, as Kant puts it, ‘the apes of genius’ and seek a substitute for the charismatic *auctoritas* of the *auctor* and the lofty freedom in which it asserts itself, in an ‘arty’ off-handedness (seen for example in the casual facility of their style) and in a conspicuous refusal of the heavy didacticism and grey, impersonal, tedious pedantry which are the counterpart or external sign of institutional competence—and all this must be done while living in the unease of the inherently contradictory role of a ‘presenter’ devoid of intrinsic value. (326)

Cultural intermediaries, then, are invested in the production of cultural goods in their own taste as well as in their legitimation. As goods and tastes shift, so does the field of production, allowing the success of further changes and demands in a sort of feedback loop. However, Bourdieu, as a left-leaning sociologist of his time, characterises the taste of these new cultural intermediaries as middlebrow in a negative sense: facile and somewhat complacent.

The partial revolutions in the hierarchies which the intermediaries’ low position in the field of intellectual production and their ambivalent relation to the intellectual or scientific authorities encourage them to carry out, such as canonization of not-yet-legitimate arts of minor, marginal forms of legitimate art, combine with the effects of the allodoxia resulting from their distance from the centre of cultural values to produce, through the mixture of ‘genres’, ‘styles’ and ‘levels’, those objectified images of petit-bourgeois culture, juxtaposing ‘easy’ or ‘old-fashioned’ (i.e., devalued) legitimate products with the most ambitious products of the field of mass production [...] Nothing could be less subversive than these controlled transgressions which are inspired by a concern to rehabilitate and ennoble when they are not simply the expression of a misplaced recognition of the hierarchies, as anarchic as it is eager. The petit-bourgeois spectators know they have no need to be alarmed: they can recognize the ‘guarantees of quality’ offered by their moderately revolutionary taste-makers, who surround themselves with all the institutional signs of cultural authority—Academician contributors to painless history magazines, Sorbonne professors debating on TV,

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<sup>37</sup> Anna Gough-Yates (2003) references the work of other sociologists that were inspired by Bourdieu in their analysis of taste, class, consumption and the new middle classes in post-Fordist economies, including Piore and Sabel (1986), Lash and Urry (1994), Ross (1995) and Longhurst and Savage (1996).

Menuhins gracing ‘quality’ variety shows. Middle-brow culture is resolutely against vulgarity. (*Ibid.*)

This category, it must be clarified, is not the same as the middlebrow that appears in discussions of English literature, but a translation of *moyen*, which could also mean average. For Bourdieu:

the notion of an ‘average’ culture (*culture moyenne*) is as fictitious as that of an ‘average’, universally acceptable language. What makes middle-brow culture is the middle-class relation to culture—mistaken identity, misplaced belief, allodoxia. [...] What makes the petit-bourgeois relation to culture and its capacity to make ‘middle-brow’ whatever it touches, just as the legitimate gaze ‘saves’ whatever it lights upon, is not its ‘nature’ but the very position of the petit bourgeois in social space, the social nature of the petit bourgeois, which is constantly impressed on the petit bourgeois himself, determining his relation to legitimate culture and his avid but anxious, naive but serious way of clutching at it. (327)

It is not about the object’s inherent qualities or even the conditions of its production, but about a certain self-reflective discourse. The sociologist Mike Featherstone places the new cultural intermediaries within an expanding “new middle class” that includes critics, journalists, analysts and sociologists, that is, those who “interpret and mediate cultural and psychological questions about who we are, how we live and what we want” (Gill 2003: 35). Besides mediation, they also participate in “the intellectualization of new areas of expertise such as popular music, fashion, design, holidays, sport, popular culture, etc. which increasingly are subjected to serious analysis” (Featherstone in Gough-Yates 2003: 123). This process of legitimization is supported by the founding of new institutions, such as journals, and through the promotion of self-expression through the acquisition and display of material and cultural goods: the new middle class is both transmitter and consumer of its “symbolic products and services produced” (*ibid.*).

Nonetheless, Gough-Yates notes that Featherstone’s cultural intermediaries are not exactly the same as Bourdieu’s (2003: 163-4). Bourdieu meant “a particular ‘new petite bourgeois’ profession of cultural commentary in the media”, while Featherstone used both terms somewhat interchangeably, a mistake that has continued in later scholarship (*ibid.*). Gough-Yates acknowledges David Hesmondhalgh’s suggestion to

replace “cultural intermediaries” with a more specific term like “creative managers” or “creative practitioners” but chooses to keep the former “to refer generally to those media practitioners who produce symbols and texts—and more loosely than Bourdieu originally intended” (164). That is what I shall do as well, bearing in mind existing criticism of “such accounts of the emergence and growth of forms of a ‘new middle class’” (124). As Gough-Yates continues:

Longhurst and Savage have pointed out, for example, that these ideas are “rather unoriginal”, and that similar ideas can be traced back to the arguments of sociologists from as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. They also note that “there is currently considerable doubt about the supposed rise of ‘new middle classes’ of various types”, and observe that some sociologists have claimed that the established middle classes have simply matured and consolidated their professional power. Thus, it is argued, even though the middle class is increasingly fragmented, it is overly simplistic to attempt consistently to map all of the distinctively new occupational groupings mentioned by Bourdieu, along with specific patterns of taste, onto fractions of the middle class. (*Ibid.*)

She also references criticism of Bourdieu’s universalising claims, similar to those raised against his description of the field of fashion, and of his “almost exclusive focus on class, arguing that he marginalizes ‘race’ and gender which must also be powerful variable in the mediation of taste and lifestyles” (*ibid.*).<sup>38</sup>

The point, in any case, is the existence of figures that construct and reproduce a set of values for an audience, and of an audience that is willing to accept and interiorise them. Studying interviews with editors of women’s magazines of the late twentieth century,<sup>39</sup> Gough-Yates finds that they firmly emphasize their connection with, knowledge of, and belonging to the target audience of their magazines, describing it as instinctive. Most importantly;

Through this self-promotional rhetoric, editors professed not only to be ‘in tune’ with their ideal reader, but also to literally personify new formations of feminine lifestyles. In their claims to be ‘in touch’ with their target markets, the editors of women’s magazines can be seen to be emphasizing their status as cultural intermediaries – experts at making women’s magazines symbolically ‘meaningful’ for readers. Editors

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<sup>38</sup> Anna Gough-Yates suggests Lury (1996), Nixon (1997) and Savage et al. (1992) for a critical analysis of the inapplicability of his proposed class structure outside France, and Skeggs (1997) for a study of Bourdieu’s limited consideration of cultural identities outside of class.

<sup>39</sup> Marjorie Ferguson (1983) interviewed editors between the nineteen-fifties and the nineteen-eighties, and Gough-Yates references other interviews from that decade on.

were thus promoting their social position as intermediaries, or as members of a ‘new middle class’, as taste mappers and taste creators with the ability to identify and convert tastes into a successful magazine format. (2003: 121)

The fact that these editors belonged to the same social categories as their audience and therefore knew what they wanted naturally and effortlessly was framed as a novel development that brought them to contemporary times, which “effectively distanced the women’s magazine industry from the tired and out-dated image it held amongst advertisers” (*ibid.*). This may seem at odds with my description of the labour of the editors of *Vogue* in the interwar period, who match most aspects of the “new” cultural intermediaries: they explained modern society to itself and were expected to engage with producers of modern art and design, as well as to mingle with the social class that made up their target audience, expressing their belonging through the acquisition and display of cultural goods, including fashionable clothes. There is one key difference, however, between Gough-Yates’s editors and the ones that populate this thesis: their visibility. In the eighties, some editors of women’s magazines achieved somewhat of a celebrity status, and they took care to emphasize their

own strong sense of individuality, innovation, and professionalism. This ethos, magazine editors presumed, was something they shared with other cultural intermediaries working in advertising and marketing. Indeed, their rhetoric worked to legitimate the presence of women’s magazine editors within the ‘distinctive’ space of the cultural intermediary which the advertising and marketing trade press helped to delineate and sustain. It also furthered an image of the cultural value, sophistication and contemporaneity of the magazine industry itself. (124-5)

By contrast, despite being well-known to high society and the art world at a personal level, the various labours of the editors of interwar *Vogue* were hidden from readers. Instead of extending their own engagement with modernity to the magazine, they used it to establish connections with other creative agents.

Though they had the power to legitimise other producers in the fields of fashion or literature as modish by using *Vogue* as a vehicle, and though it was partly their choices that constructed literary celebrity in the interwar period, they did not turn that

power back onto themselves. Richard Dyer explains that “the star system was already a well-developed feature of the popular theatre [...] If the public demanded it of the cinema, then this was because the public had come to expect it of the entertainment industry as a whole” (1979: 10). The appeal of a star did not depend exclusively on their talent, of course, but on their image and the narratives they could spin, and indeed the stage stars that appeared in *Vogue* tended to be young, beautiful women who were portrayed in their current onstage roles as often as modelling current fashions. Studying the function of scandal in the construction of *fin-de-siècle* celebrity, Isabel Clúa finds that a somewhat subversive narrative around their biography, romantic relationships or eccentric personality was as necessary as the distribution of the star’s image, which meant blurring the distinction between public and private (2016: 94). A possible strategy was to present the star as extraordinary, but the success of this gimmick depended on their “capacity to affect public opinion when presenting behaviours and attitudes that go against normative regulations” (110). *Vogue*, however, did not publish gossip or distasteful stories, focusing instead on the aesthetic dispositions of celebrities, their sartorial and spatial styling. This had been another strategy for publicity even before the interwar period; after all, divas often publicised their private spaces, showcasing their “artistic sensibility” and thus reinforcing their perception as authors (124).

Accounts of the history of celebrity have been shaped, according to Catherine Hindson, by “a general assumption that international celebrity culture was the product of the rapid growth in the mass culture industries” that developed after the Great War (2006: 162). However, its strategies—mass reproduction of images and salacious narratives—had their roots in the nineteenth century: lithograph and intaglio prints and later photographs had made the faces and bodies of artists and aristocrats frequent,

accessible sights. In Britain, “popular newspapers of the 1890s had for the first time made people famous for being famous. [...] Both *Tit-Bits* and *The Daily Mail* specialized in what would later be called ‘gossip columns’” (Lucas 1997: 7). After the war, journalistic interest in celebrity news reached new heights, to the point that what constituted “news” became questionable. “Freelancers could earn about five shillings for one paragraph quoting a quip from a well-known person at a social function” (Collier 2006: 33), and the bar to be considered “well-known” kept descending; while “widely-known authors were besieged by requests from newspapers and magazines for articles, ranging from 25 to 250 words”, “even modestly prominent people—for instance authors of the 10,000-selling rather than million-selling variety—could be swept up in” the craze” (*ibid.*). Logically enough, saturation led to backlash. Attacks on “the interview, the celebrity profile, the reported cocktail-party quip” became “central to critiques of the press”, though other aspects of subjective reporting became accepted; “the seemingly paradoxical sense that quality journalism requires objectivity—i. e., a setting aside of personality—and relies on ‘human interest’ has become the norm” (34).

Limits to ethical reporting had to be established:

Cultural controversy about the reporting of divorces led to the passage of the Regulation of Reports Act in 1926, which somewhat restrained reporting on divorce and other matrimonial cases. It prohibited publishing ‘indecent medical, surgical, or physiological details’ and limited reporters’ access to depositions and other documents; it did not prevent them from reporting names of principles and witnesses, summarizing testimony, or reporting on judicial comments. (Collier 2006: 35)

Despite these boundaries, journalistic coverage of public figures was so extensive that some were born to fame. In his biography of the Bright Young People, D. J. Taylor writes that “the ultimate effect” of following the progress of the socialite Elizabeth Ponsonby through her portraits in society columns, by contrast to her relative lack of achievement, “is oddly mythological: a weird, outwardly innocuous but in the end faintly sinister frieze, in which quiddity is reduced to idiosyncrasy, life is a continual

twitch upon the thread of past non-achievement – a triumph of form over content” (2007: loc. 3151).

The most visible celebrities of the interwar period were actors and aristocrats, but this was not always the case. In the mid-nineteenth century, when print was the most important medium, writers drew considerable interest. Even if they lost their primacy to other types of star, “lectures and other forms of public appearance retained their importance; indeed, the circulation of author photographs on book jackets or in magazines intensified the reader’s desire for an encounter with the author ‘in the flesh’” (Hammill 2007: 106-7). In fact, as Vike Martina Plock points out, the phenomenon of literary celebrity “significantly accelerated at the turn of the twentieth century when the emergence of mass media technologies and the establishment of an all-encompassing commodity culture in Western countries facilitated the strategic dissemination of easily recognisable images of people of public renown” (2018: 7). In other words, the turn to more visual strategies of promotion and dissemination did not diminish public interest in literary celebrity, but rather added to it. The difference was that writers, especially women writers, were now marketed through image and thus their “personal style” became “often a function of their literary style” (Hammill 2007: 4). Moreover, as Plock puts it, “fashion seems to add an insistence on novelty to the story about the fabrication of celebrities” (2018: 8), which “altered the make-up of a modern celebrity culture that is democratic but capricious” (9). If one’s persona can be reinvented through style, fashion and celebrity are “mutually constitutive” (*ibid.*).

This is not to say, however, that scandal and eccentricity did not play a role in shaping literary celebrity. As Faye Hammill notes:

some of the best-known names in British literature were famous for reasons connected with scandal, with personality and style, or with marketing. Lawrence, Joyce, and Radclyffe Hall, for example, were celebrated primarily because their books had been banned or put on trial for obscenity. Writers associated with Bloomsbury and bohemia, including Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, and the Sitwells, were also fairly visible, but this

was partly because of their unconventional lifestyles and because their modes of dress and décor became fashionable in certain circles. (2007: 18)

The writers she names, with the exception of Hall, were all recurring figures in *Vogue*. During the interwar period, a literary celebrity could be a lone genius, a fashionable star, a respectably well-known name or even all three at once, depending on the medium and mode of representation.

This tension will be explored in the next chapter; for now, what I mean to highlight is that *Vogue* was one such medium, and that it was up to the editors to decide which version of literary value and celebrity they wanted to hold up. Plock agrees with Jane Garrity's view that there was “no organized group of women literary practitioners in Britain during the period of high-modernist activity comparable with the female expatriate communities in Paris’ or one that resembled ‘the system of patronage that was foundational to the institutional structure of male modernism’” (in 2018: 23). This role could have been taken by the editors of women's magazines like *British Vogue*. Although under Elspeth Champcommunal's editorship *Vogue* did highlight women writers as a category of interest, it did not review women writers more often or more emphatically than it did men. In the years that followed, *Vogue* walked the tightrope between the modernist vision of the lone genius and the modish author with middlebrow appeal.





## 2. FASHIONS OF THE MIND: THE MODERNIST PROJECT OF BRITISH *VOGUE* (1923-1927)

I believe that the interest most people have in literature is above all an interest in character. But as the genius of creation is rare, it is usually the character of the author which absorbs us. (Mortimer early September 1924: 30)

She was passionate about fashion above all else, and so at some point in 1922, after more than five years, Elspeth Champcommunal quit British *Vogue* and moved back to Paris to build her own couture house; as Amanda Carrod notes, she “became the only English woman ever to do so” (2015: 80). During the following months Ruth Anderson acted as interim editor, supported by publisher William Wood, chief staff writer and art critic Aldous Huxley, Dorothy Wilde, and Madge McHarg, receptionist turned secretary turned assistant to the editor. Caroline Seebohm calculates that British *Vogue* was struggling financially, having fallen from around 14,000 during the war to below 9,000 (in Reed 2006a: 67). It was a habit of Condé Nast’s not to intervene in person. “Like most paternalistic employers”, Susan Ronald reflects in her biography, he “had an anaphylactic reaction to firing people” (2019: 156). Despite his difficulties trusting others, he disliked having to manage his personnel, resulting in a remote *modus operandi* of transatlantic dimensions: “control took the form of a barrage of cabled commands and enquiries [...] and the transfer of trusted New York staff to London” (Luckhurst 1998: 19).

This time, however, he did not send an American intervenor but an Englishwoman, Dorothy Todd. Every account of this stage emphasizes how it is not possible to tell “when or how she came to [Edna Chase’s], or Nast’s, or William Wood’s attention—or what sort of work, if any, Dody did before being hired by *Vogue*”

because of the magazine's policy of anonymity and because its British offices "were bombed during the Blitz, which destroyed whatever records might have been saved until then" (Cohen 2012: loc. 3346). There is one known detail among the confusion and obscurity: Todd had been the founding editor of British *Vogue* in September 1916 (Mellown 1996; Luckhurst 1998; Cohen 2012), but she had been brought to New York to be trained "in the doctrines of 'Vogue policies and format'" (Carrod 2015: 78) for some years. Upon her return, she constructed a network of friends and collaborators that included—to use Sylvia Townsend Warner's phrase—"all the old Bloomsbury Omnibus" (13 February 1930 in Garnett 1994: 47). Her editorship is probably British *Vogue*'s most researched period, as she is a figure of interest to literary, design and queer history.

Under Todd, British *Vogue* became a vehicle for a specific strand of modernist aesthetics and celebrity. It published, showcased and referenced modernist artists and writers, especially those attached to Bloomsbury, pushing the idea that being smart meant being well-read and culturally up-to-date ever further. Through *Vogue*, readers would learn about fashion and interior design but also about art and literature, as these disciplines existed on the same plane:

For Fashion—whose other name is Change—though once looked down upon as a merely frivolous minx, is now revealed in a truer light as a combination of many of the more attractive virtues and a vast amount of wisdom [...] In literature, the drama, art and architecture, the same spirit of change is seen at work, and to the intelligent observer the interplay of suggestion and influence between all these things is one of the fascinations of the study of the contemporary world. (Early April 1925: 45).

Despite affirming and legitimising modernist works and values for a lay audience, *Vogue*'s relationship to the movement and its key figures was often ambiguous, or even tense. Satirical illustrations mocked phony bohemians, and critics and society columnists admitted that there were books they meant to read, but never got around to. In return, its featured highbrows—Virginia Woolf comes to mind—were dismissive of

the magazine and its editors in private. This chapter will explore these dynamics and analyse the construction and representation of literary celebrity during this period.

## 2.1. THE MODERNIST PROJECT OF DOROTHY TODD

### 2.1.1. “A Political Rupture”: Dorothy Todd and the Bloomsbury Omnibus

Dorothy Todd returned to British *Vogue* early in 1923<sup>1</sup> “in an aura of expensive perfume”, wearing a perpetual “jacket with a velvet collar, the skirt of a fashionable length—with a fresh flower in her buttonhole every day”; she “had a commanding, pleasing voice and a plummy accent” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3406-3420). Ruth Anderson’s tenure was hardly distinctive, but even the most casual reader would have been able to recognise a shift later that year. Following a brief given by Condé Nast in the summer, “the ‘percentage of fashion pages’ was reduced and, significantly, ‘the fashions shown are to be more in keeping with the present economic stress of this country’, and the rest of the magazine is to be considerably broadened and humanised and brought into keeping with the apparent taste of the British public” (Yoxall 28 June 1923 in Luckhurst 1998: 18). The early September issue announced that the cover price would be lowered to one shilling, and Nast’s instructions, which focused on its aspects as a service, were articulated for the reader:

the flattering letters which from time to time find their way to the editorial desk suggest that no alteration in the magazine itself is desired [...] The only change in the editorial programme will be, if anything, to give a slightly broader treatment to the general features of *Vogue*—its decorating suggestions, its art and stage and sport pages, and its special articles—and an added emphasis upon the service departments and useful organisations which are at the call of every reader (17).

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Carrod follows Dorothy Todd’s movements in and out of New York City in shipping records, finding that she arrived from Liverpool in June 1915 and left for England in July 1916, identifying herself as a journalist, “apparently secure in her newly acquired position on the staff of the newly to be launched British *Vogue*” (2015: 78). Lisa Cohen finds that “a ‘Dorothy Todd, artist’ appears in the New York City directory at a Greenwich Village address from 1917 to 1919” (2012: loc. 3440), suggesting that despite the lack of a record she returned to America soon after the launching of British *Vogue*. Todd was officially listed as an immigrant from September 18, 1919 (Carrod 2015: 78). While Cohen posits that she may have returned to London for a time between 1920 and 1921 (2012: loc. 3346), Carrod argues that she stayed in America “until 17<sup>th</sup> February 1923 when she returns as a ‘magazine editor’” (*ibid.*).

No such letters, by the way, were published in the magazine at this point.

I believe that *Vogue* under Todd was not entirely an exception compared to what it had been and would become; rather, it was a heightened manifestation of a lasting interest in modern practices of artistic production and consumption. First of all, many regular features—“Seen on the Stage”, “Seen in the Shops”, “Vogue Pattern Service”, “On Her Dressing Table” and “Round and About the Car”—were brought over from Champcommunal’s editorship, undergoing changes in title and format but not in focus. In a quite cynical move, in early May 1927 *Vogue* announced it had “been moved by the plight of the ‘new poor’ to make this number a compendium of smart fashions at moderate cost” (41): in fact, that had been a regular section for years. Advertisements continued exactly as before, with the same structure and product range, although their space grew in late 1923 and again in late 1924, hand in hand with a wider variety of goods and services shown. During this period *Vogue* tried out new commercial functions, like a School Service that helped find good schools for children and advertisements for adult courses, as “the woman of to-day is not content to fulfil her humdrum everyday duties in an indifferent manner” (late June 1924: x). The Pattern Book and Children’s *Vogue* were merged into a *Vogue Fashion Bi-Monthly* that cost eighteen pence (the price of an issue and a half), and the British edition of *House & Garden* became a monthly supplement from early April 1924 on. Fashion journalism stayed at the core of the magazine: even when other sections grew they never surpassed the number of pages allotted to fashion. The styles, of course, changed with the times. By the mid-twenties fantasy gave way to simplicity, and fashion features began to abandon the generalising statement that smartness means dressing to one’s type to spell out how each type should dress. For instance, a series of “Guides to Chic” advised the small woman, the woman over forty, the woman with silver hair and the business

woman. The very idea of *Vogue* was identified with the latter: “Is not *Vogue* itself well versed in such problems from intimately personal experience? For *Vogue* leads a business and professional life, however much it may lean towards a frivolous and chic appearance in print” (late November 1926: 60).<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on *Vogue* as a service, its detailed delineation of target readerships and its incorporation of other Nast publications were the outcome of a coordinated business strategy, thought up and managed from New York. Changes within the magazine, on the other hand, have been attributed to Todd herself. For instance, Nicola Luckhurst writes that Todd revealed her “editorial ambitions” by changing the order of the sections, and especially in the editorial essays, which now showed a degree of continuity from one issue to the other; though she describes this as “equivalent to a seismic upheaval in the deep structure of women’s magazines” (1998: 10), I believe that this continuity was thematic, and ought not to be overstated. Todd’s interest in commissioning essays and reviews from well-knowns has been traced to her time in New York, where she would have been familiar with *Vanity Fair*, “both as a magazine and an editorial milieu” (Reed 2006a: 44). Therefore, Todd did not stray from the “Condé Nast formula” but “simply offered the smaller British market a fusion of Nast’s two flagship products in one publication”, bringing in selected features from *Vanity Fair* but staying almost identical to American *Vogue* in its fashion journalism and illustration (*ibid.*). If Nast had recently attempted and presumably failed to create a British edition of *Vanity Fair*, if his 1923 brief had explicitly ordered a wider scope, if he had sent the business manager of *Vanity Fair*, Albert Lee, to oversee this “reconstruction” (Ronald 2019: 187), and if the content of British *Vogue* was partially

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<sup>2</sup> Such a woman ought to dress in dark or strong colours, as they were economical and on trend; she required a sensible, formal and smartly-tailored wardrobe and accessories that took into account that she would be sitting down for long periods of time. She was expected to have time for herself after work, when she would go for tea or to the theatre without stopping by at home. In order to blend effortlessly between work and leisure, she ought to add distinguished details to her clothes.

borrowed from its American siblings, it becomes difficult to take the argument that Todd one-sidedly turned her back on fashion at face value.

A “short, square, crop-headed, double-breasted, bow-tied lady”: Peter Quennell’s evocative description of Todd, which contrasted her to “her more decoratively appalled friend and colleague” (1976: 149), has been repeatedly quoted by some scholars in a way that suggests that her appearance was “alarmingly butch” (Kavanagh 1996: 73). Amanda Carrod convincingly argues against this portrayal in her thesis, writing: “scholars of British *Vogue* take the knowledge of Todd’s open lesbianism, mix it with their knowledge of the stereotypical masculine based femininity of the 1920s and arrive at the conclusion that Todd must have looked something like their visualizations of Radclyffe Hall and her cross-dressing protagonist” (2015: 219). However, Todd’s style was no different from what *Vogue* posited as modish and was perfectly suited to her position as the editor of a prestigious fashion magazine; “it was probably Todd’s age—she was thirty-nine when she became editor of *Vogue* in 1922—which now places her alongside definitions of the Masculine Woman rather than the more fashion conscious image of the Modern Girl” (*ibid.*). I would add argue that the description needs to be framed in the context of Quennell’s memoirs, as it is part of a passage that introduced his neighbours as a cast of comically bohemian characters. The severity of her looks was therefore probably exaggerated for comedy’s sake:

My original London lodging was a smallish basement room in Chelsea, only a few steps from the King’s Road, part of a house that belonged to an amiable woman artist whose widowed mother lived near Berkhamstead. My fellow lodgers were an interesting collection—a short, square, crop-headed, double-breasted, bow-tied lady, the editress of a famous fashion-magazine, and her more decoratively appalled friend and colleague, the deserted wife of a celebrated modern sculptor [Cordelia Tregurtha], who talked at length of ‘Dobbie’s’ [Frank Dobson’s] matrimonial misdeeds, and Freddie Ashton, now Sir Frederick, the doyen of British ballet, then a gay and energetic young dancer. Our landlady, though she enjoyed bohemian company, was somewhat suspicious of her inmates’ morals, and would now and then arrest a brush-stroke, as she stood before her canvas, and gaze up apprehensively towards the ceiling, since she had learned that the inhabitants of the first floor formed a slightly unconventional ménage.

She also employed a Communist housemaid from Battersea, to whom the goings-on of the dissolute middle classes were a constant source of indignation. (Quennell 1976: 148-9)

Todd's queer looks and milieu shaped the narrative of her life and career. She would become a figure of fun and parody, and her landlady would not be alone in objecting to her morals. She is a riddle, a composite of “glimpses [...] caught in the letters, diaries and memoirs” of the inhabitants of London's modish bohemia (Luckhurst 1998: 3). The long string of adjectives that follow her—“energetic, portly, determined, louche, exasperating, intelligent, raddled, commercial” (*ibid.*); “strictly tailored and coiffed, shrewd, sophisticated, intimidating” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3365)—might well describe the voice of *Vogue* in the twenties. To the critic Raymond Mortimer she was “imperious and enterprising” (21 July 1977 in Cohen 2012: loc. 3365); to the manager Harry Yoxall, she was “stimulating” yet temperamental and startling (Cohen 2012: loc. 3755). “She was at ease in Paris, had an American disregard for convention, and had apparently flawless English social credentials” (loc. 3365). It would not be her interest in fashion alone that would be questioned, but also her management of money, her suitability as representative of the smart set, and her family. Yet when *Vogue* began to steer towards a wider horizon in 1923, she was doing nothing she had been explicitly told not to do.

Dorothy Todd benefitted from the friendship of her predecessor, Elspeth Champcommunal, taking over as a tenant at 80 (now Old) Church Street, possibly the same house that she shared with Peter Quennell. She did not board alone: at some point after her arrival, in 1923 or 1924, secretary turned assistant to the editor Madge Garland, née McHarg, left her husband for the new editor and moved in with her (loc. 3365). Despite the estrangement, and despite the fact that she had not changed her name upon marrying, Madge decided to use her husband's surname at Gertrude Stein's suggestion (loc. 3867). According to Champcommunal's daughter, Chloe Tyner, Todd “was ‘the absolute making of Madge, [...] and Madge lapped it up and absolutely fell in



love.’ Madge once described this period as ‘the only two happy years of my life’” (19 May 1997 in Cohen 2012: loc. 3386). Garland hosted at their home, and advised on matters of style not only Virginia Woolf but also “her friends in haute bohemia: the writer Violet Powell, wife of novelist Anthony Powell; Clive Bell’s mistress Benita Jaeger” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3565). She accompanied *Vogue*’s featured celebrities and socialites to the studio, where she would eventually direct and style sessions. “Visiting other artists’ studios, she became friends with the people she met—in London with Ted McKnight Kauffer and Marion Dorn, and with the young painter, decorator, and textile designer Allan Walton; in Paris, with Man Ray and Lee Miller, with Nicole and André Groult, and with their friend Marie Laurencin” (loc. 3550). By the mid-twenties she had risen to fashion editor and as such she was influential on her own: “To up-and-coming young gay men such as Cecil Beaton, George ‘Dadie’ Rylands, and Steven Runciman, how Madge looked and what she thought mattered. She was more experienced and sophisticated than they, despite her lack of a university education. [...] When Rylands, then knocking about Bloomsbury, needed money, she got him a job as a model” (loc. 3565). Despite their separate and different roles at *Vogue*, in the labour of editors like them there was no clear line between leisure and productive practices or affective and professional relationships, and so Todd and Garland are usually referred to as one inextricable entity.

Edna Woolman Chase, the editor-in-chief, had visited the offices of British *Vogue* sometime in 1923 (Carrod 2015: 115). This was early in Todd’s editorship, and so she may have meant to check that the new editor was adhering to Nast’s brief rather than concerned about the shift in content and contributors or the stagnant sales. It was said, however, that Todd received “several warnings” regarding the highbrow tone of the magazine (*ibid.*). Susan Ronald writes that “on his annual trip to London in June

1924, Condé was flabbergasted to see the changes at British *Vogue*”, suggesting that Todd had interpreted the brief too freely (2019: 187). As for Albert Lee, the business manager, he had apparently failed in his mission”; consequently, “Condé installed himself in London for the summer and asked his daughter, Natica, to join him for six weeks to act as his hostess for the events he would attend and plan—including presenting Natica at court” (*ibid.*). It was then that Harry Yoxall was asked to take over Lee’s job. His mission was to oversee the mergers and shifts, and his diaries and records provide the source for most in-depth accounts of this period. He arrived to a magazine that continued to lose money: as mentioned, from a wartime circulation of 14,000 (Seebohm 1982: 124-5) to 16,000 (Luckhurst 1998: 18-9), by Todd’s arrival it had dropped to around 9,000 and stalled there, with losses of £25,000 in 1923 (Yoxall in Reed 2006a: 61). Circulation began to grow under Yoxall’s management, but this slow growth was cut short by the General Strike of May 1926.<sup>3</sup> These numbers, it must be remembered, are drawn from memoirs and diaries as well as studies of the periodical market, as magazines like *Vogue* rarely shared official figures. According to Luckhurst, Nast made the decision of dismissing her, guessing that “what Todd must consistently have failed to recognize was the gravity of *Vogue*’s financial situation” (1998: 20). It was Yoxall who took anxious note of the magazine’s economy, troubled “by generalised circulation problems and nation-wide strikes (*ibid.*). What actually brought about Todd’s sacking, however, was not that straight-forward.

Lisa Cohen’s account provides a wider picture: “if Dody was a brilliant editor she was probably not a good manager. Edna Chase had appeared in London more than

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<sup>3</sup> “This rise is only vaguely quantified by [Yoxall’s] recollection of stockpiling 7,000 copies of the magazine to deliver to London newsagents during the strike in contrast to ‘the bulk of our mid-May issue’ that was stuck on the idled railroads”, clarifies Christopher Reed (2006a: 67). According to Susan Ronald, Yoxall argued in favour of mechanising the process and speeding up *Vogue*’s distribution in the provinces. Before his arrival, its pattern books “sold well immediately in London; six months later sales would pick up in the so-called home counties and provincial big cities; and finally in the deep provinces and small cities another six months after that, just as *Vogue* wanted to withdraw the pattern as outmoded” (2019: 201).

once during her tenure, trying to whip the staff into shape. Harry Yoxall, who found Dody stimulating if difficult, was startled by her swings of temper in the office and described her borrowing money from him in order to invite someone else to lunch. Madge suggested at the end of her life that Dody had mishandled Nast's money" (2012: loc. 3755). These growing doubts regarding her behaviour and business skills fuelled the objections to the direction in which she was taking the magazine; objections built on, or at least tinted by, homophobia. "By 1926, Nast, Yoxall, and Chase were arguing that Dody's preferences—aesthetic and, it was implied, sexual—had perverted the magazine. Chase's description of Dody as 'naturally of a literary and artistic bent' (like the epithets *bookish* and *highbrow* that she and other chroniclers of Condé Nast use to describe Dody's editorial stance) always seems to stand for less mentionable terms" (loc. 3741). Reed also scrutinises Chase's memoir, finding that while she acknowledged the intellectual prestige of her contributors, she immediately undermined it by arguing that Todd had deprioritised fashion and shopping features (2006a: 40).

Carrod suggests that there may have been a sense of danger, of potential contagion, in Todd's promotion of her contributors (2015: 112). Indeed, Chase makes it clear in her memoir that *British Vogue* was not intended as a review, not even as a substitute for *Vanity Fair*. "That new ideas are also a matter of fashion", Reed contraposes, "is the reiterated claim of many articles published during Todd's tenure as editor, which broadened *British Vogue*'s scope to engage new and youthful perspectives on topics far beyond clothes" (2006b: 381). As shown in the previous chapter, the notion that artistic production, decorative objects and even manners are subject to fashion and can be acquired and displayed for prestige was present before Todd's arrival: the difference was that *Vogue* was now advocating for a perspective on art that was too modernist, and perhaps too visibly queer. Todd's supposed demotion of fashion

was a central argument in Chase's narrative, and it has unfortunately been reproduced in subsequent accounts, as Chase's memoir has been a key source for many official histories of *Vogue*. Reed highlights that these histories sometimes add; "as if it were an unrelated datum, the point that 'the morally rigorous Mrs. Chase also disapproved strongly of Miss Todd's personal proclivities, which were overtly homosexual'" (Seebohm 1982: 125 in Reed 2006b: 400). Nonetheless, *Vogue* continued to deliver strong fashion content, and the contributions from Bloomsbury, while perhaps more intellectual in tone, still mostly dealt with daily life, modern manners and, as I shall show, often discussed women writers and women's reading preferences. Finally, Carrod points out that photographs of Todd show her "interest in presenting herself fashionably", which "go some length in disproving" Chase's argument that she did not care for fashion (2015: 45).

Despite the setback caused by the General Strike of May 1926, and most damnably contradicting later accounts, in fact "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" (Reed 2006a: 61). Luckhurst writes that the year before *Vogue* had already lost advertisers, as they "were not keen to promote their products in a magazine which gave them little complimentary copy—copy tended to be reserved for *Vogue*'s favoured highbrow writers and artists—and which in their eyes seemed to be selling a publication for men to women" (1998: 20). As explained, however, *Vogue*'s editorial and advertising space had always been strictly separate. Carrod further debunks this argument by pointing out that her "own close study of the editions between 1922 and 1926 reveals little change in the amount of space given to advertising experienced in the six years prior to 1922 and the six years post 1926.

Advertising content does not alter significantly in terms of the type of items being promoted either” (2015: 45). Meanwhile, Elizabeth Sheehan notices that British *Vogue*

was not precisely “date-stamped.” Instead it was labelled as “early” or “late” month. Chase claims that, under Todd’s watch, the timing of the magazine’s appearances was handled in a “*laissez faire*” manner and that hurt sales, since many British readers purchased magazines by visiting their “local dealers” on the same day each week—usually a Wednesday, when *Eve*, *Tatler*, and the *Sketch* regularly appeared. So Todd’s *Vogue* may have been too experimental for its day when it came to the temporal demands of the fashion magazine business (2018: loc. 405.0).

I would note that this same date system had been used from the beginning, and it was not abandoned until a year after Todd’s firing. Chase’s and Yoxall’s reports of Todd’s mismanagement make me suspect that delays in publication may well have been a real issue, but they would not have resulted from an “experimental” approach to logistics. I do agree with Sheehan’s proposition that the shifting layout of the table of contents “might seem like a sign of inconsistency, but it also suggests that British *Vogue* might be just the kind of witty, nimble guide to fashion that a reader might want” (loc. 403.2-405.0), though, again, this was not exclusive of Todd’s editorship.

These arguments and reservations, subtextual and explicit, were all made manifest in one specific, yet frustratingly obscured, event. Early in September 1926 Yoxall wrote to Nast complaining of Todd’s “prolonged absence at a crucial time, with all her fashion staff too”—what this crucial time might be is not clear, but the late September issue always covered the Paris openings and was the most important number of the year—“but the letter was only one of many such that I might have written and I never expected such drastic consequences”; namely a cable that instructed him to fire her (Yoxall 13 September 1926 in Luckhurst 1998: 20). Characteristically, Nast did not tell Todd himself. Some days later, “Yoxall dismissed Madge; he referred to her in his diary as ‘Miss McHarg (Mrs. Garland), the *maîtresse en titre*’” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3769). While shocked at the fast and definitive turn of events, Yoxall was left wondering just how Todd had not been fired before: ““For details of the Todd

developments see files of my private correspondence with Nast,' Yoxall noted in his diary in November 1926—but we cannot see; these files have not survived” (loc. 3769).

Vita Sackville-West reported the debacle to her husband, the diplomat Harold Nicolson:<sup>4</sup>

As Tray has probably told you, she has got the sack from *Vogue*, which owing to being too highbrow is sinking in circulation. Todd, a woman of spirit, though remonstrated with by Condé Nast, refused to make any concessions to the reading public. So Nast sacked her. She then took legal advice and was told she could get £5,000 damages on the strength of her contract. Nast, when threatened with an action, retorted that he would defend himself by attacking Todd's morals. So poor Todd is silenced, since her morals are of the classic rather than the conventional order. [...] (24 September 1926 in Luckhurst 1998: 21)

Thus threatened, Todd had to “accept the parsimonious dismissal conditions offered” (Carrod 2015: 115). Ronald somewhat defends Nast in her biography, writing that “the incident also made Condé act out of character [...] Given the adversarial nature of the British legal system, Condé's uncharacteristic threat must have come with sound legal advice” (2019: 203). Given later situations with editors, this argument does not really hold. Garland would not have kind words for Nast when she reviewed Caroline Seebom's biography of the publisher in the eighties. Garland “described him as ‘a man whose whole life was based on pursuing an absolute balance of perfection: his own blinkered vision of what women should wear, what a page of the magazine should look like, the exact relation of illustration to text.’ In this book review, she was able to say that the magazine ‘smelled of snobbery so extreme that it [now] seems sometimes obnoxious, sometimes hilarious’” (in Cohen 2012: loc. 5216). Significantly, while she considered that “in the days when homosexuality was a criminal offence he was not above using the threat of disclosure to avoid paying up for a broken contract” she also

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<sup>4</sup> This letter, in which Vita reported a conversation that took place at Monk's House, the Woolfs' cottage in Rodmell, begs the question of whether “Tray”, that is, Raymond Mortimer, *Vogue's* regular literary critic, wrote to Harold, with whom he was at this time romantically involved, or at least still friendly. Mortimer would have had privileged insight as an insider at the magazine and a friend of Todd's.

pointed out that Nast apparently knew of Helen, Todd's illegitimate daughter, and that he may also have threatened to reveal her existence (in Cohen 2012: loc. 3786).

After the sacking, Cohen writes, "other *Vogue* staff resigned in protest; contributors threatened to stop writing for the magazine" (2012: loc. 3769-85); this Sackville-West described as a "political rupture" later in her later. We do not know who resigned, but there were no more reviews from Mortimer for a while, suggesting that he may have been among them. The pair was "devastated"; "unemployed, tainted by scandal, and so virtually unemployable. Bloomsbury did not shun them, but they were ostentatiously avoided by many other former colleagues and friends" (loc. 3816). They stayed in their flat on Royal Hospital Road in Chelsea, where they still hosted their friends for a couple of years: it was not until 1928 that they introduced Virginia Woolf to Rebecca West (loc. 3843). Garland "scrambled for freelance journalism" (loc. 3833) while Todd wrote *The New Interior Decoration* with Mortimer, a survey written in a "prose style – at once breathless and precious [... that] is reminiscent of *Vogue*" (Luckhurst 1998: 23). According to Cohen, Todd's plan was to create her own rival magazine with Garland as her second. While Luckhurst writes that Todd was perceived as too commercial for the older Bloomsbury group, and she was unable to pay them with money or exposure anyway, Cohen finds that "Raymond Mortimer and others had already been recruited", as had Cecil Beaton, Edith Sitwell "and several of the other queer young men who supported them: Dadie Rylands, Steven Runciman, the poet Brian Howard" (2012: loc. 3826). In any case, funds for the magazine were nowhere in sight "and the strain was starting to show" (loc. 3833). Todd's alcoholism gained ground; soon "the bills started coming in from businesses all over London—florists, dressmakers, galleries, restaurants—and [Madge] was confronted with Dody's catastrophic handling of money" (loc. 3849). She would pay off Todd's debts for years,

stating: “Other people will say she ruined my life, she ruined my marriage, she gave me a terrible time. To hell. I have no regrets at all. She fostered me and helped me. She opened many doors. I repaid that debt in full, because I supported her in later life. But I owed her more than I could ever repay” (Garland 29 March 1989 in Cohen 2012: loc. 3498).

Their time together, though, was over. Their belongings were seized and Garland took refuge with her friends, in France for a while, then back to England. They had been too well-known; “public figures who provoked sexual gossip on Fleet Street, London’s grubby, male newspaper world” (Cohen 2012: loc. 3786). By the thirties, Todd’s name was rarely mentioned in her circles, with the exception of Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. “In debt, drinking heavily, shunned socially, unable to find work, she fled to New York. It was the moment of the prosecution of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* for obscenity, and at a Manhattan party Mercedes de Acosta made a splash by calling Dody ‘the bucket in the well of loneliness’” (loc. 3406). Reed puts it more simply: “Failure has few friends, and Dorothy Todd ultimately failed in her ambitious effort to create a magazine that broke the boundaries that protected (and still, to a large extent, protect) art from fashion, intellectuals from popular culture, masculinity from femininity, and heteronormativity from queerness of all kinds” (2006a: 40).

Todd’s final appearances in the correspondence of her circle are unkind. In February 13, 1930, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote to David Garnett that her friends, newlyweds Bea Howe and Mark Lubbock, had “taken the house in Royal Hospital Road where the Todd used to live” and found that “her correspondence is still there, incriminating letters from all the old Bloomsbury Omnibus”, adding, lethally: “so for some time they will live by selling autographs and blackmail” (in Garnett 1994: 47).



Nonetheless, Todd did have her champions. Arriving “at a party in King’s Bench Walk”, the new editor of *Vogue*, Alison Settle, met Iris Tree, who “not knowing who I was, threatened what she and her friends would do to the new editor, who replaced the (?) lesbian former editor” (Settle n. d.: B.305.7). Tree’s infuriated declaration suggests that the rumour mill had been at work: homophobia was perhaps not the cause of Todd’s firing, but it had been leveraged in the immediate aftermath of the event, and it certainly informed the narrative that was spun by both sides afterwards. In other words, Tree may well have believed that Todd had been fired *because* she was a lesbian. And yet most of Todd’s collaborators, themselves queer and relatively known to be so, continued their attachment to the magazine in the long run. Mortimer would return to *Vogue* less than a year later, and so did Garland in 1934. Chase, it seems, drew the line at the editor—who was supposed to embody *Vogue* and its values—loving women. When Settle had to be substituted herself, “Madge lobbied hard for the job”, but despite her experience Chase and “and another manager were ‘bitterly anti-Garland on the morality issue’” (Yoxall 2 September 1935 in Cohen 2012: loc. 4070). Yoxall himself was more sympathetic: “Can’t see why, myself, her editorship should cause such a scandal, when her appointment as fashion editor did not do so” (*ibid.*).

What both Garland and Yoxall witnessed was that Todd mishandled money and showed unprofessional behaviour. Reports of fleeing advertisers and alienated readers have been shown to be exaggerated, but everything points to Todd having been genuinely unreliable as a manager. Chase does not say that in her memoir, nor does she offer specific examples, perhaps out of a very partial discretion or because she believed that Todd’s tastes, family life and “morals” so bad as to make her lack of business acumen irrelevant. On that point, it is worth noting that Woolf proposed that Todd write her memoirs for her Hogarth Press but soon had reservations, as “I gather there are

passages of an inconceivable squalor” (Woolf 2 June 1926 in Reed 2004: 297). Be it for one reason or many, Todd’s backhanded expulsion has been presented as the end of British *Vogue* as a modernist project: the shift to “highbrow” content has been attributed solely to Todd, both as an accusation and as a reason to champion her. Reed frames her firing within the cultural landscape of the late twenties, which saw a “reactionary potential massed against Amusing queerness” made manifest in the trial of Radclyffe Hall: “With that, an era at British *Vogue* was over. Todd’s circle of celebrity authors, buffered by their stronger links with class privilege, great literature, and matrimony, dropped their relationship with *Vogue*” (2006b: 396).

Was that it? Had British *Vogue* strained the confines of the glossy until they snapped, provoking readers, management, even its own contributors? As most accounts to date would have it, the modernist project of *Vogue*, either failed or suppressed, ended with Todd. Once she was fired in September 1926 for being too unreliable, too highbrow, too notoriously lesbian, an unwed mother, or all at once, and Garland followed, the Bloomsberries then resigned in solidarity and championed their martyr for a while, before she became too embarrassing to be seen with, and moved on to less obviously commercial enterprises.

Nast, it seems, doubted whether placing a safer candidate in Todd’s stead was worth it. Chase convinced him not to shut down British *Vogue* and stepped in to do damage control as interim editor until the designated successor, Alison Settle, had been properly groomed. Yoxall, meanwhile, “set plans in motion to increase advertising revenue and effectively re-launch the magazine” (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 84). Indeed, most accounts have 1926 as the first year of Settle’s editorship. Chase’s own record of this crisis is odd, as it focuses instead on the search for a new fashion editor. Her first option was Michel de Brunhoff, editor of *Jardin des Modes* and brother of Cosette

Vogel, the editor of *Vogue Paris*, whose husband, in turn, was also a key player in the world of Parisian fashion periodicals.

He went to London and the foreseeable happened. He adored it. To be sure, there was a period of very French bickering over terms, but he was full of ideas and did a fine job, not only in regard to the fashions themselves, but in creating pages related to the London shops, which we had long been wanting. He went to London for a few days every other fortnight and he and Harry Yoxall became fast personal friends, their liking based on mutual respect and admiration and, on Harry's side, a relish of Michel's latent comic genius. (Chase 2018: loc. 2091)

Chase then explained her struggle to convince Yoxall and Lawrence Schneider, the advertising manager, to respect her authority as a woman. Unfortunately identifying this period as the twenties, without giving a more exact date, she wrote:

Today Harry Yoxall is one of my close and oldest friends, but at the time of which I write, when Condé sent me over to reorganize English *Vogue*, my advent caused him no rejoicing. To begin with, I was a woman, and Harry was very British. A woman in a position of authority was galling in any case, and when her authority could in theory, and possibly in practice, supersede his own, she became even more distasteful.

[...] Whatever their troubles with Dorothy Todd had been, and some of them were acute, she at least was the devil they knew. In me they saw the Disturber, the Demon Housekeeper come to upset their cosy masculine regime. And the truth was that some upsetting was necessary if *Vogue* were to survive.

Although I had been abroad many times before, this time my husband and Ilka were both with me; we had taken a fairly large maisonette in a house in Regent's Park, and were installed there for an indefinite period. (loc. 2119)

Writing to Chase about her daughter Ilka's book, *Past Imperfect*, Yoxall noted that it made him "think of the old days and of all the frightful fights we had that year" and regret his mistrust of her, wondering at "Condé's—shall we call it folly or far-sightedness? —in entrusting the London office to such inexperienced youngsters as Lawrence and me" (in Chase 2018: loc. 2191). Yoxall's words imply that they had been left in charge on their own, without an editor.

There is nothing to make us doubt that this happened right after Todd's departure, though the moment when Settle stepped in is unclear. Her own accounts vary. The proofs for her entry in *Who's Who 1960* state: "I became Editor of the British edition of *VOGUE* in the later 'Twenties and through most of the 'Thirties: also appointed a director of the Conde Nast Publications" (n. d.: AS. 39). Studies of the period (Abey Suriya *et al.* 1994; Button 2006; Cox and Mowatt 2012; Carrod 2015;

Coser 2017) locate her starting date in 1926. They may simply have estimated it from Todd's firing or relied on "Alison Settle Remembers", a light-hearted piece that describes how Cecil Beaton pestered her on a trip to Venice to introduce him to *Vogue* (Settle 24 June 1973: AS. 29). From Beaton's diaries we know that the trip took place in August 1926, when Todd was still the editor. Settle's account implies that she had sway in the magazine, as she forwarded his work to Chase: this was because she was *Vogue's* society reporter, one of her many jobs at the time (Coser 2017: 8). Elizabeth Penrose took over at British *Vogue* in November 1935 after yet another series of clashes with the American management that resulted in an editor's ethically dubious firing, and Settle's own papers repeatedly state that she held the post of editor for seven years. Counting back, and being generous, this could bring the starting date to 1927, but not to late 1926. Settle may have misremembered, or Chase may have stepped in during those months in between.

The story shifts, however, if we pull at a different thread. I have suggested throughout this section that *Vogue's* highbrow turn has been overrepresented in secondary scholarship; it is now time to clarify. If we approach *Vogue* only through its most canonical affiliates—first Virginia Woolf, then the Bloomsbury group as a whole, then Edith Sitwell and her crusade on behalf of Gertrude Stein—we miss a dynamic of literary engagement that outlived Todd. Reading Sarah Knights' biography of David Garnett for clues as to when and through whom he and Francis Birrell first made contact with *Vogue*, I came across a startling new name.

Vera Meynell, née Mendel, had been the financier of her husband Francis and David Garnett's Nonesuch Press, founded early in 1923. Often contrasted with the Hogarth Press, Nonesuch aimed to publish "limited editions of exquisitely printed books": Vera was in charge of finance and management, "Francis was an expert

typographer”, and David “would broaden their literary outlook” (Garnett 1962: 16). Knights sums up their ethos: “they wanted to produce beautiful books [...] for people who wanted to read them, rather than simply to own them [...] at relatively affordable prices” (2015: 182-3). Nonesuch existed in a “symbiotic relationship” with the Birrell & Garnett bookshop, which “provided a convivial atmosphere and its stock of second hand and rare books furnished a library-like repository for the Nonesuch editors” (183). For a while, the bookshop and the press made a strange but attractive organism, as the latter existed in the basement of the former. Birrell, Garnett and Meynell all contributed to *Vogue* semi-regularly, and their editorial and commercial philosophy could not have been more appealing to its values. Their publications “sold well from the beginning and at one time all our editions were oversubscribed three or four times before publication” (Garnett 1962: 18-9); their catalogue showcased the eye for historic oddities and delightful finds that *Vogue* included in its vision of modernity, and indeed their publications were referenced and reviewed in *Vogue* as often, if not more, than those of the Hogarth Press. The Nonesuch Press had one single bestseller, *The Week-End Book*, mostly edited by Vera, which was repeatedly and warmly recommended by *Vogue*. Ashley Montagu explains that its success was “not because it was well designed, which it was, but because it appealed to weekenders and to stay at-home would-be weekenders, because it was (and still is) great fun, and because there was nothing else like it” (1983: 132). First published in 1924, it continued to sell well for decades and made Nonesuch successful enough to move to new premises near Bloomsbury.

With the growth of the business, Vera’s interest in Nonesuch began to lessen. She had done quite a deal of editing and book-choosing in the early years, but her chief employment was as company secretary, and as early as 1927 she had begun to be bored with this. So she accepted a surprising invitation to go on trial for six months as editor of *Vogue*. This was not a success: indeed, Vera did not really expect it to be. Her views, her attitude, were different from those of the American proprietors and the English management. Even her vocabulary was different. The social correspondent submitted a report of a big dance which began with these words: ‘On Friday the second of Lord Camrose’s balls came off’. Vera circulated this to the sub-editors with a large query

mark. Nobody confessed to seeing that these words were capable of a far-from-intended interpretation. (Meynell 1971: 179-80)

Vera Meynell would not have been considered had Dorothy Todd been fired because she had turned *Vogue* into a highbrow publication that paid too much attention to literature: this can only be explained if the management wanted someone from a similar background and perspective, only with proven business acumen and hopefully more amenable. Meynell, however, was too far removed from *Vogue*'s intended milieu and did not intend to get any closer. Probably because she knew Todd first-hand, she was pessimistic about her ideas aligning with Nast's. "In due course" Chase traveled to London, where she: "Politely told Vera that her six-months engagement would not be renewed. At their parting Harry Yoxall said: 'Please, Vera, don't look at us as if you despised us and the whole set-up'. 'Dear me, Harry,' said Vera, 'and I thought I had a poker-face.'" (180).

I believe that the timeline is best explained as follows: Meynell must have been tapped late in 1926, perhaps immediately after Todd's firing, as her immediate circle, including Birrell and Garnett, were frequently in contact with *Vogue* and may have suggested her name. It is also not impossible that she had already contributed an anonymous piece or more. The early June 1927 issue included a lecture that Chase gave at Harrods, meaning that she was in London at this time, and featured Herbert Farjeon's first contribution. Farjeon was a friend and collaborator of the Meynells, so it must have been Vera who commissioned him. Therefore, I would propose June 1927 as the latest possible end her tenure, and the summer that followed as the time when Chase stepped in as interim editor and great re-organizer. Throughout this chapter, however, I will consider articles and reviews published until August, as they could easily have been commissioned before Settle's time, and even if they were not, they speak to an investment in a highly stylish, referential and amusing modernity that survived Todd.

### 2.1.2. “Through Leaves”: Modernism in Vogue

Dorothy Todd’s relationships with the Bloomsbury group—and, to a lesser extent, other British modernists—and their manifestation in British *Vogue* have garnered enough attention from the field of modernist studies (Mellown 1996; Luckhurst 1998; Mahood 2002; Reed 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Koppen 2009; Lachmansingh 2010; Carrod 2015; Kalich 2018; Sheehan 2018) that a discussion of her editorship is inseparable from a discussion of the movement. This section must balance two ideas that do not sit comfortably next to each other: one, that Todd’s *Vogue* was positioned as a modernist project and ought to be read as such, and two, that the issues between February 1923 and September 1926 cannot be dislodged, even less neatly sliced out, from the progression of the magazine. After all, it must be remembered that she was not responsible for *Vogue*’s editorial line and commissions on her own, that dates cannot be told with exactitude, and that the magazine had not ignored modernist art and criticism before her arrival and would in fact continue to explore them after her forced exit. Therefore, this section is an uneasy sequence of “yes, but” arguments that will hopefully present *Vogue* as a dynamic project that was invested not only in the development and promotion of modernism but also with its accessibility—perhaps a sign of the middlebrow position that would follow—and that brought together varied and occasionally contradictory interests, including artistic innovation and commerce.

In order to correct the somewhat distorted understanding of this evolution, it is necessary to follow the threads that were brought over from Elspeth Champcommunal’s day. The aforementioned studies tend to accept Georgina Howell’s statement that during Todd’s editorship “the pages looked ten times more interesting with photographs by Steichen and Hoyningen-Huene, Man Ray and Beaton, and came alive with subjects as

different as Gertrude Stein [...] and the rhythms of the *Revue Nègre*”, Josephine Baker’s successful show (1978: 49). It is true that these artists began to appear then, but the first two were based in America and France rather than Britain; coverage of the arts grew, but gradually; while more photographs were added, there was no sudden change in layout or particularly striking design—if that is what is meant by “ten times more interesting”.

The introductory page continued to change and to flicker out. In early March 1923, Miss Vogue selected letters and introduced the next issue; in late February 1924, a telegram supposedly sent from the Paris offices teased what was to come; in late July of the same year the introduction made a statement of purpose, explaining that she had taken “a last look round the shops” and collected a list of holiday books that “will satisfy the gravest as well as the gayest of tastes” before leaving for Scotland (21); by early March 1927, it showed a simple table of contents. *Vogue* continued to offer the services of the Paris information bureau and to invite readers to contact its free Shopping Service or ask for advice by letter, emphasising its economy:

*Money ill-spent is money wasted. Money well spent is money saved. Every page of Vogue shows you how to save money by spending it to advantage.*

DO YOU SAVE MONEY?

DO YOU USE VOGUE?

It is one thing to buy and read Vogue; it is quite another thing to *use* Vogue and profit—not only by its counsel based on experience and carefully gathered, accurate information—but by the services it offers you free of charge. A single issue of Vogue is a pleasant tonic. But the reading of a single issue will not remedy your clothes troubles, any more than a single glass of sparkling water at Homburg will restore you to health. One must take the Vogue ‘cure,’ just as one takes the cure at the Spa. If you absorb Vogue regularly, issue by issue, as it comes to you from your newsdealer, you gradually become imbued with the Vogue idea, and almost unconsciously you grow wise in the ways of spending your dress money to the best advantage—exhilarated with the discovery that money well spent goes a long way, often leaving a balance available for the indulgence of some pet extravagance.

LET VOGUE *INFORM* YOU

LET VOGUE *ADVISE* YOU

LET VOGUE *SERVE* YOU (late October 1923: v)



Through its introductions, essays and quizzes that tested the reader's—or her husband's—knowledge,<sup>5</sup> *Vogue* underscored the importance of informed choices in shopping and dressing. It also continued to stimulate the imagination with first-hand accounts from abroad as well as photographs of period interiors.

Most studies of this period in *Vogue* have come from the fields of literature and art history, and, logically, they have highlighted those subjects. However, its interest in other manifestations of fashionable living grew significantly as well. This was especially obvious in the case of society coverage, which distanced this edition of *Vogue* from the American original. When issues became longer in the autumn of 1923 it was not only because of added advertising space, but also because of the pages devoted to society journalism and photographs, a version of celebrity culture centred on British high society. Interestingly, this meant that men—aristocrats, sportsmen, actors and musicians—became a more frequent sight. X. Marcel Boulestin, of the famous restaurant, whose story I told in the first chapter, had a column on fine cooking and entertaining that began in early June 1923 and lasted for years: in fact, during this period he was by far *Vogue's* most prolific contributor. Hostesses were advised on cocktails, Danish sandwiches, late-night snacks, and what seems to be an ancestor of the frappe; all the necessary garnishes of a newly nocturnal social diary. Fish, Benito and Charles Martin satirised the types one encountered in such events: the young flappers and bachelors in pursuit of love and the bohemians, like the Poetic Girl, who recited above her would-be suitor's tolerance, the Decalcomaniac, who “will most certainly convert your poetic masterpieces into striking decorations” (early September 1924: 31),

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<sup>5</sup> Testing one's husband, *Vogue* suggested, would make him more amenable to one's spending, as it would prove it was not thoughtless but well-informed: “You can make a similar quiz yourself from any issue: and the best of it is that, every time you play, you're not only showing how much you know, but learning what you ought to have known and didn't! My game isn't only good for women; it's marvellous for husbands. If they are inclined to murmur at your bills, it proves to them that there is at least one extravagance of which they cannot hold you guilty—the only inexcusable extravagance—to buy in haste and to repent at leisure.” (Early May 1927: 61)

My Lady Nicotine or The Speed Queen. In his study of the manifestations of a queer subculture in Todd's *Vogue*, Christopher Reed sees in these cartoons "the fluidity of gender and eroticism", as they "regularly lampoon courtship and marriage, with an array of effeminate men avoiding or failing at heterosexual coupling" (2006a: 45). *Vogue's* six Parisian friends were featured until they were substituted in late 1926 by "Viola Paris". When the "types" portrayed were people of colour, the commentary was decidedly racist, drawing from and promoting colonial discourse.<sup>6</sup>

The smart set populated a regular column, which went through different titles, usually "Our Lives from Day to Day" or a variation thereof. This column, while unsigned, was conspicuously written in the first person of the plural. It reported on the events—openings, parties, weddings—of the past two weeks, almost exclusively in London. Its recurring characters were the women who appeared in full-page portraits: the Curzon sisters, the Asquith women, the Wyndham children, the theatrical Trees. These columns offhandedly referenced the political climate, international news or the art work *du jour* in a jovial, gossipy but not insolent tone: "A series of studies, psychological and sartorial, of hostesses at 10, Downing Street, from Mrs. Asquith to Miss Ishbel MacDonald, would make fascinating reading! There are some charming and socially interesting young women connected directly and indirectly with politics nowadays" (late February 1924: 29). Notably, as shall be explored later in this chapter,

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of Eric D. Walrond and Covarrubias's more complex representations of "the New Negro and other Jazz Age 'types'", see the chapter by Natalie Kalich in Clay *et al.*'s volume on interwar women's periodicals. She explains that: "*Vogue* often published work on these subjects by non-African Americans, reaffirming many black artists' fears that their creative efforts were being appropriated by the dominant race—both in terms of production and reception. [...] The problem of representation existed within and across races, making Covarrubias an interesting case study as a Mexican immigrant who befriended many Harlem Renaissance artists and contributed illustrations to their texts while also working for magazines created for and run by whites" (2018: loc. 154.1). His work may not have been read as an exaggeration in Europe, Kalich posits, where black bodies and cultures tended to be exoticised. As for Walrond's captions, she argues that his "use of black dialect could have been political, a refusal to write in standard (white) English in order to elevate the African American voice. In the context of *Vogue*, however, which featured aspects of wealthy white culture and which was constructed with white readers in mind, the reception of the pictorial becomes more ambiguous" (loc. 169.4). Black culture, then, was appropriated and caricatured rather than genuinely approached.

it also covered *Vogue*'s highbrow contributors, who represented the intellectual aspect of true modish living as well as revealed interest in what the greats were doing. "Notes and News" were still received from Paris, signed by J.R.F. and later by Lysiane Bernhardt, granddaughter of the actress.

There was a growing willingness to show the inner workings of the magazine and to draw the reader behind the scenes, and the visibility of its contributors was one of its manifestations. For its thirtieth anniversary, *Vogue* acknowledged the melancholy of existing within "the metropolitan whirl": "in a quiet little library hidden in the very middle of all the rush of editors and artists and models and photographers that go to make up the current issue, and the next issue, and the one after that, there's a quiet row of bound volumes [...] Sitting here in the silent centre of a maelstrom of colour and sound, and turning over these whispering pages, is rather eerie, and rather funny, and rather sad (like life)" (early February 1923: 35). In this instance *Vogue* let go of the conceit of a personified Miss Vogue and instead presented itself, quite simply, as a magazine; a surprisingly rare admission of the limitations of the format. The same issue made the point that fashion journalism was not "too easy a task"; "if there is no rest for the wicked [...] there is still less for those who try to keep pace with the vagaries of the world of fashion" (83). The very effort of reporting on the modes, then, was caught up in the pace of modernity.

In early January 1924 *Vogue* announced its move to a new and larger base at Aldwych House and renewed the standing invitation: "In addition to the spacious reception room where Vogue readers will find the Information and Shopping Services at their disposal, there is a fully equipped Vogue Pattern Showroom and Salesroom, where all Vogue Patterns may be obtained, and where large drawings in colour may be inspected, and full information and advice concerning the use of the patterns is

available” (77). In the following issue, Miss Vogue held up a map and reintroduced its function of service to the modern woman: “Even the most independent and capable person occasionally wants advice and doesn’t quite know where to get it. Next time that happens to you, try Vogue” (late January 1924: 19). *Vogue* occasionally acknowledged the impact of major external events on its inner workings: the railway strike of early 1924 pushed back the arrival of new fabrics, and the General Strike of May 1926 delayed the arrival of Nancy Cunard’s Paris report, a contretemps that was noted by the very first editor’s note (108) and caused the June issues to be combined into one. The annual Paris Openings always caused a flurry at the offices, and they were marketed to create as much excitement as possible, turning candour into a strategy and urging readers to reserve the upcoming issue at their newsagent’s:

The Fashion Editor of Vogue has just flown back from Paris, bringing with her dozens of sketches and notes [...] and leaving behind her orders for dozens more of finished drawings and photographs.

Out of this material, during the next fortnight, the Vogue staff will create the fashion pages of the Early September number—working full-speed while everyone else is holiday-making, so that Vogue may maintain its reputation for presenting the styles more swiftly, as well as more tastefully and more authoritatively, than any other publication. (Late August 1924: xvi)

There was also visual meta-commentary; illustrations that suggested how *Vogue* could aid the imagination. The introduction to the late September 1924 issue shows two women reading *Vogue* together, watching small figurines emerge from the pages; another illustration shows a woman pondering new outfits from affordable patterns. The idealised *Vogue* reader even appeared on the cover in late September 1926. Meanwhile, William Bolin turned his satirical eye inward to parody the style of *Vogue*’s regulars—Benito, Platt, Martin, Fish and himself—assuming that the reader would know them from previous appearances. *Vogue* was thus reaffirmed from within: recurrence, given enough layers, became reliability.

Such openness did not extend to revealing the names of the regular workaday staff, and the editor stayed an anonymous authority figure. “Vogue’s-Eye View of the

Mode” was signed “The Editor”, no name given, when it was signed at all. An early May 1926 article on new couture houses showcased Champcommunal’s new venture with a photograph of her by Man Ray, but did not mention that she had edited British *Vogue* for six years even though it would have emphasised its proximity to the fashion industry. An exception was made for Edna Woolman Chase in early June 1927; her lecture at Harrods on “Good Taste in Dress” was printed in the magazine, sanctioning her expertise and role as intermediary. “It is because *Vogue* is so constantly being consulted about questions of taste in dress and so many women seem to find it difficult to distinguish between the right thing and the wrong thing—that I am going to talk to-day on the fundamental points of taste; of current fashions—and of how to purchase them and how to wear them” (65). With exemplary photographs, Chase reinforced the ideas that “good taste is not a question of money, it is a question of knowledge and time spent in acquiring it” (*ibid.*); “simplicity and elimination are our watchwords to-day” (78); as always; “to achieve individuality in the present mode, a woman must give infinite attention to detail. Her frock offers an inviting background, but not only that—it demands something of her own ingenuity, her taste, and sense of restraint [...] A really intelligent shopper always works to a plan. [...] And it is just at this point that the fashion magazine begins to play its rôle” (*ibid.*). It seems that this lecture was part of a marketing strategy to reinforce *Vogue*’s renown as a guide, as it was also published as a separate illustrated booklet.

There were anniversary issues, which brought the temporal oddities of fashion magazines to the front and served to turn *Vogue* into a quasi-mythical institution. The early February 1923 issue celebrated the thirtieth anniversary “of our eternally youthful journal” (33); always of the immediate future, but with a history of reliability. On the cover Miss 1892 and Miss 1922 offered Miss *Vogue* a cake, bridging “the remote and

fabulous past [...] with the bright immediate present of 1923. We are halting a moment in the dizzy onrush of modern life to look back and remember and compare—to yearn a little wistfully over the vanished days—and to thank our stars that after all we are lucky enough to live in the enlightened Now” (*ibid.*). Essays on changes in the practices of dressing, driving or shopping were brought to life by illustrated icons of the fin-de-siècle, like a woman on a tricycle. Important dates—Christmas, the yearly Ascot Races, the Championships at Wimbledon, the presentation of young ladies at Court, royal weddings and deaths—were often commemorated with nostalgic images and essays filled with historical anecdotes, including first-hand testimonials.<sup>7</sup> As Mary MacCarthy put it, “it has become one of our amusements to be conscious of periods” and to apply their terms not only to trends and spaces, but also to people (early May 1926: 57). Besides the aborted series on fashion history there were plenty other features that put contemporary fashions into historical context and made broad statements about the advance of women’s position as shown in their clothes. Furthermore, the small illustrations that accompanied all sorts of articles usually showed women—men only occasionally, and in subservient positions—in historical costume, mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Punctuated by these grounding winks to history, the editorial essays would continue their attempts to capture the lived experience of modernity. For Bertrand Russell, “the modern increase in warlike instinct is attributable to the dissatisfaction (mostly unconscious) caused by the regularity, monotony, and tameness of modern life” (late May 1924: 92): we are moved, he wrote, by the need to be admired by others, which leads us to accumulate and display material goods. He argued that modern

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<sup>7</sup> There was, for instance, “My Ascots and Ascot Frocks”, in which the actress now called Lady Tree looked back at her first races in 1891, when “one’s idea was to be graceful and picturesque without eccentricity, distinguished without looking conspicuous” (late May 1926: 59). By contrast, David Garnett’s “Two Centuries of Ascot”, illustrated by Mademoiselle Jacquier, included quotations from a width of historical sources and was comic in tone (early June 1927).

machinery brought monotony, which could only be fought with adventurous leisure. The column that mourned Queen Alexandra's death articulated a different sentiment with similar imagery: the Edwardian age being officially over, readers must "set our profiles vigorously to contemporary things, to this crystal, transparent, luminous, mechanical, secretless future. There is nothing that will be barred to us—we can hear everything, see everything, be everywhere, be inoculated with new souls and new bodies, have our faces lifted to what angle we please and even determine our span of years on the earth" (late December 1925: 39). Aldous Huxley reflected that modernity was made manifest through a fixation on comfort: "The invention of the means of being comfortable and the pursuit of comfort as a desirable end—one of the most desirable that human beings can propose to themselves—are modern phenomena, unparalleled in history since the time of the Romans" (early July 1927: 43). In other essays, the true sign of the times was dancing: the post-war girl, boyish or high-heeled, wants a man that is her "delightful accessory [...] Whatever else he does he must dance well, and dress well" (Tremayne early August 1923: 20); wherever one went one saw "dancing couples of every kind", dancing jazz and the tango, "duty dancing, pleasure dancing, bad dancing, good dancing; a hectic pulsation that is continuously whipped up as though a pause would mean its loss forever" (early July 1927: 27).

A striking essay by Sydney Tremayne opened with a nightmare of daily life, referencing sex and suicide in a shocking, almost aggressive tone, to then follow him down to the "Utopian Underworld"—"a real Utopia, which, all unrealised, lies at our feet, or rather, beneath them, as they slither through the greasy, malodorous mud of London streets" (early January 1924: 47). The underground was "Poster Land": not the meeting-space of Anthony Asquith's *Underground*, but a grim gallery of advertisements that, with their perfection and allure, only highlighted what the viewer was missing. In

general, though, *Vogue* held a positive view of poster art, reproducing E. McKnight Kauffer's likeness, including him in its gallery of celebrities, and reviewing his exhibitions: "thanks to him, the hoardings and tube stations of London are places where, during an otherwise tedious journey, one may encounter a delightful surprise among a mass of vulgar and stupid advertisement, giving hope that if in the future other forms of art are to be crushed by the inroads of industrialised civilisation, it may still subsist in this form" (late May 1925: 77).

Despite occasionally raising the alarm at modern speed, need, and distressing surfaces, *Vogue* continued to tie contemporary taste and ideas together in the notion of smartness. "Newer than the newest detail about fashion", *Vogue* would pretend to realise in 1927, "is the present attitude towards fashion. No longer is the mode a matter of frivolity, a means of coquetry, a subject in which only the light-minded are interested. It is now a practical matter, and it is efficient and intelligent to be well dressed" (late June 1927: 33). It had of course made this point in numerous occasions: the difference was the growing emphasis on rationality and efficiency, better suited to the more sober climate of the late twenties. If, as shown in the previous chapter, intellectual curiosity was a necessary aspect of smartness before 1922, during Todd's editorship it became its core. "What *Vogue's* fashion pages are to the mode, *Vogue's* other pages are to the general interests of the sophisticated, modern reader. [...] No intelligent person can overlook its up-to-the-minute, cleverly written, beautifully illustrated review of Society, sport, the drama, art or decoration" (late August 1924: xvi). Most importantly, interest in culture was understood to mean interest in modernist culture:

For Fashion—whose other name is Change—though once looked down upon as a merely frivolous minx, is now revealed in a truer light as a combination of many of the more attractive virtues and a vast amount of wisdom. [...] *Vogue* has no intention of confining its pages to hats and frocks. In literature, the drama, art and architecture, the same spirit of change is seen at work, and to the intelligent observer the interplay of



suggestion and influence between all these things is one of the fascinations of the study of the contemporary world. (Early April 1925: 45)

This introduction, where the “spirit of change” can comfortably be identified with modernism, has—I believe rightly—been quoted in many studies of Todd’s *Vogue*. Other introductions also served as a statement of purpose, but this one did so openly, perfectly articulating “Todd’s representation of modernism” as “an holistic one” (Carrod 2015: 6) and supporting the argument that she promoted “a dialogue between the leading literary and artistic minds of the day” (7) even more emphatically and effectively than before. If the reader can learn to notice this “interplay of suggestion and influence” at work, then buying *Vogue* was not a frivolity but “essential for the reader who does not want to be behind the times” (Sheehan 2018: loc. 406.8).

The term “modernism”, referring to modish living, appeared in *Vogue* almost a decade before Laura Riding and Robert Graves made it commonplace with their *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* in 1927 (Beasley 2014 in Carrod 2015: 13), when Paul Iribe contributed “The Audacious Note of Modernism in the Boudoir”, an interior design feature, in early July 1919. This early appearance of “modernism”, however, was rare; the widespread use of “modern”, as Amanda Carrod notes, is more significant: “There are also more than fifty uses of the word ‘modern’ within article titles — not including those relating to fashion specifically” (*ibid.*). Rita Felski defines modernism as “a specific form of artistic production, serving as an umbrella term for a mélange of artistic schools and styles which first arose in late-nineteenth-century Europe and America” (1995: 13). Therefore, modernist texts are marked by “aesthetic self-consciousness, stylistic fragmentation, and a questioning of representation” (*ibid.*) which might manifest in “juxtaposition”, “montage”, “paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty; and the dehumanization of the subject” (23). Elizabeth M. Sheehan mentions that fragmentation and rearrangement often occur in representations of time, as manifested in “celebrations

of the new and attempts to transcend the vicissitudes of time as well as disruptions of narrative progression and representations of time as variable, relative, and contingent” (2018: loc. 401.4-403.2); she proposes that this is one of the ways in which “Todd’s *Vogue* emerges as a modernist venture. Time stretches and contracts in its pages, which leap from discussions of dresses that are absolutely of the moment to analyses of how garments blend older styles with contemporary modes and from features that treat the year as the definitive temporal unit of fashion to articles that address the simultaneously cyclic, progressive, and disruptive temporalities of fashion and culture” (*ibid.*), a temporal distortion that was also articulated through layout design. I agree with her reading, yet I would again point out that such manifestations were not a novelty of this editorship but rather a heightened expression of what was already there, and a common aspect of fashion magazines (Parkins 2010).

With every issue, *Vogue* made it apparent that one could approach daily life through a modernist perspective, thus framing domestic décor and dress, conversation and entertainment, collecting and reading. In its appealing first person, the society column mused: “As I lie in the luxury of my bed, with the light black quilt, and look round at the Chinese room I am for the moment occupying, I think how more than difficult it is to be first, or even with things, for instance, in the way of taste [...] Chinoiserie is very great fun—yes, to look at, but chinoiseries of the mind will be our danger: not to be simple, not to be able to receive new impressions, how terrible!” (early February 1926: 29). One must be open-minded, but that alone is not enough: one must make the active effort to live beautifully. In a characteristic scene that combined cultural criticism with ostentatious name-dropping, the columnist attended a Tchekov play at the theatre, among an “interesting and mainly highbrow” audience that also included actress Jeanne de Casalis and writer Francis Birrell. In another such column, she regretted her

choice of outfit for “a very smart luncheon where all the women happened to have velvet berets, hastily stabbed on with arrows of onyx and jade” (late April 1926: 47).

She continued, perhaps in detached irony, perhaps in sober joy:

Every day I seem to learn something new about [the ultra-moderns'] theories. At this very dinner I was involved in a conversation on philistines, of whose circle I was so lately one; perhaps in a way I still am, but at all events I am not one who thinks modern painting, writing or music either funny, disgusting or mad. I at least have begun to find the pictures beautiful, and that, according to Keats, is all I am like to know or need to know on earth. Even to hate modern art sufficiently, according to the contemporaries, is something gained; it is not apathy or indifference, and this leads to another theory of theirs that only what is ordinary and humdrum is insane. (49)

Wrapping up her week, the anonymous columnist then attended “a very high-brow party” at the recently opened Mayor Gallery in Mayfair (*ibid.*). *Vogue*'s own position was identified as “highbrow” on multiple occasions: the theatre pages of late February 1925 expressed relief that “there has been a great recrudescence of highbrow drama during the last fortnight [...] after the tepidities that have recently been offered to the readers of *Vogue*” (56). “Jazz and Mr. Gershwin”, subtitled “An Interview, with a Preface in Praise of Syncopation”, was simply signed by “A High Brow” (late June 1925). Interestingly, it spoke of “the old, unlucky, barbarous division of English people into aesthetes and athletes, the arty and the hearty, Heartbreak House and Horseback Hall. There are precious few of us who are at ease with both”; believers in jazz were thus highbrows, and Clive Bell, who tried “to stem the tide”, was, against all expectation, left outside that group (47).

There is no question that Todd brought *Vogue* closer to “high” culture, what was then the avant-garde and is now part of the canon, but her efforts cannot be described as “highbrow” without qualification. Under her editorship, *Vogue* sharpened its function as a cultural intermediary: it continued to articulate a vision of modern living that was based on curiosity and material display, but now it did so through the lens of modernism. As Reed points out, “that the range of readership for British *Vogue* included those whose middle-class identity was more aspirational than actual is suggested by

advertisements and editorial copy promoting ‘Vogue’s School Service’” (2006a: 68). *Vogue’s* argument in favour of cultivation and upward social mobility is also implicit in its cultural coverage: it made modernist art and ideas accessible without being on the defensive or talking down to the reader, all the while mocking those who only pretended to understand. Its self-appointed position as a “highbrow” publication was certainly complex. In the essay “The Horrors of Society”, Huxley disparaged of “polite” society as a whole: the “lowbrow” among them filled “the vacuum of their existence” with games, which brought him near

a deep-seated, septic, and suppurating boredom.

So much for good society of the more low-browed variety. What now of the highbrow rich, the aristocratic intellectuals, the leisured patrons of the arts? What of these? They ought, of course, by definition to be superior to the lowbrows. Experience, alas, gives the lie to *a priori* definitions. I am inclined to think that, as a whole, the highbrows are almost worse than the lows. Those who sin after having seen the light and eaten of the tree of knowledge are more blameworthy than those who sin in pre-Adamite innocence and darkness. (Late September 1925: 54)

At the heart of the problem, he wrote, was leisure: the “highbrow rich” consumed art and discussed it frivolously, as they approached all other subjects. For them, art was a pastime; they did not create anything, nor did they care much for art at all:

In highbrow salons, on the other hand, you must talk—of the latest pictures, the latest scandals, pornographies, and eccentricities; the latest books, the latest modes; the latest music, the latest religions, the latest psychologies of love, the latest theories of science and philosophy. And it is all, no doubt, very agreeable and diverting; but oh, if you happen to take anything at all seriously, how profoundly shocking and horrible! For to those polished beings, art is only another time killer, [...] an amusing subject, but not, of course, so entertaining as a juicy piece of scandal. All fine and important things are degraded; all values overturned. Men and ideas are prized in this polite society, not for their intrinsic merit, but because they happen, for one reason or another, to be fashionable. (*ibid.*)

Thus Huxley attacked those who took *Vogue’s* advice on collecting and showing off new ideas and famous connections at the most superficial level. His essay must be read in conversation with other issues; it stated that “the much regretted salons of the eighteenth century” (*ibid.*)—regretted, as I have shown, by none more than *Vogue*—suffered from the same problems: namely, that their attendants lacked “internal resources” against boredom (90). In the context of this essay, both “highbrow” and

“lowbrow” had negative connotations, as they both lacked interiority and depth. In other occasions *Vogue* would turn its critical eye to messy would-be bohemians and incomprehensible avant-gardists as well as the people who enabled them.

By contrast, flexibility and a degree of light-heartedness in the discussion of weighty topics were praised both before and after Huxley’s disparagingly funny piece. The unsigned essay “Fashions of the Mind” argued that there are moral and ideological fashions just like there are material ones, precisely the sort of argument Huxley seemed to be suspicious of:

The fashions of the mind are not altogether governed by hazard. It is sagacious to remember that they are transitory, that they will fade and decay like those they have replace. But such lofty considerations do not make them uninteresting or unimportant. And the people who refuse to change their mental furniture have no right to consider themselves superior. [...] The best minds are first in the field with the fashions of the mind. And whereas the *nouveautés* in costume are capricious and uncertain in origin, the movements in taste can to some extent be explained and accounted for. (Early February 1924: 49)

“A reasonable moralist”, concluded the essay, “would not condemn the love of fashion: he would praise it. For fashion means change, and change, in the long run, improvement” (*ibid.*). Reed identifies the author as Raymond Mortimer, as it is actually the abridged version of an essay published in the September 1923 issue of *Vanity Fair*, which was credited to him (2006b: 400). If this essay was not a manifesto, it could easily be interpreted as an invitation. At this stage, *Vogue* wove together familiar forms, like the editorial essay, with avant-garde signatures. Accessible divagations on “high” art were as frequent as high-flung defences of seemingly frivolous topics; the rigorous tone of fashion journalism was balanced by high-handed, cultivated and satirical voices on many other subjects. A faithful subscriber who had followed *Vogue* since the war would notice a shift in tone, as it was now less pompous and more insolent, and an expansion in topics covered, but no sudden jolt: even if they did not find the new content interesting, they would not have found it incomprehensible either.

There were unequivocally “highbrow” additions, like the occasional poem by well-known modernists, including Richard Aldington, H.D., W. H. Davies, Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, framed by essays or reviews. There was even the odd story by David Garnett, Raymond Mortimer, Paul Morand and T. F. Powys: this was a departure from the Condé Nast formula of not including short stories precisely because of their mass appeal, but it was softened by the distinction of these highbrow names. Gallery and theatre reviews covered an appealing width of artists and events, from favourites carried over from the previous decade, like Léon Bakst or Marie Laurencin, to more daring figures, like Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Jean Cocteau, Le Corbusier, Wyndham Lewis, modern dancer Margaret Morris, Picasso or the *Revue Nègre*, as well as critical essays on cutting-edge architecture or poster art. *Vogue* also began to cover the cinema, with reviews by Iris Barry starting from late August 1924 until 1926 and features on upcoming films, like *Metropolis*.

*Vogue*'s balancing act, together with its conflicted use of “highbrow”, nudges us to another label, “middlebrow”. This term would gain weight later in the decade, when it would be thrown about by literary critics, and it will be central to the next chapter, where it will be discussed in more depth. Nonetheless, it is useful to temper my own description of *Vogue* as a modernist project. In its more disparaging sense, the middlebrow is that which is aspirational, imitative, tame, homogenous, often associated with the domestic. It has also been approached, though, “as a productive, affirmative standpoint for writers who were not wholly aligned with either high modernism or popular culture” (Hammill 2007: 6) but were able to assume “an easy familiarity” with the texts and traits of the highbrow “while simultaneously caricaturing intellectuals as self-indulgent and naïve” (10). This familiarity may well have been gained by reading

reviews of “highbrow” works and accessible essays, poems and sketches by highbrow authors as published in British *Vogue*.

There are three essays in particular, two by “Polly Flinders”, one unsigned, that I believe are richer when read through the framework of the middlebrow. They are concerned with those sudden moments of aesthetic transcendence in one’s daily life: moments not found in the theatre, or at a gallery, or even reading, but rather by chance, when one is on the move, abstracted. In order to enjoy them one must have one’s senses at the ready, meaning that the mind must be open and flexible. The first of these essays, the anonymous one, found a name for them:

We have, thank goodness, our common meeting-grounds. [...] the little pleasures, the little irritations, the small sensualities, the miniature rages, the tiny aesthetic delights.

I had a tentative phrase for it once, insufficient in that its meaning did not spring immediately to the mind; but nevertheless it was satisfactory to have *something* to murmur in recognition when the subtle moment twinkled into sight. ‘Through leaves,’ I called it, taking the expression from that peculiar pleasure of walking (you must drag the feet, to make it perfect) through the dry drifted leaves of autumn. (Late February 1924: 49)

In isolation, this idea might seem banal. Surrounded as it was by the frantic now-ness of fashion reports and gallery openings, by glamorous portraits, cutting-edge designs and contradictory opinions on just how much one ought to care about all of the above, it was an invitation to extend one’s attitude to art to the minutiae of life, and to do so quietly for the sake of deeper connection.

The next essay, a reflection by “Polly Flinders” inspired by a bad performance of Dryden’s Restoration comedy *The Assignation*, proposed that it was possible to engage with art in a richer manner through nostalgia if one compares a new sensation to something previously felt. It playfully quoted from T. S. Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, stretching his meanings, and asked that plays be modernised, for instance, with stage design by Duncan Grant, whose style the reader was assumed to be familiar with. While calling for more modern, more deeply-felt, *better* art, “Flinders”

looked for an exemplary sensorial experience and landed on one that fits the notion of “through leaves”:

At this moment, as I am writing, I am brought a bouquet of flowers; at eleven o'clock in the morning, wrapped in its stiff soap paper, from Adam, Bond Street, a bouquet and a card. Sweet and penetrating memory of the pleasures of receiving bouquets! Instantly amidst the wreckage of a morning's troubles, on the dust heap of the usual and the so-called necessary, grows the flower of pleasure—it is spring—my highest heels—a button-hole; let me open my sunshade. (Late April 1925: 65)

If Flinders's proposal went unheeded, she warned: “We shall put up, time after time, in the name of culture, with the destruction of what was considered, up to the Victorian age, to the honour of humanity: free speech, beauty, and delicacy of feeling. We shall put up because we cannot remember precisely the pleasure of excitement, of enticement and wonder; and so we are without measure—without discontent and without appetite” (*ibid.*).

Her other essay, “Fireworks”, philosophised on the art of hosting. Unlike Huxley's deprecation of “polite” gatherings where conversations were had just to pass the time, she argued that it is the human connection and the aesthetic experience that matters, not the actual topic of discussion. Both hosts and guests ought to be light-hearted, theatrically heightened versions of themselves; they ought to dress up, not only sartorially, but also mentally: “He must be changed—touched by a little frenzy. [...] Who, feeling himself a daisy, has not wished suddenly to assert his daisiness bravely, to become a monstrous daisy, flowering magnificently? A party should be his opportunity. [...] There, no sense of responsibility should live: opinions need not be true, nor gestures be in need of explanation, nor liable to consequences” (early January 1926: 49). Conversation must be witty, charming and memorable: “any subject can be thrown out like salt into the snapdragon, and cause a conflagration” (*ibid.*). There should be drink, games, fireworks: to heighten reality is to better live it.



Sometimes *Vogue's* editorial essays took on a surprising new form: the biographical sketch. Instead of looking for the transcendental moments in the present, a handful of celebrity contributors turned to historical figures. Interestingly, they touched on past notions of celebrity while only occasionally relating them to the present, as in Aldington's off-hand statement that "the lives of the modern rich need brightening" (early May 1925: 47). These sketches usually disparaged of the Victorians and found delight in the excess and playfulness of the long eighteenth century, an attitude shared by *Vogue's* features on art and fashion history: "In Europe, at any rate, civilisation has never reached a higher level than it did in eighteenth-century France: and never were women more powerful and more intelligent than they were then" (late February 1925: 36). The French Revolution was

a blow from which we are only now beginning to recover. Art deserted the common things of life and found a place only in the pages of books and upon the canvases of painters: and women, to have a voice in things, were reduced to demanding a voice. In the eighteenth century every man, from the King downwards, was dominated by a woman. And women ruled at least as much by their wit as by their beauty. Voltaire's mistress was a mathematician. However blue her stockings were, the eighteenth century woman looked *chic* in them. Beauty alone, the sumptuous empty beauty that in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries was so much admired, carried little weight. Piquancy was all the rage. (*Ibid.*)

This essay, ostensibly about the engravings of Moreau le Jeune, argued that among the upper classes women and men could meet "on equal terms" (80): the women, when not engaged in romantic affairs, spent their time in serious reading and writing, as "no elaboration of curls could enchant if there were no brains beneath them" (82). Knowing who was who in the eighteenth century, I gather, was a way to exert said brains. And so an anonymous author wrote about Talleyrand; Richard Aldington wrote about Madame de Pompadour and the poets of her court, Cyrano de Bergerac, the Count Hoditz-Roswald and the Marquise du Châtelet, stating that:

One of Mme. du Châtelet's worst crimes (in the eyes of other women) was that she contrived to be cleverer than they were, an intellectual equal to the foremost men of the time, without abandoning any of her feminine charms and decorations. Women will always forgive a learned slut, but not a woman of accomplishments who succeeds in being as sexually attractive as the most brainless of them. [...] She was always well-

dressed, always interested in fashions, in new falbalas, new fans, new perfumes, and all the immense learning of the efficient female toilette; but, she was able to do it all in an astoundingly short space of time and to have hours every day for the cultivation of a remarkably profound intellect and a very keen scientific and literary curiosity. (Late December 1925: 59)

Francis Birrell wrote about Louise de la Vallière, Madame de Montespan (in an issue that also included an article on eighteenth-century engraving and a glowing review of *Dangerous Acquaintances*), the Marquise de Maintenon, and two hostesses, the Duchesse du Maine and Claudine Guérin de Tencin, whose salons were compared to contemporary ones, as she and her guests “tore off masks” and “sat together in small drawing rooms, their heads very close together, sentimentalizing about political institutions or the nature of the solar system (late May 1925: 69). Mary MacCarthy discussed the courtier and memoirist Lord Hervey and his son, the Bishop of Derry, whom she actually took up twice; Raymond Mortimer, meanwhile, discussed Armand Louis de Gontaut, Duc de Lauzun.

Some nineteenth-century figures were allowed a reappraisal. Virginia Woolf chose a Regency figure, the eccentric John Mytton; Augustine Birrell wrote about nineteenth-century biographers John Gibson Lockhart and Mark Pattison, while the June 1926 issue carried two such essays, one on the crossdressing explorer Madame Dieulafoy by Vita Sackville-West and another on the actress and royal mistress Caroline Bauer by Sylvia Townsend Warner. These figures were approached as interesting characters rather than as subjects of rigorous historical exploration, as suggested by the fact that on one occasion Aldington explored the interplay between the real women warriors of the seventeenth-century, such as Geneviève Prémoy, and the high-spirited novels about them. Many articles were decorated with small illustrations of mannequins in historical costume; quite a few showed eighteenth-century ladies interacting with or juxtaposed to their contemporary counterparts. These illustrations, together with the biographical sketches, aligned *Vogue* with the referential, decorative, arch and

“amusing” strand of modernism represented by the Bloomsbury group and the Sitwells that shall be explored later, as well as with the ethos of the Nonesuch press.

### 2.1.3. “Whoring After Todd”: *The Optics of Commerce*

No essay illustrates British *Vogue*'s temporary alliance with the Bloomsbury sphere as well as the column in which the reporter, “a Woman of the World”, walks by Great Russell Street and the British Museum and gets “out at the Ritz to try to buy at the corner a quarterly magazine for which T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley and Gertrude Stein write; but one can never get it” (late February 1926: 43). It was probably the recently launched *New Criterion*, making this a rare instance in which a periodical outside Condé Nast was discussed in *Vogue*. By that time, all four authors had been discussed or published in the magazine. Through commissions and patronage, Dorothy Todd amplified *Vogue*'s position as an accessible vehicle of modernism; by bringing it into the social column, she and her staff wove art and literature into daily life. Nicola Luckhurst rightly points out that while Todd often commissioned “women writers on topics contemporary [...] and literary” (1998: 10), her regular art and literature contributors were men. There is no such thing as an official list of members of the Bloomsbury group, which went through different stages and dynamics, nor did they have a cohesive ideology, as they practised a width of ways of living, creating and critiquing. Of course, neither can they be wholly equated with English modernism.<sup>8</sup> Despite all this, however, it can be said that that most of *Vogue*'s highbrow contributors of this period were somehow attached to the Bloomsbury group, if not always directly, and that its expression of modernist ideas and forms suited the mode and manners of Bloomsbury or the Sitwells rather than, say, Ezra Pound.

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<sup>8</sup> See Quentin Bell's *Bloomsbury* (1968) or S. P. Rosenbaum's series on the Bloomsbury group (1987, 1994, 2003).

During Todd's editorship and in the interim periods that bracketed it, *Vogue's* contributors included central Bloomsbury figures like art critic Clive Bell, artist Roger Fry and writers Mary MacCarthy, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, as well as "satellite" figures like art historian Tancred Borenius, writers David Garnett, Aldous Huxley, Peter Quennell and Vita Sackville-West, host Ottoline Morrell, and, closest to Todd, critic Raymond Mortimer. Other passengers of the "Bloomsbury Omnibus" like Vanessa Bell, E. M. Forster, Duncan Grant, John Maynard Keynes, Desmond MacCarthy and Lytton Strachey were featured in reviews and portraits, as were their celebrity friends and relations. In a market where they could have their pick of literary reviews, their collaboration with *Vogue* makes sense if we take into account Christopher Reed's argument that even into the twenties "Bloomsbury's ideas were central to efforts to define modernism, not as a denial of the economic and social conditions of the twentieth century, but as a rationale for managing modernity so as to achieve an unprecedented realization of the ideals of humanistic individualism" (2004: 226). This version of modernism could be made manifest, for instance, through tasteful domestic display—in the shape of classical references and still lives—which made *Vogue* an appropriate vehicle for their ideas.

Nonetheless, I believe that Bloomsbury has been overrepresented not only in the narrative constructed by first-hand witnesses who blamed Todd's firing on her excessive promotion of the group but also in secondary studies of *Vogue* from the field of modernist studies. It is true that signed articles became more common as contributors of renown joined the ranks, and it is also true that most can be linked to Bloomsbury, but in many cases only tenuously so. Between 1922 and 1927 the most frequent signature was that of X. Marcel Boulestin, whose regular column on fine dining and entertaining appeared about eighty times; Mortimer, who most often reviewed books,

signed forty-six contributions; then follow art critic Bell (twenty-five); essayist Huxley (twenty); literary critic Richard Aldington (twenty); fashion and society journalist M.H. (eighteen), who, if she was indeed Mary Hutchinson and thus the essayist “Polly Flinders” (eight), would overtake Bell at twenty-six contributions; golf writer Bernard Darwin (eighteen); music critic Edwin Evans (twelve); theatre reviewer and essayist Sydney Tremayne (twelve); Paris correspondent Jeanne Ramon Fernandez (twelve); and critic and essayist Francis Birrell (eleven). It is not possible to realize an exact count, which prevents me from reaching a stronger conclusion. It is worth repeating that “Fashions of the Mind”, now known to have been authored by Mortimer, was unsigned; Huxley, as chief staff writer and art critic, wrote many anonymous pieces; perhaps Todd contributed her own pieces as well. Despite their connections to the Bloomsbury group, the web woven by these names does not match it exactly. Clive Bell was the only “central” Bloomsbury figure who wrote regularly for *Vogue*: Boulestin, Mortimer, Huxley, Hutchinson and Birrell, like Bonamy Dobrée (eight), Garnett (eight), Sackville-West (six) or George Rylands (three) were attached to the Bloomsbury group through affective relationships rather than through participation in its exhibitions or writing clubs.

Nor was *Vogue* the ultra-modern publication that some accounts suggest. Critics have emphasised the presence of Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein or Jean Cocteau; the latter has been described as “a bridge between the arts, a gifted dilettante who helped initiate *Vogue* readers into the *avant-garde* by keeping three or four steps ahead” (Howell 1978: 59), and indeed it published some of his illustrations and reviewed his work; but it did not dedicate more space to him than to the Ascot races. Rather, numbers tell us that it was the Sitwell siblings who acted as the juncture between established modernist artists, up-and-coming hopefuls, and the magazine, especially before the

editors' friendships with Bloomsbury became more closely entangled in the mid-twenties. Edith (eight), Osbert (six) and Sacheverell Sitwell (three) contributed to *Vogue* more often than Mary MacCarthy (six), Virginia Woolf (five), Bertrand Russell (two), Fry (two), Grant (one), Morrell (one) or Leonard Woolf (one). In return, *Vogue* championed *Façade*, a collaborative work by Edith Sitwell and William Walton that was first presented to a private audience in 1922 and opened in June 1923 to “a mixture of the indignant, the baffled, and the cautiously admiring” public (Hammill 2015: 131), and defended the siblings in a negative review of Noël Coward’s *London Calling!*:

It is characteristic of the up-to-dateness of *London Calling* that it should contain a parody of *Façade*. But the authors have not studied with sufficient care the methods of that scintillating trinity, Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, whose poems are sharp as icicles, jagged as tinfoil, unexpected as flamingos in Bond Street or pearls in a dinner-oyster. The attempted imitations are soft and silly, not to say sentimental. (Early October 1923: 31)

As Faye Hammill notices in her study of the Sitwell-Coward feud, which would last for decades, “the castigation of *London Calling!* does not fit with the playful tone and openness to parody that more usually characterized the Condé Nast magazines, nor does it fit with their broader admiration of Coward’s work and of his personal style” (2015: 140);<sup>9</sup> *Vogue*’s combative backing of the Sitwells only makes sense if it happened during “the most intensely modernist moment of its history” (*ibid.*). *Vogue*’s other interests were represented by the photographer-turned-essayist Edward Steichen, car expert John Prioleau or sports writer Arthur W. Coaten, as well as one-off contributions from actresses, aristocrats, art historians, dancers, designers, novelists, playwrights,

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<sup>9</sup> The feud, Hammill writes, “played out on a personal level, as recorded in diary entries and letters, and it also inflected responses to their work in the wider literary community and in the periodical press” (2015: 130). The Sitwells made much of the impact of their play, “though as Pearson notes, the supposed riot described in the Sitwells’ accounts was invented retrospectively in order to construct the 1923 *Façade* as an iconoclastic moment in the history of modernist performance” (131).

poets, textile artists and food, sports and travel writers, some attached to Bloomsbury, others not.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, unable to locate the Todd correspondence that could have been mined for blackmail, *Vogue's* archives half-destroyed and half-unresponding, I must undermine my argument that the contributions of canonised authors have been overrepresented and turn to the diaries, letters and memoirs of Sackville-West, Sitwell and Woolf to trace how these connections were built. As it turns out, they shed light on the role of figures whose presence in the magazine was, to all appearances, minimal. It is Francis Meynell's memoirs that explain that his wife Vera was the editor of British *Vogue* for a time, and one only gets there by tracing the lives and connections of his friends Francis Birrell and David Garnett; *Vogue* itself never mentioned her, and neither her nor Francis wrote for the magazine at this time.<sup>11</sup>

Another such figure is that of George "Dadie" Rylands. His path crossed Woolf's when she was becoming a celebrity, which led her to consider her relationship with fashion in its different forms. Her diary entry for March 17, 1923 says: "I have seen Osbert Sitwell, Sebastian Sprot [*sic*] & Mr Mortimer. As Nessa says, we are becoming fashionable. Sprot & I lunched at Mary's; then, tipsy with echoing brains, went to tea at Hill's in [Kensington] High Street. Infinitely old I felt & rich; he is very poor" (Bell 1978: 239). The first contributions from Mortimer and Sitwell would be published in the following months: all around Woolf, *Vogue's* processes of commission and recommendation were already at work. Mortimer, she wrote on September 5, 1923, "is a curious half breed. An Oxford young man, inclined to smartness, dress & culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Occasional contributors during this period, below five appearances, included writers Weymer Mills, Stella Benson, Augustine Birrell, Nancy Cunard, Arthur Waley, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Colette, Gerald Cumberland, Camilla Doyle, Ada Leverson, Dorothy Richardson and Humbert Wolfe.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Meynell did contribute an essay, "The First Edition Club", to the June 27, 1928 issue. It could be that his wife commissioned it before her departure and that it took a long time to write and edit, or that Alison Settle did not sever ties with the pair.

His soul is uneasy in Cambridge company. He squirms a little visibly. One is not sure how far one likes him. He flatters. He is not very simple, candid, or talkative” (264). She wrote down a comment he made when discussing Clive Bell: “I have a culte for Bloomsbury” (*ibid.*). Significantly, six days later she noted Mortimer’s so far unrequited attraction to Rylands, “to Raymond the most intoxicatingly beautiful young man that it is possible to imagine” (266), who “threw out an idea that he might join the [Hogarth] Press. The printing mania has come upon him & Sebastian, & it looks as if we might now start a Cambridge branch” (268). In the summer of the following year Rylands did indeed join the Hogarth Press. A few months later, Woolf was added to *Vogue*’s increasingly prestigious list. Her entry for October 17, 1924 reveals that;

I asked Todd for £10 for 1,000 words: she orders 4 articles at that fee [...] *Vogue*, (via Dadie) is going to take up Mrs Woolf, to boom her: &—&—&— So very likely this time next year I shall be one of those people who are, so father said, in the little circle of London Society which represents the Apostles, I think, on a larger scale. Or does this no longer exist? To know everyone worth knowing. I can just see what he meant; just imagine being in that position—if women can be. Lytton is: Maynard; Ld Balfour; not perhaps Hardy. (319)

It was Rylands, then, who brought her to Todd. As it happens, he was also central to someone else’s first appearance.

Cecil Beaton’s first photograph for *Vogue*, in early April 1924, showed Rylands “as an anonymous Cambridge undergraduate in magnificent drag as the Duchess of Malfi [...] to accompany an ecstatic description by an unsigned reviewer [...] keen to fan the flames of rivalry with Oxford men who performed women’s roles in undergraduate plays”—Mortimer himself (Reed 2006a: 57). “At Cambridge”, Beaton wrote, “each issue of *Vogue* was received as an event of importance” (1951: 39-40 in Reed 2006a: 62). It is difficult to pin down the sequence of events that brought Beaton to *Vogue*, as different editors have claimed the honour. According to Lisa Cohen, he “was highly attuned to the doings of what he called ‘the Vogue gang’ and always hoping to find a way to impress Madge and Dody so they would publish his



photographs”, as well as their friend Allanah Harper (2012: loc. 3579). On May 6, 1926, Beaton received a note from Todd that she accepted his photographs for publication (2018: 124); soon enough he photographed Garland and they were attending each other’s parties. Cohen writes that “Beaton was upset about the turn British *Vogue* had taken under Alison Settle (and Chase’s firm hand) [...] and he did his best to be affiliated with Madge and Dody’s new venture” after they were fired (2012: loc. 3818-3825), as did Mortimer and Rylands. Regardless of his feelings in this matter, his contributions to *Vogue* in fact grew, and he became its best-known photographer. Settle, who had met Beaton in Venice in the summer of 1926, would give herself credit for his discovery, perhaps deservedly so. After all, Todd was fired before she could do much campaigning on his behalf, and it was during Settle’s editorship that he received regular commissions and benefited from his new access to high society. In her memoir, Edna Woolman Chase also presented herself as Beaton’s champion, explaining how they finally met in person in the spring of 1928 and describing her feelings as maternal. There is no reason to doubt that Settle and Chase showed genuine appreciation and tenacity in sponsoring Beaton, but it would not do to diminish the importance of Todd, Garland and their social circle in launching his career.

D. J. Taylor’s group biography of the Bright Young People finds that Robert Byron, an aspiring travel writer, “applied to Miss Todd, the editor of *Vogue*, using Elizabeth Ponsonby—whose brother Matthew he had known at Oxford—as a go-between” (2007: loc. 2922). Ponsonby was not a writer or artist herself, but if Todd and Garland’s parties were attended by notorious young socialites, celebrities and aspiring artists like Brenda Dean Paul, Allanah Harper, Brian Howard or Olivia Wyndham (Cohen 2012), it seems likely that Ponsonby, a leader of that set, would also have been there. As it happened, Byron would not be published in *Vogue* until 1928, after Todd’s

time, but my point stands: to equate *Vogue's* modernist project with the Bloomsbury group is in fact to limit and distort its complex entanglement with diverse avant-garde and upper class groupings and to dismiss the very real weight of frowned-upon practices involving money, desire, aspiration, hedonism and bohemianism in the processes of sponsorship and editorship.

Lest the society column that referenced the *New Criterion* were perceived as an attack on *Vogue's* own interests, the reporter went on to mention the celebrities—writers, yes, but also actors and aristocrats—she met along the way. *Vogue's* modernist living was then heavily informed by its promoters' economic, social and cultural capital, not only behind the scenes but also on the page. One ought to have the resources and leisure time to read *Vogue* and the books it recommended, to attend gallery openings, the theatre, the right parties and clubs, which in turn necessitated having the right wardrobe and network of contacts. As I shall show, though *Vogue* did not entirely abandon the figure of the lone, masculine-coded genius, it also made active use of consumer practices and feminine-coded pursuits. At first glance this may seem to contradict the supposedly anti-commercial, anti-bourgeois values of modernism. After all, Andreas Huyssen (1986) argued that modernism was constructed as the discursive opposite to a feminised mass culture, and while Condé Nast did his best for *Vogue* to be considered a “class publication”, preventing mass appeal by focusing on luxury advertisers and choosing not to publish fiction, he had made commerce and femininity its main identity markers.

At this point, it is worth picking up Matthew Levay's comment that the “‘great divide’ that Andreas Huyssen posited between high modernism and mass culture has by now been traversed so many times as to seem like something of a critical straw man, invoked only to be dismissed”, which perhaps nowadays is as frequently mentioned as

Huyssen's original comment (2013: 5). I do not mean to use Huyssen in this way, but to unravel how *Vogue*, as an intermediary that made modernism a more accessible movement by presenting its key texts, ideas and figures as something one could purchase and display, both continued and contested the tension between modernism and mass culture. These ideas were not foreign to other women's periodicals like *Eve* or *Good Housekeeping*, but *Vogue*—and *Harper's Bazaar*—showed exceptional balance in devoting so many pages to modernist art and criticism and to the very notion of modernity as inextricable from smartness while staying a fashion magazine for women.<sup>12</sup> Of course, modernist artists and critics participated in a lively print ecosystem that was not at all independent from commercial interest. Rita Felski notes that “an imaginary identification with the feminine emerged as a key stratagem in the literary avant-garde's subversion of sexual and textual norms. This refusal of traditional models of masculinity took the form of a self-conscious textualism which defined itself in opposition to the prevailing conventions of realist representation, turning toward a decadent aesthetic of surface, style, and parody that was explicitly coded as both ‘feminine’ and ‘modern’” (1995: 91). In practice, though it was not shocking for *Vogue*'s modernist contributors to take on a critical style that could be perceived as feminine or to participate in publications other than literary reviews, the fact that they lent their names to such an enterprise for economic benefit did lead to suspicions of inauthenticity, superficiality and commercial interest.

Virginia Woolf for one was self-deprecating about her participation: “Now I must answer Gerald Brenan, & read the *Genji*; for tomorrow I make a second £20 from *Vogue*” (June 14, 1925 in Bell 1980: 30-1); “I am going to write [...] for *Richmond*, as a sign of grace, after sweeping guineas off the *Vogue* counter” (June 27, 1925 in Bell

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<sup>12</sup> See Alice Wood's *Modernism and Modernity in British Women's Magazines* (2020) for a comparative survey of the four periodicals during this period. *Vogue*'s turn towards modernism may seem exceptional for a fashion magazine, but it was rather a heightened manifestation of a shared interest.

1980: 33). Her scorn was complicated by her “ambiguous personal investment in Dorothy Todd herself, ranging from keen involvement [...] to revulsion” (Luckhurst 1998: 4). She definitely identified the magazine with its editor: “What’s the objection to whoring after Todd?” she wondered in a letter to Vita Sackville-West; “Better whore, I think, than honestly and timidly and coolly and respectably copulate with the Times Lit. Sup.” (1 September 1925 in Luckhurst 1998: 6). Woolf balanced defensiveness with an in-your-face tone. There was a freedom, an undeniable fun, to be found in *Vogue*’s widening interests. As she put it to Logan Pearsall Smith; “Todd lets you write what you like, and its [*sic*] your own fault if you conform to the stays and the petticoats” (28 January 1925 in Luckhurst 1998: 6). She recorded her troubled feelings, from fascination to reluctant interest to dismissal, for Todd as a person. She seems to have found her discomfiting, even grotesque: “I am involved in dress buying with Todd; I tremble & shiver all over at the appalling magnitude of the task I have undertaken—to go to a dressmaker recommended by Todd, even, she suggested, but here my blood ran cold, with Todd. Perhaps this excites me more feverishly than the [General] Strike” (6 May 1926 in Bell 1980: 78). Her opinion did not change after Todd’s dismissal:

Todd like some primeval animal emerging from the swamp, muddy, hirsute. A woman who is commercial—rather an exception in my world. She spoke of ‘getting my money back’ as Gerald Duckworth might have spoken with the same look of rather hostile & cautious greed, as though the world were banded to rob her. This money-grubbing way is not attractive; but it is lightened by a shimmer of dash & ‘chic’ even. She stands on her two feet as she expresses it. She is starting a paper—I’m so bored with people starting papers in May! There’s Desmond for another. But Todd has none of his bubble & gush. She finds work very dull. She likes life. [*Six words omitted*] flirting with Osbert I presume. She is tapir like, & the creature’s nose snuffs pertinaciously after Bloomsbury. (18 February 1928 in Bell 1980: 175-6)

“Whore”; “commercial”; “money-grubbing”; collaborating with *Vogue* was, most of all, about direct benefit, and yet Woolf appreciated both Todd’s stylistic “shimmer of dash” and the opportunity to write about what she felt like writing, though she downplayed the limitations that did exist.

Roger Fry “found *Vogue*’s strictures more problematic”, as his article on Kauffer was returned with suggestions to make it less highbrow; instead of amending it, it was published in the *Nation* instead (Luckhurst 1998: 13). Luckhurst wonders:

just who the Bloomsbury contributors thought they were writing for. Who was the reader of *Vogue*? Clearly someone who might purchase Grant or Bell’s paintings or might even commission them to design an interior – if, that is, they could be persuaded of the degree of chic represented by the Bloomsbury painters [...] Perhaps they were quite simply the masses—a mass of female consumers, interested in fashion, golf and decorating their coffee tables with the glorious colour of *Vogue*’s covers (14)

She finds this uncertainty reflected in the tone of their pieces, which ranged “from inclusiveness [...] to the satirical or pedagogic” (15). While contributors might have felt troubled at an individual level, I would argue that *Vogue* as a whole still presented a coherent picture, as it explicitly praised exploration and variety in modern living. “A strange assortment of people greet the eyes at the chic haunts of Paris night-life”, explained a society piece; “in fact, it is only chic when the crowd *is* strange” (late June 1923: 19).

Wherever one went there were posters, advertisements, alluring storefronts, commissioned interiors, imitations, veneers, mass and class publications; Patrick Collier points out that criticism from the press tended to “tote baggage of class or gender condescension” (2006: 22); “new journalism” was seen to appeal to consumers rather than readers—to women rather than men—and it was therefore devalued. While some artists and critics relied on differentiation to present authenticity and autonomy, others sought to bring this ambiguity into their work. Elizabeth Outka finds that “marketers in turn were eager to make such divisions into opportunities, evoking ideas of authenticity and the genuine artwork, and promising that products were not tainted by commerce – and yet were the latest thing and might be easily purchased” (2014: 82); in the literary marketplace, modernists “incorporated aspects of consumer and popular culture into their poems and novels” both to protest and to engage with contemporaneity, and used

those same discourses to market themselves (92). While they may have feared “being devoured by mass culture through co-option, commodification, and the ‘wrong’ kind of success” (Huysen 1986: 53), “there was a concerted effort to publicize and market certain works as the important literary texts of the age. Most high modernist artists were not reluctant to engage in the active manipulation of public opinion or institutional and cultural histories in order to ensure the best reception of their work” (Rosenquist 2009: 5).<sup>13</sup>

Outka defines the “commodified authentic” as the phenomenon in which “various notions of authenticity were presented to a broad market, infusing highbrow ideas of commercial purity into popular culture” (2009: 100), using it to explore the construction of authenticity as a commercial and cultural value. This phenomenon was manifested, for instance, in the furnishings and textiles produced in the Omega Workshops (1913-20), a Bloomsbury project that was occasionally referenced in *Vogue*. Their products were “designed to appeal to the reasonably well-heeled hipster of the 1920s” (2014: 90), blurring the line between artwork and craftwork. Similarly, Reed characterises the post-war work of the Bloomsbury group in product and interior design as playful and quotative, “deeply implicated in developments that historians focusing on economics, literature, sexuality, and mass-culture have identified as definitive of modernity”, and points out that considering it only through “heroic narratives of modernism” (2004: 216) does it a severe disservice. Modernist publications did not turn their backs on consumer culture entirely;<sup>14</sup> all in all, modernist criticism and creation, especially of the Bloomsbury strand, was not anathema to, but in fact interwoven with,

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<sup>13</sup> In his study of the balancing act of modernism, now-ness and posterity, Rod Rosenquist uses James Joyce as an example of active participation in the marketplace as he actively searched for reviews of *Ulysses*, campaigning, pressuring, “helping to compose catchphrases and favourable reviews of his own novel, encouraging opinions to be formed from his own dictation rather than waiting for them to form in their own time” (2009: 6).

<sup>14</sup> Amanda Carrod (2015), for instance, finds that both *The Dial* and *The Athenaeum* explored fashion.

consumer culture. *Vogue* made it clear, if only implicitly, that one must not only engage with modernism but also be seen to do so. This could only happen in the right spaces; if not the private homes of artists or patrons, at least the semi-public clubs, restaurants, galleries or theatres they attended. This version of modernism was therefore markedly urban and elitist. Likewise, *Vogue*'s modernity was built on prescribed notions of taste, domesticity and "safe" public life, which functioned as boundaries as well as constructive starting points. Agreeing with Jane Garrity (1999), Elizabeth M. Sheehan argues that the magazine deployed the discourse and tropes "of masculine cultural authority, celebrations of aristocratic British femininity, and fantasies of an enduring national identity and culture", reinforcing boundaries of class, nation and ethnicity in its articulation of both modernism and modernity (2018: loc. 408.7).

In *Vogue*'s unfolding construction of smart living modernism became a social movement as well as a philosophical or artistic one, and thus we must also look for it in the society columns, where the reference to the *New Criterion* was not an isolated event. Nancy Cunard, briefly acting as Paris correspondent, attended a bicycle race with "some of 'those tired rich', who come here because of *le snobisme* and its being the right thing to do" (late May 1926: 75) and an opening at the Galérie Surréaliste, "whose founders, André Breton and Louis Aragon, are amongst the most discussed personalities of Paris, not only as the inaugurators of the 'Surréalisme' movement, but individually as brilliant young writers and poets whose erudition is as solid as their outlook and way of writing is new" (*ibid.*) She referenced Man Ray, Cocteau, Tristan Tzara, Erik Satie, Picasso, Josephine Baker and Russian taxi drivers, and described the scene for those unable to go. She also provided blasé commentary on the construction and deflation of hype, acknowledging that a locale would be considered fashionable depending on "the curiosity of those who've heard that 'there are likely to be poets and painters and in

general well-known figures whose names mean something' within the walls" (*ibid.*); that is, that its perceived bohemian-ness and authenticity added to its commercial viability. Cunard also discussed the publishing industry, noting that "the system of very limited editions is well established here, in particular for the very 'modern' publications, and a number of people exists that subscribes regularly to the first (perhaps the only) edition of each work, more out of the spirit of collectorship than from understanding or appreciation. But the edition is always immediately sold out" (108). On another instalment she discussed film, music, bookshops, Florence Mills and the Blackbirds, Ezra Pound's opera and Picasso's gallery show, and reported on the "severe trouncing" received by the Russian Ballet's production of *Romeo et Juliet*:

The reason being that Max Ernst and Joan Miró, two members of the ever-vigilant *surréalistes*, had offended the art morality of that group by their collaboration with the Ballets Russes and the *surréalistes* are intransigent in their denouncement of turn-coats, who at one time (in this case very recently) professed the same tastes and opinions. When worth while they will protest and spare themselves neither the pains of a fracas with the gendarmes nor the possible *suites* of a *procès*. Art for art's sake! Who would believe this old bromide contained the truth, a truth carried to violence in 1926? (Early July 1926: 50)

High art as gossip; society dinners as cultural events; constant literary references, usually as a joke; American imports; continental novelties. In late November 1926, the society reporter—probably Alison Settle—confessed that they had been in the company of Cecil Beaton, Lydia Lopokova, Clive Bell and Edwin Evans after the ballet.

But when winter comes, all our meetings are for the sake of food foremost and talk as extra. Even Mr. H. G. Wells' celebrated dinners alter like that. In the summer we went over to his house full of desire to meet Margaret Kennedy, young Romilly John, the engineer son of Augustus, a Russian princess or so. Now we meet no less amusing people at the Wells' flat in Westminster (the 'heightened haunt of highborn socialism' as Mrs. Ros would say, not meaning what we mean by socialism), but appreciate first the good service of two robotlike men, the good food, and then only turn to see who is of the company. (64-5)

That column was interspersed with quotations from Amanda McKittrick Ros's famously terrible 1897 novel *Irene Iddesleigh*, which had been recently reissued by the Nonesuch Press and reviewed in *Vogue*. After all, one of the particularities of *Vogue's* modernism was that it was enjoyable, and "difficult" reading was balanced by shared



jokes and small pleasures. Similarly, D. H. wrote of *The Triumph of Neptune* that “of course, half the fun of the ballet is the audience, which is always a mixture of the smart and intellectual sets” (late April 1927: 42).

Natalie Kalich notices that “throughout Todd’s tenure, change is an underlying theme in many articles, coupled with speculation on the positive and negative consequences of such swift transitions” (2018: loc. 150.7). One noticeable shift was towards a more complex relationship with American culture, from fascination to reactionary revulsion, which materialised most often in discussions of jazz. Clive Bell infamously and prematurely “rung the death knell for jazz” in 1921, but it only took some years for his set to “come around” (loc. 152.4).<sup>15</sup> Jazz was conceptually linked to nocturnal living and, to an extent, to the end of tradition in pieces like Harry Melville’s “Nox Ambrosiana” or the unsigned essay “The Wind from America”:

In England the old order which lived in a splendid seclusion, immune from ideas, untarnished by any movement of life, has almost passed away. The electric light has revealed what loomed in obscurity, casting a brilliant illumination on the bare space where hung the Rembrandt before its trans-Atlantic voyage. 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; in fact, Dr. Edison has ‘beaten the family ghost to a frazzle.’ Devonshire House jazes to its death, and the sky-scraper reigns in its stead. The cocktail, banished from its own land, has here ousted the port and sherry of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. [...] The rhythm has crept into the pictures, and music of the day, and even into the sedate measures of our Georgian poets, without, perhaps, their knowing it. (Late March 1923: 35)

The survivors of this old order must leave their refuge and walk the windswept country: they may find that their entertainment—their art, their poetry, even their drink—now comes from abroad, but they are still called to promote it.

*Vogue* insisted that leisured eccentrics ought to lead in fashion and art; it could hardly do otherwise if it wanted to fully embrace the cause of the Sitwells. In “The Dangers of Work” Huxley satirised “Our Excitement Concerning the Dignity of Labour” that drove even the old rich to work. Leisured society, he acknowledged, had

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<sup>15</sup> Kalich points to Genevieve Abravanel’s 2012 *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* for more on jazz as the site for debate around cultural homogeneity.

so far mostly indulged itself in ethically dubious ways, but its cultivation was in fact beneficial to the majority:

Leisured society, at its best, is detached and unprejudiced, has good taste, and an open mind; it may, it is true, regard the arts and the philosophies with insufficient seriousness—as mere pastimes—but, at any rate, it admits their existence; it interests itself in them, and in their practitioners. And it is able to do so because it is leisured. [...] Honest work thus tends to rob society of its genial and unprejudiced sceptics, its refined appreciators, its setters of elegant standards. It can be no mere coincidence that the absorption of the old leisured class in practical and immediately profitable work should have been going on at the same time as the break-up of literary and artistic tradition and the general decay of taste. (Late April 1924: 106)

He did not clarify what he meant by “the break-up of literary and artistic tradition”; not the avant-garde, surely, as his essay was surrounded with their portraits and reviews. He may have meant mass culture, or simply relied on a topical theme for comedic effect. Significantly, he was not concerned about the salons of the past or his contemporary hostesses:

One immediate result of the modern mania for work has been to increase enormously the power and importance of women in society. The leisured class, such as it is now, consist entirely of women. [...] If only the women could have been infected with the mania of working. ... Man’s real place is in the home. It is there, at leisure and relieved from immediate, practical preoccupations that he can exercise his native powers of abstraction. Women’s passion for the concrete, for immediacy, for Life should be exercised in the practical conduct of affairs. A recrudescence of male luxury would be an excellent thing. [...] It would bring him back, through a pre-occupation with his own personal adornment, to a general interest in all matters of taste—to the infinite improvement of taste. (*Ibid.*)

Needless to say, he did not touch upon the practicalities of education and labour in relation to gender and class; this essay reads more like a provocation, a joke for the upper-class women who were its target audience to share.

And yet the practices of affluent, artistically-minded women did not escape parody. “The Woman in the Club”, a satirical piece illustrated by Fish, provided humorous insight into the goings-on at an “artistic” club: “Though its members are not birds in the ornithological or music-hallogical senses of the word, they flock together, and are to be recognised by their embroideries and beads, their bobbed and bandeau’d hair, their attitudes and platitudes” (Tremayne late September 1923: 27). The author

wondered what that multiplication of women's clubs meant in terms of the nature of women, but mostly mined the comedic potential of the presence of men in these spaces:

Women were, of course, invented for the comfort of men, and individually they may achieve their destiny, but a number of women can make on man feel very uncomfortable indeed.

The truth is that there is a special sort of man whom it is admissible and even desirable to entertain at a woman's club. It is no good trying to use any other sort for the purpose; they don't like it. The ideal male visitors are drawn from the ranks of timid husbands, elderly relatives, residuary legatees and unpublished poets.

I am convinced that the foundation of the first women's club was an act of defiance—like bloomers and the bicycle-made-for-two; and it still remains a sort of cardboard stronghold of emancipation, a word and a condition which have lost their thrill and become, like the club, a little meaningless.

I do not believe that women really like clubs or know what to do with them. They try hard to be adequate clubwomen. They sit about the members' rooms with rather a lost or wait-till-called-for air; they smoke very nasty smelling cigarettes and drink warm cocktails a trifle self-consciously with extended little finger; and they read the papers—the illustrated ones—and leave them, each sheet separately, in an accordion-pleated condition on every chair. The card-room is generally empty except in clubs which are specifically bridge clubs, and the bridge club and the bridge woman are things apart. [...]

The fact is women have not the club sense; they are not gregarious in the way that men are. At my club, in order to persuade members to be 'matey' they divide them into congenial groups—wheels within wheels—and clubs within a club as it were. There is the literary section, the musical section, the sporting section and the purely social (or socially pure). They are all composed of clearly differentiated types, and each section holds its own little meetings and entertainments and has its own little (appropriately decorated) notice board. Now I ask you, is this clubbish, or is it old-maidish, school-girlish, parochial – anything *but* clubbish? (28-9)

Then, Tremayne moved on to rather mean-spirited mockery of a policewoman's mannish looks and doubled down on women's inability to mix with different "types": he did not expand on would-be bohemian women or clarify if a man poet would be entertained or provide the entertainment. What is important, however, is that these clubs and types of women would have been recognisable to the contemporary reader. Women patrons and artists were thus part of fashionable life, and "real" artists were understood to be a separate species from those who merely pretended.

A humorous essay by "Polly Flinders" also explored whether upper-class women could become artists or merely play at it. Men's careers, she argued, could be foreseen since childhood. Women, however, had more unpredictable paths, influenced by external factors:

All the same it is advisable for the young ladies to scan the sky to see what birds of prey approach; to watch the horizon; to examine the top-stories; to have, indeed, a little choice. [...] Very romantic women may dream of being a more sympathetic Fanny to a Keats, a perfect mistress to a Byron, but beware! Genius is often strange, lonely, and cruel.

It is perhaps not very profitable to dream of heroes—to try and put salt in their tails—be rather heroines and dress yourselves up, thereby discovering your tastes and your talents. Be queens sometimes, and sometimes confidantes; sometimes a little ballet dancer spinning all over the world like a top, sometimes Lady Bessborough writing riddles with Sheridan. Think of the exuberant and brilliant Madame de Staël, think of Nell Gwynne and Stella, think of gentle Madame de Lafayette walking between Henrietta and M. de la Rochefoucauld—whom do you love? Which is your sister? (Late December 1923: 51)

“Flinders” would probably have had a different reading of artistic women’s clubs. She did not speak of “they” or “we”, but of “you”: from speaking of young women to a wide audience, she shifted into a direct address, inspiring readers to look at past writers, actresses, patronesses—all witty, all sociable—and to see themselves reflected.

## 2.2. THE MORNING-ROOM TABLE

### 2.2.1. “*The Books That Thrill One*”: *Critical Essays*

Issue after issue, *Vogue* conjured images of browsing and reading. It made it easy to imagine a woman standing at a train station bookshop, one hand stretched out in front of her, her choice not yet made, in the summer of any year of the mid-twenties. As *Vogue* would have it, she would be travelling to Scotland for the holidays: she would enjoy motoring (her hair would never get tangled), wear smart tweeds, and never carry her own bags. She would be able to recognise the pillars of modernism and would definitely consider herself modern. This imaginary woman would go to the theatre often and remember her French; of course she would pick up *Vogue* regularly, and once she had walked up to the bookshop with the intention of keeping herself entertained for the hours to come, *Vogue* would be the one to guide her choice. Dorothy Todd’s editorship, with its holistic approach to modernity and the avant-garde, coincided with the emergence of an “‘hegemonic’ strand of literary modernism [...], a dominant mode of

critical values led by the cultural and institutional power of, most obviously, Eliot and, to varying extents, Pound, Joyce and others”, as Rod Rosenquist puts it (2009: 4). He notes that they “were not just engaged in writing the literature of the period, but were often simultaneously acting as critics and historians of their own movement”, turning their works into immediate historical monuments, “modern for all time” (176). They were not the ones passing judgement in the pages of *Vogue*, which delved into what may be called a parallel strand of modernism, but its critics engaged in similar practices and dynamics, promoting their own publications as signifiers of modern taste.

If she wanted intensive literary content, this figured woman could have turned to highbrow publications with relatively small circulation numbers, the proverbially short-lived and financially precarious little magazines. They were “essentially collagist”, expressing or elsehow responding to a sense of vital or artistic fragmentation, carried “reviews, poems, fictional and non-fictional prose, commentary, perhaps illustrations” and tended to have “a coherent editorial policy, both for and more particularly against [...] Editors and contributors were united in thinking that issues of vast significance were at stake” (Lucas 1997: 177-8), and so they were positioned as minority resistance against the masses, or, as Patrick Collier describes it, “islands of cultivation in a debased public sphere” (2006: 27).<sup>16</sup> Readers could also pick from many intellectual reviews and journals with larger circulations and longer runs, as well as “more sober dailies like the *Guardian*, and politically committed papers like the *Daily News* and the socialist *Daily Herald*” (20). For a feminist perspective, they could turn to the weekly *Time and Tide* (1920-1979).<sup>17</sup> This was a dynamic field where the most prestigious publications had influence in public opinion and even in government policy (Clay

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<sup>16</sup> Among the little magazines available in interwar Britain were the *Calendar of Modern Letters* (1925-27), *The Criterion* (1922-39), *The Poetry Review* (1912-69), *To-Day* (1917-23) or *The Tyro* (1921-22).

<sup>17</sup> After the death of its founder Margaret Haig Thomas, Lady Rhondda, in 1958, *Time and Tide* was sold; though it kept its title and editor, it virtually became an entirely different paper. When it folded in July 1979 it was subtitled *The Business Man's Weekly Newspaper* (Clay 2018b).

2018b). The *New Statesman* (1913-31) had the largest circulation and “dominated the market on the left”, but *The Nation and Athenaeum* (1921-31),<sup>18</sup> despite its smaller reach, thrived under the stronger direction and prestige of its editors (2018c: 114); they eventually merged, becoming the *New Statesman and Nation* (1931-64; later again *New Statesman*). Be they conservative or radical, the majority of weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies were concerned with literature to some degree. Little magazines shared, as Lucas puts it, an “opposition to the older magazines which seemed for the most part to be run by John Squire and the Squirearchy, and of which *The London Mercury* was at once the most successful and despised” (1997: 178). While the circulation of these established literary journals ranged from 500 to 5,000 (Collier 2006: 29), *The London Mercury* (1919-39) reached 10,000, as did *The Adelphi* (1923-55).<sup>19</sup>

Women’s periodicals manifested a noticeable and growing interest in reading practices. “Not only did the magazines act as reading material themselves – providing stories, articles, and reviews”, Claire Battershill notes, “they also gestured beyond their own pages to the world of books and publishing at large” (2018: loc. 58.8).<sup>20</sup> She

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<sup>18</sup> The *Nation and Athenaeum* was formed in 1921 from the merger of *The Nation* (founded 1907) and *The Athenaeum* (founded 1828). Amanda Carrod has found parallels between the latter and Todd’s *Vogue*: “*The Athenaeum* did not seek to align itself with such specificity to one particular strand of modernist thought as other modernist magazines were intent on doing, but instead aimed to instruct its readers about the literary and artistic revolution in more approachable ways” (2015: 135). She finds further points in common, “particularly in terms of principles and contributors” (129), from which she posits “that Todd perhaps modelled her *Vogue* upon the already established — and successful — model of *The Athenaeum*. When *The Athenaeum* ceased independent publication in 1921, Todd was left with the perfect circumstances for making her *Dial* inspired vision a success” (*ibid.*)

<sup>19</sup> Other options were *The Quarterly Review* (1809-1962), *The Saturday Review* (1855-1938) or, later, *Scrutiny* (1932-53), as well as the more mainstream *Times Literary Supplement* (1902-) or Arnold Bennett’s weekly contribution to the *Evening Standard* (1926-31). There were also *Punch* (1841-1992), *The Spectator* (1828-1925) and *Vanity Fair* (1868-1928), as well as popular choices like *John o’London’s Weekly* (1919-54), “aimed at the not-very-educated classes” (Rose 2007: 350), *Pearson’s Magazine* (1896-1939), *The Red Magazine* (1908-39), *The Sphere* (1900-64), *The Story-Teller* (1907-37), *The Strand Magazine* (1891-1950) or the *Windsor Magazine* (1895-1939).

<sup>20</sup> Battershill surveys twenty women’s periodicals, “from fashion and ‘service’ magazines to feminist papers and pulps”, finding that “the most book-oriented publications were the intellectual feminist periodicals and the more expensive home and fashion magazines”, that is, *Everywoman*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Time and Tide*, *Vogue* and *Woman’s Magazine*. “Generally speaking, pulp magazines priced at 2d, such as *Peg’s Paper*, *Joy*, and *Red Letter* tended not to contain much book-related content, in part because they consisted themselves largely of often-serialised romantic fiction” (2018: loc. 64.6).

classifies the literary content of women's periodicals in three "primary modes of engagement [...] regular book review columns and literary critical essays; publishers' advertisements; and 'book-as-object' discussions, which contextualise books and related accessories alongside other household purchases" (loc. 60.8), a classification that I will adapt for the purposes of this chapter. Book review columns came in different formats:

Some employed a regular named columnist who carried readers through the unpredictable territory of the publishers' lists, and offered opinionated commentary on the works at hand. Others continued the practice, dominant in the early part of the century, of printing anonymous reviews (although that anonymity was sometimes explicitly gendered female). Still others, such as *Good Housekeeping*, contained a rotating cast of reviewers who were also well-known literary figures (for example, Winifred Holtby and A. A. Milne). Some, like *Time and Tide*, also included library lists and briefer reading recommendations alongside more expansive review essays. (loc. 66.5-68.4)

Before Todd, *Vogue's* book reviews had been of the short and anonymous class. The change was sudden and noticeable: in the spring of 1924, following visible and deliberate changes, the review column was awarded its own full-page section and was signed by regular reviewers, with the occasionally renowned guest. The editorial essay, so far anonymous and concerned with manners, customs and changing expectations in the lives of upper-class women, now often took the form of a signed critical essay that looked into the interplay between social mores and fiction or into developments in the arts, especially in literature. While they shared *Vogue's* signature breezy tone, the aim and format of review columns and critical essays were different enough to discuss them separately. Publishers' advertisements were minimal, so they will not be considered on their own; I shall, however, take note of the contributors who were also publishers, and consider whether they promoted their own set of friends and colleagues—a more undercover sort of publicity. After all, a handful of firms were named more frequently than others, "suggesting a connection between particular publishing imprints and

particular periodicals” (loc. 78.0) built on personal, critical and commercial affinity.<sup>21</sup> *Vogue* did occasionally comment on books as commodities to acquire and display, especially in its essays, and so this mode of engagement shall be considered in the same section. It shall become clear that, despite its occasionally contradictory approach to books—“as objects, as cultural signifiers, as vehicles for identity, even as friends” (loc. 93.3)—there was an underlying thread in *Vogue* as in the other periodicals Battershill analyses: the books one chose “were always accorded significance in determining and defining taste” (*ibid.*).

Its critical essays were, of necessity, contradictory. There is the polyphony of contributors to take into account: their different positions in the literary field, their varying degrees of authority and their conflicted view of *Vogue* as an interesting intermediary, a promotional strategy and a source of income. Moreover, as a fashion magazine *Vogue* also had to accommodate the requirements of the format. Its essays ranged from blasé to devoted, from memoirs of childhood reading to reflections on publishing trends, and not all were wholly sympathetic to modernism. Despite occasional dissent, they tended to equate familiarity with modernist texts and authors with smartness, and, to an extent, with chic unconventionality: in other words, they commended the ability to read, critique, or simply be able to hold a conversation about modernist literature. As shown in the previous section, *Vogue* trained its readers to recognize the key names and traits of modernism across the arts, to pick them up and to integrate them into their self-presentation and daily practices: “Intelligent simplification in the matter of our clothes and our houses would seem to be the master-key to chic and

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<sup>21</sup> Battershill notes that “publishing houses tended to create one standard marketing programme and design package and use it for a variety of periodicals (sometimes increasing the size of the advertisement but seldom changing the actual typography or style). [...] By far the most common price for a book advertised in the periodicals’ pages was the standard novel price of 7s 6d, and many of the books advertised were novels” (2018: loc. 81.8). While *Vogue* frequently included non-fiction and poetry in its criticism, and keeping in mind that advertisements for books were relatively rare, her findings still apply.



comfort. The same idea is everywhere apparent; in sculpture the elimination of the non-essential details has been carried to perhaps the highest possible point by Brancusi [...] In poetry *Vogue* offers you as an example of the same tendency a new poem by Edith Sitwell” (late December 1925: 37).

Though *Vogue* never was a central institution of modernism, it expressed its highbrow allegiances by featuring modernist writers simultaneously as critics and as objects of interest. In practice, their contributions often referenced other modernist ventures, from journals like *The Criterion* to publishing houses like the Hogarth Press or events like *Façade*, which unsurprisingly fuelled the suspicion that *Vogue* had been taken over by a circle of intellectuals who only talked about themselves. This accusation was laid at *Vogue*’s feet many times, but it was hardly an exceptional phenomenon. In fact, as Battershill points out, “intersections between books and magazines” could be found everywhere in the wider literary ecosystem: “writers often worked with book publishers and magazine editors alike; publishers sometimes produced both books and magazines; and even illustrators and designers moved between and across venues in their professional lives” (2018: loc. 58.8). Furthermore, fashion magazines are concerned with celebrity and popularity, and reinforce trends through scrutiny and discussion. Consider the Princess Marthe Bibesco, who was a frequent sight across the different sections of *Vogue*: her sustained presence did not raise any eyebrows, probably because her social class made her an expected figure in this type of periodical. It was when the writers and genres that took up critical and promotional space were somehow unexpected—because of their identity, allegiance, subject matter or style—that they began to raise suspicion.

“I am a champion of all the intellectual snobberies”, declared Aldous Huxley, “and I am outraged by the growth of that intellectual ‘realism’ which manifests itself in

the growing contempt of youth for all that is high-brow” (early April 1925: 38). “The prestige of low living and high thinking has decayed” (74); instead of “intellectual snobbery”, bluntness in action and manners was now appreciated. The taste for fine literature had waned, and since “out of every hundred readers more than ninety-five are Philistines who read out of snobbery” writers were being robbed of their “daily bread”; in fact, “even the artists themselves are busily engaged in disparaging and ridiculing their art” (*ibid.*). Huxley acknowledged the hypocrisy of writing and reading for “social credit”: as he put it, “the fashionable lady feels it necessary to keep her reading as up-to-date as her wardrobe”, but “the state of things is changing” (*ibid.*). The reader who came across this essay may well be among that majority who read to keep up the appearance of smartness and whose highbrow-ness was but a pose, but she was still invited to identify with a sophisticated community threatened by those who did not read at all.

Ironically, an unsigned essay proposed Huxley himself as the representative of the younger generation that he criticised as uninterested highbrow culture. “A new morality begins to show its head, based largely on the importance of personal relations. All inhibitions are being obliterated. A generation has arisen which it is impossible to shock. [...] Of this generation the author of *Crome Yellow* and *Antic Hay* is the best known English portraitist” (early March 1924: 63). The protagonist of this essay, however, was not Huxley but his “French equivalent”, Paul Morand, praised on account of his quintessential modernity and cosmopolitanism. “The conscious distortion, the careful displacement of the accent, which mark most modern movements in the arts have left their imprint on Monsieur Morand’s prose” (*ibid.*). Underscoring the connection between the two writers allowed *Vogue* to suggest itself into the discourse

around cutting-edge modernity: Huxley was youthfully modern, and therefore so was *Vogue*, and therefore so were its intelligent, open-minded readers.<sup>22</sup>

Experimentation, exploration and novelty were, roughly speaking, central values of modernism: they made a text successfully modern. Rosenquist analyses the balancing act that modernist writers undertook in order to “make careers for themselves out of constantly reinventing the new, all the while consciously positioning their works within an older literary tradition” (2009: 1). They were invested in defining the qualities of valuable literature which, of course, must result in their own enduring celebrity.

We are not only forced to come to terms with a high modernism involved in marketing itself, but with a group at the core of a notional modernist canon who were involved in the formation of, not just the new texts of the period, but the structure of the literary field and the history that would come to be written of the movement – in fact, investing time and energy in the institutions that would make these new works endure beyond their immediate novelty. [...] The rise in historical self-consciousness that was infiltrating the minds of writers in the 1910s and 1920s closely parallels the rise of professionalization in the literary vocations of the time, as well as the development of modern ‘English’ as taught within academic institutions. (7 from Graff 1987)

High modernist authors thus occupied different positions in the field—“as literary artists, critics and historians”—as if “a step ahead of the tastes of the general reader, viewing the present as if from the position of a future historian, able to fit the immediacy of the ‘modern’ into the wider concept of a past tradition” and “helping to institutionalize the creative work of their contemporaries, even their own, as it is produced” (9). The differentiation between high modernists and the rest was concurrent with their production. Commenting on Richard Aldington’s criticism in *Literary Studies and Reviews* (1924), Rosenquist finds that:

In identifying these exceptional few with a select ‘type’ of poet – a type distinguishable from the merely ‘conventional’ poet, with which others might share ‘affinities’ and therefore belong – Aldington hereby highlights why a group with limited popular appeal and exclusive manifestos and critical formulations might still manage cultural dominance. These authors, signifying the typicality of ‘the modern’, were drawn into definitions of the period, perhaps even against their will, and often at the expense of those who remained conventionally outside. (16)

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<sup>22</sup> In her survey of fashion between 1900 and 1920, María Luz Morales draws from Ortega y Gasset in describing youth as an inherently challenging time that struggles to get away from the inherited past and towards an inner unmediated truth. The men and women of the twenties, she adds, were young in that way (1947: 299-300).

That these “culturally dominant” authors were a recognisable, and recognisably modern, “type” was also suggested and reinforced by the cumulative effect of *Vogue*’s celebrity galleries, which will be the subject of the latter section of this chapter.

In “High Fountain of Genius”, a glowing review of *Orlando* for the *New York Herald Tribune Books* (October 21, 1928), Rebecca West underscored how Woolf’s novel “is no photograph, it is as inexact a copy of appearances as a tapestry, and one can see the stitches” (Scott 1990: 594). Most importantly, “it is an epitome of all of us, it leaves us impaled, as we all are, on the mystery of the present moment” (595);

It demands careful reading and the completest consent to receive novelty. In fact, it has got to be read as conscientiously and as often as one would play over a newly discovered Beethoven sonata before one is satisfied one had got everything out of it that the composer had put in; which is a demand that literature is usually too humble to make. But if one complies with it one will have no anxiety about the effect of our critical age on the genuinely creative spirit. (596)

I include this review from a different periodical because the values West commended—a reward for the reader’s efforts in facing something new, the novel’s lucidity, its author’s willingness to show her craft, together with the aforementioned aspect of novelty—match the qualities that *Vogue* looked for. It found them in the work of high modernist authors, but also beyond. As Vike Martina Plock writes, the value of a literary text was “tested by an ability to carefully conceal the promise of mass appeal behind the attractively packaged suggestion of novelty and difference” (2018: 11). Modernist writing, Plock notes, was not oppositional but in fact compliant with—or at least manipulative of—the literary market.

A deep-seated suspicion of uniformity, which was the ghostly by-product of democracy, propelled demands for novelty, change and, above all, new styles that were meant to index individuality through the singularity of the subject’s particular, at times even peculiar, tastes. But this suggestion that artistic independence was designable through a radical break with accepted cultural forms and productions was fraught and riddled with complexities—above all because the insistence on individuality and difference was itself a carefully controlled dynamic by which the operations of the capitalist market, the producer of standardised forms and tastes, could be maintained. (11-2)

*Vogue* thus favoured the qualities associated with modernist writing even when found in non-modernist texts. That is not to say, however, that it appreciated all literary modes. As Rita Felski explains, the “engulfing, regressive lures of modern mass culture and consumer society”, with their “inauthentic pleasures and pseudo-happiness”, were marked as feminine (1995: 5). When it came to reading, “the ostensibly distanced and unemotional aesthetic stance embraced by both naturalists and early modernists was explicitly valorized over the feminine sentimentality associated with popular fiction” (80), and “previously value-neutral terms such as ‘sentimental’, ‘melodramatic’, and ‘romantic’ acquired increasingly negative, feminine, and old-fashioned connotations” as early as the end of the nineteenth century (117). Moreover, texts could also be condemned on grounds of conventionality and lack of experimentation.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, as Plock reminds us, modernist literature was also suspected to be “as contingent on modern fashion’s cultural dictates as that produced by commercially minded writers” (2018: 59) as far as it hinged on novelty and difference.<sup>24</sup> She considers Edith Wharton, who critiqued “a mercurial publishing industry that facilitated the manufacturing of celebrity authors and produced, as quasi-intellectual rebound, a literary culture that prioritised unintelligibility and formlessness as revolutionary modes of artistic expression” (61). Wharton expressed what scholars have by now analysed in depth: that popular and modernist literatures were enmeshed in the same “fractured

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<sup>23</sup> Rosenquist considers the issue of what could possibly come after high modernism, as “the modernist latecomers could neither accept nor reject their predecessors’ claims to modernity since the former would deprive them of making their mark and the latter, as De Man makes clear, would be simply repetitive and unoriginal” (2009: 178).

<sup>24</sup> Plock identifies the two conceptually opposed literary formations—commercial and modernist—in Bourdieuan terms: “the *field of large-scale cultural production*, specifically organised with a view to the production of goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods” and “the *field of restricted production as a system of restricted production* as a system producing cultural goods (and instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods” respectively (2018: 17). As she notes, recent scholarship has shown the boundary between them to be in fact “permeable and easily negotiable” (*ibid.*). *Vogue*, as an intermediary, sits uneasily in between: studies of the magazine have highlighted its function as a promoter of modernist writing while underplaying its promotion of more types of literature.

market of many audiences and an equally fractured literary psyche attempting to negotiate and survive the uncertainties of multiple audiences and aesthetics”, and that the gender of writers and readers played a significant part in said fractures (Baldwin 2013: 156 in Clay 2018a: loc. 247.0). As Plock puts it, women writers “who wanted to be recognised as serious artists could find commercial success similarly empowering and disabling”, as it could mark their work as “perishable and intellectually vacuous” and thus “inconsequential” (2018: 14). Writers that stepped into this contested position included Virginia Woolf, who expressed both discomfort and defensiveness regarding her work for *Vogue*, and Elizabeth Bowen, who wrote specifically about women’s reading and writing practices for women’s magazines despite not cultivating success exclusively among women readers.

*Vogue*’s critical essays were not only concerned with avant-garde literature; on the contrary, the majority discussed older works, usually prompted by new translations or renewals of interest, which further underscores that its concept of smartness brought together the avant-garde and the layers of past centuries. Let us return for a moment to the Nonesuch Press, which was referenced and praised surprisingly often. Francis Birrell described its founders—his friends—as “those most intelligent publishers”, lauding them for their publication of George Moore (early October 1924: 91); a review of *The Receipt Book of Elizabeth Roper*, an eighteenth-century curiosity brought to light by the Nonesuch, said that its editors “treat literature like wine—to them poetry and prose are mellow and tawny, sweet or dry, and meet to be sipped with salted almonds; they have the airs of Dr. Middleton, they decant literature gracefully for an aristocratic table” (late October 1924: 40). When the Nonesuch was mentioned, it was often noted for its character. Its recurring presence was surely due to the direct connection between *Vogue* and its founders, but also, I would argue, because they shared the core values of

charm, a preference for tasteful oddities, and the balance of modernism and antiquarian interest.

Even those who were not connected to the Nonesuch Press looked into the past for buried treasure. In “Jane Austen and George Eliot” Edith Sitwell attempted to describe the feeling of their novels, blending *Vogue*’s favourite formats, the impressionistic essay with the biographical sketch, and appealing to the sensorial experiences of daily life. Eliot, she wrote, had “a kind of rather dusty golden beauty” and “real moral courage”, though she never managed to ““see through’ people” (late August 1924: 32). Sitwell reinscribed the figure of the writer as the one who, standing against the current “in front of a crowd of moral savages” (*ibid.*), could pick up that sought-after quality of through-leaves-ness. It was precisely that moral courage, though, that made reading her work a less pleasant experience; it “nearly” drove Sitwell “mad with boredom”, though she acknowledged “a feeling of respect and a certain affection for the writer and the woman” (*ibid.*). Austen, on the other hand, was “the woman writer *par excellence*” (*ibid.*): “nothing on this earth could induce me not to read all Jane Austen’s works. I love the thorns among her moss-roses, I love the sudden flash of steel from those delicate velvet paws” (72). Only three months later came Virginia Woolf’s “Indiscretions”, which reflected on a width of writers from antiquity to the nineteenth century and also started by contrasting Eliot and Austen, finding the latter to be more appreciated by male critics. “Our whole day is stained and steeped by the affections”, meaning that our daily practices are shaped by our subjective preferences, “and so it must be in reading” (late November 1924: 47). So far it had been the affections of men that shaped criticism, but it may be time “to enquire into [women’s] preferences, their equally suppressed but equally instinctive response to the lure of personal liking in the printed page” (*ibid.*). Rather than the appeal of specific novels, Woolf explored the

attractiveness of the writers, the traits they were associated with—what nowadays may be called their brand—over each sex.

But there is a class which keeps itself aloof from any such contamination. Milton is their leader; with him are Landor, Sappho, Sir Thomas Browne, Marvell. Feminists or anti-feminists, passionate or cold—whatever the romances or adventures of their private lives not a whiff of that mist attaches itself to their writing. It is pure, uncontaminated, sexless as the angels are said to be sexless. But on no account is this to be confused with another group which has the same peculiarity. To which sex do the works of Emerson, Matthew Arnold, Harriet Martineau, Ruskin and Maria Edgeworth belong? It is uncertain. It is, moreover, quite immaterial. They are not men when they write, nor are they women. They appeal to that large tract of the soul which is sexless; they excite no passions; they exalt, improve, instruct, and man or woman can profit equally by their pages, without indulging in the folly of affection or the fury of partisanship. (*Ibid.*)

Woolf then turned to the question of women's affections for each other, in this case of women readers for their preferred writers, and discussed them in familial terms: Elizabeth Gaskell was "maternal", George Eliot "an Aunt" (88). However, the two greatest literary "consuming passions of a lifetime" for women were John Donne and Walter Scott. Woolf did not offer insight into their writing or even praise them. Instead, she assumed shared experience, drawing the reader into the joke.

In the autumn of 1924 Arthur Waley published a two-part essay on Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*; coincidentally, his own translation was about to be published. Calling it "a long and intensely 'modern' novel" (early October 1924: 59), the first essay focused on the author and her position as a woman. It must be noted that though the magazine tended to weave its Bloomsbury connections through its discussion of literary modernity, Waley did not reference Woolf or even Vita Sackville-West, but instead wrote that "it is hard for us, among whom the names of Sinclair, Richardson, Macaulay and Kaye-Smith are household words—who live indeed in the Golden Age of feminine fiction—to realise that there was once a land devoid not only of lady novelists, but of novels altogether" (112). The second essay, which paid closer attention to the novel, highlighted Murasaki's control over her prose: "We feel that the authoress herself stands always on some such eminence, never lost in the intricacies of



the plot as it proceeds from episode to episode, but steadily viewing the ultimate course of the story as though from some detached, commanding crest” (early November 1924: 65). For her skill and depth, she was compared to the *Princesse de Clèves* and Proust. *Vogue* clearly had a sustained interest in this novel, as Woolf would contribute her own essay about it a year later.

Though I have insisted on the risks of overestimating *Vogue*'s highbrow concerns during this period, I did not mean that they did not have a significant place in its critical essays.<sup>25</sup> Sitwell's "Three Women Writers", on Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein, provides an interesting contrast to her essay on Austen and Eliot. It opened, as expected, with the surety that time and critical reassessment will reveal the importance of all three writers. Sitwell championed Stein throughout the two following years, and in this essay placed her above the other two. She noted, first of all, Stein's difficulty, but she valorised it for its power to startle the reader. Stein was "stimulating"; "strange, wild, fly-away" (early October 1924: 81). Tellingly, Sitwell went on to write:

It is unfortunately impossible to use ordinary methods of criticism on Miss Stein's work, or to explain it to people who cannot understand it. Either one understands it (after an infinity of groping in the dark) or one doesn't. I have come to understand most of it, or to have an apprehension of it, after a year's hard work, during which time I did Miss Stein injustice. It was worth the work, but Miss Stein is a writers' writer. She will doubtless have a great influence, but I hope that influence will be over experienced writers, and not over the very young if they are also rather silly. (*Ibid.*)

The appeal of Mansfield and Richardson, meanwhile, was described in familiar terms that recalled Austen and Eliot's perceptiveness and warmth: Mansfield was "pellucid beyond measure" and Richardson had "a warm household style", her genius manifesting in her ability "to open the door of the mind and be able to shut it again" (*ibid.*). Sitwell

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<sup>25</sup> Besides the essays explored in this section, there were Edith Sitwell's "Some Observations on Women's Poetry" (early March 1925) and "The Work of Gertrude Stein" (early October 1925); Richard Aldington's "T. S. Eliot, Poet and Critic" (early April 1925), "D. H. Lawrence" (late March 1926) and his series about "Modern Free Verse" (late September 1925; early December 1925); Virginia Woolf's sketches of George Moore (early June 1925) and Walter Raleigh—the professor and Apostle, not the sailor (early May 1926); Raymond Mortimer's essay "The Modern French Novel" (late September 1926); and an anonymous feature on Pirandello (early July 1925).

acknowledged the high skill necessary for their more familiar, immediate mode of writing was presented as highly skilled; though she preferred Stein, she seemed to be implying that any attempt to bring her to the uninitiated would fail. While Mansfield and Richardson were said to express “something we have always known” (114), it was Stein who, looking for “the unknown”, “breaks beyond the limitation imposed by her medium” (*ibid.*). In fact, the way in which Sitwell praised Stein recalled the terms used by Aldington to praise D. H. Lawrence and by Raymond Mortimer to praise Jean Cocteau.

When discussing texts that the reader was understood to be familiar with, the tone was often more light-hearted, even affectionately teasing. “Heat, Thunder, and the Vapours” derided nineteenth century novels and wondered “what is going to happen to the world when all its ladies have become (as they seem about to do) dark and sensible—things not to be contemplated”:

Instruction should be given by those who know about it to those who do not, in the technique of fainting, the flutters, the vapours, hysterics—serious and otherwise; in childlike plaintiveness and poutings, sudden showers of tears; in timidity and terror; in the art of clinging—not so as to inspire alarm or aversion in the strong arm clung to, but just enough to make it recognise that it truly is a strong arm; in short, in all sorts of appealingness. [...] Therefore, if women wish to be adored, they must return to the tricks and manners they have abandoned. They must learn to appeal. Not for nothing has that arch-idiot, Dora Copperfield [...] been drawn by Dickens as the acme of child-wifely attractiveness. (Late July 1923: 43)

The topic of readers imitating fiction was taken up, also in comic tones, in David Garnett’s essay “Fashions in Lovers”: “It is an odd fact that books affect life much more than life affects books. An unpleasant thought! Really we are all at the mercy of some scrubby, unpresentable little scribbler who may be sitting in a garret at this omen writing a work which, like Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, will completely change all the thought and opinions of everybody about everything” (late September 1923: 51). The image of the author as a badly-dressed bohemian in a garret was obviously satirical—Garnett himself was identified as the author of *Lady Into Fox*, a highly

successful novel—and, as I shall show, was a fixture of satirical illustrations and sketches of this period. While acknowledging that the “scribbler” exerted influence over his readers, the essay questioned the utility of his work. “Perhaps the greatest disappointments in this respect are poets and painters, who have no regular office hours, but yet contrive to spend ten hours out of the twenty-four in recording their emotions on paper or canvas, and usually have nothing to show for it in the end. Men should express their emotions by thinking out and furnishing new and delightful amusements” (*ibid.*). Garnett also considered the relation between fictional women and real-life ones: while eighteenth-century heroes despised women, after Rousseau came an odd sort of respect, though limited to “women who were totally ignorant and kept without any intelligent interests or occupations” (*ibid.*). Another essay in this light-hearted vein was “The Universal Cat” (late March 1925), on cats in literature, history and fashion; conversely, Huxley’s “On Taking the Comic Seriously” proposed a lineage of comic writing and painting. “Most of our comic literature”, he complained, “is mere satire, mere comedy of manners, mere wit” (early February 1925: 82). True, enduring comedy—just like true, enduring tragedy—must be the invention of “pure comic genius”; its inhabitants “are inventions of the poet’s mind, living not in our world but in a parallel world” (*ibid.*), independent from social reality.

The popularity of certain genres and modes over others was also a recurring subject. Even if they frequently made a case against sentimentalism, some of these essays expressed an appreciation of thrills and romance, prioritising the assumed preferences of upper-class women readers. A typically tongue-in-cheek essay by Garnett, “Real Life Is So Sentimental”, shared a tender Christmas scene between a poor father and his children that he claimed to have witnessed. He lamented that it would be “wasted, absolutely wasted” on his generation: “We don’t like that kind of story any

longer—it's as *démodé* as the hobble-skirt, but for some reason if ever I look about me in real life I find tiresomely old-fashioned incidents of that description being enacted under my very nose. Oh, it's a miserable life being a writer nowadays" (late January 1926: 53). Of course, by publishing this essay he had shared the story, making the reader complicit in his joke. Meanwhile, Vita Sackville-West wondered "What Do Readers Look For?", "And Above All, What Do Women Want From Books?" Her authority was established by her status as a novelist writing about novels; though her given name was shortened to a "V.", her gender was probably known to most readers. Across the nation, in the rooms of women from all classes "a book lies between the flowers and the lamp" on the fireside table, "with a paper-cutter thrust in to mark the page" (early October 1923: 51). This again implied that most women read privately, leisurely, maybe a bit carelessly, but that even then their habits were worth exploring. The book in question was "a novel or a biography, half the time; something personal, something human. The average reader concerns himself or herself very little with the craftsman's skill [...] his reader doesn't want art, he wants something which he can understand. He wants something he can apply to his own case; something he can recognise" (*ibid.*). Women, Sackville-West wrote, cared about this even more than men; "by nature" they were "romantic", "lawless and individual" and "lack that particularly male instinct for the classical tradition", and so the "present amorphous" novel, with its almost infinite elasticity and scope, had unsurprisingly become the dominant genre. She found a direct relation between the work of women writers throughout the centuries to women's reading habits: women showed a "natural inclination" for the novel or its "first cousin in the literary hierarchy: the memoir or the biography", the unromantic Austen being the exception. The examples she gave could well be a joke—"for books on the mistresses of Louis XV, or the dogaresses of Venice, or victims of the scaffold, there is

an insatiable demand”—and yet those were precisely the subjects of *Vogue*'s own essays and recommended reading. The average woman, and the average man too, was said to neglect poetry: “they do not know what the poet is trying to do, they turn impatient, they apply the standards of their own workaday plane and find them insufficient” (*ibid.*). In the next chapter I shall explore the long-established association of women's reading habits and consumption, but for now it is enough to note that Sackville-West's readers did not devour indiscriminately: instead they peeked, fascinated, at other people's lives.

While Sackville-West did not mention her own literary preferences, Garnett's congenial “The Books That Thrill One” was written in the first person rather than the third. It began:

In real life, of course, most of us are cowards—intelligent cowards—and on the whole in real life we probably get what we want: family life, summer holidays, shooting, winter sports or strolls for *Peter Pan*. We are respectable and good-natured, and as the years roll on find that straight-line silhouette which is fashionable at the moment less and less worth trying for. Though of course we *do* still try or we shouldn't be reading *Vogue* this minute. (Late October 1923: 59)

Even for those who balanced comfort with a vague ambition for fashionable living, reading was an “escape”. “As long as we can say that ‘We don't pretend to be highbrow, but we know what we like’ with any degree of truth, we can be sure of getting the thrill that we are looking for—just that thrill which can't be got out of life. Most of us read books for the sake of that thrill. ... besides, one must be cultured, mustn't one?” (*ibid.*) Garnett played with the reader; by referencing daily occurrences and shared reading experiences, he set up the humorous revelation that his “we” was not above popular literature. He did not exactly oppose Sackville-West's claim that readers preferred a human touch in their entertainment, but he contradicted her to an extent, arguing that what people wanted was larger-than-life characters. While not positing these novels as any good at all, he referenced the brutality of the heroes of *A Dark*

*Lantern, The Way of an Eagle* and *The Sheik*: of course there was *Jane Eyre*, “but one cannot hope for a work of genius every time one takes a book out of the library, and one must be thankful for writers of such comparatively anaemic kidney as Ethel M. Dell or E. M. Hull” (*ibid.*). While he never used the expression, he seems to be pointing to certain books as guilty pleasures.

Similar points were raised in Huxley’s “Popular Literature”, an earlier exploration of the subject of best-sellers. He started with a caveat: “If I knew that interesting recipe I should be, by this time, the Corona-smoking owner of a Hispano-Suiza” (late September 1924: 57). He acknowledged a difference between the interests of art and the market, though he did not present them necessarily as opposing forces: “Authors may remain poor on principal [...] But the love of art has rather less weight, I fancy, with the majority of publishers and theatrical producers” (*ibid.*). Even the latter sort of writing, though, was not described as a profession but as the result of a certain kind of genius:

Popular writers are born, not made. A man must be born with just the right sort of vulgar mind, just the adequate amount of talent. For talent is necessary; let us make no mistake about that. Your highbrow who, after reading a novel by Mrs. Barclay or Nat Gould, declares derisively that he could do that sort of thing in his spare time, if he wanted to, is not telling the truth. He couldn’t write that sort of thing; he couldn’t write anything, in all probability, half so good. The fact that he can read Henry James is no guarantee of being able to write Charles Garvice. In order to write anything—anything, that is to say, that people will spend money on—one must be born with a well-developed power of self-expression. (*Ibid.*)

A highbrow, this paragraph implied, was someone who read difficult texts and boasted of it. Meanwhile, writers became popular when their minds were like their readers’, who mostly preferred to see their way of thinking reflected in fiction. That is not to say, however, that *Vogue* or Huxley championed the reading habits of this majority. If the whiff of condescendence and the back-handed compliments to the named authors were not enough, none of them were ever reviewed during this period. “Formulas cannot replace talent or induce a frame of mind. There are no recipes for making popular

literature, no short cuts to becoming a best-seller. The best one can do is to analyse the sort of literature that is popular, so as to show what are the more or less invariable elements on which individual writers work” (*ibid.*). First among them was the aforementioned thrill: “All intellectual interests are ruled out. Popular literature must be ‘human’; that is to say, it must deal with men and women in so far as they resemble the brutes” (*ibid.*). Secondly, the would-be best-seller must be suited to the trends and preferences of its context, treating questions like sex and money with the fashionable degree of propriety. Thirdly, the reader must find the potential for projection, or at least for escapism. The hero of popular literature “compensates by his virtue and his happiness for the chronic inclemency and incurable moral weakness of the reader’s life. [...] One of the principal functions of literature in the present state of society is to do justice and to make dreams come true” (92). As in the previous essays, readers were assumed to know the referenced texts, but not necessarily to have read them in depth: it was enough, it seems, to show familiarity.

*Vogue* expressed its reservations about the propriety of the content of modernist novels, and on occasion about their innovative use of language as well. Huxley was left pondering the very limits of literature after viewing, of all things, a Felix the Cat cartoon:

An artist who uses words as his medium finds himself severely limited in the expression of his phantasy by the fact that the words he uses are not his own invention, but traditional and hereditary things, impregnated by centuries of use with definite meanings and aureoled with certain specific associations. [...] ‘Young’ writers, especially in France, have for some years been in revolt against the tyrannies of language. They have tried forcibly to dissociate old ideas, to use words in a new and revolutionary way. It cannot be said that the results have been very successful. To the general public their writing seems nonsensical; and even their admirers have to admit that their books make difficult reading. The fact is that these ‘young’ writers are rebelling, not against effete literary conventions, but against language itself. They are trying to make words do what they cannot do, in the nature of things. They are working in the wrong medium. (Late November 1926: 76)

And if popular texts were used to reframe highbrow ones, they were also discussed by themselves. “What are the qualities that cause a book to sell like soap or breakfast food

or Ford cars?”, Huxley wondered, now prompted by the publication of a volume on best-sellers.

It is a question the answer to which we should all like to know. Armed with that precious recipe, we should go to the nearest stationer’s shop, buy a hundred sheets of paper for sixpence, blacken them with magical scribbles and sell them again for six thousand pounds. There is no raw material so richly amenable to treatment as paper. [...] If only we knew the secret of the process by which paper is turned into popular literature! But we don’t. [...] The only thing Mr. Joseph can tell us is this: the Best Seller must be sincere. [...] The truth is that sincerity in art is not an affair of the will, of a moral choice between honesty and dishonesty. It is mainly an affair of talent. [...] For in matters of art ‘being sincere’ is synonymous with ‘possessing the gifts of psychological understanding and expression.’ (Early April 1926: 63).

The best-seller, inherently commercial yet not entirely equated with popular or lowbrow genres, had no prescriptive formula except to sidestep pastiche and melodrama in favour of insight and empathy. Two bestselling novels from 1924, Michael Arlen’s *The Green Hat* and Margaret Kennedy’s *The Constant Nymph*, were unfavourably compared to their stage adaptations. Of the former, the drama critic wrote that its “popular success” was due to Arlen’s “worst qualities” (late October 1925: 64); while his characters were modern on the surface, their minds were “not so up to date” (*ibid.*). More damnably, “they are not only fast, but suburban. And the more sentimental passages made me uncomfortable when they did not make me laugh. Mr. Arlen has an unrivalled gift for being nauseating” (64-5). Similarly, Bonamy Dobrée critiqued the same fatal combination in *The Constant Nymph*: “There is too much in it of what the French call *literature*, too much atmosphere making, and indirect appeals to our sentimentality” (early October 1926: 73). Anita Loos’s 1925 hit *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, on the other hand, was an “intensely well thought out *soufflé*” (early April 1926: 53). This comment did not come from an essay or review but from the social column, which noted that besides being fun and true to life, the novel was famously “ungettable in this country” (*ibid.*); a cosmopolitan, exclusive, sophisticated commodity.

Books, bestselling or rare, could function as status symbols. *Vogue* prioritised keeping up with developments in literature very highly and discussed fashionable



writers and ways of reading, which suggests that the value of a book emanated from its producer in a way that was never completely demystified. By contrast, it paid surprising little attention to how to display books as objects. When *Vogue* visited the homes of the famous it usually showcased drawing rooms and special architecture or design features, but it made an exception in late June 1925 with “Books as Decoration” and “The Libraries of Some Notable People”, which reported on those of such worthies as H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, Winston Churchill or Duff Cooper. There was one significant long article with “Some Suggestions for the Library”. It was accompanied by an illustration (51) in which a woman dressed in a stylish drop-waist frock looked at a large volume by a lampshade; there was something furtive in her being alone, the windows shut, as if she snuck out from a party.

What is a library? Certainly, when one is shown many houses nowadays, the question is pertinent, for one is so often told ‘this is the library,’ when there is nothing to prove it except a few magazines or elaborately bound books lying about. A proper house for book-loving people should have provision for a small collection of books in each room, in addition to those in the library—the source, where books grow on books like flowers in a garden. Indeed, a library is more like a garden than anything else, for it is constantly flowering with new books, and constantly being weeded out, as worthless books give place to more precious ones.

It’s hard to imagine having too many books. We love them all—catalogues and first editions, French yellow-back novels and Italian ones bound up in jolly Florentine papers, museum catalogues and guide-books, all mixed up together. Big ones and little ones stand side by side, and fine ones and cheap ones; and the resulting mass is something that only time can produce.

An inelastic library is a dead one; there must be room for expansion. It is very difficult, if one likes both books and an architectural completeness, to achieve a proper library, because, if many shelves are left empty, then there is a ragged look. The best way to get round this, when building the room, is to provide recessed spaces for shelves all round the room, and to cover many of them with loose panels of wood which may be removed as the books accumulate. (Early August 1923: 50)

It said little about visiting and showing off, though the idea that one’s library reflects one’s self, just like one’s clothes and home, implies the presence of a beholder. Books were at the core of this piece: the sensorial experience of looking at them and picking them up, the physicality of carrying them around the house, the vitality of their “flowering”, the necessity of saving space for the ones to come. Most importantly, it acknowledged the beauty of cheap books and ephemera and their place in one’s reading.

All the while, *Vogue* insisted that elasticity of the mind was the thing to cultivate. Lisa Cohen notes that Madge Garland “lost and destroyed many personal papers, but she never let go of several small notebooks she kept in the 1930s and ‘40s in which she recorded the books she had read and planned to read—the documentation of someone who does not take reading for granted” (2012: loc. 3165). There may have been a sense of reclamation in this practice, as if she were making up for the education that she had not received. Taking note of books, reading certain titles for edification and others for sophistication, was a common trait in *Vogue*’s smart women both real and fictional. Battershill notices that “the ‘book as friend’ metaphor is one that occurs frequently in Victorian and early twentieth-century writings, and, as narrative theorist Wayne Booth [1988] has pointed out, it was a common way of framing reading as an ethical act” (2018: loc. 56.9); through Margaret Beetham (1996), she finds that women’s periodicals also took on a friendly voice when discussing books. The accumulation of books shown in *Vogue* reinforced this sense of friendliness, of continuity and growth. Reading could then be something one did to accumulate and articulate prestige, but also for private comfort.

Let us turn for a moment to when and where these smart women read. After the critical essays and reviews, the society column was perhaps the most personal of *Vogue*’s sections in the sense that it centred the first person and could plausibly provide glimpses into the columnist’s own real or ideal practices. During the holidays, when the weather got warm, “the best way to keep cool would have been to eat one’s own cucumber in one’s own dining-room and then go into one’s own square with pillow and sunshade and books” (early August 1926: 27). Those who felt restless could visit “the stately homes of England—where writing tables are large, pencils numerous; where baths are heavily salted and new books and quarterlies snow themselves under on every

table” (early May 1926: 51). Reading was a treat for those at ease; it was done for leisure, in semi-private spaces and comfortable clothes. The “lounging pyjama”—different from the sleeping and the beach pyjama—was best worn in the “later morning hours when letter writing or reading lures one to one’s room” (late March 1925: 74) as well as “when one is entertaining friends at mah jong or bridge [...] here is a great field for the display of fantasy and individuality” (75).

The protagonist of *Vogue*’s “The Diary of a Débutante” also read in the morning. This was a sharply written piece, with sentences like a clock’s staccato ticking. She started her day by checking “the gossip-writer’s columns”, where she found “the rumour of one’s engagement” (early January 1927: 60). An hour later, at 9, she read “the four pages of Carl van Vechten” (*ibid.*). Her day proper started at noon: she attended an unsuccessful committee meeting, then a private viewing at Claridge’s, and later rehearsed for a charity matinée, the sort of semi-public occupation, between labour and leisure, associated with her set. She hummed both operas and popular songs, and at the viewing she was faced with “the pretending to understand. The introduction to artist. The talk on Art. The hurried withdrawal” (*ibid.*) After “the retreat to the boudoir” at 7 pm came “the feeling of melancholy. The three paragraphs of Roger Fry’s *Transformations*. The three chapters of *Galahad*” (*ibid.*). The three books referenced were published in 1926, proving that she kept in touch with new releases, from American novels to British criticism. Yet her reading was scattered: she could not sustain her attention, and finally gave up and dressed for dining out. Similarly, the “Bachelor at Bay” wished to “spend a quiet evening alone with his books” but instead found himself lounging, distractedly leafing through *La Garçonne* and *Le Rire*, presumably Victor Margueritte’s 1922 novel and the long-running magazine (early May

1925: 72). *Vogue* called for the leisured classes to become patrons of the arts, but these pieces equated free time with lack of focus.

The fictional “Rose the Intuitive”, a paragon of smartness created by Marthe Bibesco, lived “everywhere and nowhere”—meaning that she split her time between London, Rome, Cairo, Constantinople and Spain, wherever was most beautiful at the time of year—and was renowned for her skill in dressing for her surroundings (late June 1927: 53). Her extraordinary abilities, Bibesco wrote, resulted from her cultivation in decoration and painting, her intelligence, and her knowledge of palette and line. However, she was not overly intellectual: “Rose has the sense of relativity although she reads very few German philosophers in the train. [...] she is able to please everywhere, to adapt herself and to harmonise with the place, the time, living beings and things. [...] In order not to jar with anything or anyone you must obey the essential law of all biological life, which Rose follows without knowing it—adaptation to environment” (*ibid.*). The reference to what she read or did not read on the train is significant, as it was the transport of choice for other examples of barely sustained reading. Narrating her journey to Cannes at the end of the winter, the social columnist noted how;

There seemed only just time in those twenty-four hours to glance at the books I brought—Naomi Royd-Smith’s [*sic*] *Skindeep* (funny that I’d had tea with Ernest Milton days after their marriage and had known nothing of it); the newest Maurice Baring (bought Tauchnitz at Calais), and to re-read Geoffrey Scott’s *Portrait of Zélide*. How good it is; now he’s doing a Boswell book, stirred to it, he told me, by the part where Zélide so nearly marries the egotistic little man. (Early February 1927: 27)

Quite humanely, *Vogue* acknowledged the widespread tendency to overestimate our power to read every single book we buy. A recurring icon in its illustrations and photographs was the elegant woman who held a book in her hands but did not actually look at it. Again, distracted reading was almost always found in the context of leisure: the cover for early June 1925, by Lepape, showed her in a field, gazing at a bird; the one for early August 1925, by Brissaud, had her clasping both a book and a rose. These

books were always nondescript: they stood in for a type of reading or represented the concept of a book. On the other hand, there were some books that one bought with no intention of ever reading. These included “gift books”, which Huxley called “the very devil”: the usual suspect was the inevitable illustrated edition of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* that apparently came out every year in time for Christmas (early December 1924: 100). Reading, then, was something one ought to do, but one did not always have the necessary energy or attention span. Fortunately, these essays and images did not pass judgement but rather winked conspiratorially at the reader.

### 2.2.2. “New Books for the Morning-Room Table”: Book Reviews

So far the book review column had been anonymous, brief and buried in the tail end of the issue, among the advertisements; the change to a prominent position in the autumn of 1923 must have startled readers into noticing that a shift in cultural coverage had taken place. Theatre and gallery reviews continued to appear regularly, but from that point forward they would be surpassed in size and depth by literature. The earliest and most notable change was the reappearance of “Turning Over New Leaves” in early October after six months without any book reviews at all. Though still unsigned, the section was moved to the main body of the issue, taking up two full pages and a third one at the back. It also carried photographs and a subtitle—“Notes on Some of the Most Interesting Books of the Day, and the Themes and Characters They Represent”—that signalled *Vogue*’s newfound willingness to discuss books in detail and relate them to its vision for modern life. Later, in late May 1924, it was renamed “New Books for the Morning-Room Table”, which still emphasised novelty while acknowledging the potential of books for display and comfort. The new title could be understood to imply as a less active approach to reading, but the content of the section, as I shall show, did

not. In any case, it is not productive to place too much weight on the question of the title, as it changed when context or content demanded it—“Books for Christmas Presents” (early December 1924), “Three New Books” (late May 1925)—and perhaps due to slips in editing—“New Books for the Library” (early December 1926). It would return to its first incarnation, “Turning Over New Leaves”, in early January 1927, with a one-off regression to “New Books for the Morning-Room Table” in late August of that year.

If during the nineteenth century book columns had “operated as an informal system of apprenticeship for the would-be writer” (Brake 1994: 2 in Collier 2006: 26), by the time *Vogue*’s reviewers began to sign their columns a visible and much-discussed chasm had grown between literature and journalism, the latter dropping in prestige “to the status of what Brake calls ‘subjugated knowledge’” (*ibid.*). Patrick Collier points out a parallel reappraisal of the terms “criticism” and “review”, which had until then been used interchangeably. Indeed, it is true that in the case of *Vogue* the best-known writers contributed more critical essays than review columns, indicating the latter’s lower prestige: out of Vita Sackville-West’s six contributions only two were reviews; one, and shared at that, out of David Garnett’s eight; none from Virginia Woolf or the Sitwells. Added to Woolf’s comments about contributing to *Vogue* and David Garnett’s belief that his literary journalism had been detrimental to his writing career,<sup>26</sup> this difference

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<sup>26</sup> After publishing a few well-reviewed novels in the twenties and early thirties, David Garnett became the literary editor of the *New Statesman* in 1933. Though he held that role for two years, when he was substituted by Raymond Mortimer, he continued to contribute reviews until the war (Garnett 1994: 55). “Tied to the *New Statesman*, Bunny feared he was losing his identity as a novelist, or at least that he was losing sight of it. Initially he had enjoyed his job and the status it conferred, but he was not a natural administrator and the unvarying day-to-day, week-by-week routine seemed relentless and became dull”, his biographer Sarah Knights explains (2015: 280); “Bunny did not feel entirely comfortable as a literary critic because he considered criticism inferior to imaginative writing. When William Golding, an aspiring young writer, approached Bunny for guidance about a literary career, he was told that reviewing was not a good job” (285). Despite his conclusion that journalism had been a waste of his time, Knights considers that “the *New Statesman* contains some of his finest writing. The essay format suited him, and his columns are delightful, reflecting his humour, intelligence, scholarship and wide-ranging interests” (332); those qualities, I believe, can be foreseen in his contributions to *Vogue*.

shows how creative and critical writing were privileged over reviewing. There is no way to know whether guest reviewers were granted special status or pay over regular reviewers, though, on the page, their columns had the same format and tone. Some columns were unsigned, which makes it impossible to know for sure who was in *Vogue's* roster.<sup>27</sup> However, Raymond Mortimer must have been *Vogue's* chief literary critic at thirty-two columns. Far behind followed Humbert Wolfe (seven), Richard Aldington (six) and Edwin Muir (six, one shared).

*Vogue's* most reviewed authors before 1922 all saw their thrones usurped: John Galsworthy hung on, with three books reviewed, while John Middleton Murry had one and F. Tennyson Jesse none, perhaps because of her turn to crime writing. Instead, the most reviewed authors between 1922 and August 1927—including translators, as their role was often credited and discussed—were D. H. Lawrence (eight), followed by *Vogue's* own Aldous Huxley (six), Richard Aldington, Vita Sackville-West, Osbert Sitwell, and T. F. Powys (four), Michael Arlen, Bonamy Dobrée, David Garnett, Robert Graves and Virginia Woolf (three): Dobrée, Garnett and Woolf were *Vogue* contributors. Authors with more than one book reviewed and at least one contribution to *Vogue* under their belts were Stella Benson, Marthe Bibesco, Paul Morand, Bertrand Russell, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell and Sylvia Townsend Warner; meanwhile, Clive Bell, Augustine and Francis Birrell, Nancy Cunard, Roger Fry, Edwin Muir, George Rylands, Viola Tree, Humbert Wolfe, Leonard Woolf and H. W. Yoxall were reviewed

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<sup>27</sup> In his memoirs, David Garnett explains that, in his time, the *New Statesman* had a section of “Shorter Notices” that “was run as a charity. Certain impoverished writers were, by custom, allowed to range round the shelves of books for review and pick out one or two on which they would write three or four sentences. For this they received about 7/6. Naturally they chose the most expensive books which they could sell for half-price. Thus if one of them got a book selling at a guinea it would bring the remuneration up to 18/-. It was a good system. The publisher got a review and was encouraged to send books to the *New Statesman*. And five or six meritorious down-and-outs in the literary world received a meagre pittance” (1962: 151). It is at least possible that *Vogue* functioned similarly in the mid-twenties, supporting up-and-coming writers and publishers.

once; their appearances shows how woven the practices of commissioning and reviewing were.

While two notices may be seen as a small presence among more than five years' worth of reviews, the authors who caught *Vogue's* eye at least twice—Sherwood Anderson, Maurice Baring, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Theodore Dreiser, T. S. Eliot, John Erskine, Ford Madox Ford, E. M. Forster, Jane Harrison, Sinclair Lewis, Katherine Mansfield, W. Somerset Maugham, Hope Mirrlees, Luigi Pirandello, Bernard Shaw, Carl van Vechten, H. G. Wells, Romer Wilson, Elinor Wylie and W. B. Yeats—reveal an interesting whole that included high modernists and authors that had sold well for decades as well as coterie names, middlebrow writers on the rise, cross-genre oddities, Americans, Brits, and representatives of continental chic. There were many other one-off reviews, of course, and many were of writers that have been considered of interest in studies of modernism and the middlebrow: E. F. Benson, Elizabeth Bibesco, Mary Borden, Elizabeth Bowen, Willa Cather, G. K. Chesterton, Ivy Compton-Burnett, H. D., John Dos Passos, Janet Flanner, Ronald Firbank, Edmund Gosse, Ernest Hemingway Storm Jameson, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Margaret Kennedy, Wyndham Lewis, Rose Macaulay, Compton Mackenzie, John Masefield, Naomi Mitchison, John Middleton Murry, Edith Olivier, Marcel Proust, Edward Sackville-West, Siegfried Sassoon, Solita Solano, Marjorie Strachey, Tristan Tzara and Dorothy Wellesley, among others.

That first weighty column from early October 1923 already showed most of the characteristics that would mark the reviews of this period. Though unsigned, it appeared after Mortimer's first known contribution to *Vogue*, and it was written in the same style as his later reviews, which suggests that it could be attributed to him or, at least, that it may have been used as a layout for later reviewers to follow. Each book—more often than not a novel, though poetry, biographies and essays on a variety of subjects were



also included—was allotted a paragraph. As I shall show now, it was the reviewer's choice to outline the plot, main characters or themes, to introduce the author or, if already established, to reflect on their public perception, to comment on the author's accomplishments or lack thereof, to describe the overall effect of the reading experience, to contrast it with other works, to draw from personal anecdotes and contemporary events or to attempt to guess its most receptive audience. Often the reviewer combined these approaches, commenting on whatever caught their attention, which resulted in a miscellaneous, disordered but still coherent whole.

In this particular column, the reviewer's interest was in aesthetic and sensorial pleasure, both the reader's and that inferred from the writing process, as they included terms like "tonic" (62), "subtle" (63) and "exciting" (79).<sup>28</sup> They were particularly forceful when discussing Osbert Sitwell's *Out of the Flame*: "There are folk whom the Sitwells' poetry makes very angry. That means that the Sitwells are alive, for you cannot annoy people much when you are dead. They are not only alive, but lively. They have made poetry amusing, which it has hardly been for a couple of centuries. But if they have brought wit in at the door, they have not driven beauty through the window", and Osbert has the added appeal of being "kinder to his readers' brains than is his sister" (*ibid.*).

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<sup>28</sup> The books reviewed were *Isles of Illusion: Letters from the South Seas*, edited by Bohun Lynch, "a tonic corrective to romantic imagining"; Michael Arlen's *These Charming People*, where he "sips" on civilisation "like a connoisseur" and thus "weaves with brightest skills the most elegant patterns" (early October 1923: 62); *On British Freedom* by Clive Bell; *The Dove's Nest*, a posthumous collection by Katherine Mansfield, whose stories were said to be "full of the old lights and shades, the old subtle beauty and elegance", and the reviewer regretted that "she was preparing herself for an advance she was never to make"; *Kangaroo* by D. H. Lawrence, "the most uncomfortable and the most objectionable English writer living"; *Ulven* by Ulv Youff, whom the reviewer compared to Wilde and Strindberg; *When Values Change* by Frida Sinclair, "a very pretty drama" marred by too many coincidences; *Grey Wethers* by Vita Sackville-West, "a poet in her novels as well as her verse" (63); *The End of the House of Alard* by Sheila Kaye-Smith, "an almost epic portrayal of the sacrifice of individual happiness to an idea [...] full of tragic beauty"; *Woman: A Vindication*, by Anthony Ludovici, "thought provoking, exciting and skilful—a spectacle to keep you well awake and furnish you with table-talk for more than a week of dining"; *The Diary of Nellie Ptaschkina*; *Some Victorian Women* by Harry Furniss, made up of "pleasant and desultory anecdotalage"; *A Mid-Victorian Pepys* by S. M. Ellis; and *Out of the Flame* by Osbert Sitwell (79).

The columns that followed were not so lengthy, as they usually covered four or five titles, but the width of authors and approaches within a single column did become a noticeable feature. There were of course differences in tone depending on the reviewer. Mortimer tended to begin by introducing the author and sharing his impression of their oeuvre. Then, he detailed the content or accomplishments of the specific work under review, and finally he considered what it would do for the author's place in the literary landscape. However, he did not show much interest in reading as an experience, or in the effect of the text on the reader. If one reads his reviews in succession—admittedly against the expectations under which they were published—, they reveal an understated shift in style: as time went on, he began to abandon the specificities of each text in favour of reflecting on literature at a more personal level, revealing more of the reviewer behind the column, especially in the opening paragraphs:

There are, I believe, old gentlemen still to be found who feel as well as profess a contempt for 'book knowledge.' It is not to be supposed that their opportunities for direct experience are much greater or more various than those of the rest of us, and the only result of their contempt is that they have a much narrower knowledge than we have who read. [...] One little bunch of artists can radically alter the sensibility of a whole civilisation, and it is to writers that we owe most of our acquaintance with the way other minds work. (Mortimer early April 1925: 54)

Other reviewers—Garnett and Rylands come to mind—chose a more detached, jokingly “smart” tone, writing for the reader's entertainment as much as for their instruction: “Short books are delightful; delightful for the author and still more delightful for the reader. There really is not time to get bored reading a book of less than a hundred pages. It is also much easier to find the place in a short book, if one does lay it down unfinished. [...] A short book can be got through in a couple of hours, after which you are free to live your own life once more” (early November 1924: 46). It is worth remembering that these columns were not written to be analysed or even read attentively from beginning to end, but rather to pique interest. That is not to say, however, that they were always more frivolous than their colleagues: Mortimer himself

wrote that “the sad thing is that only good writers make short books; bad writers make long ones” (early January 1925: 49). Aldington too enjoyed a one-liner: “It is indecent to argue about poetry; you should either surrender to it or reject it” (late November 1924: 59).

All reviewers, urbane or not, appreciated the same qualities that were sketched in the critical essays; their columns therefore reflected the values and chosen voice of *Vogue*, and did not jar with the other sections. Reviewers may allow a peek into their personal history and past reading experiences when the situation called for it, but they never acknowledged the relationships they may have with the authors they discussed: they critiqued books by acquaintances, friends or lovers without a caveat—never mind that attentive readers may have noticed the connection, as their social circles were commented upon in critical essays, art features and society columns. Similarly, while the more public aspects of a writer’s biography may be commented upon, details that would be considered gossip were never included; it was also common to mention modern life, novelty and timeliness in a very generalising manner, but actual references to current political events were rare. The only obvious exception was made during the General Strike of 1926 in a review of *Life and Work in Modern Europe*, written by G. Renard and G. Weulersse and translated by Margaret Rickards:

As everyone has recently had the economic facts of life forced grimly on their attention, a large class of persons will probably be glad to know how Europe has got into a state in which general strikes or whispers of general strikes are almost as common as starlings [...] England is the perfect expression of Capitalism, liberal, flexible, free-thinking, peace-loving and energetic. In fact, the history of England during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries represents the strongest case that can be made out against the cardinal virtues. (Birrell June 1926: 106)

Another blind spot in their discussion of literary modernity was the publishing industry itself, which is significant considering that most reviewers were involved in editing, publishing or bookselling. The value or beauty of a book as an object was only occasionally commented upon; whether an author or movement was in fashion or

outdated was not judged in explicit terms. Nonetheless, the collection of Tzara's 7 *manifestes dada* caused Mortimer to comment: "It is characteristic of Paris that there is a perpetual *mouvement littéraire*. In England we are content for the most part to *piétiner sur place*, each kennelled in his own little writing-room". But Dada was now *passé*, and thus not taken very seriously—"Down with them all! But nonsense can be very delightful"—, and he turned his attention to René Crevel, the "latest phenomenon" (early December 1924: 71).

Reviewers focused on the accomplishments of the text above everything else. As British *Vogue* has not been digitalised, it is not possible at the moment to process these columns and create a word cloud. However, it is my naked-eye impression that readers were expected to appreciate good story-telling, conscientiousness, delight, freshness, directness, sincerity and credibility even in the most exotic tales; smartness, but of the brainy, no-nonsense kind. This cannot be surprising, as what was praised in a book was implicitly praised in the magazine that carried the review and the person who read it. Mortimer used the latest issue of *The Criterion* as a reference point to consider new publications: it was commended for the "uncommonly high point of excellence" it had achieved by publishing a fragment from Proust's upcoming *Recherche* volume, an essay on Rococo by Osbert Sitwell and "Character in Fiction" by Virginia Woolf,<sup>29</sup> noting the latter's "elegance of perception and phrasing" (early September 1924: 30). Their names, their topics of interest, their qualities all aligned *Vogue* with *The Criterion*, and thus with modern excellence.

Let us consider the two following comments:

What are the qualities we hope to find in a new poet? A vivid creative imagination, a sense of beauty, vitality, new rhythms and new images, control of language. They will be found in Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell's *The Thirteenth Caesar*, and in addition taste, intelligence, the swift scratch of irony, the sharp laugh of sarcasm—all the gifts exerted

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<sup>29</sup> Later published by the Hogarth Press as *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924).

by modern poets to redeem poetry from the deadly insipidity it inherited from the last generations. (Aldington late November 1924: 59).

It is not the perversity of poets which has been making contemporary art difficult to grasp: it is the complexity of modern civilisation. In a world where buying and selling were simple and direct matters, art too could be simple and direct. [...] Modern art is the book-keeping of the soul, and to follow it demands a training of the intelligence (Mortimer early January 1925: 70)

What was the purpose of *Vogue*, if not to train the mind to appreciate the difficulties of modern art at its most vital?

Were we to reverse-engineer *Vogue*'s ideal book from its reviews, the result would most likely be a novel written in a distinctly amusing voice, which may be detached or both humorously and tenderly involved with its subject. With *A Man in the Zoo*, Garnett had turned "a very diverting anecdote" into "a very poignant expression" of tormented love through "lucid and beautiful" language, a recognisably individual sense of humour, and, most importantly, a "good taste" that "saves him from ever growing sentimental, although he writes with uncommon tenderness and feeling" (Mortimer late May 1924: 61). Forster was "the object of enormous admiration for all who appreciate *finesse*, irony and detachment" (Mortimer early July 1924: 49); in *A Passage to India*, a novel that would be immediately re-read for its reserved beauty, he showed an "Olympian" eye, "so detached and unprejudiced is it, if the mind behind it were not so full of sympathy and understanding" (*ibid.*). Mortimer, it is worth noting, articulated his response in the first-person singular while implying that it would be shared by most readers. For Muir, in *All Summer in a Day* Sacheverell Sitwell was exciting, enlightening, flitting; he showed his "peculiarly concrete and immediate imagination" at work "with complete triumph [...] as if he were creating new and beautiful objects out of nothing", blending fantasy and reality (late November 1926: 67). There were risks to his style, however, and he occasionally stretched the imagination too far, making "his intuitions merely extravagant or actually ineffectual" (*ibid.*). Mortimer defended his favourites from such disqualifications, writing that "Mr.

Ronald Firbank has for some reason not yet become popular. He is one of the contemporary novelists I most admire, and whose works I read with most interest. I am told that he is affected, that he is silly, that he sniggers. I consider that he is elegant, that he is poetic, and that he is witty” (late February 1925: 41). Outside of *Vogue*, this review implies, their amusing style was suspect, and such suspicions were expressed in highly gendered terms. The magazine, however, showed its tacit agreement with Mortimer by attaching Firbank’s photograph and noting that his portrait by Álvaro Guevara could be seen at the Tate Gallery.

Amusing Mortimer was not enough to secure a positive review, though: while A. S. M. Hutchinson’s style was described as “entertaining” in its oddities, the subject of the book was thought to be superficial and in bad taste, which suggests that it was a backhanded compliment (late October 1925: 47). Many writers, it seems, strived for amusing and landed on affectation and unsuccessful artifice. Elizabeth Bibesco turned out to be “a most irritating writer. She throws at us a mixture of pearls and potato-peelings which is equally unsuitable to the pearl-lovers among us and the swine. She has rare talents which she persistently misuses: her fourth book is still the work of a clever, careless, and perceptive child” (94): despite a few good aphorisms, as a whole her book was bad. Reviewers were willing to acknowledge that balance was difficult to find: in her biography of *Catherine the Great*, Katherine Antony betrayed “too much of an effort to be entertaining. The latter is a fault common to many contemporary writers—*mea culpa*—who undertake the impossible task of trying to interest blockheads in subjects they do not really want to hear about” (Aldington early May 1926: 96).

Writers could express timeliness and modernity through stylised writing, but *Vogue* also considered these qualities in relation to structure and, of course, subject. What made Stella Benson’s *Pipers and a Dancer* interesting was that she “exploits a

world where sentences and sentiments have been made meaningless by such things as cinema captions, advertisements, American slang and art societies” (Garnett and Rylands early November 1924: 96); a world that would be recognisable to *Vogue* readers and thus worth interrogating. Even more daringly, Solita Solano’s *The Uncertain Feast* was “as live as a shell, bursting, exploding, deafening, almost lethal”; it had “something of the modernity and disorientation of contemporary French writers”, which readers were understood to know (Mortimer early December 1924: 124). Though modernity could be commended in such violent terms, in general reviewers were willing to ease potential readers: Theodore Dreiser’s language in *An American Tragedy* was “certainly uncouth”, sown with “barbarous mannerisms; but the style of a great novel need not be elegant or accomplished” (Muir late January 1927: 57). In fact, his novel was “with *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* and *Ulysses*, one of the three great achievements of the age” (*ibid.*). In less superlative terms, yet on the same line, Frances Newman was said to struggle with the English language in *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*. She was;

in search of something curter, harder and simpler than this queer Transatlantic thing with its thousand lights and shades, its magical subtleties, and its heavily weighted tradition. She wants an idiom rather like hail, which hits the unprotected face with sleety violence, and then suddenly melts, leaving only a sting behind. She is aiming at a restless cinematograph landscape of speech fit for American heroines to live in—breathlessly.

She has accordingly declared war on construction and punctuation alike.  
(Wolfe early April 1927: 71)

Unfortunately, her chosen theme was old news, and the result was superficial. Not all approaches to modernity were as explosive. To Aldington, Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* was “a very satisfactory example of the modern novel; so neat, so economical, so direct, so nicely proportioned, so restrained” (late November 1924: 59). Cather, he insisted, ought to be better known.

There was an altogether different, though still cosmopolitan, strand of literary modernity. In 1924, Mortimer reviewed two books by Marthe Bibesco, *Vogue*’s

favourite Romanian aristocrat: *Le Perroquet Vert* and *Isvor*. He found the former “extremely attractive”, “short and composed with admirable economy”, and significant because of its treatment of death and mourning, “carried to an extent in which I should not believe had I not met its parallel in just such a *milieu* as Princess Bibesco describes” (early September 1924: 72). By vouching for the realism of its most foreign aspects, Mortimer supported the link between *Vogue* and continental sophistication. The value of the latter, by contrast, was in its picturesque pleasantness: while he commented lightly on the construction of the book, he said little about Bibesco’s technical accomplishments and instead played up national differences. “A poetry, long lost to Western Europe, informs this worship of unrecognised but unforgotten gods, and Princess Bibesco delicately discovers it to the horror of her English governess, and to the delight of those of us who are not governesses”; intelligent readers would dare go beyond English conventionality and absorb its “poignant sense of the richness, the variety, and the melancholy of human life” (early December 1924: 71). This preference also took the familiar form of romantic orientalism, and was entangled with the rediscovery of the eighteenth century that was an aspect of amusing modernism. “We are now most of us romantic about China”, Mortimer reflected: “In this feeling we are at one with our eighteenth century ancestors, in strong contrast to the Victorians who regarded the Chinese as barbarians” (late April 1925: 43). The reviewed book, *China and Europe* by Adolf Reichwein, was thus of interest because it responded to an aesthetic and critical trend, even though by itself was “rather disappointing” (*ibid.*).

*Vogue*’s reviewers appreciated good story-telling even above an adventurous or highly cultivated style, which in practice meant solid plotting and an eye for detail; these qualities, it seems, could cover most stylistic flaws. *Before the Bombardment*, by Osbert Sitwell, was “unusually thorough in construction, characterisation and style, as



well as extremely witty”, though it suffered from being too fanciful and long (Muir late November 1926: 67). Meanwhile, *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner, was “a very neat, tight, honest piece of journeywork”, but despite her “clear, concise, vivid” style the story disappointed in its lack of conflict (Muir late February 1926: 45). Stella Benson was commended for her “courage, sensibility and irony” and for writing about what she was drawn to rather than “what is supposed to interest other people”, a tantalising reference to literary trends that was never quite spelled out (Mortimer early November 1925: 69). Two years later, Aldington would praise Benson for her “metallic hardness” (early January 1927: 70). Sinclair Lewis was “able, observant, conscientious, and even passionate” (Mortimer late March 1925: 67). David Garnett’s novels had “an eminent clarity; the style is without doubts, almost without nuances, the treatment unpsychological, concrete, matter of fact [...] Mrs. Virginia Woolf has said of him that he is a true story teller as compared with Mr. Masefield, who is merely an interesting one” (Muir early October 1925: 59).

Above all, writers were judged on how credibly and deeply they expressed character and personality. Margaret Kennedy was praised for her excellent ear for familial dynamics and dialogue: “One sees her characters swimming in the clear swift stream of the most natural entertaining talk, as one might lean over a bridge to watch the trout” (Garnett and Rylands early November 1924: 96); Naomi Mitchison demonstrated “a talent bordering upon genius for interesting us in persons who lived in the remote past” (Mortimer late December 1925: 63); Wolfe took care to correct Romer Wilson’s reputation as a romantic, as he argued that that was “completely to misunderstand her. She is, in fact, a realist, but the reality which she is making is not ours, but a thing conceived and given substance in the dark and cool silence of her genius” (early April 1927: 71, 96). *Vogue* appreciated perceptive portrayals of human nature, even if it was

as types. Harold Nicolson's *Some People*, "an attempt at a new literary genus, a hybrid of the short story and the book of memoirs", had a cast of characters that included plenty of well-known public figures, including "decadent poets, inglorious failures, and fantastic snobs" and would surely and deservedly become a best seller—though of course Mortimer could not fail to praise it (early July 1927: 74). Interest in character was extended to non-fiction, as already suggested by its publication of biographical sketches. Of Geoffrey Scott's biography of the eighteenth-century writer Isabelle de Charrière, *Zélide*, Mortimer praised the author's irony and cleverness, but also his sympathy, and recommended it "to everyone interested in character" (late March 1925: 67). Aldington took offence at Benedetto Croce's criticism of Walter Scott, as he argued that, for all his erudition, Croce had overlooked Scott's redeeming quality, his "remarkable powers as a creator of character" (late November 1924: 59).

As a whole, and despite their enthusiasm for stylish writing, these columns repeatedly rejected artifice when it was too superficial or overt. Would-be readers of Hope Mirrlees's fantasy *Lud-in-the-Mist*, in one of the exceptional occasions in which they were addressed by a feminine pronoun, were warned of its fairy-tale construction: "If the reader can make it hers and accept the convention, it will make delightful reading; if not, it cannot seem anything but an agreeable artifice" (Aldington early January 1927: 70). Similarly, "*Crewe Train*, the best novel Miss [Rose] Macaulay has written, has the same fault as her other stories: if you fall in with the mood, the book will seem delightfully amusing; if you do not, it will appear a little falsetto" (Muir late January 1927: 57). Even *Vogue*'s own David Garnett was accused of superficiality in *Go She Must*: if one is nothing but manners and style, "they are ultimately bad manners and bad style" (Wolfe early March 1927: 62). Others were skilful enough to conquer this failure. Excessive reliance on artifice, "the shake and thrill of *il bel canto*", had

hampered Storm Jameson's works until *The Lovely Ship*, when she finally overcame it with "economy, vigour and simplicity" (Wolfe early May 1927: 74).

But there were worse sins than artifice. After *Mockery Gap*, T. F. Powys's "star is no longer steadfast [*sic*]; it pales"; it was "not serious enough to divert us from an autumnal mood", and his characters were but "human goats and monkeys [...] untouched by pity, tragedy or wonder" (Rylands early November 1925: 96). Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* proved that "sincerity is not enough" to save an unoriginal work (Wolfe early June 1927: 55). "It is to be hoped", Sylvia Townsend Warner disingenuously worried, that Almey St. John Adcock's "publishers will not persuade her that they have got hold of a new Sheila Kaye Smith. Great writers can circumscribe themselves as they will: Miss Austen among the gentry, T. F. Powys in a Dorset village write of something universal which transcends class and locality. Lesser writers only handicap themselves by these regional surveys" (late October 1926: 88). Though G. K. Chesterton had "real genius", his "inexact" mind prevented him from doing himself justice (Wolfe late July 1927: 45). Beverley Nichols was sentimental, stocky; to put it plainly, he "must not write rubbish" (Blanco-White late March 1927: 65). There was no saving that one: "the reader feels that only one sure means to a thrill is left to him—the sudden heaving of half a brick, if possible through a window-pane, at the author" (96). Mary Borden and Shane Leslie were directly accused of bad writing. Of the former, Mortimer said that "distinctiveness and distinction are far from being synonymous" (late December 1925: 63). Even more damnably, the latter betrayed in his biography of George IV "inevitable hints of [Lytton] Strachey; but there are also hints of Woolworth's", a store so frequently associated with the middle classes that it became a trope in middlebrow texts (Warner late October 1926: 60).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> References to Woolworth's even get their own exploration in Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (2001: 130-4).

Very few books were actually panned, except for the long-running joke that was *Irene Addesleigh*; *Vogue*'s reviewers only discussed books that held potential interest for their readers. In fact, only one writer was consistently criticised. There surely were worse books than those of D. H. Lawrence, but he was at the centre of literary debate, and therefore reviewers brought him up repeatedly, recognising his talents with reservation, suspicion and frustration, like a scab that they must pick at. Mortimer found that *Studies in Classical American Literature* covered little of interest about its subject, "though much about Mr. Lawrence" (early September 1924: 72); so much so that "everyone should read it who has been at once attracted, puzzled and repelled by those strange novels in which the illumination of genius alternates with the dreary darkness of a half-baked mysticism" (*ibid.*). This was a charge he would repeat, albeit more positively, with *The Plumed Serpent*: "But though Mr. Lawrence fights on the side of what I consider darkness—his favourite adjective is 'dark'—his work intermittently shows an imagination perhaps more ardent and compelling, despite its limitations, than that of any other living writer. [...] I pick up Mr. Lawrence's books remembering that he is a mystagogue. I lay them down admitting that he is a genius" (early March 1926: 45). Aldington shared the same concerns, describing Lawrence's preface to the *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, by M. M, as "a first-rate piece of writing in spite of a few characteristic lapses into cheapness and a hysterical finish 'off the deep end.' According to mood, one vacillates ignominiously in one's opinion about Mr. Lawrence"; "the trouble is that he knows he has genius and abuses the privilege" (late November 1924: 88).

Discussing Lawrence allowed the reviewers to broaden their scope and consider the dynamics of the literary field. That same preface was answered by a pamphlet by Norman Douglas, *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus: a Plea for Better Manners*.

Despite its specificity, Mortimer reviewed it for *Vogue*, making it one of the exceptional occasions in which such goings-on were reported in depth. “In the fifty odd pages he manages to discourse with all his accustomed wit of a hundred things, from Mr. Lawrence and the modern novelists’ fondness for portraying their friends, to the folly of sleeping with the window open; and including a few lines about Conrad which show what piercing criticism Mr. Douglas could write if he would. Won’t he?” (late March 1925: 98). Lawrence’s role as *bête noire* suggests that he was a topic of discussion beyond exclusively literary circles, and thus that the sides taken by different intellectuals were also food for conversation. Unsurprisingly, these columns weighted his technical accomplishments and choice of subject, but also the public perception of his persona and what it said about modern society.

Won’t Mr. Lawrence, who can do the trick, continue to write novels for us instead of wasting his time and ours on sociological, psychological, sexual ravings? [...] He is always in a rage now; full of fury and indignation, though he is not quite sure what it is all about. [...] Mr. Lawrence suffers terribly from the disease of his age—that life, not only for the scientists, but for every man and woman, has been broken up into atoms, resolved into its minutest particles, so that we are quite unable to put it together any more [...] So it comes about that novelists, whose function is to reflect life, have only two courses open to them: either they must shut their eyes and adopt the older convention; or else they must reproduce in books this shivered surface of our modern consciousness. The story must no longer be like a picture in a frame, neat, complete, self-sufficient, entire; it must be a broken thing, contriving to suggest a rush of other, irrelevant things going on all round it; a fact is no longer an isolated event, but an event brought about by a kaleidoscope of circumstances. [...] Mr. Lawrence makes one angrier than any other writer (I suppose he enjoys doing that), but it is anger at the waste of his genius, not a mere irritated disagreement with his opinions. (Sackville-West late July 1926: 47)

Lawrence, though frustratingly disperse, was thus named one of the representatives of the modern novel—Sherwood Anderson was another. Nonetheless, Sackville-West did not disparage of the more conventional kind of storytelling: “It seems to me that novelists, nowadays, have got to make up their minds: either they must choose the perfectly flat photographic system, like Mr. Galsworthy who no longer interests us: or else they must choose the suggestive system, implying irrelevant forces at work; or else they must bravely choose the conventional system, and make their little world complete

within itself' (*ibid.*). If a writer chose the latter, their saving grace, their way into modernity, could be "a little artificiality"—a touch of the amusing—which "may convey just as much significance as a good deal of downright sincerity; and it adds considerably to the gracefulness of life. There is, at all events, a definite place for the Mr. Garnetts and the Miss [Elinor] Wylies. They may not be Tchehovs, but they are very pleasantly and self-consciously eighteenth century" (*ibid.*). For Sackville-West, those three paths were not separate but permeable. Elizabeth Bowen, she proposed, managed to work with "a happy bastard" system "between the photographic and the suggestive"; however, Bowen's genre was the short story, which did not demand "from the reader a sufficiently prolonged effort of concentration to stamp them on the memory", no matter how stimulating (*ibid.*).

Huxley and the Sitwells, who had a much closer relationship with *Vogue* than Lawrence ever would, were more often discussed because of what they said about modern culture rather than because of their specific strengths and weaknesses as writers. *Antic Hay* was populated by materialistic, hedonistic characters that pursued nothing but sex and their own notion of good taste, with "hardly the ghost of a moral idea between them"; "what these people do to-day", the reviewer warns, "thousands of people may be doing in a few years, when the whole of civilisation crashes"; "all serious persons, therefore, should read his book, because it is extremely characteristic of our age. All frivolous people will read it because it is extremely amusing. You may hate Mr. Huxley: you cannot neglect him" (early January 1924: 45). Mortimer drew the same conclusion from *Little Mexican*. "By now all readers of fiction must be divided into two classes, those who enjoy his work, and those who detest it": love him or hate him, everybody was sure to know him (late June 1924: 46). This disagreement was not rooted in aesthetic concerns, he wrote, but in "fundamentally opposed philosophies of life":

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 the 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 Steinach operation and a pronounced *maquillage*, then it is almost certain you will be an admirer of Mr. Huxley’s writings. (*Ibid.*)

Though other columns accommodated the “older generation”, this one implicitly shamed it. It is worth noting that both Huxley and Mortimer were quite literally of the younger generation, at 30 and 29 respectively. “It is impossible”, Mortimer concluded, “not to read his work”; as a matter of fact, he guessed that he would become known as “the best authority” on post-war England in the near future, or even be remembered as its “characteristic figure” (*ibid.*). This review, at an exceptionally long four paragraphs, considered Huxley’s technique to surprisingly not too flattering results. “He is hardly a natural novelist, though his technical agility helps him to hide the fact. At the same time the essay is too jejune a form to be satisfactorily revived” (*ibid.*)—a comment that may be read as an attack on Huxley’s own contributions to *Vogue*, as that very same issue carried one on music. While perhaps not entirely sincere, such a comment undermines criticisms of Todd’s *Vogue* as a coterie that closed its ranks: indeed, although most reviews of his work underscored the sophistication of his characters, his misanthropy and detachment, and, above all, his “descriptions of states of mind at the present time” that would ensure the lasting “documentary interest” of his novels (late February 1925: 41), not one reminded readers that he was a regular writer at *Vogue*.

Mortimer underscored his allegiance to the younger generation by remarking that he, “an early admirer” of the Sitwell siblings, now found “a malicious pleasure in watching the change of attitude towards them of the older generation” (early July 1924: 49). The warm reception of Osbert Sitwell’s *Triple Fugue* reflected growing appreciation for the three siblings; “yet it is not these authors who have changed

(though, of course, their talents have developed), but the public taste”, which proved that *Vogue* was the righteous champion of youthful, chic modernity (*ibid.*). The rest of the review may well have been a manifesto: “Mr. Sitwell knows that there is for authors only one unforgivable sin, and that is to be a bore. [...] He has seen many amusing places and persons, and he has an alarmingly observant eye. He has an astonishing feeling for ‘period’” (*ibid.*). What made him interesting to readers of *Vogue* were his accomplishments as a writer and observer, but also the fact that he was a society author. “Asking one’s friends how they like the portraits Mr. Sitwell has made of them will obviously be a favourite recreation during the last weeks of the season” (*ibid.*), meaning that this “one” was not impersonal, but either himself or someone from the bohemian or intellectual urban circles. Nonetheless, Mortimer expressed reservations about relying exclusively on insider knowledge: “Personally, I think portrait-painting in fiction is usually a mistake; whether composite or not, portraits are not artistically justified unless they interest those who do not recognise the originals” (*ibid.*).

The Sitwells stood for all that was young, modern and smart in the literary world on numerous occasions, but they were also positioned as relatively approachable; avant-garde, but neither stereotypically nonsensical nor so obscure as to be unenjoyable.

The grand indignation about [Epstein’s Hudson memorial] makes me wonder what would happen if the works of some of our contemporary poets could be exposed in the same way free of charge to the public gaze. The Broadcasting Company might induce Miss Sitwell, for instance, to read some of her poems into the microphone. I say Miss Sitwell because her poems are fairly conservative in form. They are elegantly rhymed, and rarely, if ever, obscure. (To offer a wireless audience Gertrude Stein or even T. S. Eliot would be unfair; the Hudson memorial is by Epstein, not by Laurens or Archipenko.) But I think Miss Sitwell’s poems would be written to the *Times* about, called immoral, German, Bolshevistic, formless, unwomanly, meaningless and ugly, though they really are as charming as glass-pictures, as feminine as ribbon-work, and as English as Mrs. Browning. Mr. Ernest Newman has just written a book to prove that genius always receives contemporary appreciation, that the fame of the great is never only posthumous. [...] The man in the street has always been a conservative animal. He still is. But to the more intelligent critics nothing is any longer *a priori* inadmissible. (Mortimer early August 1925: 53)

This musing was brought about not by one of the Sitwells’ many publications during this period, but by Robert Graves’s *Contemporary Techniques in Poetry*. “His wit, his



humility, his good taste and his detachment combine to make a most delightful essay”; it was, in fact, “the liveliest pamphlet since Mr. Bell’s *On British Freedom*” (*ibid.*). Readers were thus encouraged to look for deeper literary criticism from specialist sources, which were often reviewed in similar terms to fiction. Though T. S. Eliot’s was criticised for his “lack of gusto”, his “dessication of the mind” and his “determined frigidity”, he was said to be “always serious, always clear-headed, always independent, and always intensely interesting” (Mortimer early January 1925: 49). All these adjectives, liberally used to characterise writers as much as their work, reflect a reservation that Mortimer acknowledged in his review of E. M. Forster’s *Anonymity*. In highly developed societies like twentieth-century Britain, which had long moved on from folk literature, “all the best art shows personality”—that is, the author’s (late January 1926: 43). The qualities of a writer, regardless of genre, were transferred to their work and the other way around: their style and mode were identified with their personality.

There were other authors who, though not as often as Huxley or the Sitwells, were also identified as exemplary in contemporary literature, as perceptive commentators on modern society and manners, or as both. Virginia Woolf was “the chief agent” of the disintegration of the novel in England, paralleling that of other institutions, from petticoats to entire government systems, which were all falling apart to be “replaced by something fresh” (Mortimer early June 1925: 60). Like other novelists of “the younger generation”, among which Mortimer named E. M. Forster, David Garnett, and D. H. Lawrence—all in their forties except for Garnett—, she was “preoccupied with questions of sensibility and of style which have actuality for me, while the Edwardians move ordinarily in a world which must seem to my generation

insipid or unreal, ashen or outworn” (late October 1925: 47).<sup>31</sup> The publication of a study of James Joyce by H. S. Gorman, despite being “a little disappointing”, was celebrated for the fame and respect it would bring to its subject, and pushed Aldington to defend *Ulysses*:

I am inclined to quarrel with the publisher for announcing that *Ulysses* was ‘very properly prohibited.’ As the law stands, any magistrate was bound to order its suppression, but one cannot approve of suppression in the case of a book which is undoubtedly a work of the greatest importance, any more than one approves of the literary journal which evaded the issue by refusing to notice the book. But prohibited or not, ignored or denounced, *Ulysses* exists, and no one who is really interested in modern literature can afford to miss it. You may, like Sir Edmund Gosse, think it a ‘foul chaos,’ or find it boring, as Mr. Aldous Huxley does, or a record of inhibitions as (I think) Mr. Middleton Murry does, but you cannot pretend that it does not exist or that it is unimportant. It does exist, it is important, it is a great book. It is incomprehensible to me that any critic can read the book and not admire, even if with horror and repulsion, the extraordinary powers of the author. *Ulysses* is the inferno of the very sensitive, highly educated, most imaginative and observant mind. Mr. Joyce’s memory for detail is by itself a marvellous possession; it is much more remarkable than Mr. F. M. Hueffer’s, for instance, because it is accurate as well as extensive. But this memory is less striking than Mr. Joyce’s command of words, his imagination, and his bitterness and horror of life. [...] But however much one may question Mr. Joyce’s attitude to life—and I confess I think it senseless and indefensible—there can be no question of his powers as a creative artist. Until those are generally recognised, until Mr. Joyce receives the respect due to his genius, it is premature to conduct a destructive examination of his moral philosophy. (Early May 1926: 96-8)

Because of its obscurity and length, Aldington chose *Ulysses* to criticise *The Art of Being Ruled*, by Wyndham Lewis: “There is nothing remarkable in the artist turned *philosophe*, for this phenomenon has occurred before, but the amazing farrago now published by Mr. Lewis is indeed remarkable [...] But, as everyone knows, the English public loves to be preached at and kicked, and to be convicted of all sorts of wickedness. This Mr. Lewis performs with great energy and ruthlessness” (late April 1926: 70). Nothing in this review suggests any respect for Lewis, who was portrayed as all bray and no depth, and whose book was described as an “amateur construction of

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<sup>31</sup> In this review, however, Mortimer pulled back to reclaim solid storytelling, adding that “if I were asked what living novelist I most admired, I should have to answer ‘Wells’”, whom he compared to Dickens (late October 1925: 47). An anonymous reviewer, by contrast, acknowledged that: “one approaches a new work by Mr. Wells or Mr. Galsworthy with something of the faint reluctance inseparable from an act of duty. That is the penalty they pay for their position of eminence in what is called the world of letters. Their reward is the fact that every inhabitant of their work *must* approach their works, and—unless he be a professional reviewer—must pay the fee of admission”; their latest novels, unfortunately, turned out to “evoke a negative state of mind, neither denunciatory nor enthusiastic” (early October 1926: 81).

thought” (*ibid.*). Other examples of writers presented as very modern indeed include Carl Van Vechten and Ford Madox Ford, “perpetually young in promise and surprise” (Partington early November 1926: 84). None among the contemporary poets, unfortunately, could “hold the main attention of the age”, which betrayed the unhealthy state of the art:

No other branch of literature seems at present to be dividing and subsiding in so many directions, or shows in every direction such meagre results. [...] What the main stream of poetry is at present it is indeed impossible to say. Our prose is in a better position [...] Mr. Lawrence, Mrs. Woolf, Mr. Strachey, unlike as they are in certain essential respects, can with some management be fitted into the same tradition; they do not put a greater strain upon the unity of the age than the existence of Carlyle, Thackeray and Emily Brontë put upon theirs. And this is largely because their achievement is sufficiently solid and individual to be co-ordinated. In poetry, on the other hand, we have the Georgians fading gently into the past; the Sitwells who have nothing in common with the Georgians; the small but increasingly influential following of Mr. Eliot, who are resolved on isolation; the *vers libristes* who, except for ‘H.D.,’ Mr. Aldington and Mr. Flint, have given up the fight; Mr. Graves, essentially an idiosyncratic poet; Mr. Wolfe, who in a very different way is also idiosyncratic; and Mr. Blunden, a Georgian who has outgrown the school. (Muir late February 1926: 45)

The Parisian scene was said to be more advanced, as “the French mind” was “working like the new Rolls-Royces at a time when our mental motors still had their doors at the back” (Mortimer late August 1925: 55). Besides Tristan Tzara, Guillaume Apollinaire or Proust, *Vogue* often referenced the aforementioned Paul Morand:

A post-war Petronius, Monsieur Morand presents the superficialities of modern life as no other writer does. ‘A very Morand evening,’ ‘Quite a Morand scene,’ are expressions that spring naturally to one’s lips on certain occasions. [...] Never has life been more fantastic than now, when all values are confused, all tradition neglected, all distinctions lost, and all taboos forgotten. The rhythm of existence has become syncopated; we live in a ballet; and the surface and the depths of our lives are equally bizarre. Monsieur Morand stages superbly. He is the Diaghileff of literature. (71)

All in all, reviewers tended to be more concerned with the author than with the book in question: the technical and stylistic aspects of the text, even more than its content, were associated with the writer’s public persona and output to date. More often than not, this resulted in reviewers recommending a book depending on how well it represented the generation or movement associated with its author. Only seldom did reviews explain the plot or themes, and even more rarely would they let the text speak for itself. The review of H. D.’s *Heliodora* was an exception, as it reproduced the poem

“Helen” and concluded: “I think after reading that, you will want to buy her book” (Mortimer late May 1924: 84). Sometimes the reviewer attempted to guess a book’s potential readership, reflecting on the reading habits of a particular demographic. Elinor Wylie’s *Jennifer Lorn* was “a *bibelot*, a fashionable ornament, a book for fine ladies to read when in the hands of the manicure or the coiffeur” (Mortimer early July 1924: 49). By contrast, only “a small number of intellectual readers”, would appreciate George Rylands’s *Russet and Taffeta*, which required wide “accumulated reading of years” to make sense of (Mortimer late December 1925: 63). The same people would enjoy Leonard Woolf’s *The Hunting of the Highbrow*, though it asked for a bit of introspection:

Mr. Woolf is compelled to entrust his wit and irony, to say nothing of the truth that is in him, to a pamphlet which costs its purchaser half-a-crown. [...] Mr Woolf’s *Altifrons aestheticus*, var: *severus*, in particular, the man who only likes what is best in literature, art and music, is now, as never before, ridiculed and loathed. There is, of course, good reason for this. The fellow may be mild-mannered, but he is suspected, and rightly, of despising lowbrows, of wishing to infect young people with his good taste, of permeating our movies and wireless programmes and so making those who are, and intend to remain, incapable of good taste feel old and vulgar and at a disadvantage. It is scorn for scorn, a natural and not an improper instinct. But we do not agree with Mr. Woolf that his *Altifrons altifrontissimus*, or intellectual highbrow, the man who prefers his intellect to his senses, is in so bad a case. The bulk of the English very rightly distrust their senses, and our towns are full of pallid men—the readers of *Science Siftings* and *Thoughts of To-day*—who, far from hating this superb *Altifrons*, are wistfully anxious to quote him and admire. If Mr. Woolf dipped occasionally, as he should, into lowbrow assemblies, he would realise that though men do not imagine that they have read Einstein as they imagine that they have read Newton and the Bible, the word ‘relativity’ is a social force. [...] The difficulty does not lie with the masses, which, as we know, are sound at heart, but with the highbrows one or two grades lower. (Blanco-White late April 1927: 59)

*Vogue* suggested whether a book’s ideas were fashionable or outdate in a roundabout way, locating them in the literary market, rather than saying so outright. Similarly, reviewers discussed readers—their taste, their social origin, their daily habits—in the abstract and only very rarely brought themselves into the page by offering their own response. This is not to say, however, that it never happened. Mortimer found that F. M. Mayor’s *The Rector’s Daughter* was “one of those quiet, rare, distinguished books that one hesitates to recommend, save to one’s personal

friends, and only to a few of them” (late June 1924: 46): books could be a window to the self as well as a bridge to others, and so to reveal one’s deepest literary preferences was to be vulnerable. He was left in “despair” when he reached the abrupt end of *Sanditon* and revealed that his favourite Austen novel was always “the one I have most recently re-read” (early March 1925: 90)— an opinion that surely many readers related to. He “sat up till 2 a.m.” submerged in *The Rasp*: “The detective story is, of course, a taste apart; it is more akin to cross-word puzzles than to literature. [...] In fact, there are no books, except works of philosophy, which demand such concentrated and serious reading as detective stories. If ever the demand for them fails, it will show that the reading public is becoming incurably frivolous” (late April 1925: 90). Aldington described another type of response when he advised the would-be reader to “surrender to Mr. Sitwell, let him take charge of your imagination, respond quickly to his hints, suggestions, half motions, and you will be swept up by his verse into a strange, new world of ideal loveliness” (late November 1924: 59). He was not making a case for escapist or analytical reading, but for throwing oneself head-first at the experience. Novels could, of course, transport the reader as in the least laboured of images: “most ‘best-sellers’ strike me as dull”, considered Mortimer, but those by Berta Ruck “carry me along as smoothly as a Rolls-Royce” (late June 1925: 56). Reading *Manhattan Transfer*, by John Dos Passos, “you can almost hear the roar” of the Broadway traffic;

You are for ever being pulled up short by the controls, and your attention is shifted without any particular reason, except that of ceaseless movement, from one vehicle to another, from one group of passengers to the next. You emerge from reading as tired as though you had been held up in a traffic-block for an hour, and with a faint continuous rumbling in your ears. But there is real vigour and passion in the book (Wolfe early June 1927: 86)

*Fiesta*, by Ernest Hemingway, was said to be a dexterous example of “fiction which makes a semi-solemn claim on your attention, that you can read with a clear conscience during a journey and need not be excessively perturbed if you happen to forget and

leave behind” (Quennell late August 1927: 37, 64). If Aldington was to be believed, the modern novel was not entirely appealing, even when successful: “nobody but the author or an over-scrupulous reviewer ever reads a modern novel twice” (late April 1926: 70). On the other hand, readers were advised to overcome their reticence and to be confident in their own abilities to read modern poetry:

And at that point an impatient reader, or a reader unacquainted with the temper of Mr. Yeats, the poet, might lay the book aside, saying: ‘But this is written not for the world, but for disciples. It is written in a language strange to me (but no doubt known to them), full of unfamiliar symbols. It seems to me arrogant and unintelligible, and I shall not be afraid to say so, because, if a man has a message, he should not deliver it in a parcel that the vast majority of the world cannot untie.’

The impatient reader would be wrong. In the first place he must take into account the misted ease of the writing itself. (Wolfe early February 1927: 46)

Surprisingly, only once was the lexical field of fashion used in relation to reading:

Touched by a sweet infection from the neighbouring pages, I feel inclined to describe the books before me in terms of clothes. Monsieur Paul Morand’s ‘collection’ is straight from Paris, and, like several of the best *couturiers* (Monsieur Giraudoux, for instance, the author of *Suzanne et le Pacifique* and *Siegfried et le Limousin*), he is extremely fond of exotic *motifs*, and finds inspiration in every conceivable country. [...] Mr. Michael Arlen shows twelve models [...] They are less striking than the famous green hat which won such surprising popularity a year or so ago (he sold, his advertisements tell us, 150,000 of them), but they are certain to have a vogue. The exaggerated elaboration of the embroidery and the excessive use of *diamanté* will not commend them to every taste. They are, in fact, more showy than *chic*, and are perhaps best adapted to use upon the stage. Mr. D. H. Lawrence is not less imaginative than Messieurs Morand and Arlen, but he is of the revolutionary school which believes in ‘reformed’ or ‘natural’ clothing. The two models he shows, *St. Mawr* and *The Princess*, are designed to exhibit the body and give it freedom. They are at once cowboy and palaeolithic in inspiration, though it is also possible to see in them a slight Viennese *cachet*, due, no doubt, to the influence of Maison Freud. (Mortimer early July 1925: 39)

In fact, references to *Vogue*’s assumed milieu were also used negatively: *Bella*, by Jean Giraudoux, was said to be superficially clever, as “nothing could be more obvious than his plot; it is the merest magazine story [...] All this Proustian snobbery is perhaps demanded of a ‘high life’ novel nowadays, but M. Giraudoux is really too lavish” (Aldington late April 1926: 70). *Vogue* could certainly be accused of “Proustian snobbery”, and yet it was safe, as it almost never carried stories and published this review in the first place. Aldington repeatedly referenced the magazine story to characterise a type of reader and their habits: “There are perhaps many people who will

read and enjoy a story, just as a story, with no regard to any of the artistic values. The people who buy and read ‘fiction magazines’ may do this [...] But even the most miscellaneous ‘fiction magazine’ is rather more remarkable for its sameness than its variety—the editor sees to that” (early December 1926: 81). In this particular review he was critiquing a chaotic anthology of ghost stories: “Even if people do read in the indiscriminate manner tacitly assumed by this book they ought not to be encouraged to do so. It is the surest way to discourage a genuine enjoyment of literature. [...] We all read too little and read too many books” (*ibid*).

A more tangible “I” trespassed onto the page when reviewers looked back and drew from personal anecdotes, revealing something of their daily lives, formative moments and relationships. Mortimer critiqued E. F. Benson’s *David of King’s* because, as he explained, “I count among my highest privileges the friendship of some undergraduates at King’s College, Cambridge”; the “fastidiousness and sophistication” of King’s College and its young men were “the object of alarmed admiration for the mere Oxonian” (late June 1924: 46).<sup>32</sup> His reminiscences sometimes were, however, wishful projection rather than nostalgia. He found that he did “dare not re-read”

#### Compton Mackenzie’s *Carnival*

for fear of shattering a memory bound up with the already mythical pre-war Oxford. The pretty elegances of the Nineties have lost their savour [...] Artifice has now to be a little acid, and delicacy a trifle dry. Marie Laurencin has replaced Audrey Beardsley, Mr. David Garnett, Mr. Compton Mackenzie, in the admiration of the sophisticated young. And those of us who would still kneel to the old gods find our knees too stiff, or our eyes too sharp (late April 1925: 90)

Those Nineties are in fact a reconstruction, as he was born in 1895, suggesting that he may have meant to address an older readership. In a review of *The Beardsley Period*, meanwhile, he outright stated that he wished he “had been born in 1868: it must have

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Woolf noted in her diary that Mortimer was “a curious half breed. An Oxford young man, inclined to smartness, dress & culture. His soul is uneasy in Cambridge company. He squirms a little visibly” (5 September 1923 in Bell 1978: 264), and Rylands made fun of him for having attended Oxford (11 September 1923 in Bell 1978: 266).

been such fun to be young in the Nineties” (early March 1925: 49), and followed his wish with a brief—and stereotyped—sketch of its milieu. Occasionally he looked further back for aesthetic pleasure:

I am a lover of books rather than a bibliophile. I value commodity higher than comeliness, and like best of all books those late eighteenth century editions printed in elegantly clear type upon conveniently thin paper. I am even so Philistinish as to prefer my seventeenth century poets in a neat and scholarly modern dress, light to hold and handy to pack, rather than in the ponderously handsome folios which were their original habiliment. [...] The printing of the new Nonesuch Press Edition [of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*] is admirable—that we have come to take for granted in Nonesuch publications [...] One might imagine that no book was less suited to illustrations in the twentieth century manner than *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: it is so essentially a book typical of the early seventeenth century. So one approaches Mr. McKnight Kauffer’s work with a certain prejudice. But I at least have been entirely won over. Of Mr. Kauffer’s ability as a decorator there can be no question. The very bowels of the earth declare his handiwork. I think in *The Anatomy* he also shows uncommon intelligence, tact and imagination. (Mortimer early February 1926: 32)

There was none better than the Nonesuch, then, to bridge the chasm and find the modern in centuries past, though *Vogue* also reviewed classics and reprints from long-gone periods when they arrived through other channels. Aldington reviewed eighteenth-century novels as well as biographies of writers of the period: Ninon de Lanclos was presented as a model for the modern intellectual woman, though more as a hostess than as a writer, while Madame de Staël was “by no means the dull, obsolete personage she is sometimes supposed to be. She is much more ‘modern’ than Ninon, if only from the untidiness and incoherence of her mind”; “her taste was bad but sincere; she set, not followed the fashion” (early April 1926: 96). Leonard Woolf reviewed a new translation of *The Symposium or Supper of Plato*, also from the Nonesuch; *Essays. Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion*, by Francis Bacon; and the *Letters of James Boswell*. He clearly did so with a society hostess in mind, commenting that “to write about them in a single article upon a single page may seem at first like taking caviare, salsify, and Pêche Melba, and trying to make porridge out of them for the children’s breakfast”, as if desperate for a simile the imagined reader would understand



(late January 1925: 55). Furthermore, he noted that the age of Pericles, as shown by Plato;

was, perhaps, the only age in the world's history when the upper classes were civilised, and culture, art and intellect played a real part in their lives. [...] It is true that many modern readers of the *Symposium*, if they understand it, will be shocked by it, and that much of the 'Platonic love' which is discussed in it is now a criminal offence in twentieth-century England, but I do not think that an unprejudiced person would deny that the conversation and conversers at this supper come nearer to being civilised than they could have come at any other moment of the world's history. (Ibid.)

To all appearances, there was only one bad way to read: indiscriminately. That did not mean shutting oneself off from specific genres: "Books for Christmas Presents", an unsigned list of brief recommendations, brought together highly unusual titles, from *Mediaeval Gardens* by Frank Crisp to *The Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians*, including the newsletters of a Renaissance banking family, illustrated editions of nineteenth century masterpieces, and anthologies of contemporary essays. Rather, *Vogue* commended absorption, analysis, rest, nostalgia and laughter. Some books were warm and friendly, "the sort to dawdle over in a garden or a punt, sometimes reading pieces out loud to your companion" (Mortimer early August 1925: 53); "for reading on the verandah on a lazy summer afternoon", reminiscing of better times (Mortimer late May 1924: 84). Others were meant to be funny, like *The Young Visitors* or *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and others were meant to be laughed at, like *Irene Iddesleigh*, which ought "to be turned softly and richly on the tongue, like a wine that has lost in poignancy and gained in bloom" (Partington early November 1926: 64), or *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde*. If the messages in question were real, Mortimer wrote;

it would mean that after death we went on doing what we do on earth, only less competently and with decaying powers [...] if many ghosts are as good journalists as this one, the living will soon lose their jobs. Swift and Voltaire may get going, and we shall have papers written exclusively by Shades. And is the money they earn to be paid to their heirs or to the medium? A whole new code of laws must be arranged; and I, for my part, shall at once set about selling the rights of my posthumous reviews. (Late May 1924: 61)

When we consider *Vogue's* reviews as a whole, a pattern emerges: regardless of what each reviewer chose to focus on—be it the subject matter, the time period or the

reading experience—the core of what made a book worth reading was its author and their relationship with the literary landscape. In the next section, then, I shall analyse the portrayals of authorship, discursive and visual, that *Vogue* constructed.

## 2.3. THE HALL OF FAME

### 2.3.1. “Here She Is”: Modernist Authorships

The less literary reader may have skipped the critical essays and reviews altogether, but they still would have found the figures of the moment in other pages. The society columnist met Bloomsbury authors in her rounds, the full-page portraits of aristocratic ladies occasionally acknowledged their creative labours; *Vogue* visited the homes of men and women of letters and commented on their design choices; writers of rural and historical novels were positioned side by side with psychoanalysts, Cubists and all sorts of cutting-edge figures. Such curious meetings, though perhaps not wholly unexpected, considering *Vogue*'s penchant for amusing juxtaposition, were often brought about with a passing reference, but increasingly those references were accompanied by descriptions, illustrations or photographs. One might expect its most represented writers to match its target audience, namely upper-class women; alternatively, one might guess that they would be its most frequently reviewed writers—the notorious D. H. Lawrence, or the habitual suspects Richard Aldington, Aldous Huxley, Vita Sackville-West, Osbert Sitwell and T. F. Powys; or else, if a dressed and posed body is to be read as a set of endorsed values, they ought to belong to the Bloomsbury group, to the Sitwells and acolytes, the highbrows who stood for all that was smart and worth discussing. Were one to take this one step further and imagine a Venn diagram of these three demographics, Vita Sackville-West would surely be at the centre.

This section will explore which of these guesses, if any, was correct. As shown in the first chapter, upper and middle-class women were associated with embodiment, consumption and sartorial display; therefore, I shall take into account the weight of gender and class in the discussion and promotion of a writer's creative labour. I shall begin with an overview of the associations that can be teased out from modernist ideas of authorship and then consider the theoretical framework of authorship as performance, which will allow me to explore *Vogue's* construction and representation of fashionable literary practices through earnest discussion, advice and satire.

Writers were repeatedly referred to as geniuses in *Vogue*. Such a notion, which has been traced back to the eighteenth century, necessitates an understanding of the self as individual, solitary and unique, continuous and therefore recognisable (Cantero 2015: 135), as well as innately gifted; what a genius creates is spiritual rather than material, flowing rather than laboriously crafted (Pérez and Torras 2016: 19). This framework privileges the writer's interiority, considering them as somehow apart from society while turning them into a spectacle, a figure of fascination, at play in the social and literary scene (30). It is in this context that both copyright law and literary celebrity can be born.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century the author became an increasingly visible and recognisable figure. There was interest in their biography; the available apparatus ("*dispositivos y soportes*") for their exhibition multiplied; they manifested in the paratext in supposed acts of self-expression; they were represented in new genres and media, such as interviews, home visits or photographs (31). Though the literary genius may be assumed to be male, there was room to reclaim women geniuses. At the turn of

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<sup>33</sup> Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey point to Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" as the essay that brought critical attention to copyright. One of the results of this attention was Paul Saint-Amour's *The Copyrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination*, in which he "identifies the persistence in copyright law of a Romantic conception of the 'individual genius-creator' as at odds with the 'dynamic and intersubjective model of meaning or value' that has become the intellectual currency of our own time" (2016: loc. 2873-2879).

the century, Wilfrid Meynell—father of Francis and Viola—reflected that “great authors [...] were born, bred, and did their work singly”; while some had followers, most “stood alone; and singular, separate, the first of her kind, the first great author of the nineteenth century who was a woman, was one of these founders of dynasties – the satirist, Jane Austen” (1901: 30; Varty 2000: 107-8). Three decades later, reviewing *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Rebecca West was convinced “that it is time we all stopped reading about Lawrence and started reading Lawrence, so wise an exploration is it into the sources of a fountain of genius” (in Scott 1990: 591). The invested reader, it was understood, could turn to a writer’s personal papers not necessarily for emotional connection and intimate understanding, but to gain insight into their literary prowess, which was undistinguishable from their personality. It must be remembered that *Vogue*’s essays and reviews associated the tone, themes and even characters of a work with its author to the extent that their output was interwoven with their persona. “The major problem that all concepts of authorship present us with – in, be it said, all the arts – is the relationship between the semiotic or aesthetic text and the author. Traditionally this has been thought of as ‘expression’; the text expresses the ideas, feelings and/or ‘personality’ of the author” (Dyer 1979: 173). *Vogue*, then, was hardly alone in this idea; what is interesting is that *Vogue* made the same argument for every stylistic choice an individual made, be it sartorial, domestic or textual.

Aaron Jaffe points out that the “new types of anthologies, which began to emerge in the years leading up to the First World War, were key instruments in fostering this dynamic, advertising networks of authors – literary brands, so to speak – as suitable staging grounds for advancing the solitary genius” (2005: 135). The figure of a creator apart from the rest, yet sustained and contextualised by them, was appealing to the imaginary of high modernism; after all, the movement appreciated stylistic

innovation, foregrounded form and defended the autonomy of art (Rosenquist 2009: 181). Importantly, high modernism ostensibly cultivated an exclusive audience: as Rod Rosenquist puts it, “high modernists had gathered, even during their own age, a reputation of detachment, even to the point where they were considered aloof to critical or popular reception” (5).<sup>34</sup> The subtleties of this exclusivity lie not only in the difficulty of their texts, but in their availability and distinction. By underscoring the autonomy of art and the artist, modernism suppressed “its own conditions of production, specifically, the collaborative work of making and promoting modernists. Making modernism – that is, making the single modernist artist – is a promotional project that relies on others being occluded yet requires them to be never entirely blotted out” (Jaffe 2005: 166).<sup>35</sup>

This was an act of myth-making in which *Vogue* played an ambiguous part. Vike Martine Plock argues that “the myth of an exclusive modernism that based its right of existence on formal difficulty, novelty and the cult of the individual was explicitly cultivated in the interwar period”, “propagated” by the writers themselves, and thus that “modernism can best be seen as one of Bourdieu’s ‘pseudo-concepts’ or *practical* classifying tools’ [...] an effective marker of distinction that organised into relational categories literary activity (2018: 18-9). Writers were not the only agents involved in the processes of propagating this narrative and compiling a canon, of course: there were also critics, editors, academics and so on, including those at *Vogue*. However, it rarely celebrated the solitary creator against the world in a straightforward, whole-hearted

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<sup>34</sup> Rosenquist then cites Richard Aldington, who “when writing about the modernist artist in general [...] would say, ‘He writes for an audience equipped to understand him, and is indifferent to popular success’” (1924: 182 in 2009: 5).

<sup>35</sup> “The narrative of neglect” of women writers and editors “upholds this promotional dynamic at the same time as it complains of it, presenting the work of putting aside old literary goods, as if it were an enviable result of individual creative acts rather than a great deal of fussing and *réclame*” (Jaffe 2005: 166).

manner; the term “genius” was most often granted to Lawrence, usually while begrudging him his choice of subject, tone, or manners.<sup>36</sup>

Drawing from the definition of *imprimatur* in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, “the official approval of something, given by a person in a position of authority”, Jaffe develops the concept of the imprimatur as the “authorial signature”; “the metonym that represents [its subject] as an object of cultural production, circulation, and consumption” (2005: 1). This signature, unique and recognisable, could be used as “a means of promotion” in the interwar literary marketplace in order “to create and expand a market for elite literary works” (3), a limited set of “serious” texts that operated on the principle of scarcity (1), or, in other words, could “condense (capitalize from the cultural field at large to *privileged representativeness to monopoly on representativeness*) because of an incentive-laden hoarding of value that was a deliberate part of its promotional logic” (10). “Imprimatur fashioning”, he explains, “informed the *ad hoc* infrastructure of modernist production” from the published books themselves “to its sanctioned, masculinist frameworks of reviewing, introducing, editing, and anthologizing to its kinds of devalued, feminized collaborative work

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<sup>36</sup> There were some commendations of literary genius, like the impassionate defence of Shelley on the centenary of his death in an anonymous critical essay: “What, for example, could be more depressing than the spectacle which afflicted us this summer—the spectacle of poor Shelley, the rebel, the iconoclast, being crowned by the praises of all the oldest and most boring critics, and carried in funereal pomp (a fossilized classic) to his niche in the temple of respectability? What would these critics, so patronizingly fond of dead Shelley, think of his living equivalent—a young man who, not content with being a literary innovator, should declare himself a Bolshevik, a pacifist, an enemy of established society, a hater of ordered religion? They would hate him as much as the Scotch reviewers hated Shelley; they would disparage and cry down his talent; or, if they were rather more subtle, they would never allow his name to appear in their literary papers. But since Shelley is not a dangerous live man, but only a dead classic, they draw his coffin out to the light and solemnly re-bury it under piles of boring articles and edifying speeches. Pity the poor great men! What they have to suffer after they are dead! They are not merely twice buried, they are forced at their centenaries to become public bores. We English make our great dead an excuse for depressing the living. [...] For poetry is life, not death; and the memory of a poet is worthily celebrated by anything which quickens life among the living. Let Shelley, lover of wind and speed, of mountains and water and the birds, be celebrated by aeroplane and boat races, not by the outpourings of dull old men” (late October 1922: 67). Here *Vogue* relied on the adage that all great artists are misunderstood in their time: Shelley was a modern. In a similar clichéd line, an anonymous commenter dismissed “laureates functioning in their official capacity as the celebrators of ‘auspicious occasions’”, such as a royal wedding, as “rarely poets”; “for the poet, as we all know, is born, and can only work when the spirit moves him” (late April 1923: 48). In general, though, *Vogue* was more nuanced and materialistic in its discussions of literary authorship.

apocryphally documented in modernist memoirs” (3). The modernist author was identified with their production through paratexts or “internal cues such as narrative irony” to the point that “modernist work offers itself as a functional replacement for the biographical self” (30-1). Jaffe notices that many such authors have had their names turned into adjectives through the suffixes *-esque* or *-ian*: “Taken together, these entries comprise a makeshift register, an inventory of authorial names charged with the utmost degree of connotative aura, a situation homologous with a conception of literary value articulated in much of modernist literary criticism” (61).

By offering the signature element as a substitute for the self, modernist works were promoted “in campaigns that seemingly circumvented ‘celebrity and its fetish of biography’ in the very process of creating them” (Jaffe 2005: 2-3 in Plock 2018: 5-6).<sup>37</sup> This promotional strategy, Plock notes, does not rely exclusively on “textual idiosyncrasy”, but also on the author’s personality, which also informed publicity (11). *Vogue* did discuss Eliot, Joyce and Pound, the authors that Jaffe explores in depth, but it engaged more often and more intimately with the Bloomsbury, Sitwell and continental strands of modernism, associated with the visual arts, stylish eccentricity, and fashion know-how, and also writers outside the elite market of modernist imprimaturs. Faye Hammill points out that in Jaffe’s figuration the highbrow’s signature “supposedly designates a unique locus of genius, entirely separate from all other literary producers”, all the while “conceal[ing] the operation of another kind of logic”, a mercantile one; by contrast, “for the purely commercial writer”, the signature “is a brand name”, while the “middlebrow author [...] locates herself between these two poles” (2007: 193). Therefore, *Vogue*’s approach to literary celebrity cannot be described purely as a mobilization of modernist imprimaturs, but it is still a useful figuration because it aligns

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<sup>37</sup> Modernist imprimaturs circulated “as a unique form of elite currency precisely because they have been purged of their associations with journalism and celebrity and are thereby lifted into a separate economy of literary value” (Collier 2008: 110).

textual idiosyncrasy (as commented upon in reviews) and personality, which includes sartorial style and aesthetic labour (as analysed in society columns and design articles, and portrayed in images), with the author's signature, which marked a book as fashionable or not.

Jaffe explains that the configuration of the modernist imprimatur obscures the material conditions and economic interests that condition the production of the published text: "Modernist value [...] capitalizes through the systematic devaluation and effacement of a host of promotional and other literary labors first by modernist others and later in multiple scenes of reading and assorted cultural encounters" (2005: 10). The editor of a fashion magazine would certainly be affected by this effacement, and indeed when contributors and even staff writers began to sign their pieces, Todd and the fashion reporters did not. For the sake of reclaiming her legacy, and in an effort to bring to light the tightly woven web of British modernism and its buried commercial concerns, and thus to undermine heroic narratives of high modernism, critical studies of this period of *Vogue* have attempted a difficult balance. On the one hand, it has been necessary to highlight the magazine's positive engagement with the modernist movement; on the other, Todd has often been positioned as an individual creative force, struggling to enlighten her readers against her conservative supervisors. The participants and ideas that appeared in *Vogue* during her editorship have been identified with Todd, I would argue, to the point that it has been dislodged from currents and agents that both preceded and survived her, placing Todd back within the system that originally obscured her. The narrative spun around her firing—the accusation that she had pushed away readers by over-relying on her highbrow acquaintances—reveals both the weight of affective affiliation in the construction of literary celebrity and the success of certain



names as imprimaturs, as their mere presence in *Vogue* seemed to indicate an incompatibility with the kind of cultural capital that Nast aimed to project.

High modernism is a recognisable movement with identifiable participants, stylistic and thematic preferences. Rosenquist finds “evidence that the contemporaries of the high modernists viewed them as forming a coherent and dominant group of writers—in fact, that the historical configurations were begun by the high modernists themselves and their immediate literary contemporaries and successors” (2009: 17). Writers, as well as editors, critics, publishers and booksellers, were actively constructing their own myth; in its efforts to identify the participants of its own version of literary modernity, *Vogue* too constructed its own model—multiple models, it turns out—of literary celebrity.<sup>38</sup> These were the years when celebrity contributors became a familiar sight, and *Vogue* made sure to have at least one per issue. Their names were announced in the introductory page, or even in the previous issue, relying on the qualities and stylistic traits associated with them. Among many instances I would highlight late July 1925, when *Vogue* heralded the presence of its own constructed celebrity, “Polly Flinders”, as if placing her at the same level as actual well-known authors. Another shifted the focus from contributor to subject while still underscoring the former’s prestige: “A critical article, by one of the foremost poets and critics of the day, on the work of that strange genius, Gertrude Stein, who builds words into hitherto

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<sup>38</sup> Of course not every high modernist author played the solitary genius: some resisted this configuration, while others exposed the workings of literary celebrity in their own way. Jaffe points out that “in *Vile Bodies*, Waugh joins other writers of the period in their cynical ‘discovery’ that literary promotion can coexist with the various cultural forms of disillusionment which they have joined to high aesthetic form and purpose. The prevalence of the satirical roman-à-clef in the twenties and thirties is no coincidence, for it is a form that draws its appeal from the popular notoriety of its targets. In this regard, the artistic milieu – the social domain in which this work sought to make its mark – made for especially profitable subject matter, because it closes the circuit. [...] Wyndham Lewis’s *Apes of God* (1930) and Anthony Powell’s *Afternoon Men* (1931) [...] both set their sights squarely on Bloomsbury, while Richard Aldington’s *Stepping Heavenward* (1931) targeted Tom and Vivienne Eliot. [...] The manner in which Isherwood universalizes an inherently particularized experience points to the increasing instrumentality that writers like Waugh, Isherwood, and others found in using authors’ names and signatures as imprimaturs and as mechanisms of celebrity” (2005: 49-50). Unsurprisingly, novels about fashionably bohemian circles and the publishing industry were frequently reviewed in *Vogue*, especially in the more blasé thirties, when it had mostly moved on from highbrow contributors.

unthought of patterns”—the mystery contributor was of course Edith Sitwell (early October 1925: 53). Yet another proclaimed:

‘There are two things greater than all things are,’ and of the twain Aldous Huxley has chosen the former for the subject of his discourse. With Edith Sitwell writing of writers and Bernard Darwin of golf, *Vogue* does a little high thinking combined with the acquisition of sporting knowledge, but soon forsakes the library for the *salon* and there contemplates the manifold delights which Paris has contributed to the present issue (late August 1924: 25)

These introductions reveal what—or rather, whom—*Vogue* preferred to use for promotion and self-presentation: it privileged contributions on literature and the visual arts, with exceptions for well-known experts in high living, like Boulestin and Darwin. Illustrators, who had been the best-treated contributors right after the war, saw their fame displaced. Regardless of *Vogue*’s prestige in the field of fashion and the expertise of its reporters, they were never named—much less announced in fanfare. However, though *Vogue* could have made much of Huxley being a staff writer, and despite the frequent appearances of notable highbrows, the introductions did not turn the familiarity of their signatures into an obvious source of prestige; instead, they tended to highlight new contributors, usually without explaining the reason for their fame. That was left for the guest piece itself, which often included a short note with a biographical note or a summary of the author’s publications.

*Vogue*’s visual representations and critical essays on authorship were certainly grounded in the idea of genius; considering the context and its self-appointed role as intermediary to high modernism, it could hardly do otherwise. Nonetheless, it also undermined it by acknowledging the commercial side of the literary marketplace, by characterising both books and their authors as objects to be displayed and discussed, and by considering pleasure side by side with technique. Perhaps surprisingly, it also approached the model of the genius highbrow author satirically, especially through

illustration.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it did not mock lowbrows, hacks or snobs as often as it did messy would-be bohemians and incomprehensible avant-gardists. In this context:

celebrity authorship was carefully manufactured, and it was managed by negotiating exactly the kind of tensions that fashion brings into play: the relationship between individual and collective identity and between originality and social approval. [...] too much extravagance in writing or authorial posturing could easily lead to the same results as extravagance in dress: incomprehension and possible rejection by an intended target audience (Plock 2018: 4)

At the core of *Vogue*'s satire was a mistrust of phoniness, an accusation that it never threw at those who could prove their credentials through published work, stylistic presentation or personal connections. The Sitwells, and especially Edith, were elsewhere seen as the incarnation of excessive posturing, yet *Vogue* continually championed them as if they were shielded by their aristocratic ascendancy, their genuine experimentation or their role as patrons, or rather probably all three.

Instead, *Vogue* mocked a stereotype, a recurring model of modern artist that was never actually identified. It appeared most frequently in its satires of the "types" one encountered in modern society, together with scatter-brained bachelors and flighty flappers. *Vogue* identified a literary career as a common symptom of putting on cultural airs even before Dorothy Todd's arrival. No career was safe from the satirical pen: Martin's sketches of his "fellow artists" included the students at Slade and the members of the London Group (early January 1925: 48). However, the solution was not to be a philistine. "Educate the Brute" complained about a generalised lack of conversation to be had with men, who would go on and on about their business or their very limited hobbies:

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<sup>39</sup> Patrick Collier notes that *John O'London's Weekly*: "provided an arena for the reiteration, variation, and reformulation of the terms of contest between models of authorship, marked by editorial efforts to contain the gleefully commercial images of writing in advertisements within a range of more respectable norms. As Wexler argues, despite the apparent neatness of the art/commerce division, images of authorship did not cleanly divide between the romantic, 'starving artist' and the professional writer. Each had its 'cautionary counterpart': the flip-side of the professional was the 'hack who wrote only for money'; that of the Romantic was the self-involved 'amateur who wrote for no one'. Superimposed on these in *John O'London's* was the model of the author-as-celebrity, one that made authorship appear a desirable lifestyle and which could variably stress writing's commercial nature or elevate the author above it" (2008: 99).

Ingrained in the soul of this type of man there seems to be what actually amounts to a fear of art. Acknowledging an appreciation of the beautiful is to him almost a confession of effeminacy, and, whatever else he may do, all the world must be able to see that he is as masculine as Zeus and as virile as Hercules. To him the figure of poetry is some odd mixture of velvet-coated Oscar Wilde and goat-hoofed Pan. [...] Painting he patronises, but his approach to the artist must necessarily be through the dealer, for in the dealer he finds a comforting masculine sense of art expressed in terms of ‘turnover.’ [...] She would like, however, to have him realise the essential virility of art. Most of all, she demands an appreciation. [...] Cannot societies be formed to acquire a wider outlook? Poets, with a few notable exceptions, no longer wear long hair or chrysanthemums. [...] Anne, herself, in the final instance, must face the duty of re-educating her male coterie. Perhaps she undertakes this with zest shortly after marriage, but often she is quite as complacent as they. Soon she forgets that men can be anything but good providers. If one is well clothed and elaborately fed one can find comfort even in boredom, she decides. (Late May 1923: 37)

Notice that the effeminacy of literary personages was expressed sartorially: velvet coats, long hair, lapel flowers. In the same way, the superficial modernity of would-be highbrows was usually signified by their styling:

Here in Oxford Street mere green carpets, jazz bands, perpetual champagne, palms, megaphones for election results; here mere ambassadors, Royalty *incog.*, actors, editors, politicians, tinkers, tailors, soldiers and sailors, about six Labour sympathisers, the latest bride and bridegroom, the oldest man in London, the prettiest actress, the cleverest hostess, an authoress who hasn't short hair, two people who couldn't get invitations, and heaps of Jews, Russians, all intent on dancing or the guillotine, drawn or piped hither by an affiliating community of interests, uniting them into activity or passivity. (Early January 1924: 17)

The “authoress” in this piece was singled out by her exceptional decision not to shear her hair, the obvious marker of the modern professional woman. Indeed, when Benito, the illustrator, sketched short haircuts for different “types” he portrayed the “literati” with a severe straight bob, a heavy-lidded gaze and dark lipstick: “We agree”, argued the caption, “that before starting your new book you should have your hair bobbed. The modern public cannot be induced to read novels by women writers with long hair” (late October 1924: 72). Men were also marked by their sartorial practices. Martin constructed types on the basis of their choice of neckwear, with the devastating comment that the “Beaux-arts” type wore a huge bow “for concealing the wearer’s lack of genius” (late December 1924: 41). Meanwhile, Aldington blamed “the ridicule and contempt which now adhere to the very name of poet” on “the absurdities practised by the minor Romantics of about a century ago. The ordinary person’s idea of the poet as a

needy, hairy, eccentric, extravagant, impractical, dreamy and misanthropical parsonage, while completely false of the modern poet, is true enough of the period when les Jeunes-France flourished” (late August 1926: 43). The context for this accusation was a rather funny essay on the generation that followed Byron and de Quincey, in particular Philotée O’Neddy:

A round unearned income is the only comfortable basis for Romanticism, for then imaginary woes are a real luxury [...] His complexion was dark, his cheveleure à la Ezra Pound was fair, abundant and crinkly; he was so short-sighted that his eyes bulged visibly and, since no Jeune-France could wear anything so bourgeois as spectacles, Dondey’s vague glare used to terrify the women in omnibuses. [...] You cannot subsidise a rebellion or even undertake a Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage on fifty francs a week and ten days’ vacation a year. You cannot cut much of a figure as a suitor to princesses. The income barely runs to the necessary skull and punch. The beard and hair, of course, are gratis; and there is always the refuge of being a ‘rebel.’ [...] To-day he would be a hanger-on of Dada. This frantic striving for originality at all costs is nearly always the sign of a fundamentally imitative mind conscious of its own weakness. (43, 72)

*Vogue*’s critics made use of an arsenal of models beyond the successful high modernist, like the phony would-be avant-gardist, the aristocratic lady writer, the best-selling author, the staid middle-class woman writer and so on. The framework of authorship as performance will be fruitful to analyse these configurations.

Janet Staiger configures authorship as a performative act, grounded in Judith Butler’s account of the performativity of gender in turn drawn from Michel Foucault. Staiger’s field is film studies, so my attempt to transport it not only to a different historical context but also to a different medium will probably result in awkward gaps and distortions. Nonetheless, as I hope to show, *Vogue*’s ambiguous approach to literary celebrity, modernism and commerce suits her understanding of authorship as repeated, contingent self-assertion. “We might see authoring”, Staiger posits, “as one sort of technique of the self, like gender: a performative act that works when an individual, first, is positioned in a social formation in a location in which authoring is expected and, second, behaves as an author (produces objects the social formation views as texts)” (2013: 206). The literary pages of *Vogue* were such a location, as they validated,

foregrounded and therefore constructed authors—but so were the society pages and the features on interior design, where the stylistic choices of authors, meaning their sartorial and staging practices, not only their publications, were expected to match their output and thus construct a coherent persona.

If an individual conceives themselves as able to act and if the structure that holds them shares that conception, then they can be an acting subject whose actions—producing a message, becoming an author—can have consequences.

Authoring as an ‘act of existence’ becomes a repetitive assertion of ‘self-as-expresser’ through culturally and socially laden discourses of authoring. Individuals author by duplicating recipes and exercises of authorship. Authorship is also a technique of the self, creating and recreating the individual as an acting subject within history. The message produced should not be considered a direct expression of a wholly constituted origin with presence or personality or preoccupations. Yet the message is produced from circumstances in which the individual conceives a self as able to act. The individual believes in the author-function, and this works because the discursive structure (our culture) in which the individual acts also believes in it. (2003: 50)

*Vogue* offered a wide repertoire of “recipes and exercises of authorship”—of “citations”—as well as opportunities to exist as one such citation.

Citations work only if they fit within boundaries of the norms they cite, although norms do not exist prior to and separate from the citation. The citation affirms and produces the norm. [...] The subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. [...] a repetitive citation of a performative statement of ‘authoring choice’ produces the ‘author’ [...] What an author IS, is the repetition of statements. (51)

It is possible to deviate—“transcend”, “defamiliarise”, “subvert”, “resist”—from the norm while still participating in citational practices, resulting in non-dominant expressions, a strategy often favoured by subjects in minority-subject positions (52).<sup>40</sup> Stylistic eccentricity in writing, dressing and living was in fact to be expected from the more experimental or bohemian authors that were featured in *Vogue*, who were invariably from the upper or upper middle classes; this strand of unconventionality was not hardly a transgression, then, but a norm reinscribed to the point of parody.

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<sup>40</sup> Staiger notes that scholars often “seek such deviations, ignoring normative statements by minority individuals and deviant statements by dominant individuals” and cites the work of David Bordwell (1989: 101-2) to clarify that “in symptomatic criticism, the pattern has been for scholars to claim that dominant-authored texts subvert themselves without the knowledge of the authors but minority-authored texts do it intentionally” (2003: 52).

To an extent, *Vogue's* coverage of literary celebrity existed separately from its criticism, meaning that on the one hand there were the signed critical essays and reviews and on the other the anonymous features that showcased the sartorial and social practices of authors. In both types of reporting, writers—at least those that its critics liked—were granted special status. They were both objects of interest and deserving speaking subjects, whose opinions on modern life and manners were worth reading about. This corresponds, at least partially, to the figuration of the individual genius that traditionally underscores and legitimises their “distance and distinction” from ordinary people (Pérez and Torras 2016: 34-5). The rarefied yet playful cultivation of the aristocratic Sitwells, for instance, was commented in both society and literary columns: together, these representations built a recognisable norm, or frame of reference, for fashionable authorship. Their mental flexibility was presented as a value that readers could aspire to, embody and display through their dress and décor. After all, not even the most eccentric of *Vogue's* aristocratic authors was entirely disengaged from the quotidian practices and routines that made up fashionable urban life: on the contrary, readers would recognise them as fellow participants.

One of Huxley's essays was concerned with the relationship between celebrity authors and their readers, and the influence the former could have on the latter. He had realised that “the effect produced by an artist on his contemporaries is not at all proportional to his intrinsic merit as an artist”: Shakespeare, “universal and of all time”, had no direct impact on his society, whereas Wilde “invented decadence as a social stunt” (late December 1924: 70). Playing to his audience, and using the glib tone that was to be expected, he explored how art had influenced the beauty standards of different periods. August John was said to be “responsible for short hair, brilliantly coloured dresses and jumpers, a certain floppiness and untidiness and a deplorable tendency to

pose against cosmic backgrounds or the tops of hills or by the sea” that was fashionable among “arty” young women (70, 74). Of all contemporary literary celebrities:

On cultured society no contemporary writer has had a more penetrating effect than Marcel Proust. Since the publication of ‘A la Recherche du Temps Perdu’ love is made, in the best drawing-rooms, in a new and Proustian fashion. His interminable analyses of the passion have enabled somewhat jaded young men and women to love once more at greater length, more self-consciously and with a more damning knowledge of what is going on in their partner’s mind than was possible in the past. Without such occasional renewings love tends to become rather stale in those sections of society where it is the staple occupation. Writers like Proust are real benefactors to humanity, or at any rate to certain sections of it. Another great renewer of love is Mr. D. H. Lawrence, who, magnificent writer though he is, is responsible for much in certain sections of contemporary society that is exceedingly tiresome. One can have a great deal too much of love and hate, loins and solar plexuses. (74)

Huxley did not clarify whether “cultured society” was actually reading those authors and taking notes from those painters to recreate a way of dressing and relating to each other, or if they were absorbing and manifesting the mood of the period.

Despite literary celebrity being “an elaborate system of representations in its own right”, with its own associated set of media and formats (Moran 2000: 4 in Plock 2018: 32), *Vogue* frequently made it hard to tell the reason for someone’s fame. In the sections that actively engaged with celebrity culture, like portraits, home visits or society columns, writers were presented on the same plane as politicians, artists or gentry cricket players. Readers may know already that the Princess Bibesco, for example, had published novels and memoirs, but they were not always told outright. When made into a spectacle, that is, when observed and commented upon by a reporter, writers shared more visual and textual cues—from framing, styling and posing to captions—with other celebrities than with themselves as approached by a literary critic. Despite these contrasting approaches, however, certain traits, like “distinguished”, “contemporary” or “amusing” were consistently associated with specific authors across all sections of the magazine, and by extension with a social and cultural milieu, a mode, a movement, and a style, informing a range of models of authorship.



Plock notes that, some men modernists could and did deploy fashion “to work against cultural hegemonies and assumptions – a process that was much harder to emulate by anglophone women writers of the same period” (2018: 15).<sup>41</sup> Women could only with difficulty rely on sartorial choices to underscore their “non-conformity, originality and difference” as writers, as their “long-standing, negative association with commodity culture” meant that such eccentricity would be read as reinforcing rather than challenging “existing views about gender hierarchies” (*ibid.*). Some women modernists did “manage the spectacular productivity in which they are disseminated, using the body as a means of performing modernity; perhaps even disrupting its gendered assumptions” (Armstrong 1998: 114). However, the fact remained that “they signify as bodies, even where this role coexists with literary or artistic productivity”, and so they tended to embody “a bohemian aesthetic, yet never accorded a central position” (113). Among these stylistically challenging women, Plock points out Edith Sitwell, who happened to be a favourite of *Vogue*, as well as Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes.<sup>42</sup>

Despite ostensibly targeting women, *Vogue* was also interested in the stylistic practices of men writers. The frame of reference for male authorship, however, was askew: they were overrepresented in critical essays and reviews—both as subjects and as contributors—and somewhat underrepresented in portraiture. The issue of portraiture requires clarification: full-page portraits, as explained, were almost exclusively devoted to women, including a handful of writers. By contrast, the relatively short-lived feature “Hall of Fame” featured the portraits of one hundred thirty-six men and only forty-nine

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<sup>41</sup> “As a performance of self, the buffoonish mimicry and the impossible embodiment of disembodied patriarchal authority are decidedly uncomfortable, not least for a woman writer, whose relationship to phallic, patriarchal power is, needless to say, already more vexed, yet it was not unfeasible... and herein lies the detrimentally misogynistic logic of the regime [...] of meticulously maintained originality – self-hardening” (Jaffe 2005: 134). Jaffe is here characterising a group made up of self-sufficient members who negotiate boundaries behind the scenes, with Ezra Pound as their ideologist and central figure.

<sup>42</sup> Plock refers to Alex Goody (2007) for a study of the latter two (2018: 32).

women. The overwhelming majority of these women were writers, while the men represented a more diverse cultural landscape; literature clearly allowed more models for women than the other arts and professions. Despite the larger numbers of men in this section, most of the images in *Vogue* were of women, corresponding with their association with bodies, clothes, and appearances. The upper and upper middle classes were also visually overrepresented; as I explained in the first chapter, only aristocrats and the best-known entertainers were granted full-page portraits, an exclusion that also applied to writers. They could play the bohemian aristocrat or the coterie insider, and afford to be seen in more eccentric—if not necessarily more conventionally smart—clothes than middle or working class authors. Hammill observes that;

For Margaret Kennedy, Stella Gibbons, and E. M. Delafield, a conventionally elegant style of dress was part of their assertion of a civilized, commonsensical, broadly middlebrow identity, in contrast to the eccentric and unkempt bohemian characters depicted in their novels. Equally, a restrained, realist prose style is constructed as a norm in their texts, in contradistinction to overcolored or radically experimental modes of writing and conversation, which they render parodically. (2007: 4)

After the success of her novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Anita Loos caused a splash on her visit to London in 1926, embodying a different, glamorous model of literary celebrity, “because she was a conduit to the stars of Hollywood, who fascinated the British public. As her comparison with matinee idols suggests, the high-profile authors of the twenties and thirties were constructed in relation to new models of fame emerging from Hollywood” (2). The arch stylishness associated with certain women writers, as Plock explains, tinted their authorial persona from their “glamorously distinct” appearance to their writing (2018: 32).

Looking at *John O’London’s Weekly*, Patrick Collier finds that it not only aimed to guide readers, but actually;

presented images of an attractive lifestyle in which reading and writing were central – images conveyed in gossip items, feature stories on authors, and advertisements for pens, reading-lamps, and bookcases. Gossip columns such as ‘What I Hear’ and ‘The Book World’ reported on authors returning from exotic vacations or setting up homes in desirable locations. Here authors emerge as people with interesting lives [...] *John*

*O'London's* never explicitly states that these lifestyles are within the reach of its readers: trafficking in literary celebrity requires that the celebrities be treated at least ostensibly as unusual, and therefore newsworthy. (2008: 101)

This periodical, Collier writes, balanced a somewhat contradictory vision of the author as genius with a “you-can-be-a-writer” ethos. H. G. Wells was repeatedly portrayed as an example of the latter in a way that “aligns him with definitive characteristics of modernity: speed, mechanical reproduction, the modern literary marketplace itself”, while leaving him vulnerable; “his prolific output, implying speedy writing, might suggest slapdash intellection; his embrace of technology and his status as ‘one of the multitude’ could place him among modern forces of cultural decline” (108). *Vogue* likewise included literary practices in its ideal lifestyle, though reading was by far more represented than writing. When it showcased items like desks or pens, they usually had the explicit purpose of writing letters: they were for the gregarious lady, the fashionable hostess, rather than for the aspiring novelist. The literary profession was not represented by its tools, but by its leading figures. Though Jaffe notes that “the matrix of associations supporting their [modernists] reputations is not intrinsically image-based but predicated instead a high literary product from the inflating signs of consumption” (2005: 1), *Vogue* did use visuals to sustain the celebrity of the individual author, including the modernist author; interestingly, in its “Hall of Fame” it juxtaposed them with other artists and public figures in a collage-like representation of the modern cultural landscape. There was remarkably little of the usual iconography of authorship in *Vogue's* portraits, neither in the “Hall of Fame” nor in the formal full-page portraits: no heads resting on hands in deep thought, no pens, no paper.

Dominique Maingueneau conceptualizes the “image of the author” (*image d'auteur*) as either the reception of a work or the “staging [*mise en scène*] of the literary producer—including their own ‘self-presentation’ (Goffman) and representations by others” (2015: 17; my translation). It is thus tied to the text and to the actor, “whose

behaviour relies and acts upon collective representations a writer's normal activity in a specific time and place" (21). Such decisions rely on previously existing images of authorship in order to be comprehensible and recognisable, but they will result in a new one (*ibid.*). The managing and control of the image of the author is an ongoing process at the hands of different actors in the literary institution—including, of course, those of the writer themselves (25). It is "a shifting frontier, the result of an unstable balancing act in permanent reconfiguration"; "the writer must constantly legitimise their creative process by tailoring an image of the author to their work" (26). The staging of the writer is a collective effort, with other actors at play, in which "editorial" decisions carry weight (21). Such actors include the staff of *Vogue*, as they built relationships with writers, critics and publishers, and therefore shaped and disseminated those images.

Amanda Carrod notices how Todd made sure to present recognisable personalities as well as their literary output:

[She] showcased modernism through the methods associated with mass culture. The attempt to make her contributors well known to her readers demonstrated the extent to which Todd was intent on promoting the dissemination of the modernist ethos and appreciation for its new works. This attempt to make celebrities out of her contributors, further blurred the boundaries between 'high brow modernism and low brow fashion' as the contributors themselves were also aware. (2015: 16)

These methods consisted in "adapting the pre-existing *Vogue* formula to the fullest extent", for instance through "illustrated invasions" not of the homes of aristocrats (123), but "of her own intelligent contributors" (124). It bears repeating, though, that some of Todd's modernist contacts also contributed to other magazines that also displayed their homes, dressed bodies and families, such as *Tatler* or *Vogue*'s main competitor, *Harper's Bazaar*. Consequently, in its treatment of literary celebrity *Vogue* should be considered "part of the larger dialogue of artistic and literary progression" (95) rather than an isolated instance of modernist compromise.

As explained in the previous chapter, *Vogue* usually carried full-page portraits, most often studio photographs of aristocratic women. While a few of these ladies pursued literary careers, this section was not concerned with that kind of celebrity: the captions summed up their titles and lineage and only occasionally their accomplishments, meaning that birth trumped profession.<sup>43</sup> The portrait of Iris Tree did not mention her artistic and literary accomplishments; Mrs. Norman Grosvenor (née Caroline Stuart-Wortley), despite appearing bespectacled and reading, was not introduced as a published novelist.

“Highbrow” writers represented in this manner included Nancy Cunard, T. S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell (the latter accompanied by his wife) and Virginia Woolf, as well as the lesser-known but familiar figure of “Polly Flinders” (Mary Hutchinson). Unexpected, and definitely worth noting, was Eugene O’Neill. These were not frontispieces but mid-issue portraits, often by their signed contributions, and thus served to introduce them as *Vogue* talents. Perhaps the best example of this strategy is the portrait of Sitwell by Maurice Beck and Helen Macgregor, placed right by her essay on Stein; after all, promoting Stein seems to have been among her reasons to contribute to *Vogue* in the first place. I would not describe this portrait as her most eccentric fashion moment, but it showed some signs of the “unconventional, often camp self-presentation, and the disruptive and shocking dimensions” of the work that she and her brothers were known for (Hammill 2015: 138). “One of the most original and accomplished of living English poets” (early

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<sup>43</sup> Before Dorothy Todd’s editorship, they included Lady Frances Balfour, “a writer, and the author of three memoirs” (early February 1921: 26); Lady Glenconner (née Pamela Wyndham), who “has published many volumes in prose and poetry, and is devoted to her country home, Wilsford Manor, Salisbury” (early May 1921: 34); and Lady Margaret Sackville, whose note commented on her poetry and interest in the arts (early November 1918). In our current period, the “society” writers who were portrayed in this way were Cynthia Asquith (née Charteris); Lady Horne (née Auriol Hay-Drummond), who “will probably soon be adding to the number of her already published articles on foreign art and politics” (early September 1925: 52); and Mrs. Gerald Montagu (née Florence Costello), “well-known as a dramatic writer under the name of F. C. Montagu” (early March 1924: 62). Against expectations, the tone and focus of the captions did not change.

October 1925: 72), she was seated, her gaze to the side, as in yearning or creative abstraction: there is something of the Orthodox icon in her expression. The accessories were curiously juxtaposed: she wore a wide-brimmed hat, its matte blackness contrasting with the shine of a dress apparently made from heavy, brocaded fabric, and a large jewelled cross. Her singularity made her easily identifiable as “the inventor of a new poetic idiom, the perfecter of an individual poetic style”, and therefore her words on Stein ought to be taken seriously. Sitwell championed Stein, and *Vogue*, lest the reader forget it, had championed Sitwell from the start: “she has been consistently misunderstood until quite recently but is beginning to be appreciated even by her critics” (*ibid.*).

Cunard also appeared to be sartorially eccentric in her photograph by Curtis Moffat and Olivia Wyndham. It was a deliberately artistic study, as the caption referenced her “fantastic” headgear and named the photographers (late March 1926: 51). She did not look directly at the camera: her face, made up in dark shades, was instead reflected and framed by a mirror. Her high-necked black outfit emphasised the pale skin, eyes, and profusion of white feathers at the back of the headdress. She was introduced as “the daughter of Lady Cunard and the late Sir Bache Cunard. Miss Cunard has published three volumes of poems, the latest of which, entitled ‘Parallax,’ ranges her among the most interesting of the younger school of poets” (*ibid.*). This portrait predates her first contribution to *Vogue*, but she had already appeared in the Hall of Fame, and an attentive reader would have caught her appearance in the society notes a few pages before: “I ran to take my coffee at Boulestin’s”, wrote the columnist, “where Miss Nancy Cunard was lunching, in a green hat of all things!” (47). She was therefore not only a renowned poet, but a character in the social landscape, as she was associated with the protagonist of Michael Arlen’s successful novel *The Green Hat*.

The Beck and Macgregor photograph of Woolf in her mother's gown had appeared in the Hall of Fame of late May 1924 and was recycled for the mid-issue portrait of early May 1926. Modernist scholars who have taken an interest in this period of *Vogue* have often focused on Woolf's collaboration, and therefore this portrait has been repeatedly scrutinised—unsurprisingly, considering the oddity of her dress. Nicola Luckhurst notes that it marked her first visual appearance in *Vogue*, and perceives “a sense of her ambiguous response to the magazine” from her choice to wear “a dark Victorian gown which had belonged to her mother” (1998: 4). She too was looking to the side, a frequent pose in these portraits; her expression can be read as demure, distracted or cutting, the gown gaping awkwardly around her shoulders.<sup>44</sup> Woolf was not the only modern writer to be photographed in authentic or referential Victorian clothing. Carrod draws attention to the portrait of “Polly Flinders” (late October 1924), while I would also point to the Hall of Fame photograph of Mary MacCarthy (late November 1924) and the portrait of Ottoline Morrell (late October 1923). Woolf's appearance was not exceptional, but the manifestation of a trend within her social circle. These were the years of “Memoir Club evenings and Apostles dinners” at Gordon Square;

house-warmings and reunions; family parties and fancy dress parties; weekend parties, dancing parties, studio parties, concert parties. There were parties on the river and parties to the zoo [...] parties to meet distinguished visitors (Gertrude Stein at Edith Sitwell's) or to see star performers; parties for special purposes (like the one at Richmond to immortalise Desmond MacCarthy's dazzling conversation, which somehow evaporated on the page). There were grand soirées and tea parties in the houses of famous hostesses, with fireworks and fairy lights in the gardens and jazz. There were all-night parties with a great deal of drink. ('Bloomsbury', on the whole, did not take drugs – or gamble.) [...] She was there, dressed in her mother's lace-edged dress, at a fancy dress party at no. 46, in January 1923, lit up and fizzing, talking to all her old friends (and with especial pleasure to Sickert, so 'workmanlike' and straightforward). (Lee 1996: 681)

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<sup>44</sup> In other photographs from the same session, which appeared in *Atalanta's Garland*, the publication of the Edinburgh University Women's Union in 1926, she was standing and smiling, “less formal” (Luckhurst 1998: 4).

Woolf recorded these events in her diary: “We were all easy & gifted & friendly & like good children rewarded by having the capacity for enjoying ourselves thus. Could our fathers? I, wearing my mothers laces, looked at Marys soft Jerboa face in the old looking glass – & wondered” (in Koppen 2011: 26). Woolf brought her friendships and leisure practices to the page through dress and wove them into her persona; by accepting and displaying that image, *Vogue* confirmed its place within that same network and aesthetic framework. Nonetheless, a casual reader could easily have felt left out: if they did not absorb its defences of the amusing, or if they missed the handful of examples of costume as formal dress, they would be left without the code to read them. There is no explanation for the Victorian gown in the caption, which characterised Woolf as;

the most brilliant and enterprising of the writers of the younger generation. Her last two novels, ‘Jacob’s Room’ and ‘Mrs. Dalloway,’ are successful experiments in an original method; ‘The Common Reader,’ a volume of critical essays, is distinguished in style and thought, serious and entertaining. Her earlier books are ‘The Voyage Out,’ ‘Night and Day,’ and ‘Monday or Tuesday.’ Mrs. Woolf is a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen. She and her husband, Leonard Woolf, started the Hogarth Press, which has published several of her books. (Early May 1926: 68)

Right after came her contribution to that issue, the biographical sketch of Walter Raleigh, which deepened her engagement with history.

The 1927 portrait of Marthe Bibesco by Berenice Abbott,<sup>45</sup> more contained, praised her as “distinguished”—a recurring adjective—and contemporary. “One of the most distinguished women writers of to-day, well-known in this country as the author of ‘Isvor’ and ‘The Green Parrot,’ [she] is the wife of the head of the Bibesco family. Her new book, ‘Catherine-Paris,’ has just been published” (late June 1927: 52). She was all dark and sleek, with a satin and metal finish; she wore a very tight cap, perhaps a cloche hat, and dangling earrings. The oddest accessory was a spray of foliage pinned with a brooch that climbed over her shoulder, as if growing from her heart; not quite visible in this photograph, but noticeable in other shots from the same sitting, was a hand-mirror.

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<sup>45</sup> As of 2022, the print in question is kept at the Clark Art Institute, Massachusetts, and can be viewed on their website.



Reassuringly, her appearance matched the tone of her books as reviewed by Raymond Mortimer, and was the picture of a woman who could be trusted to write “a series of portraits of modern Frenchwomen” for *Vogue* (*ibid.*).

The sartorial style displayed in these portraits corresponded with their literary style, at least as represented in the critical essays and reviews; when there were any, the captions reinforced this connection. *Vogue* was one more vehicle for the construction of their persona—except in the case of “Polly Flinders”, where *Vogue* was the only vehicle for her celebrity. In late October 1924 it introduced “a witty woman writer whose contributions to *Vogue* have aroused much interest [...] So this is ‘Polly Flinders.’ It is not easy to imagine that airy and fantastic pen wielded by so grave a person. But here she is, the witty lady of fashion with the cynical glance and the touch of sentiment, who has sometimes been described as ‘the modern Millamant’” (58). By presenting her in a formal portrait, of course preceding one of her essays, *Vogue* placed “Flinders” on the same ground as bona fide celebrities—yet she was only known within the pages of *Vogue*, and not even a year had passed since her first contribution. As it implicitly valued its own judgement regarding literary celebrity above all others, *Vogue* signalled that these writers were not condescending to contribute, but rather that *Vogue* was a force to be reckoned with in the construction of celebrity and fashionable reading.

By contrast, the few men writers who were granted a formal portrait were soberly dressed and presented. In his portrait by Beck and Macgregor in early April 1925 Eliot was shown deep in thought, leaving no doubt about his concentration. He appeared relatively at ease, in a suit, smoking and reading a large tome with a half-smile: every inch the young intellectual. It accompanied an essay about him, however, rather than by him: “T. S. Eliot, Poet and Critic”, by Aldington, which made the caption that described Eliot as “the most distinguished men of letters belonging to the younger

generation” redundant. Meanwhile, the portrait of O’Neill showed a more serious man, standing and soberly dressed, and gave him a more grandiose title: “The Sun Never Sets Upon Him”. Although the portrait was printed without a deeper discussion of his work to contextualise it, the caption introduced him as “the most discussed of modern American dramatists. He has twice won the Pulitzer Prize for the best American play, and is now almost as well known abroad as in the United States”, and listed the plays that had been performed internationally (early May 1926: 80).

By now, critical essays and reviews often included a photograph or illustration of their main subject—in fact, the number of photographs increased as a whole. The review of *Façade* by Gerald Cumberland included a photograph of Edith Sitwell, “to whose invention is due a strange and characteristic setting for the strangeness and beauty of her own poetry” (early July 1923: 36), and a reproduction of the curtain painted by Frank Dobson. Behind one of the masks in the curtains, through a Sengerphone, “Miss Edith Sitwell was stationed, her clever head full of her strangely disturbing poetry” (*ibid.*). Though he did comment on Osbert’s role, it was Edith he placed at the centre of the event. Cumberland went on to describe her voice in detail: “To this hour I am by no means sure what some of her poems mean; but if I do not understand their beauty, I divine it, and for that reason am all the more attracted, drawn, seduced” (*ibid.*); “Miss Sitwell, then, has discovered and tried a new method of interpretation. The experiment was well work making; but I am inclined to think that her success was in no small measure due to the strangeness and beauty of her poetry. Her bizarre work demands a bizarre setting, a bizarre delivery” (70). Throughout these years, she also appeared as interpreted by visual artists. For instance, Huxley’s essay on Wyndham Lewis reproduced his portraits of Sitwell and Ezra Pound, underscoring their importance not only as producers but as incarnations of modern art (early June 1923).

The salons, streets, galleries and theatres that structured the society column were similarly populated with writers. They functioned not only as passing references, off-hand confirmation of *Vogue's* connections with highbrow spheres. In fact, *Vogue* commented on the events they attended and the people they met—though rarely on what they wore. Tracing the steps of the society reporter, and thus the shifting friendships of the staff at *Vogue*, we can reconstruct its literary milieu. Among the aristocrats of “The Social Horizon Widens”, the reporter noticed that:

The brilliant Sitwell brothers are still in Italy with their father, Sir George Sitwell, at the Palazzo, near Florence. The Hon. Harold and Mrs. Nicholson [*sic*] have just come back from visiting Lady Sibyl Scott at the Villa Medici [...] Mrs. Nicholson [*sic*], who is Lady Sackville's daughter, is best known to the public by the name she writes under, Victoria Sackville West. She has just won the American Poetry Society's prize for the best sea sonnet, a very fine performance, considering that there were five hundred competitors, two hundred of them British poets! But do not let the formidable list of clever and charming people who are outward bound [...] make you think that there is no one and 'nothing doing' in England. (Late November 1923: 33)

Because of their standing—his diplomatic profession, her ancestry—, literary careers, many-layered attachments to Bloomsbury and contributions to *Vogue*, and probably because of his romantic relationship with Mortimer, the Nicolsons made natural characters for the society column. *Vogue* was interested in what they wrote, of course, and readers were often reminded of their literary credentials, but also in whom they visited and where. Months later, it mentioned Harold's new study of Byron and explained that “the Nicolsons were among the first to set up their camp in Ebury Street, which Lady Sackville, who has a wonderful flair for houses, ‘discovered’ from a residential point of view, but they now spend most of their time at ‘Long Barn,’ their delightful old house in Kent” (early April 1924: 35). The Sitwells—the brothers more often than Edith—were also frequent sights in the social landscape. Sacheverell's engagement to Georgia Doble was duly announced, portrait and all, but the reporter soon returned to his literary merits: together with his siblings, “he has invented the characteristic attitude to life, the style of imagery, and the distinctive taste which we

have come to sum up as Sitwellism. Both in verse and imaginative prose he is one of the most distinguished writers of our time” (late August 1925: 57).

Never was *Vogue*'s alliance with Bloomsbury illustrated as clearly as in the society column of early October 1925. “To-day being Saturday”, it began, “anyhow *I* had a fair amount of adventure”:

Few people know what brains are confined within a radius of a hundred yards or so. All the Stracheys, Maynard Keynes and Lopokova, Adrian Stevens, Clive Bell and Raymond Mortimer, whom we know so well, round the corner the house of the Hogarth Press, where sits, most satisfying to me of all writers, Virginia Woolf, and not far away her sister, Vanessa Bell, and the best of contemporary painters, Duncan Grant; these are not nearly all, but we have to take off our hats all the way up Gordon Square, and again in Woburn Square, where the greatest authority on Chinese literature, Arthur Waley, occasionally stays with his mother, and turning into beautiful Gower Street, on this luck day I met Anthony Hope and his red-haired wife, and crossing the Square I saw Lord Oxford's car standing outside the door, the well worn green car. (55-7)

Those upon the “Bloomsbury Omnibus” were thus granted celebrity status on the basis of cultural capital, and they were discussed in the same terms as the best-known writers of the previous generation—it had been thirty years since the publication of Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*—or the highest-ranking of politicians—Lord Oxford being the former Prime Minister H. H. Asquith, now a member of the House of Lords. This impressive string of names proved what the reporter admitted in the next issue: “I am a snob about great men and count it a good day if I have seen Shaw, Wells, or Moore, Augustus John or Lytton Strachey, or even Diaghileff, with his strange blue face” (late October 1925: 43). Indeed, she often noted the literary personages she encountered when she went for a walk or attended an event, even if they were not Bloomsbury highbrows—as long as they had the social credentials. Cunard, for instance, looked “lovely” at a party (late November 1925: 58). The reporter was privy to literary conversation at another event, attended by “all the authors, Wellses, Mary Borden, Hugh Walpoles, Cowards”: “One must read Dostoievsky or be dark as ignorance according to Aldous Huxley, how glad I am to pick up a first-hand opinion” (late July 1926: 29). At a party hosted by Shane Leslie and Clare Sheridan, who balanced writing

with another career, the former as a diplomat and the latter as a sculptor, the reporter saw Elizabeth von Armin, the Countess Russell:

One always thinks of her in connection with her first book, 'Elizabeth and her German Garden,' but, as a matter of fact, almost any of her subsequent novels, written in her individual, sensitive and witty style, would have been equally sure to make her reputation. Another clever and amusing woman who was among *les invités* was Mrs. Jack Gilliat [Lilian Florence Maud Chetwynd], with her husband. She was the widow of the last Marquis of Anglesey, and not only has good looks and red hair, but has published poems and epigrams (late March 1924: 39)

In the summer of 1925, most of the smart set had abandoned London, "leaving the world to Michael Arlen"—Tallulah Bankhead was currently starring in *The Green Hat*—as well as to "the bondwomen and men, painters, actors, authors, journalists" who also stayed (early September 1925: 35).

Such encounters, it seems, happened both by chance and by design. The columnist shared her own engagements, weaving her social and cultural capital with that of *Vogue*. She mentioned "lunch with Rebecca West, whom I know I shall like when I know her. Eddy Knoblock and some others round her seemed to adore her" (late October 1925: 43), pushing back against the notion that *Vogue* was concerned with Bloomsbury alone and proposing journalists and playwrights as potential alternative incarnations of modern smartness. Nonetheless, she did end "the evening in a Bloomsbury attic with a few best friends. The Bloomsburyites know that houses get better towards the top—lighter, brighter and cheaper [...] Supper was in a charming room hung with newspapers of all nations" (44). The room in question may sound familiar to the attentive reader, as it had been featured some months before: though *Vogue* never revealed who it belonged to, it was in fact Mortimer's flat. On another occasion she supped "with literary people. Such as Mr. Francis Birrell, Mr. Harold Nicolson and A. E. W. Mason [...] the Ladies Lavery and Colefax, and many patrons of the Arts, and H. G. Wells himself—whom hardly anyone there knew by sight, so rarely is he lured from his house in Essex, or his equally good flat in London on the river"

(late November 1925: 106). The reporter knew the homes of the literati well enough to comment on their decoration and living habits. “The Hutchinsons”, she reported;

who have an advanced taste in pictures and a very distinguished taste in furniture, have taken everything from their river house at Chiswick and dumped them down into this camouflaged Regency house with Queen Anne mouldings; yet the pictures look quite well, in spite of the setting of an entirely different taste and date. But how the Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant colossal wall decorations will fit I cannot imagine—I shall try to acquire them myself, and so probably will some of the readers of *Vogue* who saw them reproduced in a recent issue. (Late March 1926: 47)

Moreover, she was well-informed about where they liked to holiday, as their taste matched hers: “I believe that the Sitwells share my opinion” on the attractiveness of Brighton, “and certainly does Max Beerbohm” (*ibid.*). Her own preferences and practices tinted the pages, adding a personal touch and proving her credentials as a smart woman. When she shared her reading habits, she sounded exactly like *Vogue*’s fictional representatives:

I like the train, the idly laid aside Wells novel while one passes Richmond Park, taken up again quickly while one passes Slough or Staines. The intensifying of one’s powder and lip salve as one reaches Reading. The H. G. Wells again [...] Then the relief of the glorious pre-dinner bath; of being left alone with scrap books during other people’s bridge, the final collecting of all books one has longed for—Addison, de Grammont, *The Spectator*, *The Nation*, *Cat’s Cradle*, a mass that one never reads at home. And so to bed—perhaps without reading any, but a pleasant thought that they will be there in the morning. (Late November 1925: 59, 106)

I have not been able to date with precision Alison Settle’s arrival to *Vogue* beyond the fact that she was its society reporter in the summer of 1926. The column shifted in favoured milieu in the autumn, around the time when Todd was fired, but I am not entirely sure whether this change had to do with Settle’s preferences, with a directive to turn away from Bloomsbury, or with another unknown cause. In any case, Bloomsbury sightings diminished. Instead the reporter dined at Evan Morgan’s South Kensington flat (early November 1926), visited the Gargoyle Club (late December 1926) and admired Nancy Mitford’s swimming (late March 1927). This was the milieu of the Bright Young People, known for their antics, family connections, and in some cases for literary aspirations that would be fulfilled in the following decades. Their

presence in *Vogue's* society pages was an early sign of their ascendancy over youthful smartness. A springtime lunch provides insight into this tide-change:

We were talking our decorating plans over at a lunch which Mr. Cecil Beaton gave, a Business-World lunch, as it were, from which we all hurried off to our—usually fleeting—occupations: Lady Eleanor Smith (but without her marmoset) to her editorial chair; Prince George of Russia back to his decorating business next to the Birkenheads; Eddie Gathorne Hardy to his bookshop; Lady Harris to her shell work. Truly we live the lives of bees, but what strange honey we fashion! Only Miss Edith Sitwell was reluctant to hurry to Wardour Street and the shooting of her new phonofilm. (Early March 1927: 50-1)

Were it not because the reporter had admitted to scattered reading in the past, it would be easy to interpret the image of Sackville-West's *Passenger to Teheran*, dropped "by the chaise-longe" at a French chateau, as a metaphor of this change (late February 1927: 37). She would continue to reference books only to immediately confess she had not yet read them: "I feel like any miracle might occur on the Thames and I would take all the books I've meant to read and re-read, the new Maurois, Frances Newman's *Hard Boiled Virgin* (a third reading for that), Lady Sybil Grant's—'Neil Scot's'—*Riding Light*, all these I have no time for in Mayfair" (early June 1927: 35). Unfortunately, this miracle did not come.

Nonetheless, this section did not altogether abandon the practice of highbrow-spotting. In fact, it maintained quite a few networking strategies and recurring characters. When the reporter left the French chateau it was to;

stay in G. B. Stern's—Mrs. Holdworth's—vaulted Italian house on a mule-track up the hill [...] my host and hostess with two others had bought themselves a Fiat last autumn and done a wine tour, talking, thinking wine at its very source and origin, eating with each wine its appropriate dish. All of which wisdom goes into Miss Stern's new book, 'Vintage,' when it comes out. Just as all the wisdom and wit of the ten dogs who were all around me in my stay goes into 'The Dark Gentleman,' her book about the Dogs and the Legs, as the dogs call us humans. [...] Letters arriving to keep us in the world, letters from Rebecca West and others of the intelligentsia with news of clothes buying in Paris, news of Noel Coward on his way to North Borneo. Letters from Gilbert Frankau at Cannes. News of H. G. Wells at Grasse. (Late February 1927: 37)

The doings of the intelligentsia, here represented by West and Wells, were still of interest. Some of its characters turned out to be future contributors, supporting the argument that *Vogue* drew from the personal relationships of its staff to find new voices.

G. B. Stern was in fact a friend of Settle's, and she would begin to work for *Vogue* in late August 1927.

The society column included descriptions and portraits of its characters, more often than not at leisure: examples include André Maurois and his wife “outside their delightful villa at La Napoule” (late February 1925: 37)<sup>46</sup> and Stephen Tennant, who “writes as well as he draws and paints” (early May 1927: 67). With the benefit of hindsight we can recognise Barbara Cartland at the very beginning of her career (early October 1925). When she reported teased that she had “heard something of the Le Touquet day (that begins at eleven and ends with a five-in-the-morning bedtime) [...] of Nancy Cunard in a blue and red dance dress with huge beads at her throat and a score of bracelets to her elbow” (early May 1927: 66), the mere sight of Cunard was understood to stand for urbanity; from her holiday in Scotland, the reporter missed the ballet, the Eiffel Tower restaurant, and “seeing Miss Nancy Cunard at the next table with Cook, the Labour leader” (late July 1927: 23-4). Sackville-West was sketched at Knole, dispensing tea and wearing “a crêpe de Chine two-piece frock in black and red and a coat in red, black and brown” (late June 1927: 38); she was shown as the lady of the house, rather than as a writer. Cecil Beaton contributed sketches, including one of Elinor Glyn at a ball at Lansdowne House in a dress “of yellow chiffon” (early July 1927: 40) and one of Edith Sitwell, who “was given bunches of scarlet flowers and yellow arum lilies after she had recited her poems in an emerald green brocade dress at the Chenil Galleries” (late July 1927: 27).

The nineteenth century had brought “the genre of the interview of the ‘author at home’”, a promotional strategy that “depends paradoxically on a sense of the author as special, as accessible, and as mechanically reproducible, all at once” (Collier 2008:

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<sup>46</sup> Maurois, whose book on Shelley was repeatedly and favourably brought up in *Vogue*, came from a rich though non-aristocratic family, and he had professional and academic ties with the United Kingdom. His wife was an aristocrat.



111). Surprisingly, despite its investment in naming favourites, relying on their opinions on literature and modern society at large, and showing interest in their daily practices and preferences, *Vogue* did not actually interview them. It visited the homes of writers, artists and critics without asking them how they related to their living and working spaces, or even how they had gone about decorating them. These homes were approached exclusively in terms of interior design, removing the person of the author; however, their material possessions remained in display as an extension of their persona.<sup>47</sup> In her analysis of a series on writers' rooms published in *The Guardian* in 2007, Claire Battershill notes that;

In imbuing writers' rooms with significance these newspaper columns suggest that the literal and physical materials being used in authorial practice might also give privileged insight into the imaginative structures that literature is 'really made from.' Far from possessing the museum quality of dead authors' spaces, rooms that are still being used, incorporating new forms of writing technology, and having drafts of manuscripts scattered around them, can offer insight into such well-worn and ineffable areas of speculation as inspiration and productivity. (2014: 2)

Although these features speak to the sustained interest in the daily practices of writers across the decades, complicating the dichotomy of embodied, lived-in reality and creative genius, *Vogue's* photographs were never intrusive, and they were uninterested in or unwilling to show the artist at work. Rather than bedrooms, boudoirs, cluttered desks and manuscripts, these spreads showed architectural highlights, gardens, formal rooms; the tidy spaces that a near-stranger would be admitted to. I would argue that this degree of decorum does not detract but rather add to Battershill's reading of the "aestheticization of writers' rooms" as "consecrate[ing] the initial space of individual creation as an act connected with ownership of a space, a method, and, by extension, the literary products that emerge from this space" (6). The articles she analyses, in fact, also

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<sup>47</sup> This notion was not new to the twenties. Isabel Clúa finds that the private spaces of dancers, showgirls and divas of the turn of the century—she analyses Tórtola Valencia—, shown off for the press, served to express "their artistic sensibility [...] thus reinforcing the notion of authorship", and functioned as a promotional strategy in both elite and popular culture (2016: 124; my translation).

showed the rooms without their inhabitants, which she says “reduces the role of personal authorial presence” (8);

The writing technologies, the sentimental trinkets, the bookshelves, and the arrangements of the rooms can all be read as telling intertexts for the writers’ works, as personal, intimate spaces that give readers access to authors’ private lives as processes and constructions akin to written work itself, and as evidence for the material production of manuscripts. These are elusive photographs of spaces that embody the creative process, that fetishize and laud authorship while paradoxically removing authors from their own portraits. (11)

In the context of *Vogue* in the mid-twenties, the objects in display were not only intertexts for their production and/or persona but signs of their allegiance to a particular version of modernity.

Houses, like women, are very well-dressed nowadays. [...] The difference between a well-dressed woman and a chic woman is that the latter achieves personality in her clothes; she wears the same dresses, but differently. The same is true of houses.

Our motors are standardised, but need our rooms be? A house is a background for a human being. If the owner lives exactly the same life, reads exactly the same books, and thinks exactly the same thoughts as all her friends, it is only appropriate that her drawing-room should be exactly the same as her drawing-rooms, her pictures exactly the same as their pictures. (Late April 1926: 27)

In practice, this meant that *Vogue* was on the lookout for Bloomsbury connections or for amusing juxtapositions. The line between features on interior design per se and features on writers’ homes is therefore blurred: the rooms of Bloomsbury personages were often featured as examples of design, and Bloomsbury designs were featured as manifestations of the owners’ taste.

In his study of Bloomsbury rooms, Christopher Reed notes that the Woolfs’ sitting-room served as a “semi-public domestic space: a place for meetings, receptions, and dinners; a background for celebrity portraits; and—like Keynes’s rooms—the subject of journalistic interest as the setting of an exemplary form of modernism” (2004: 223). As he puts it, if Bloomsbury had most been associated with the visual arts before the war, during the interwar period the figures associated with publishing “created a broader identity for the group, contextualizing its artists’ output within broader challenges to prevailing norms of interest to a wide public” (*ibid.*). It made sense, then,

that *Vogue* highlighted the ways in which they matched the traits and values of its visual artists and stood for a certain unconventional approach. As *Vogue* turned to Bloomsbury, “even the unsubtle analysis of popular pictorial magazines recognized Grant’s and Bell’s interiors as modern alternatives to the standard” styles that one could find in department stores, thus allowing for a narrative of modernism that did engage with commerce (225). When *Vogue* visited “the Tavistock Square house of Virginia Woolf, the brilliant author of *Jacob’s Room* and *The Voyage Out*” it highlighted the panels painted by Grant and Bell, detailing their colours and the way they were arranged (early November 1924: 45). The implication was, of course, that the owner validated the art in display, and the other way around. Reed notices that “much of the furniture and all of the clutter of books and papers visible in more casual images were removed” (2004: 224), removing the traces of labour. The Woolfs’ choice of décor, then, “reflected what was rapidly becoming the house-style of their press, asserting continuities between Bloomsbury’s productions of art and literature that cannot be ignored in assessments of the group’s place in the history of modernism” (227) and underscored the values that Todd’s *Vogue* also aimed to articulate.

If the Woolfs and their Hogarth Press increasingly stood for Bloomsbury modernism, it was the Hutchinsons that *Vogue* visited most often. It first visited River House, Hammersmith, in early February 1919, misidentifying it as the house where William Morris had established his Kelmscott press.<sup>48</sup> Though this feature referred only to St. John and did not mention Mary, *Vogue*’s own “M.H.” and “Polly Flinders”, she did appear in the following three visits, all from 1924. Their house was said to “[owe] its individuality” to Grant and Bell’s panels; together with other artistic details, they made a “deliberately fanciful, carefully capricious” whole (early November 1924: 44)—

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<sup>48</sup> For a study of the process of design and decoration for River House and the Hutchinsons’ relationship with Bloomsbury, see chapter 12 of Christopher Reed’s *Bloomsbury Rooms* (2004).

and the chimney piece was shown yet again in early July 1925. The Hutchinsons' move was covered in the society column in more detail than usual:

I went up past the Hutchinsons' house, which belonged to Sir Louis Mallet [...] The Hutchinsons, who have an advanced taste in pictures and a very distinguished taste in furniture, have taken everything from their river house at Chiswick and dumped them down into this camouflaged Regency house with Queen Anne mouldings; yet the pictures look quite well, in spite of the setting of an entirely different taste and date. But how the Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant colossal wall decorations will fit I cannot imagine—I shall try to acquire them myself, and so probably will some of the readers of *Vogue* who saw them reproduced in a recent issue. (Late March 1926: 47)

*Vogue's* list of Bloomsbury contacts was not yet exhausted. John Maynard Keynes's cupboard doors were showcased in a late February 1923 feature on "The Art of Duncan Grant", and his chimney piece by Grant and Bell was photographed, like Hutchinson's, in early July 1925. Keynes's Cambridge rooms—including, of course, pieces by Grant and Bell—were also the subject of a spread, where he was introduced as "the best known living economist", who "even succeeded in making a book on economics a best-seller"; on top of that, he was "also a well known and discriminating admirer of modern painting. He owns pictures by Cézanne, Seurat, Matisse and Derain: he was one of the first to recognise Mr. Grant's talent, and owns several of his best works. By combining exact scholarship with an interest in contemporary art, Mr. Keynes may be said to have restored a tradition that has been lost to our Universities since the Renaissance" (early March 1925: 47). The panels in particular were considered a pioneering success, "and we count it a great privilege to be the first to reproduce photographs of it" (*ibid.*). This way, as Reed notes, *Vogue* suggested approval "of old-fashioned artistry with praise for Keynes as an old-fashioned patron" (2004: 222).

It comes as no surprise that the homes of Bloomsbury's aristocratic associates were also visited and photographed—in fact, they drew interest before the merely literary names. In early July 1923 *Vogue* visited the Nicolson's, discussing their family and career in more detail than would become the norm in this section. "The names of

both Mr. and Mrs. Nicolson are well known in contemporary literature”; in their writing one could find “that quality and distinction which their house reflects”, and they were said to share a passion for architecture and gardening as well as for “their writing and their two sons, Lionel and Nigel. The family is devoted to animals and has a kennel of Norwegian elkhounds” (38). *Vogue* portrayed a lived-in space, where creative work and human relationships could develop; the connection was underscored by photographs of the exterior and interior of the house, as well as of the Nicolsons and their cat. By contrast, Ottoline Morrell’s Garsington Manor was discussed in more conventional terms, without bringing her into the picture, in late October 1923.

Perhaps the oddest example of these visits is the one to “A Bachelor Flat in Bloomsbury”. “On the walls”, *Vogue* noted, “are foreign newspapers, arranged like patchwork, and varnished”; there were also pictures by Elliott Seabrooke, Keith Baynes, and Picasso, and the sitting-room had been decorated—guess—by Grant and Bell (late April 1925: 44-5). The flat’s anonymity underscores Reed’s point that “as the group reassembled in London and its circles of association widened to include a younger generation, other rooms in the subdivided town houses of Bloomsbury began to display a different kind of modern aesthetic. [...] these rooms were associated less with specific patrons than with the group as a whole” (2004: 232). It belonged, as previously revealed, to Mortimer, one of the younger additions to the group. It may be as per usual that *Vogue* did not mention his work for the magazine, as it had not done so when it visited Mary Hutchinson. However, Mortimer was not even named in this spread. This, added to his continuing interest in interior design and to the personal aspects of the visit to the Nicolsons, suggests that Mortimer himself may be the reporter behind these visits. Huxley did not sign his contributions outside the field of literature; perhaps Mortimer thought to do the same.

As always, *Vogue* did not only feature the homes of Bloomsbury figures. Margot Asquith's house at 44 Bedford Square was repeatedly photographed; she was a hostess and the wife of the former Prime Minister, but also a published memoirist, and thus a recurring figure in the milieu of the magazine. It also featured the homes of playwright W. Somerset Maugham,<sup>49</sup> politician and industrialist Henry McLaren, Cubist painter Amédée Ozenfant, musician Cole Porter, *Vogue*'s own film critic Iris Barry, and the oft-portrayed Diana Cooper. The visit to the latter's "Delightful Old House in Gower Street" is notable because it predated the decisive shift towards Bloomsbury and discussed the neighbourhood as an eighteenth-century relic that ought to be defended; it was appreciated for having been the home of the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris, whereas the moderns went unmentioned (late February 1923: 44). *Vogue* also paid attention to the interiors of Arnold Bennett's London home, though it did not comment on his publications, and visited the roof garden of the Nonesuch Press. It also showed the home of Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell at 2 Carlyle Square: it was "an excellent example of the whimsical style in furnishing. [...] Nothing in the house can be justified save on the all-important ground that it amused the Sitwells" (late October 1924: 53). The spread highlighted the many pictures on the wall, including works by Wyndham Lewis and Modigliani:

As we look at these extraordinary specimens of every period and every climate, we perceive they are bound together by a mental tie, which is the intellectual experience of those who have collected them. Everything is stamped with the personality of the Sitwells. If it be the object of a house to express the inhabitants, No. 2, Carlyle Square is one of the most remarkable achievements on record. (92)

Their cultivated approach to collection and display, the lush and amusing effect, reinforced the sophisticated and aristocratically eccentric collective persona of the Sitwells themselves. When *Vogue* showcased the hall and drawing-room at Rivercourt,

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<sup>49</sup> This house was in fact presented as his wife's. By the time of this visit Syrie Maugham was already a renowned interior decorator: she would be presented as such in the following years, but in this case she was only identified as "the wife of the playwright" (early July 1927: 50).

the home of Naomi and Dick Mitchinson, it revealed the connection between material goods, status and artistic allegiance in a surprisingly straight-forward manner: “on the mantelpiece is a Tang horse, the subject of a poem by Mrs. Mitchison, and Italian carved wood candlesticks, once church pieces. The chair is contemporary Swedish, the porcelain on the pedestal Viennese” (late January 1927: 54). They had a day nursery, with windows “glazed with the new vitaglass, to let in the beneficial violet rays. In the arched recess is Bernard Sleight’s charming ‘Ancient Mapped of Fairyland’” (55). Yet again, the Mitchinsons received *Vogue*’s approval with a dressing-table “designed by Roger Fry and made by the Omega Workshops” (*ibid.*). The bedroom had “a built-in cupboard painted in gay colours by Miss MacDoweli, who also did the chest” and a copy of a Byzantine chair “made for some private theatricals” (*ibid.*). Significantly, there was no desk, library or study in sight: the carefully chosen and commissioned objects thus stood for their politics and literary creation.

### 2.3.2. “We Nominate for the Hall of Fame”: Literary Celebrity

*Vogue* used a width of features to present authors as figures of interest in the abstract and as celebrities in their own right. Most of them could be found in other periodicals of the time: reviews, reports on their doings, photographs. However, there was one strategy specific to Condé Nast publications, as has been noticed by most scholars with an interest in this period: the Hall of Fame. This section constructed a constellation of stars from a range of disciplines, always profoundly “modern”, and juxtaposed them for the reader’s cultivation. While the notions of leisure and sophistication in relation to literary celebrity will be explored in more depth in the following chapter, this section will consider modernist writers in particular as literary celebrities and as prestige symbols

for readers to collect and display—in book or in person—or even as codes to be read. Before that, however, it is necessary to define literary celebrity.

“Stars”, Richard Dyer paraphrases, “have a major control over the representation of people in society – and how people are represented as being in the mass media is going to have some influence (even if only of reinforcement) on how people are in society. Stars have a privileged position in the definition of social roles and types, and this must have real consequences in terms of how people believe they can and should behave” (1979: 8). Their most obvious influence, if we think of film stars, is physical and sartorial: we can see it in beauty and size standards, cosmetics and dress. A shift in fashion, he continues, “is also always a change in social meaning” (16). In their visible embodiment of social values, through their actions and sartorial practices, they “articulate” the “crisis as to what a person is”, “whether affirming or exposing, or moving between the two”, “the reality of people as individuals or subjects over against ideology and history”, “always through the cultural and historical specificities of class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, sub-cultural formations, etc.”, while also functioning “at the more general level – itself culturally and historically specific – of defining what a person is” (183). A star, therefore, is a point of reference that cannot be dislodged from its context; that does not mean that the viewer engages in untroubled identification with the star, but that it “would work *either* by providing an affirmation of an alternative or oppositional attitude/response by audience members to their life situations that is not otherwise recognised by the dominant media, *or* by providing an image of a way out of those situations through role models that suggested alternative ways of inhabiting or transforming them” (183-4).

The star system at work at the turn of the century was “a well-developed feature of the popular theatre (especially vaudeville, from which the cinema took its first



audiences). Stars were part of the business of show business. If the public demanded it of the cinema, then this was because the public had come to expect it of the entertainment industry as a whole” (10). Looking at the popular dance hall performers of that period, Isabel Clúa notices that their celebrity was not exactly individual but rather relied on the construction and reproduction of “types”; their visibility, the easy access to their image, built their fame, but they also needed a narrative that suited that image and, through novelty and eccentricity, let them command public interest. Such a narrative would “dissolve the line between public and private” and “present an unusual, (apparently) out of the ordinary, if not scandalous, personality” (2016: 94; my translation). A dash of scandal, she notes, was necessary to present an extraordinary self; its strategic use was directly linked to its capacity to “present behaviours and attitudes that transgress normative regulations” and thus “affect public opinion” (110).

Before film, and besides the theatre and dance halls, there was also the firmly established precedent of celebrity culture in print media. Papers like *Tit-Bits* or *The Daily Mail* had perfected gossip columns, which in the twenties “came into their own” (Lucas 1997: 7); unsurprisingly, journalistic interest in the comings and goings of the British aristocracy predated those papers. A reader of the interwar period would have recognised different types of celebrity from *Vogue*’s portraits and society columns, even if they were presented and discussed in the same tone. In many cases the reason for their fame was clear: they were talented performers or distinguished writers, whose work was reviewed or somehow assessed. For others, however, “what matters is the exposure, with each new manifestation of celebrity a link in a chain that in some cases extends back to the subject’s birth”; tracing the life of socialite Elizabeth Ponsonby as presented in the press, D. J. Taylor finds that its “ultimate effect is oddly mythological: a weird, outwardly innocuous but in the end faintly sinister frieze, in which quiddity is reduced

to idiosyncrasy, life is a continual twitch upon the thread of past non-achievement – a triumph of form over content” (2007: loc. 3148-51).

Literary celebrity, while sharing certain narratives and strategies of other types of fame, had its own history. As Faye Hammill explains, the importance of print in the mid-nineteenth century;

meant that writers were especially important as public figures. Interest in them was fueled through author photographs on book jackets and in magazines; personality journalism was beginning to dominate periodical publishing and was sponsored in particular by the illustrated weeklies. [...] The arrival of radio and cinema produced new kinds of stars, whose images were circulated through entertainment papers and on posters, postcards, and advertisements, as well as on the cinema screen itself. In terms of literary celebrity, however, lectures and other forms of public appearance retained their importance; indeed, the circulation of author photographs on book jackets or in magazines intensified the reader’s desire for an encounter with the author ‘in the flesh’. (2007: 106-107).

The codes and strategies of literary celebrity, then, had a visual dimension. Vike Martina Plock underscores the importance of fashion in shaping and sustaining celebrity culture, as it “seems to add an insistence on novelty” (2018: 8); the public demands variety and reinvention, down to celebrity personas, and so fashion and celebrity are “mutually constitutive” (9). Nonetheless, though writers may use the same strategies as performers or socialites to drive their fame forward, they were granted special status:

literary celebrities are ‘complex cultural signifiers who are repositories for all kinds of meanings, the most significant of which is perhaps the nostalgia for some kind of transcendent, anti-economic, creative element in a secular, debased, commercialized culture. They thus reproduce a notion, popular since the Romantic era, of authors and their work as a kind of recuperated “other,” a haven for those creative values which an increasingly rationalistic, utilitarian society cannot otherwise accommodate.’

Thus, the representation of authors and other kinds of artists becomes a way of channeling human impulses and desires which do not fit the patterns of capitalism and rationalism, so that authors acquire an almost priestlike status; and thus it is essential to maintain the myth of their separateness from mainstream society. (Moran 2000: 9 in Hammill 2007: 112)

That is not to say that all literary celebrities were believed to be above commercial interest, nor that “highbrow” authors did not rely on their charisma, eccentricity or an air of scandal.

Lawrence, Joyce, and Radclyffe Hall, for example, were celebrated primarily because their books had been banned or put on trial for obscenity. Writers associated with Bloomsbury and bohemia, including Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, and the Sitwells, were also fairly visible, but this was partly because of their unconventional lifestyles and

because their modes of dress and décor became fashionable in certain circles. They were not, however, publicized anything like as widely as their American contemporaries. (18)

These concerns and embarrassments could be perceived in the pages of *Vogue*, with its uncomfortably hybrid position. For instance, it criticised Michael Arlen's writing as facile and vulgar, but it reproduced portraits of the best-selling author in the context of high society coverage. By contrast, though Aldous Huxley was considered vulgar by some—he had a notoriously blunt approach to modern living and discussed the recipe for commercial success in his critical essays—he was cosmopolitan and ironic in his tone, and therefore appreciated. It must be remembered, moreover, that *Vogue* never shared salacious gossip or published truly scathing critiques. As for “lowbrow” stage productions or novels, they were not considered at all.

Regardless of its allegiance to a strand of modernism, and despite never prying too far, *Vogue* and its editors were frowned upon as too commercial by many, including among those “highbrow” authors who condescended to contribute. Significantly, neither T. S. Eliot nor Ezra Pound nor James Joyce were featured beyond the occasional mention, one-off portrait or review. It is easier to understand *Vogue*'s attempt at a balancing act if we consider the historical context, in which;

the very concept of celebrity at various times became a topic of anxious cultural discussion. [...] The vogue of celebrity news among papers hungry for copy, and among freelance writers hungry for assignments, meant that even modestly prominent people—for instance authors of the 10,000-selling rather than million-selling variety—could be swept up in it. Widely-known authors were besieged by requests from newspapers and magazines for articles, ranging from 25 to 250 words [...] Freelancers could earn about five shillings for one paragraph quoting a quip from a well-known person at a social function (Collier 2006: 33).

Bearing this trend in mind, it makes sense that *Vogue*'s turn away from the highbrow at the close of the decade coincided with its greater emphasis on society reporting. Though “quality journalism” was expected to rely on “human interest”, Patrick Collier continues, public opinion increasingly frowned upon “the interview, the celebrity profile, the reported cocktail-party quip” (34).

This dismayed reaction to the growing public obsession with the famous was directly related to anxieties about overpopulation and crowd behaviour, and about the sociological effects of the mass media, political democracy, and mass education. Among the fears expressed by writers such as D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot (both influenced by Nietzschean thinking) were that universal literacy would result in a lowering of standards and a diminution of intellectual authority, and that the media would become a dominant influence, able to sway the easily-influenced crowd, and to govern them by emotional rather than rational appeal. (Hammill 2010: 110)

One of the consequences of these anxieties among intellectuals was a shift towards more prescriptive, institutionalised criticism, which rewarded “difficult” reading and deprecated “middlebrow” texts and practices, as will be explored in the next chapter. Though the modernist movement was certainly invested in the representation of its authors as “a way of channelling human impulses and desires which do not fit the patterns of capitalism and rationalism” (2007: 112), others—Hammill names Anita Loos, Dorothy Parker and Mae West—were “so closely identified with commercialized and fashionable culture that they could never be ‘recuperated’” as exclusively literary celebrities (*ibid.*). Though *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* had been discussed in *Vogue* as a status symbol, a cosmopolitan commodity, it could not whole-heartedly support Loos’s model of authorship; at this stage, her type of glamour was still suspect.

*Vogue*’s representational and critical strategies were crystallised in its Hall of Fame, which introduced the leading figures of the arts with their portrait, name and a brief and often idiosyncratic note on the reasons for their notoriety. Like a hostess who sent out invitations, set the table and carefully seated each guest to provoke the most interesting conversation, the Hall of Fame “effected somewhat surreal encounters” (Luckhurst 1998: 23). While the notion of a Hall of Fame can seem quite Hollywood to us, Aaron Jaffe points out that:

heads of ‘illustrious and eminent personages’ called ‘National Portrait Galleries’ were sold in book form as early as 1830. By the early 1840s, with the emergence of illustrated newspapers, the virtual portrait gallery became a popular staple of even broader dissemination. It is in these contexts, in particular [...] where notions of eminence as elite embodied value and prominence as public exposure become cemented (and, I would also argue, later become unhinged). (2005: 172)

Therefore, this was a long-established strategy for literary promotion by the time British *Vogue* decided to bring it over from *Vanity Fair* in early May 1924.

There are noticeable similarities between the Hall of Fame and *Vogue*'s first extended book review column in early October 1923, as if it had been trying out the format. In that issue, reviews were accompanied by photographs of each author—an illustration in Anthony Ludovici's case—and a brief nod to their respective strengths as writers:<sup>50</sup> they revealed a preference for novelty—promise, invention, cutting-edge ideas even when facing a resistant audience—and authenticity in the representation of the human spirit or its location. Though all sorts of cultural icons would be nominated to the Hall of Fame between early May 1924 and its quiet ending in 1927, these values would persist. Many have commented on the startling effect of these galleries, and it is true that they created suggestive combinations that one may spend time trying to make sense of, functioning perhaps as a conversation piece. They favoured highbrow artists and writers, but also brought in a range of figures from other media and cultural movements wider than might be expected, all presented non-hierarchically. Some of the chosen individuals were certainly surprising, as they could hardly be considered celebrities: they were contributors to the magazine, known in certain literary circles, or the less-known relatives of famous people.

Let us consider the very first Hall of Fame as an example. Three of the nominees were literary celebrities. The first was Hope Mirrlees, featured because *The Counterplot*

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<sup>50</sup> “Mr. Clive Bell has shown himself no less brilliant a champion of our decaying liberties”; “Miss Victoria Sackville-West has the rare art of imbuing her novels with the spirit of place”; “Mr. David Garnett is the author of that remarkable and haunting story, ‘Lady Into Fox,’”; “Mr. Osbert Sitwell is one of a famous trio of revolutionaries in poetry. Their work makes some people very angry, a proof that the Sitwells are very much alive” (early October 1923: 62); “Mr. Ulv Youff, the author of ‘Ulven,’ expresses a Scandinavian gloom with the terse energy of America”; “Mr. D. H. Lawrence gropes among the dim-rooted instincts of human nature and brings to the surface strange, uncomfortable trove”; “Miss Frida Sinclair is a new novelist who is welcome not only for her promise but for her performance”; “Sussex lives in the novels of Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith as truly as Wessex in the novels of Mr. Thomas Hardy”; “Witty, cynical and exquisite, Mr. Michael Arlen's stories are the quintessence of artifice, the ultimate expression of an elaborate civilisation”; “Mr. Anthony Ludovici invents both novel philosophies and philosophic novels” (63).

was “the most brilliant novel that has appeared for the past eighteen months: because her volume, ‘Paris,’ the only good dada poem in English, has the admiration of Monsieur André Gide: and because her erudition is only equalled by her wit” (early May 1924: 53). The second was the critic and bookseller Francis Birrell, who could not be described as a celebrity even if he was “one of the most brilliant dramatic critics of the day”, “the son of the Rt. Hon. Augustine Birrell” and the co-owner of Birrell & Garnett (*ibid.*). Three issues later, however, he would contribute his first theatre review (as F. B.) and so begin a collaboration that resulted in thirteen pieces over two years. By including Birrell in the Hall of Fame *Vogue* smoothed his arrival, introducing him to less literary readers, equating London literary culture with fashionable Englishness, and flattering him and his circle, who would also become, if they weren’t already, *Vogue* contributors. Then there was Ronald Knox, “because he is a Catholic priest: because his father is the most low-church of bishops and his brother the most high-church of parsons: because of ‘Sanctions,’ his other satires, his autobiographies and his limericks” (*ibid.*). This appearance predated his first detective stories—a genre that *Vogue* would not consider often, not even in the thirties. The fourth and fifth choices, though outside the realm of highbrow literature, were fit for a Hall of Fame: Grock, the clown, “the greatest artist Switzerland has ever produced”, and Elsa Lanchester, the actress, “because of her wonderful hair: because she runs a dancing school for poor children and has just started a new cabaret: because she has been sculpted by Epstein and because in the Insect Play she was such a very fascinating maggot” (*ibid.*). And finally there was Lady (Ethel) Pearson, the wife of the publishing magnate; a nod to the type of high society celebrity that *Vogue* had featured most often during and right after the war.

Every Hall of Fame followed a similar pattern: literary celebrities drew most of the attention but were closely followed by figures from the stage, composers and visual

artists;<sup>51</sup> aiming to educate the audience in cosmopolitan, cultivated smartness, there were also academics.<sup>52</sup> A demographic profile emerges from the whole: nominees skewed white, male, European and avant-garde. Even though it showcased a variety of artistic and academic disciplines and of approaches to modernity, the Hall of Fame omitted the most popular cultural manifestations of the twenties: film and jazz music. In fact, American celebrities were noticeably absent, with a handful of literary exceptions. Moreover, there was not a single fashion designer or mannequin present; neither were there any fashion journalists or editors—nor any journalists who did not have a parallel career in literature. Despite the prominence of designers like Lucile or Jeanne Lanvin, despite the fact that *Vogue* argued elsewhere for a version of modernity that included its wearable manifestations and considered sartorial know-how as a necessary part of one's cultural capital, fashion was sectioned off from the vision of culture presented in the Hall of Fame. Even the other applied arts had minimal presence—and this is despite Todd's recorded interest in interior design. Nonetheless, it sometimes nominated “middlebrow” writers—in a limited range of genres that included the society *roman à clef* and the rural novel—and best-selling authors whose works that had been adapted to film or the stage. When this was the case, the captions tended to highlight their

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<sup>51</sup> Nominees included theatre managers Lilian Baylis and C. B. Cochran; director Norman Macdermott; actors Basil Dean, Ludmilla Pitoeff, Constantin Stanislavsky and Emil Jannings; playwrights Franz Molnar, Theodore Komisarjevsky, J. R. Ackerley, Jacinto Benavente, Sean O'Casey and Ferencz Molnár (who contributed to the magazine three issues after his appearance in early February 1927); production designer Jean Victor-Hugo; dancers Lydia Lopokova and Léonide Massine; ballet impresarios Serge Diaghileff and Étienne de Beaumont; composers Arnold Schönberg, William Walton, Darius Milhaud, George Antheil, Pablo Casals and Gerald Cooper, Germaine Taillefer, Igor Stravinsky, Richard Strauss, Erik Satie, Arthur Honegger, Gustav Holst, Manuel de Falla, Frederick Delius and Bernard Van Dieren; singers Elena Gerhardt and Dorothy Silk; pianist Marcelle Meyer; the Léner String Quartet; artist and designer Natalia Goncharova; architects Philip Tilden, Le Corbusier, George Kennedy and Doris Lewis; sculptors Frank Dobson (twice), Constantin Brancusi (also twice) and Stephen Tomlin; painters Walter Sickert, Henri Matisse, Paul-Emile Pajot, Georges Braque, Juan Gris, Andre Derain, Pedro Pruna, Fernand Léger, Irène Lagut, Gino Severini and Amedee Ozenfand and Giorgio de Chirico; poster artist E. McKnight Kauffer; embroiderer Mary Hogarth; mosaicist Boris Anrep; gallerist Hoyland Mayor and art dealer brothers Léonce and Paul Rosenberg.

<sup>52</sup> Nominated scholars included Pernel Strachey, Gilbert Murray; historians Eileen Power and Bernard Fay; art historians Carl Einstein and Yukio Yashiro; architecture writer Lawrence Weaver; magistrate Margery Fry; ornithologist William Beebe; biologist and chemist J. B. S. Haldane; and surgeon Arbuthnot Lane. Worth noting were H. Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, as well as the writer and psychoanalyst Arthur Schnitzler and the philosophers Bertrand Russell and C. E. M. Joad.

commercial success and influence in the collective imagination. These writers were discussed in the Hall of Fame and review columns more often than in critical essays, suggesting that the former formats were, firstly, tailored to expectations about the tastes of *Vogue* readers, and secondly, more concerned with the social aspect of celebrity.

Thomas Burke, for instance, was featured “because he wrote ‘Broken Blossoms’: because he wrote a book about the suburbs: because his writings have sent so many simple souls to Chinatown in search of adventures: and because they return as simple as they went” (early June 1924: 55). The most interesting thing about Compton Mackenzie was his economic capital:

Because he has a passion for buying islands: because the success of his novels enables him to gratify this passion: because he owns half Capri and all Herm: because Herm is one of the Channel Islands: because the high-brows liked his early books and the low-brows like his recent ones: because he is as precious as Wilde and as boisterous as Dickens: and because he comes of an old theatrical family, and is a brother of Miss Fay Compton. (Late August 1924: 48)

The caption for W. Somerset Maugham, because—or in spite—of his successful long-running plays, was whole-heartedly positive: “he is undoubtedly the most brilliant English playwright”, with proven “accomplishment in fiction” (late November 1924: 58). The most renowned of them all was of course H. G. Wells, though his nomination read as a eulogy, belying the decades left in his career: “enjoying abroad a greater reputation than any living novelist, he is accepted in England as one of our national institutions. He has succeeded to an almost unparalleled extent in preserving the elasticity and energy of his mind; posterity will see in him one of the most representative intellects of our age” (early November 1925: 68). Notice that these successful writers were men. Women writers outside the avant-garde were praised in markedly different terms, even when they achieved commercial success and crossed over to other media. Ethel M. Dell, Elinor Glyn or Mary Roberts Rinehart, bestselling



authors and “lowbrow” favourites, were never included at all; neither were Anita Loos or Anne Douglas Sedgwick, whom *Vogue* had reviewed positively.

The women writers who were included were described as distinguished, knowledgeable, interesting or clear-sighted: in short, even when they were known for satire or keen on irony, they could not be accused of frivolity. Considering this pattern, one cannot imagine a woman writer presented in the same terms as Powys Mathers, the poet and translator, who was said to have “invented a new form of crossword puzzle” and be famous for “his intensive study of claret” (early February 1925: 62). Margaret Kennedy, nominated in the same issue, serves as an illuminating contrast. Her “brilliant novels” had been “enthusiastically received by the best critics, and the public agrees with the critics” (*ibid.*). Immediately, however, *Vogue* balanced the sophistication of her books and her degree of fame with her refusal of public exposure: “she is on the sunny side of thirty and lives contentedly with her family and St. Ives: because she has no desire to ‘see life,’ and nobody knows where she picked up so much information about it” (*ibid.*). In other words, she was respectable.<sup>53</sup> Only Colette had a colourful

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<sup>53</sup> In the same line, Rose Macaulay was beloved “because she has demolished so many platitudes”, and, like *Vogue*, could comment on the contemporary mindset with authority: “because she has added a new word—‘potterism’—to the English language: because of her wit: because neither the League of Nations nor psycho-analysis are sacred from her pen” (early June 1924: 55). Rebecca West was “one of the most energetic and versatile women in England”, a “particularly shrewd literary critic”, the author of a “remarkable” novel and, to top it off, “a champion of women’s suffrage and other political remedies” (early October 1924: 80). Stella Benson was “incisive”, “one of the women novelists whom the men critics like”; her works were “marked with a detached and ironic spirit which makes it as distressing to sentimentalists as she is delightful to the fastidious” (late November 1924: 58). Jane Harrison, “the most learned woman in England [...] carries her learning with great elegance”; “she was for years the moving spirit of Newnham College, Cambridge”, and her books are understandable even to “the unlearned” (early December 1924: 68). There were also F. M. and Beatrice Mayor, sisters-in-law: the former was “interesting” (early October 1924: 80) and “distinguished” (early January 1925: 54), the latter a relatively successful playwright, if “half a Potter” (*ibid.*). Naomi Mitchison was “unique in writing historical novels that are a pleasure to read” (late December 1925: 58), while Sylvia Townsend Warner was “a remarkable stylist and the possessor of a delicate gift of fantasy”, as well as an authority in music history (early April 1926: 62). Adelaide Eden Phillpotts’s *Lodgers in London* was among the most “remarkable” publications of recent years: “its imaginative quality is so profound, its characterisation so uncannily intimate, that it is bound to be singled out as of a completely different stamp from the mass of good fiction that is being written at present” (late April 1926: 64). Even the most socially prominent of these writers, Marthe Bibesco, whose beauty and family had to be acknowledged, was said to be “public-spirited”, and “so good”, so “vastly gifted” a writer that her books were the ones “to read” (*ibid.*). Her cousin Anna, Comtesse de Noailles, may have been a radical thinker and a participant in *Vogue*’s own Parisian milieu,

biography: it could hardly have been otherwise (late March 1925: 66). Besides the similarity in tone and content, the portraits also betrayed a resemblance: in this context, women writers were not eccentrically posed or styled. The only exception was Warner, who was drawn by Frank Dobson, reminding the reader of her connection to the highbrow milieu that took up most of *Vogue's* pages.

The Hall of Fame also showcased international highbrows, including the likes of André Gide (late August 1925, from a drawing by Marie Laurencin), Paul Valéry (late September 1925), André Breton (early December 1925) or Valéry Larbaud (late March 1926). Tristan Tzara was nominated “because he invented Dada”, of course, but also “because he is a Roumanian with an eye-glass: because he is young: because he keeps Paris lively: because his play, ‘Mouchoir de Nuages,’ was produced at the Cigale season in Paris last summer: because it was a witty satire and an enchanting entertainment: and because he is rumoured now to be translating Marlowe’s ‘Faustus’” (early December 1924: 68). There were Imagist poets John Gould Fletcher (early November 1924) and H.D., who “was born physically in America and spiritually in the Greek Islands”, and whose translations are “magnificent” (early October 1924: 80). There was Gertrude Stein, “LL.D., M.D.”; “an amazing American” who was hailed first for her taste and only later for her own production: “She was one of the first enthusiasts for Matisse and Picasso. Her experiments in style have been compared to the early efforts of Cubism and suggest quite new ways of writing prose, either English or French. She directed for a long time one of the most remarkable salons in Paris” (*ibid.*). There was also T. S. Eliot:

Because most good judges think he is either the best living poet in England or the best living critic: because many think he is both: because he is an American who was at

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but she was nominated “because Anatole France is dead, because she is therefore the most distinguished living representative of French literature of the more academic order [...] because she is a member of the historic and brilliant house of Bibesco: and because her lyrical and passionate poems are a last flowering of the Romantic Movement” (late June 1925: 58).

Oxford: because he is the editor of 'The Criterion': because of his admirable prose in 'The Sacred Wood': because his poem, 'The Waste Land,' won 'The Dial' prize of £400 and caused more discussion than any other poem of last year: and because he has, metaphorically, the highest brow of any man alive. (Late August 1924: 48)

Acknowledged credentials were important, but *Vogue* did not completely forgo the importance of money and notoriety. Perhaps paling after Eliot's superlative brow, but still worth mentioning, are Sherwood Anderson (early July 1925), Conrad Aiken (late October 1925), Louis Aragon and Marianne Moore (late January 1926) and E. E. Cummings (late March 1926).

Closer to home was May Sinclair, shown reading, underscoring the point that "she is nothing if not up to date": "she was one of the first novelists to use psycho-analytic theories in her work: and because she is always renewing her style as other women renew their complexion" (late February 1925: 65). *Vogue* saw its social and cultural ideals incarnated in Iris Tree, "because she is young and a poet: because she does not compromise with the public taste: because she was one of the original contributors to 'Wheels': and because she is a daughter of the late Sir Herbert and Lady Tree" (early September 1924: 40). There were also Siegfried Sassoon (late April 1925) and Wyndham Lewis (late April 1926), whose note remarked on his shift from painting to literature, and who was represented by a self-portrait. Edith Sitwell's protégé Harold Acton was photographed in a striped suit, considering an open book or notebook, as if about to work. The son of "a well-known Anglo-Florentine family", he was "one of our youngest poets of the most advanced school"; "though still at Oxford", he had published well-received poetry collections and was "an authority on Italian art" (early June 1925: 62), a Sitwell in the making. Interestingly, Herbert Read was not introduced as an art historian but as "eminently an intellectual poet" whose "verse is often obscure, like that of the Seventeenth Century metaphysical poets, whom he resembles in his concern to express profound and difficult ideas with the greatest possible concision", not forgetting

that he was “also an authority on Ceramics and works in the Victoria and Albert Museum” (early December 1925: 94). Again, *Vogue*’s highbrow nominees often became contributors. Bonamy Dobrée, praised for his accessible critical surveys, his military career, “because he lives in the Pyrenees: and because he married an artist, Valentine Dobrée, who exhibits with London Group” (early December 1924: 68), would become its theatre critic two years later. Like her friend Iris Tree, Nancy Cunard was presented as the “young, beautiful and a poet” who had contributed the titular poem to *Wheels*, “that startling and delightful volume”; her latest, *Parallax*, had the seal of approval from the Hogarth Press and was said to be “not only the best thing she has written, but one of the most moving poems by a contemporary writer” (late April 1925: 64). She was photographed by Curtis Moffat in profile, thoughtful and smoking, and, in contrast to her formal portrait, not eccentrically dressed.

Predictably, *Vogue* championed the Bloomsbury group and their associates in the Hall of Fame as well, though their connections to each other were only spelled out when they were familial, in the case of siblings, children or spouses. Roger Fry was nominated twice, first because he was “definitely the best art-critic in Europe: because, though an expert, he is a man of taste [...] and because he is one of the wittiest men in London” (late August 1924: 48), and then coinciding with an exhibition of Allied Artists (late May 1926). Also featured were John Maynard Keynes and Leonard Woolf (early January 1925), R. C. Trevelyan (late April 1926) and Lytton Strachey, “because he has made a revolution in the art of biography: because it is not his fault if the imitations of his work are usually so disgusting: because ‘Queen Victoria’ contrived to be both a best-seller and a serious work of art: because his irony never degenerates into banter” (early July 1925: 52). Harold Nicolson, besides being a “keen diplomatist” like his father, “also shares with his wife, V. Sackville-West, an intense interest in literature.

He has published biographical studies of Verlaine, Tennyson, and Byron, and a novel entitled ‘Sweet Waters.’ As a biographer he is highly scholarly as well as entertaining and acute” (late November 1925: 80). Desmond MacCarthy also had a famous wife:

the literary editor of ‘The New Statesman,’ is married to the author of ‘A Nineteenth Century Childhood.’ [...] Though a dramatic critic, he clearly enjoys the theatre. And he was one of the first English enthusiasts for modern painting. His writings and those of his *alter ego*, Affable Hawk, show an extreme width of sympathy, a humour both friendly and ironic, and, above all, immense gusto. He is now speaking fortnightly on books for the B.B.C., thus revealing to the public the fact, long a commonplace to his friends, that he is one of the best talkers of our time. (*Ibid.*)

Lest one think it a strictly gendered adjective, E. M. Forster was said to be “particularly distinguished”, as proved by his “reputation with people of discrimination” (early December 1924: 68). Out of these Bloomsbury-adjacent men, Woolf had already had a piece in *Vogue*, and Fry’s contributions would appear soon afterwards. As was the case with regular contributors, however, this relationship was not mentioned.

The most notable Bloomsbury nominees, because of the way they were styled, were Virginia Woolf and Mary MacCarthy. The latter had “described with incomparable taste” her family life in the memoir *A Nineteenth Century Childhood*; as if proving her authority on the subject she wore tiered skirts and a shawl, making up a mid-Victorian silhouette. That is not to suggest that she was outmoded, uninformed or quaint: *Vogue* took care to mention that she was “the daughter of the famous Dr. Warre-Cornish of Eton and of his still more famous wife”, Blanche, that she was “married to Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, the writer”, and that “she is as witty with her tongue as she is with her pen” (late November 1924: 58). The better-known Victorian reference, however, had appeared some months before. I am referring to Virginia Woolf in her mother’s gown in the photograph that was repurposed for her mid-issue portrait two years later and that I have explored in the previous section. The note in the Hall of Fame lauded her for being “a publisher with a prose style” rather than a stylish writer who was also a publisher; “because she is a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen and a sister of

Vanessa Bell: because she is the author of ‘The Voyage Out,’ ‘Night and Day’ and ‘Jacob’s Room’: because in the opinion of some of the best judges she is the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation: because she also writes admirable criticism: because with her husband she runs The Hogarth Press” (late May 1924: 49). The gown, it is worth noting, went unexplained.

By the time they were nominated to the Hall of Fame, the Sitwells had already appeared in *Vogue* both as subjects of artistic and social interest and as individual contributors. When they were nominated, however, it was as a quasi-mythological three-headed entity, which makes sense if their celebrity was mutually reinforced and inseparable from their familial connection. The caption was of necessity longer, as it mentioned their individual accomplishments across media and also credited them with the cultural shift that *Vogue* aimed to represent:

Because they have created a new style in prose, poetry and decoration: because of their intense interest in all the arts: because they are the children of Sir George Sitwell and Lady Ida Sitwell: because they are great travellers: because they have all written poems: because in addition to this Mr. Osbert Sitwell has stood for Parliament, written satires, and is about to publish a book of short stories: because Miss Sitwell edited ‘Wheels’ and has just published a new poem, ‘The Sleeping Beauty’ [...] Because Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell’s book on Southern Baroque Art has had the most appreciative reviews of any book published this year: because of their witty contributions to ‘Who’s Who’: because of their production of ‘Façade’ at the Aeolian Hall last year: because they have been caricatured by Max Beerbohm: because they are serious artists who know how to be amusing: because they are such admirable hosts and have such an interesting collection of pictures. (*Ibid.*)

Though they all contributed to *Vogue*, Sacheverell was the one to receive an individual nomination some months later. He was singled out when he put out a poetry collection that, as the note reminded readers, was reviewed in the same issue; moreover, he was a founder of the Magnasco Society, the subject of an essay by Raymond Mortimer (late November 1924: 58).

As if to stir up the accusation that Dorothy Todd promoted her highbrow contacts to embarrassing excess, only the regular critics and essayists were nominated; by contrast, the gallery never included fashion or society reporters. M.H., the recurring

initials under many fashion articles, was never identified and celebrated as Mary Hutchinson. Despite being *Vogue's* most prolific contributors, neither X. Marcel Boulestin the restaurateur nor Bernard Darwin the golf expert nor Sydney Tremayne the society wit received a nomination. As representatives of *Vogue's* claim to the Parisian fashion industry, Jeanne Ramon Fernandez, Lucien Vogel, Michel de Brunhoff or Elspeth Champcommunal were likely nominees, and yet they were never shown off in this manner. It must be pointed out, though, that when highbrow members of *Vogue's* staff were nominated their position in the magazine was not mentioned. It may be that *Vogue* was invested in discreetly constructing, promoting and naturalising its celebrities while maintaining a plausible defence against accusations of cliquishness, which may in turn explain why Huxley, the best-known writer in its payroll, was never nominated.<sup>54</sup>

They were all men: Richard Aldington, Clive Bell, Edwin Evans, Raymond Mortimer and Edwin Muir. Aldington was nominated, first and foremost, “because he is one of the most serious, scholarly and intelligent of living critics: because he is young: because he is intimately acquainted with eight different literatures: because he has made many translations” as well as published his own poetry (late April 1925: 64); he stood as if dressed for a walk, wearing a hat and carrying a stick or an umbrella. Meanwhile, Bell was “a first-rate horseman, a severe rationalist, a judge of painting, writing, dressing, living” and was blessed with “one of the most versatile and amusing minds of our time. His books [...] are remarkable for the humbugs they destroy and the truths they establish. The most genial of hosts and most stimulating of guests, he combines the sense of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the sensibility of our own” (late May 1926: 76). Muir was similarly and superlatively described as “one of the best critics belonging to the younger generation”, whose talent was credited by the Hogarth Press (late January 1926: 52).

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<sup>54</sup> His brother, the biologist Julian Huxley, was nominated to *Vogue's* Hall of Fame in early March 1925.

The note for Mortimer was the exception to the rule, as his work as a reviewer was his main claim to fame; by emphasising that aspect rather than side-stepping it, *Vogue* identified him with its entire ethos:

Because of his book reviews, which amuse everyone except the authors criticised: because he is part author of ‘The Oxford Circus’: because he enjoys all the arts but likes that of conversation the best: because of his intimate knowledge of young Paris painters: because he was educated at Oxford but now prefers Cambridge: because of his great knowledge of books, pictures and places: and because he is one of those who set the fashions of the mind. (Late February 1925: 65)

I have not found out who actually did the choosing: it may be up to the editor, or it may be discussed in meetings with staff and associates. Like Huxley, David Garnett would have been an obvious choice: he was a bestselling writer from a well-known literary family, affiliated with the Bloomsbury group and involved in bookselling, and moreover he had contributed as many pieces to *Vogue* as Bonamy Dobrée, “Polly Flinders” or Edith Sitwell, but he was never nominated. However, almost everyone around him was.<sup>55</sup> His wife Rachel (“Ray”), called “Mrs. David Garnett”, was nominated on account of being “herself a distinguished artist, as is proved by her delightful woodcuts [...] She also has immense insight into the minds of small children. ‘A Ride on a Rocking Horse,’ both written and illustrated by herself, is one of the most charming books for really young people that have been brought out for many a long year” (early November 1924: 80). His father, Edward Garnett, was nominated in early March 1925. The co-founder of Birrell & Garnett, Francis Birrell—himself a frequent contributor to *Vogue*—had been among the first ever nominees.<sup>56</sup> His father, Augustine—also a one-off contributor—was also nominated as an up-to-date representative of the old school of criticism:

Because, unlike other men of letters, he has spent many years in the Cabinet: because, unlike other politicians, he is an intellectual: because, unlike other good scholars, he is a ‘best-seller’: because, unlike other critics, he is exceedingly humane: because, unlike other people who have fine libraries, he is extremely well read: because, unlike other

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<sup>55</sup> David Garnett’s photograph did appear in other contexts, for instance when *The Sailor’s Return* was reviewed by Edwin Muir.

<sup>56</sup> Ralph Wright, who by 1923 was also running the bookshop, was never mentioned in *Vogue*.



orators, he never talks nonsense: because, unlike other veteran statesmen, he is no longer engaged in politics: and because, if he is unlike everyone else, he is astoundingly like Dr. Johnson. (Late June 1925: 58)

David Garnett's other project at this time was the Nonesuch Press, which he had founded with Francis Meynell and Vera Mendel and was based in the bookshop's basement. Nonesuch publications often received warm praise in *Vogue's* reviews, and Meynell was nominated because he had successfully "directed an inherited taste and love for literature to the arrangement and printing of books. He is a director of the Nonesuch Press, which produces scholarly editions in type most carefully chosen and arranged" and thus "set a new standard in the production of fine books at reasonable prices" (late October 1925: 58). Moreover, he was "the son and brother of well-known writers", Alice and Viola Meynell: unsurprisingly, the latter had been nominated a year before (*ibid.*). The tone of Francis Meynell's note was less arch than others; it reads, rather, like an advertisement for the press. Stephen Gooden, an artist who illustrated Nonesuch publications, was nominated in early April 1926. This dense web of reference and deference suggests that *Vogue* was more closely affiliated with the Birrell-Garnett-Meynell alliance than has been noticed up until this point. The missing piece is, of course, Vera, who was never mentioned whenever *Vogue* discussed the Nonesuch Press, but who would try out for the position of editor after Todd.

Although the Hall of Fame started out in a distinctively comedic style, its captions became blander as the months went on. In fact, so did the section as a whole, as it abandoned juxtaposition to showcase specific disciplines and demographics—women writers, Parisian artists—and appeared less and less regularly. The last gallery titled "We Nominate for the Hall of Fame" appeared in late February 1926, less than two years after its inception. Similar galleries continued to appear under different titles throughout that year, and they showed *Vogue's* signature tone—informative yet arch, in turns partial and detached—but lacking their earlier punch. "Some of the Younger

Generation of Writers”, which appeared in late July 1927, was the last of these galleries.<sup>57</sup> Featuring Rosamond Lehmann, Edith Olivier, the Sitwells, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Elinor Wylie, it illuminates *Vogue*’s slow shift to the middlebrow and to a glamour-oriented approach to celebrity culture. Wylie was “an American who is spending the summer over here. For this photograph she wore a Poiret gown in Chinese red, blue and black”, while Lehmann and Warner respectively wore “a red and white striped jersey and a finely pleated skirt” and “scarlet slippers” (44). Though the travels of writers, for work or leisure, had been commented upon from time to time, *Vogue* had actually never described their clothes in detail. Startlingly, despite the eccentric sartorial choices made by Cunard, Sitwell or Woolf, the captions had never discussed them.

Anna Thomasson, Olivier’s biographer, notes that her photograph was taken when “her literary career was burgeoning and her world was opening up”, that is, when she was a *new* writer (2015: 102).

At fifty-four she was the eldest of the group by thirteen years [...] But for *Vogue* youth was not defined by age but by a certain mentality, which they evidently considered Edith to have, one that aligned her with the Sitwells and her bright young friends. Like Edith, the magazine was a combination of the traditional and the modern; amongst the usual advertisements that year for trousseaux, Worth perfumes and Poiret dresses, were others for sanitary towels, cars and sportswear. More importantly perhaps for Edith, her presence in *Vogue* signified her metamorphosis into a writer of note, a literary ingénue. (*Ibid.*)

Indeed, in this section and elsewhere, *Vogue* used “young” to mean “modern”, “amusing” or even “interesting”. Writers were said to be “of the younger generation” as often as they were said to be “distinguished”. Novelty in form and content, as well as an open mind that soaked up and referenced a wide range of cultural works, were central aspects of *Vogue*’s preferred model of authorship; readers were invited to follow their example beyond their literary practices. However, this liberal use of the word “young”

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<sup>57</sup> The same gallery appeared as “Young Makers of the Literary Mode” in the January 1, 1928, issue of *American Vogue*. The photographs were the same, but the composition and the copy were slightly different. In this version, the Sitwell trio was said to be “among the most sophisticated of English moderns” (68), and the writers’ clothes were not commented upon.

must not obscure the fact that *Vogue* featured younger writers much more frequently than it did others with long-established careers. When a writer was said to be young it was quite often in the literal sense, and that was a positive value in itself. Because the wartime avant-gardes felt a long way back, because some writers were brought up so frequently that they were perceived to be more established than they actually were, and because we now know that its society columns would soon be taken over by the Bright Young People, it is easy to forget how young most of these writers were. Olivier was called “young” at fifty-four, Woolf at forty-two and Wylie at forty-one, while Acton was presented as an exceptional at twenty. Tree and Cunard, despite their years of notoriety, were only twenty-seven; Tzara was twenty-eight; Edith was the oldest Sitwell at thirty-nine; Aldington was only thirty-two.

Recall how T. S. Eliot was said to have “metaphorically, the highest brow of any man alive” (late August 1924: 48); how Roger Fry, “though an expert”, was “a man of taste” (*ibid.*); how Augustine Birrell, “unlike other people who have fine libraries”, was “extremely well read” (late June 1925: 58), how Desmond MacCarthy, “though a dramatic critic [...] clearly enjoys the theatre” (late November 1925: 80); bear in mind as well that the commercial success of *Vogue*-approved works was discussed as a pleasant surprise. *Vogue* approached commercial interest from the position of well-informed common-sense, and tended to portray its nominees as deserving exceptions in a marketplace of hacks. The Hall of Fame made highbrow names accessible and memorable while still showcasing middlebrow writers, novels and institutions, and was therefore a central strategy to *Vogue*’s function as a cultural intermediary. As the next chapter will show, the magazine also used the term highbrow with comedic intent and satirised excessive intellectualism and obscurity, but it did so only in the abstract, without targeting individual writers. Familiarity with highbrow figures and forms and

the ability to parody them were key aspects of the middlebrow, an approach that gained ground and eventually tinted *Vogue's* discussion of fashionable reading.



### 3. OUR LIVES FROM DAY TO DAY:

#### MIDDLEBROW BRITISH VOGUE

(1927-1939)

There was a time, in my foolish youth, when I should have felt terribly ashamed of not being up-to-date. I lived in a chronic apprehension lest I might miss the last bus and so find myself stranded in a dark desert of demodeness, while others, more nimble than myself, had already climbed on board, taken their tickets and set out towards those bright, but, alas, ever-receding goals of Modernity and Sophistication.

Now, however, I have grown shameless, I have lost my fears, I can watch unmoved the departure of the last social-cultural bus—the innumerable last buses which are starting at every instant in all the world’s capitals. [...] Why should I have my feelings outraged, why should I submit to being bored and disgusted for the sake of somebody else’s categorical imperative?

(Huxley October-November 1929: 65)

Though readers of British *Vogue* could not possibly have known, the purpose of Edna Woolman Chase’s visit to London early in the summer of 1927 was to take charge of the magazine and, as she put it in her memoir, save it from folding. After her issues with the business and advertising managers were more or less solved, she found a successor, society columnist Alison Settle, and stayed to train her in “the commercial focus of *Vogue*” (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 84) and to oversee her aesthetic and social transformation into someone who could represent its values (Seebohm 1982: 130). Settle was keen on fashion and high living, and, as a widowed mother who presumably did not have a Bloomsbury view on extramarital affairs, at least had the appearance of a conventional family life. As a result, scholarship on *Vogue*’s modernist period has tended to cast Settle as the incarnation, or at best the symptom, of the artistic and social conservatism that forced Dorothy Todd out, and has summed up her editorship as a return to conventional approaches to dressing and living. I believe that this is unfair to both Settle and her work, and that there are many suggestive moments of play and slippage between literary celebrity, modishness and eccentricity to be found in the features that she commissioned and oversaw.

Though she did not mention these troubles in the diaries she kept during this period, almost all of her later reminiscences include mentions of the haughtiness of *Vogue*'s managers and milieu. "*Vogue* was snobbish to a degree. It was unbearable how snobbish it was. I wasn't allowed to go into a bus and the fact that I lived in Hampstead and came down to the West End by tube, they thought was very lowering", she recalled (1 July 1973: n. p., AS. 29). Chase said she "ought to live in a flat which had uniformed porters and a lift. This was an order" (*ibid.*). Settle had not been born or raised in the upper classes; though one may think that her profession should have made her impervious to snobs, the word "snobbism" comes up in her notes a surprising amount of times. She used it when recalling her fight to hire Gertrude Pidoux (n. d., AS. R7), Condé Nast's tendency to date "hypocondriacs—remains of Victorian beliefs, delicacy went with breeding", or the refusal of *Vogue* staff to speak to other journalists when attending fashion openings "based no doubt on trend news leaking out?" (n. d., AS. R8). Worst of all was John McMullin, who during her editorship contributed many essays on high living and who was "the epitome of the snob supreme to me. He had no other standards but social (and so monetary) success" (*ibid.*). "Thank goodness", she sighed, "that GOURMETISM came into the snob regions", as that was one of her main interests (*ibid.*). She certainly fought to push *Vogue* in that direction, as it spread its coverage to cuisine, gardening, travel writing and urban life.

There are more accounts of her work than Elspeth Champcommunal's or Vera Meynell's, but that does not mean that there are plenty. Her diaries focused on "social activities such as lunches or dinners with advertisers and contributors, and business trips", suggesting that no line divided her social and professional life (Coser 2017: 7).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ilaria Coser's article is one of the very few scholarly studies of Settle's editorship, and the only one to consider her diaries, kept by her grandson, Charles Wakefield. While Settle did not use them to write about fashion, "every aspect of her life was conditioned by her work, and her diary is instrumental to investigate the social activities and lifestyle that *made* Settle the editor of *Vogue*" (2017: 3). They "were

As editor of *Vogue*, Settle needed, firstly, to be a *legitimate* part of the social world that *Vogue* aimed to reach. Secondly, to contribute to the *authenticity* of *Vogue*, Settle must build credibility with its customers, both readers and advertisers, via establishing authentic connections with them. Thirdly, Settle's specific role as 'cultural businesswoman' required her to accumulate the symbolic capital necessary to be successful in her professional role. (11-2)

Settle thus had to "cultivate a public persona as 'herself'", that is, a persona that was not discarded but in fact continued after business hours, presumably through the same practises that were discussed in *Vogue* (*ibid.*). Though she visited luxurious restaurants and clubs on and off the clock, she felt more at home in more bohemian spaces and was more interested in fine food and wine than in aristocratic rules of behaviour.<sup>2</sup> These entries were populated by friends, staff and society figures; some, like Beaton, were all three at once.<sup>3</sup> She had to be on the lookout for "FRESH VISUAL TALENT" and nurture relationships with her contributors, all the while running them through her American supervisors (Settle n.d., AS. R13). "Our leading names meant little or nothing to New York", she noted: "AUGUSTUS JOHN, yes, SICKERT little, GWEN JOHN no / HENRY LAMB hardky [sic] registered" (n. d., AS. R12). Indeed, only the first was published in the magazine.

Her later articles do not explain how contributors were commissioned or how economic and editorial decisions were made. Instead she wrote down the comedic highlights of her career, like Cecil Beaton chasing her across Venice when she was a mere society reporter or her befriending the imposing Helena Rubinstein under Chase's

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handwritten between 1930 and 1934, during the last part of her editorship, encompassing four and a half consecutive years and comprising over 40,000 words" (6). Her entries, Coser notes, were "very factual, avoiding almost completely deeper introspection—though Settle's focus is strictly on her own life, intimate thoughts and feelings are expressed only exceptionally and with restraint" (*ibid.*). Her interest was not in sartorial fashion, but in "gardens and flowers", "home decoration and furniture (her own and other people's), as well as food and wine" (7), proving the interests that she would bring onto *Vogue*.

<sup>2</sup> "The EIFFEL TOWER Restaurant could not compare with the Carlton, Ritz, Embassy Club but to me it was great"; the former was owned by Rudolph Stulik, "a great character", and frequented by "MATTHEW SMITH, HENRY LAMB, ABOVE ALL AUGUSTUS JOHN and his friend EPSTEIN sometimes, NINA HAMNETT, a true bohemienne, 'Naps' (LORD) ALINGTON, TALLULAH BANKHEAD, HORACE COLE" (Settle n. d., AS. R12).

<sup>3</sup> They included *Vogue* regulars like Richard Aldington, Cecil Beaton and his sisters, Madge Garland, Henrietta Malkiel Poynter and Nada Ruffer (née Gellibrand), as well as other artists, designers, journalists, society figures and writers like Michael Arlen, Mary Arnoldi, Christine Clark, Marion Dorn, Jan Juta, Derek Patmore, John Spencer-Churchill, Victor Stiebel (Coser 2017: 13-4, 22-3).



orders. Besides her journalism, there are also some handwritten notes that she meant to use for a memoir she never got to write. Unfortunately, these were written decades after the fact, hastily and in rather squiggly handwriting. Her recollections are thus incomplete and decontextualized, and hint at events and souring relationships that cannot be fully detangled. Nonetheless, they reveal that there was at least one editorial conference per issue—though it was always difficult to manage everyone’s schedules, exposed by “sheets pinned up always overlapping” (n. d., AS. R16)—and her first rocky introduction to Carmel Snow, then the fashion editor of American *Vogue*, who travelled to London and called “an editorial meeting to discuss British VOGUE – without me!” (*ibid.*).

Alison Settle’s notes reveal a shift in *Vogue*’s policy and an expansion of its lifestyle coverage that speak to the simultaneous prominence of two ostensibly opposed values: on the one hand, glamour and eccentric display, and on the other, common sense and practicality.

### 3.1. SNOBBISM

#### 3.1.1. “The Trials in a Working Life”: Alison Settle and Elizabeth Penrose

Were we to believe *Vogue*, the atmosphere in the summer of 1928—back when “Europe seemed one vast roundabout”—was exultant (September 19, 1928: 56). In truth, it was a complicated moment for the publishing industry as a whole. Though in 1929 it had a circulation of 20,000, having grown from the 9,000 of 1924, other titles were not as safe; “*Eve*, the women’s weekly that was *Vogue*’s nearest competitor in circulation and style, was absorbed by *Britannia*” that same year (Reed 2006a: 67). “If this happened to us”, Edna Woolman Chase had said of the economic crisis in the United Kingdom in the late twenties, “we would not just lie on the floor, moaning and groaning, like the

British: we would get up and DEAL with it” (Settle n.d., AS. R16). The Wall Street Crash proved her wrong.

During the economic downturn that followed Condé Nast Publications lost advertisers, especially from the luxury industries, as they “withdrew [...] or went out of business entirely” (Ronald 2019: 238).<sup>4</sup> Out of its European periodicals;

Worst hit was French *Vogue*, so to swiftly remedy the situation, Condé sent his trusted multilingual eyes and ears, Iva Patcévitch, to head up the French operations. Pat found himself in charge of more than French *Vogue* in Paris. Les Éditions Condé Nast, based on the Champs-Élysées, also owned 74 percent of *Le Jardin des Modes*; all the outstanding capital stock in Condé Nast Publications, Ltd., for the publication of *Vogue* in the British Empire; and the associated real estate in both Great Britain and France. (241-2)<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, “1929 was the year wh [sic] made me so unpopular with the parent company in New York / After all that Edna and Conde had said about the British just lying down and accepting defeat when hard financial times came, here BROGUE was, making money while AM: VOGUE was losing a fortune” (Settle n. d., AS. R17).<sup>6</sup>

Despite its financial success, British *Vogue* was closely watched from America. Alison Settle credited Frank Crowninshield, rather than Nast, with its most interesting developments, as he was the one “who read and evaluated contributions”; besides, “it was photographers and artists”—Steichen, de Meyer, Huene, Horst and Beaton—“who were the kings of the paper” (n. d., AS. R9):

HOW LITTLE OUR AMERICAN BOSSES cared for the written word: how meticulous they were over layout, type, margins and all the visual arts. VIRGINIA WOLF RAYMOND MORTIMER BOULESTIN & ALL WENT FAIRLY UNNOTICED BY Conde [sic] Nast, Edna Chase and the others from New York. Yet let

<sup>4</sup> Some of these advertisers were “picked up” by *Harper’s Bazaar* “by undercutting its advertising rates. But what few realized outside the immediate Hearst organization was that Hearst’s fortune was tied up in art and real estate holdings. Although no one dared put it into print, Hearst was strapped for cash, too. Where Condé’s debts were \$5 million, Hearst’s were over \$120 million and mounting quickly” (Ronald 2019: 241).

<sup>5</sup> German *Vogue*, launched in April 1928, was soon shut down, as in this case circulation counted for more than advertising revenue (n. d., AS. R3).

<sup>6</sup> British *Vogue* had in fact risen from “the highest losses of \$98,797 in 1923 to profits of \$67,474 in 1933” (Cox and Mowatt 2012: 75). Both Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt’s and Susan Ronald’s studies credit Harry Yoxall with this growth. The latter adds that “Yoxall’s management of the double issue with Settle had also doubled sales, and profitability had risen so much by 1932 that the publication raised its advertising rates without a murmur. The *Vogue Pattern Book* sold throughout the British Empire, in Europe, and in Egypt” (2019: 270). Yoxall, in fact, “had lent the parent company \$100,000 that year” (273).

but one number try out the slightest change of measure for, say, margins and a cable would arrive 'NOT CRITISING [sic] but kindly explain reasoning behind change of margin measurement' (n.d., AS. R14).

Her managers were not merely uninterested in modern artists, but actively rejected them, which was a source of frustration that did not ease over the years. Though she complained about Carmel Snow and John McMullin, calling them "the trials in a working life", that is not to say that Settle had no choice in her collaborators (n. d., AS. R15). She recalled that Lesley Blanch;

made herself known to me through an unsolicited article wh [sic] delighted me, telling how she tried to keep abreast with the dicta of VOGUE's fash. ed., but how difficult she found

E.g.: fox fur sczrves [sic], V announced, were now demode. She felt she must do her best to follow such guidance and so she had posted her long fox fur scarf, shoving it, bit by bit, into the mouth of the scarlet postbox outside VOGUE's door off New Bond Street (*ibid.*).

Settle was understandably charmed, and Blanch eventually became the features editor of *British Vogue*.

Though *British Vogue* had a better time in the Depression than others, it did not ignore it. It made a perfunctory attempt at arguing that hard times may be "blessings in disguise, because the acid test has been applied to our annual events" (July 9, 1930: 45). If hardship was to be the unescapable background for the festivities, then they would be described as a necessary escape, even a triumph, of high spirits.<sup>7</sup> A "cosmopolitan visitor" reported on its consequences in London and Paris:

Everything in London to-day is 'British.' Gazing in the shop-windows, one's mind is distracted from the hats and shoes by the posters of propaganda. The lions in Trafalgar Square are silhouetted against the patriotic electric sign that reads 'Buy British'; the Cheddar cheeses in shops and restaurants are bristling with tiny British flags and there are side-sows in the grocers' windows depicting Australian chickens laying 'Dominion' eggs. [...] The latest news at lunch parties, like the latest bulletins from the front during the War, described the complete 'financial ruin' of some friend or acquaintance. But the next day, that same friend or acquaintance was entertaining sixteen people at lunch [...] I have never yet seen an English communist in a white tie addressing the crowd from a soap box at Marble Arch—but I shall one day, and I make you a bet on it! [...] To

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<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, fashion journalists used the same plucky rhetoric: "Depressions, either sociological or meteorological cannot daunt the woman who has just discovered an extremely becoming and unusual combination of colours or the transforming effect of the new scarfs and bows. This should be a season of experiment for every woman, so that she not only has a smart outfit but has acquired that power of reconstructing her whole appearance with the minimum of effort that is the smartest asset of to-day" (January 20, 1932: 17).

return to these ‘ruins,’ heroes of 1932—as I said, they still keep on entertaining. Nobody has ‘grand’ food any more. (February 17, 1932: 40-1)

If London held on through ubiquitous white tie and rampant nationalism, the report from Paris revealed that the woman of fashion had “dropped elegance for chic” (42). In any case, the true impact of the Crash was a greater willingness to discuss money directly—even to the point of spelling out the budget one would need to make evening plans in the city—and to open most discussions of shopping or entertaining with an acknowledgement of the downturn.

Service to *Mesdames* was still British *Vogue*’s professed purpose, but the values that such service must uphold shifted with the change in editors, management policies and wider context. As long as it proved its success, and that it was on its terms, it was willing to acknowledge negative reception:

Vogue has been appearing in the news, and in a way that causes us to be torn between gratification that our influence should be considered so strong and dismay that it should be considered so baleful [... in a New Orleans] negro morality play [...] the devil himself was seen tempting pilgrims from the straight and narrow way. And this he achieved by offering them worldly lures, conspicuous among which were—copies of Vogue (December 13, 1933: 35).

If readers had been reminded of the importance of cultivation in the twenties, in the thirties practicality and economy seemed to gain importance. Consider this rare instance in which it addressed feedback:

One of our pleasantly vocal (or rather, epistolary) readers recently wrote to say how useful she found Vogue, what a saving of time, temper and money—just like one of our own advertisements. The Editor politely acknowledged this letter, and passed it on to our Circulation Manager, who—commercially minded fellow!—wrote suggesting that the reader in question might like us to bind her back numbers for her, at a small charge.

‘Bind them!’ she replied. ‘Good gracious, when I’ve finished with a copy of Vogue it’s all in pieces. Every idea I see for my next outfit, every thought for making something over from last season, I tear out and file away until I go shopping and until the dressmaker comes to do the little things I have made at home. (September 18, 1935: 55)

Readers were encouraged to use *Vogue* as they saw fit; to treat it as a repository of knowledge or as an object to display, or to tear it apart if they wanted, dislodging its images, sharing and circulating the information within. Regardless of its final form, *Vogue* was still a privileged observer. In fact, it claimed this role so often that in the

autumn of 1927 it added a new introductory section right after the first page, “Vogue’s-Eye View of the Mode”:

High above ‘ground floor, street level’ (five stories up to be exact) Vogue looks out over the roofs of London and sees at night the luminous aureole that hangs over the city, intensified in places by bursts of flood-lightning [...]

It’s a grand position for a bird’s eye, a Vogue’s eye view of Bond Street and all its tributary streets and squares where the English mode is born. Vogue can positively brood over the whole process, can sense the moment when an idea first rises in a designer’s brain and watch it taking lovely, original shape. (January 9, 1935: 21)

This section eventually took over the table of contents, as it had the similar function of restating the purpose of the magazine and summarising the present or upcoming issue. It had a recurring set of phrases and metaphors—“The True North of fashion is the same for every one, and, with the help of Vogue as a compass, it may be reached by a number of routes...” (May 15, 1929: 53)—that peppered not only the introduction, but also the practical features and occasional answers to correspondents regarding dress, hairstyling or weight loss.

Despite its sartorial wisdom, *Vogue* graciously deferred the power to make certain styles successful to its readers, the ultimate judges of the clothes they wore. The target reader was, as before, the modern woman, “that completely new ‘she’” who was reborn with every season (January 6, 1932: 13) and who was informed “on modern formalities—the particular conventions of the day and the hour with regard to social life, entertaining and being entertained” (*ibid.*). Its proclamations of practicality were, it turns out, somewhat half-hearted, as it always preferred playfulness to sobriety. The flexibility of mind that Dorothy Todd’s *Vogue* had identified as young and modernist was still a core value: so far, so similar to the statements of purpose of previous eras. The key change was in the tone: though in the mid-twenties it had taken the notion of heightening daily experience seriously, by the thirties this was a tired maxim, repeated with signature detachment. “Throwing away something old is often more of an improvement than acquiring something new. Ideas, for instance”, mused an introductory

note, “so prepare to jettison any of your own that you think have done their bit, and thus make room for the new” (January 11, 1933: 15). Another significant difference was that its features were more frequently tailored to specific types of readers, marked by not only gender and class but also income, profession and familial status, showing the increasing importance of the economic context.

That fashion and the visual arts were interwoven was nothing new, and *Vogue* proved uninterested in teasing out their intersections in depth. Rather than defending an avant-garde approach to all the arts, it reserved its authority for the fashion industry and did no longer attempt to cross over. As I shall show throughout this section, *Vogue* continued to scrutinise everything pleasant and expensive, balancing informative reports with satirical essays. However, more and more often it shared recipes and gave detailed instructions to shop and make oneself up: “Anything that contributes to the gaiety, the elegance, and the vitality of our swift modern world is within *Vogue*’s province. *Vogue* passes over mere vulgar novelty in favour of good taste: denies cleverness and slickness, helps elegance and discretion, and walks soberly hand in hand with the best of fashion throughout the years” (July 25, 1928: 25).

*Vogue* reinforced the transient quality of its concerns by continually associating modernity with speed and fragmentation—a connection that was, by the thirties, well-trodden. It mused on “the high-speed chameleon power of modern life, modern modes, modern London” (September 19, 1928: 37); Paul Morand wrote on “Speed – The New Vice” (July 10, 1929); Marthe Bibesco chose to name an exemplary *élégante* “The Rolls-Royce Woman” (November 12, 1930). This chain of associations, unsurprisingly, crossed over to fashion. Fashionable women outgrew their boyishness and became dynamic and “sleek; you must look as fresh as a scrubbed board; every hair must be firmly in its right and fixed place; your figure must be as trim and tapering as the lines

of a yacht; nothing about you must be indefinite or fuzzy; you must glitter and glisten with health and energy” (May 25, 1932: 61).<sup>8</sup> The decade careened into forceful sartorial statements: at its close, *Vogue* warned that; “There are newer, madder hats; louder, larger stripes; laced-up Oxford shoes for evening. Crazier and crazier goes the pace. [...] Ours is a mad mood, ours is, and a mad mode too” (February 8, 1939: 21).

Though its core values survived, there was a noticeable shift in *Vogue*’s interests during our twelve-year span, and, even more visible, in its format. The layout underwent a redesign in August 1929. The new font was soberer, the spacing wider, the titles bolder: the style was less whimsical and more readable, with a visible art deco influence. Instead of appearing in “early” and “late” bimonthly issues, from September 1927 on it was published every other Wednesday. This meant that there were twenty-six issues per year, two more than before, at the same price of one shilling. The profitable *Vogue Pattern Book* was folded into the magazine, and from October 1929 on it was published six times a year as a supplement to the magazine, with the double issue costing one shilling sixpence. Though issues became slimmer on average, around dates like Christmas and the Ascot races they tended to be thicker due to increased advertising space. The services advertised grew in variety, and products other than clothes acquired ad space before the editorial content.<sup>9</sup> It even promoted other periodicals as long as they

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<sup>8</sup> Two essays by Cecil Beaton insisted on the absolute connection between modern practices and fashions. “It is absolutely necessary for the modern Venus to behave in a modern way. The fashionable methods of speaking, sitting, crossing the legs, smoking a cigarette, and holding a cocktail glass change as much as clothes and figures” (December 12, 1928: 49); “To-day, it is essential for a woman to be bright. Nowadays, though great good looks are an advantage to begin with, unless they are backed up by intelligence and attractiveness, they will get a girl nowhere. [...] The ‘Belle’ is not a contemporary figure, for she is not amusing and has no sense of humour, without which no modern Venus is complete” (November 12, 1930: 65).

<sup>9</sup> The products advertised on 8 January 1930 were luxury items or else directly related to the fashion industry: dyes, fabrics and sewing equipment; dressmakers, hairdressers, shoemakers; furs, lingerie, perfume, silk stockings; cars, jewellery, children’s furniture; some notices of sales for good measure. By the summer of 1939, however, there was a wide range of practical products as well as all sorts of lifestyle services: linen, rayon, silks, tweeds and wools; cologne, corsets, furs, perfume, stockings and tailored coats; fashion catalogues, retailers, travel directories and international tourism campaigns; maternity wear, sanitary knickers, sun lotion, tampons, lipstick, cigarettes and a variety of slimming foods and tonics.

were not necessarily direct competition, like the new—though short-lived—weekly *Night & Day*.

Against what one might expect, the space allotted to fashion journalism did not grow much; instead, Dorothy Todd and Vera Meynell’s “highbrow” features were substituted by “lifestyle” sections, as they would be called today. The practices included under this term were, of course, also subject to fashion, and therefore reflected the smartness of the practitioner. Front matter, like a table of contents or a list of international editions, continued to blink in and out, settling somewhat in the late thirties. Though *Vogue* hardly ever published readers’ queries, it seemingly sought their feedback, suggesting an editorial effort to adjust and refine its scope during the late twenties and early thirties:

For this leaf-turning business—or page-turning, if you like—which leads the industrious reader into the various sections of *Vogue*, has one aspect to which we should like to direct your attention, just for once. Do you, as a leaf-turning reader, prefer certain pages over others, or find special satisfaction in some section of *Vogue*? If so, will you write to us giving your own personal views as a leaf-turner? (February 8, 1933: 25)

Since its beginning, it had covered subjects that would be of interest to an upper or middle class woman, able to travel and host. “From the letters we receive”, it conceded in the mid-thirties, “among readers of *Vogue* are the young bachelor women who live on their own, or in twos and threes, and do a job of work in the daytime”, who wanted advice to dress for their careers and cook on their own (January 22, 1936: 86). Even married women who did not engage in paid labour may now wonder how they could travel on their own, tip, garden or make their own cocktails, especially if they could not afford a maid.

Consequently, soon after the Crash *Vogue* announced a new section on dressing on a limited income. This was a bit of a marketing ploy, as the section already existed. Still, its revamped version was larger and more publicised. “The whole of *Vogue*’s vast and unique fashion organisation—editors, artists, photographers, designers, shoppers—



experts of every kind—will unite to present ideas, suggestions and designs that will help to make every shilling do the work of two” (March 5, 1930: 37). This section was not only practical in its aim, but also written in a straightforward tone that contrasted with the other features. There was also “Shop-Hound”, “Vogue’s own office pet, ears perpetually cocked, nose never off the scent of the new, the lovely and the rare”, who pointed at “what’s what and where to get it”, and presented shopping as a fun chase (January 9, 1935: 52). Unsurprisingly, almost every shop and department store showcased in this section was in London. By the end of the period, *Vogue* went beyond nurturing relationships with national advertisers and began to promote the British fashion industry in patriotic terms: “Never before have the London Collections been so strongly individual, so little influenced by Paris. London designers know their own minds—and know best—for Londonders” (March 22, 1939: 57). Meanwhile, the columns on hosting, cooking and gardening began to appear more regularly and with a byline, which proved their perceived importance.

Despite difficulties and transcontinental dislikes, some internal conflicts had happy endings. In 1929 Iva Patcevitch, “that charming but also brilliant financial personality”, joined Condé Nast Publications; unfortunately, that meant “losing the fashion editor of ‘Brogue’ whom I so greatly valued” (n. d., AS. R18). The editor in question was Nada Ruffer, née Nadeja Gellibrand, who had the enviable power to convert those who claimed that “people cannot look like the photographs and drawings in your paper [...] so impossibly chic” (*ibid.*). Their affair was only discovered when Harry Yoxall complained about the exorbitant phone bills of the office: “Harry accused me of constantly phoning Paris – had I a lover there? In fact, it was Nada phoning Iva, only it took time to discover this. They married – (yes, but when?)” (*ibid.*). And so in

the spring of 1934 British *Vogue* was in need of a fashion editor, and Madge Garland was asked to return. “It was a vindication on every level”, writes Lisa Cohen;

the personal satisfaction of being recognized by them; the fact that no other glossy magazine had the prestige of *Vogue* (and daily papers still did not cover fashion). Still, she bargained hard. Nast finally agreed to match her two salaries, cabling the London office from shipboard on his way back to New York: ‘Give Madge what she wants.’ She found *Vogue* a wholly different place from the magazine she had been forced out of in 1926. By 1934 many aspects of the magazine and fashion industries had been professionalized, and the alliances between editorial, manufacturing, and retail solidified. (2012: loc. 4037)

This professionalization meant that designers, “wholesale copyists and retailers” gained prestige, and were usually credited (*ibid.*). The collection openings in Paris became even more prominent, attended by retailers as well as fashion journalists. Designers were now full-fledged celebrities, as proved by *Vogue*’s interest in their doings, and fashion editors in turn became forces to be reckoned with. If in the twenties Garland’s name had been attached to Todd’s as her partner and employee, now it carried weight on its own. Though valued because of her contacts in artistic circles (loc. 4135), as fashion editor she “influenced which dresses would be mass-produced” (loc. 4054). Garland’s professional network, and therefore *Vogue*’s, expanded beyond couturiers and their most prominent clients to include department stores and commercial agents. With her “staff of seven”, she was the one who “set up *Vogue*’s photography studio”, working closely with Cecil Beaton (loc. 4064).

A significant phenomenon of this period was the manifest willingness in *Vogue*’s part to expose its internal operations, show off new developments at Condé Nast Publications and highlight the labour of its staff, especially when it served to underscore its authority.<sup>10</sup> This often coincided with the most intense moment of the year for the industry, the collection openings. “The fact is”, explained an introduction;

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<sup>10</sup> When Edna Woolman Chase received honours from the French government, Condé Nast wrote a press release in which he underscored the now proven international credentials of their project. He described her as “a powerful liaison officer between France and all other countries where civilised taste exists”, and added that “if the best aspects of French couture, illustration, photography and interior decoration have become year by year more widely known, this is due, in great measure, to her efforts [...] the

that it takes a trained observer to keep her head and know not only what's what but what's new and what's important of what's new in that colossal product of human ingenuity known as the Paris Openings. Anyone can look at a number of models and report on what they have seen, but it takes the unique fashion organisation of *Vogue*—editors, fashion experts, artists, photographers—to sift, to weed out, to select, and re-select the best of the best. (February 18, 1931: 33)

Though fashion journalists and artists remained anonymous, *Vogue* showed readers how issues were put together through photographs and detailed features. An early instance was a snapshot of “a scene in *Vogue*'s studio while posing a fashion photograph”, with a description of the attending representatives from Vionnet and an unnamed jeweller (March 18, 1931: 45). These reports were often humorous, as they revealed the less dignified aspects of the job. “I am so often asked how social news is garnered”, sighed a columnist;

that I propose to make some revelations. Quite apart from our routine work when, for instance, we lurk in the rain outside wedding receptions, disguising our note-books as best we can and trying to look like ordinary passers-by, or again when we bribe the second footman (a honest lad from the dukeries) to reveal to us the dinner table decorations and seating plan, we have also to ‘cover’—this is the very Fleet Street expression—distinguished departures from London. On that draughty Victoria platform where daily Golden Arrows are launched you may picture me hawking unwanted newspapers as a pretext for observing the travellers. (92)

By contrast, Lesley Blanch joked about her passion: “only a lowering glance from the Editor will check my enthusiasm and prevent my monopolising the next dozen pages” (February 3, 1937: 55). “Notes from a Journal of a Harassed *Vogue* Contributor”, meanwhile, detailed the routine of an anonymous fashion illustrator in a style reminiscent of the contemporary *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, with little technical detail but plenty of gleeful self-deprecation.<sup>11</sup> The piece may have been written, or at least

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cosmopolitan public, the fashion industries and *Vogue* itself are equally in Mrs. Chase's debt, for her very rare combination of expert selection, scrupulously applied, with all the elusive and intuitive elements which constitute the mind of an intelligent woman” (December 11, 1935: 39).

<sup>11</sup> She finished her drawings at 11pm, exhausted, but instead of going to sleep she decided it was “absolutely essential” to do her manicure, pluck her eyebrows and apply a face-mask “prior to attacking *Vogue*'s editorial stronghold” (April 19, 1933: 64). Midnight found her back at work, fixing her drawings, until her harried reflection sent her to bed an hour later. “Neglect to open windows allowing cool current of air to circulate. Neglect to fix mind on soothing abstractions” (*ibid.*). She clearly should have heeded those instructions, as she woke after a nightmare about her fashion plates. Rising at 9, she despaired of her hair and clothes and ruined her make-up by changing one time too many. “Decide to wear black. *Vogue* says it's unbeatable”; “Decide to go hatless like dress reformer. Realise this would gravely prejudice my chances of success. Will wear my brown” (*ibid.*). Despite running late, she got

inspired, by Lesley Blanch, as the fashion editor's smartness made the illustrator so self-conscious of her rabbit-fur accessory that she ended up stuffing it into a post-box.

Catch sight of dumpy reflection in shop window. Will-power fails. Decide to go home at once: preferably in plain van. Shall send drawings by messenger boy. Resolve never to go near Vogue again, unless wearing Summer Ermine, Sable, Blue Fox, Red Fox, Cross Fox, Clay Pack, Mud Pack, Single, Bingle, Pluck, Trim, Henna, Platinum, Tête de nègre, rouge Claire, foncée, sunset, dawn, eye black, shoe black, astringents, tissue builders, anti-wrinkle creams and... (April 19, 1933: 98)

Not even fashion insiders, it turned out, were up to *Vogue's* standards. Some readers were surely vindicated.<sup>12</sup>

As a whole, these features held up the values of *Vogue* by associating its staff and their workspaces with modern speed and detailed knowledge, alive with charming chaos. The introduction for October 30, 1935, described the meeting that had been held to plan the next issue, mentioning the fashion, beauty, and limited incomes editors, as well as a “Mentor—the Business Manager” (53). This was an important meeting, as it resulted in the increase of the price to two shillings an issue due to the addition of new colour pages. A month later came a narrative introduction in which the editor explained the contents of the upcoming issue to the publisher, who would send a bulletin for the newsagents: “‘What about the Lim. Incs.?’ from the Fetter Lane end of the wire. (‘Lim. Incs.’ is Vogue dialect for Vogue’s Portfolio of Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes. Bring out this colloquialism casually one day—and make your friends think you know your way about behind the scenes at Vogue.)” (November 27, 1935: 71).

This turn to transparency also resulted in a handful of portraits of contributors as contributors and not, as during Todd’s editorship, as celebrities who happened to

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caught up: “Study reflected self with loathing. Am repelled by warped squat appearance. Wonder if glass distorts. Acutely conscious brown ensemble looks *homely* but recollect Vogue recently pronounced it one of the season’s colours. Scan last number for confirmation” (*ibid.*). At the office, she stood “spellbound in contemplation of several faultless *élégantes* entering the building. [...] Remain rooted to the spot in recognition of the Fashion Editress” (*ibid.*).

<sup>12</sup> “Low Moments” made a similar point: “Now and then people complain that we show women only in the highest and brightest moments of their external lives. All our models, all our women, are so impeccable that they hardly seem human; and the human and peccable female derives small comfort from them, thinking, ‘Oh dear, I could never be like that’” (Melisse February 6, 1935: 60). The sketches in this feature were meant as an antidote, a friendly nod, “a sort of editorial get-together night” (*ibid.*).

contribute. “Who’s Who—of Vogue Contributors” (April 28, 1937), which showed the photographer Horst P. Horst, the cover artist Pierre Roy, the artists Vanessa Bell, Oliver Messel and Rex Whistler, and the writers and critics Seymour Leslie, Raymond Mortimer and Sacheverell Sitwell, provides an odd example. First, none but Horst were actually frequent contributors at the time; second, the notes did not clarify their manner of contribution; and third, they were the sort of highbrows that *Vogue* was moving away from in the thirties. This gallery, then, suggests that the magazine was not willing to go without the prestige of their signatures, even when they had not worked together in a long time. More understandable were the snapshots of René Bouët-Williaumez, sketchbook on his knee, working on a fashion illustration (January 10, 1934) and of the Paris fashion editor, Solange de Noailles speaking on the wireless (August 3, 1938), or the tribute to the photographer Edward Steichen on his retirement (April 13, 1938).

The ever-changing front matter was also part of this shift. From the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1929, it named the editors of all the international *Vogues*, though the list was still omitted from time to time. Even though editors and contributors were now presented as significant pieces in a successful mechanism, retrospectives only credited their past counterparts haphazardly. When Mainbocher launched his label in Paris, the article let readers know that he had been editor of *Vogue* Paris (January 7, 1931); by contrast, Elspeth Champcommunal appeared in a portrait and was called “our good friend”, but her editorship was not mentioned (January 23, 1935: 84). Similarly, an advertisement for a beauty salon relied on the support of “Mrs. Alison Settle, the well-known woman’s writer” but made no effort to connect her to *Vogue* (October 19, 1938: 93).

The introductory page for November 13, 1935, identified the editor of British *Vogue* as Elizabeth Penrose. Settle’s expulsion was perhaps not as dramatic or politically significant as Todd’s, but the events surrounding it were similarly—and

tantalisingly—opaque. Settle was fired in the autumn of 1935, “Nast et al. using tactics that, again, did not reflect well on them—indeed, that damaged their reputation in the fashion and magazine businesses in England” (Cohen 2012: loc. 4070). The problem, it seems, was her constant struggle against the tight reins held from across the Atlantic. Settle described her experience in *Vogue* as “marvellous”, “but an enclosing ‘dedicated’ life, controlled by America” (Shackleton 30 June 1960: n. p., AS. 24). In her private notes, she repeatedly mentioned a suffocating environment as well as irreconcilable differences in taste between the two sides. She was forced out through the excuse that “under American law her new contract was invalid” (Newman 1986: n. p., AS.). She could hardly credit that, and remembered it “as a humiliating experience. Even her staff were forbidden to talk to her. She stuck it out until they paid her £2,000 compensation” (1 July 1973: n. p., AS. 29). That was more than Todd ever got, and the fact that she was not compensated as a matter of course makes me suspect that, had her managers found a way to get out of it through blackmail, they would have tried to do so again. Settle moved to the coastal town of Broadstairs for a time, and she eventually continued to work in the fashion industry as an industry advisor, reporter and editor.

British *Vogue* was yet again without an editor. As mentioned in the second chapter:

[Madge Garland] lobbied hard for the job. But more than competence was at stake. Edna Chase and another manager were ‘bitterly anti-Garland on the morality issue,’ wrote Harry Yoxall in his diary. ‘Can’t see why, myself, her editorship should cause such a scandal,’ he noted, ‘when her appointment as fashion editor did not do so.’ A lesbian at the head of the magazine was not acceptable, and Condé Nast and his executives eventually chose the American Betty Penrose, whom Scott-James called ‘much more boring and solid and reliable.’ (Cohen 2012: loc. 4070)

It may be unfair to immortalise Penrose as “boring”, considering the lack of in-depth critical and biographical studies about her editorship and career. Her obituary in *The New York Times* described her as “a small-boned blonde” with “enormous” and expressive “hazel eyes” (Bender 12 January 1972: 46). She had joined American *Vogue*

in 1931 as the editor of the trade section, and her credentials included copywriting in fashion and literary advertising. She was well-known and trusted by Nast and Chase, who sent her to London in 1933, perhaps with an eye to reign the British staff in: Chase remembered her as a woman “of outstanding ability”, a job at the “several editors of varying talents” that preceded her (2018: loc. 2175).

*Vogue* often referenced the consequences of the Crash, as it affected the production and circulation of fashionable items and lifestyles, and thus reflected its socio-political climate as it had not before. As a rule, though, it continued to swerve to avoid discussing ideologies, parties or politicians in any depth. Consider this essay by Aldous Huxley on the abstract notion of “progress”:

We may remark in passing that the colossal material expansion of recent years is destined, in all probability, to be a temporary and transient phenomenon. We are rich because we are living on our capital. The coal, the oil, the nitre, the phosphates which we are so recklessly using can never be replaced. When the supplies are exhausted, men will have to do without. Our prosperity has been achieved at the expense of our children. [...] Art differs from science inasmuch as every artist, whatever the date of his birth, has to begin from the beginning, as though no artist had ever existed before him. The style of his work will be conditioned by his environment; but its intrinsic excellence will be entirely his own. [...] With regard to those activities in which knowledge is less important than natural ability, there has been no progress. [...] progress in the arts is impossible (March 21, 1928: 55, 78)

Though the codes of law and tradition had clearly evolved over time, moral problems, like artistic breakthroughs, had to be solved individually, “from the beginning, as though there had never been any moral beings before” (78). Robert Byron, by contrast, named names in an idiosyncratically snide manner:

The humour and zest of parliamentary contests have been swallowed in the bottomless pit of expanding democracy. The Comrades Mosley prate of infant welfare; the Viscountess Astor of a fettered sex. Earnest women, whose pince-nez would repulse a hangman, thunder upon the figures of derating. Athletic young men expose, instead of their bare knees, the government’s policy of disarmament, to circles of spellbound flappers. The central offices of the political parties have lost touch with English psychology. Let *Vogue* supply the deficiency. (March 20, 1929: 54)

Women’s votes, he wrote, could be won through sentimentality; though men were expected to be more serious, all genders were immediately dismissed with the statement that “the next election will be won on its looks”, including those of women door-to-door

canvassers (55). Clichés aside, it pointed out the role of showmanship in campaign and contrasted it to a perceived absence of weighty ideas: “At all costs avoid references to political issues. And remember that, for the English voter, foreigners are ridiculous and the Empire does not exist” (*ibid.*). Biographer D. J. Taylor called this piece “almost absurdly flippant” (2007: 229), and yet it was suited to the *Vogue* of this time. On the few occasions when *Vogue* featured politicians, they were usually not MPs or campaigners but royalty, hereditary peers or, from 1936 on, foreign diplomats, who were presented without discussing the grimier realities of politics.

*Vogue*’s mentions of the rise of fascist movements and military tensions across Europe reveal the same startling glibness. Throughout the early to mid-thirties, it described the political landscape as a tourist might comment on a picturesque folk festival; at best, it was a common topic in cosmopolitan conversation.<sup>13</sup> It reported that fashion was;

now getting into politics. An article in the *Popolo d’Italia*, quoted by *The Times* as presumably by Mussolini himself, gives some good advice to the Nazis, including the warning, *à propos* of a Prussian ordinance against lip stick and rouge—‘Any Power whatsoever is destined to fail before fashion. If fashion says skirts are to be short, you will not succeed in lengthening them, even with a guillotine.’ This statement by one dictator to another, acknowledging a power before which both are helpless, is of peculiar interest. (November 1, 1933: 52)

Unsurprisingly, the ramped-up martial currents of the thirties shaped fashion. “DECODED MESSAGE READS AS FOLLOWS: — SWEEPING VICTORY ON THE FASHION FRONT. DRESSMAKERS JOIN TRIUMPHAL PARADE MILITARY MODE. REGIMENTS OF SUITS MARCH THROUGH THE OPENINGS. PLUMED HELMETS DECORATE LOVELY BROWS. FORWARD MARCH WITH THE SPIRIT OF ’36” (September 4, 1935: 35), blasted a “Dispatch on the Mode” set in faux-typewriting and decorated with soldier figurines. It observed the

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Bancroft contributed an essay on the rise of astrology that, according to her, occurred “whenever the world gets topsy-turvy”, like now, “when house-painters are replacing Emperors and bandits can achieve international fame” (February 20, 1935: 76).



opposite phenomenon in millinery: “Freedom may be slipping slightly off her pedestal elsewhere in the world, but not in the quarter where hats are made. There’s no iron heel of regimentation on the milliners’ necks” (February 3, 1937: 27). The most glaringly blasé articulation of the relationship between fashion journalism and its context was “Newshirts for All Parties”, a playful feature that matched shirts to ideological affiliations (December 23, 1936).

*Vogue* turned to the royal family both for escapist solace and as a reflection on the times, as there was a flurry of royal news, some of them shocking. *Vogue* joined the celebration of George V’s Silver Jubilee in 1935 with retrospective essays on the figures, fashions and society pastimes of the Georgian era, “the opening of modern times” (Leslie May 1, 1935: 87). That summer was “exceptional, fabulous” despite the “earthquakes, economical depressions, air disasters, prospects of approaching wars and much chaos throughout the world” (Beaton August 21, 1935: 26). The king’s health declined, however, and he died in January 1936. The next issue opened with the mournful statement that it must pass;

on to subjects that must, by contrast, seem at the moment of small account. But this does not spring from thoughtlessness, nor a pre-occupation with trivialities. It is done deliberately and in the belief that this is the best, the only thing to do. Life goes on, and *Vogue*, which reflects a varied and fundamental part of life, must go on too. The continuity of English kingship is a symbol of the continuity of life, which cannot be suspended by any catastrophe. The livelihood of thousands of workers, the well-being of whole districts, depends on the activity of the fashion and printing industries. This is no time for extravagance, but it is certainly no time for thoughtless and unnecessary economy. Naturally, all people of fine feeling will follow the dictates of quiet good taste, but this no longer implies, except for those closely connected with the Royal Family, an ostentatious change from our normal activities. (February 5, 1936: 21)

The abdication crisis was formalised in December of that year; George VI was crowned in May 1937 and the Duke of Windsor, who would have been king—and who *Vogue* had praised as a leader of modern social life—was married to Wallis Simpson the following month. *Vogue*’s society journalism was unfailingly flattering, and so it did not cover the crisis and Simpson’s divorce at all. Instead, it focused only on the ceremonial

ending, reporting on the rehearsals for the coronation and the education of the new princesses and proposing whimsical designs for them to wear. The coronation itself was marked with a special issue, which included the new king's portrait in luxurious golden paper, an essay by Sacheverell Sitwell, domestic sketches of the new Royal Family by Rex Whistler and photographic spreads populated by flags, royal guards and bulldogs. Readers were invited to celebrate the occasion at home by hosting "Coronation Gaieties" and, as always, to reminisce about days past—with essays by old favourites Seymour Leslie and Raymond Mortimer—and to consider the possibilities of a new epoch. The "plumes and pomp, miniver and magnificence, diamonds and cloth of gold" of that season meant a return to elegance, which was in this case opposed to glamour, and associated with the aristocracy: "these things are becoming rare enough in a world coloured mainly by proletariat mufti and Hollywood make-believe" (May 12, 1937: 73). In contrast to the gregarious and notorious Duke and Duchess of Windsor, *Vogue* underscored the new monarch's natural and graceful manners and lack of affectation.

By the late thirties, the sombre socio-political circumstances began to alter the very structure of the magazine:

When the Munich Pact was signed in November 1938, British *Vogue*, like other businesses, began preparing for war: provisioning itself with fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and gas masks; determining the chain of command in the event that staff members were killed; carrying out air raid drills. There was the threat of bombing, and for a time it was unclear whether it would be possible to conduct nonessential businesses such as *Vogue* if England were under attack. Facing confusion at home and the New York office's failure to understand their situation, the editorial board in London decided to continue publishing provisionally, at least 'until we see some daylight in the fog of war.' (Cohen 2012: loc. 4098)

Talk of war took over the first half of 1939, with a spotlight on "Women's Work for National Defence" (February 8, 1939) and the painful acknowledgement that "between each successive Hitler-Mussolini bogey-bogey turn we may well seek distraction where we may find it", but only the young or the callous could "find much real distraction in the general world of whoopee just now" (May 3, 1939: 45). Once war was declared on

the September 3, 1939, “food rationing and price restrictions were instituted, paper rationing was imminent, London was under blackout, and friends and colleagues on the *Vogue* staff were killed in the accidents resulting from the completely dark nights” (Cohen 2012: loc. 4106). Soon *Vogue* announced its reduction into a monthly:

in accordance with the Government wish that business should carry on so far as possible [...] It will incorporate *Vogue Pattern Book*, *Vogue Beauty Book* and *Vogue House and Garden Book*. [...] *Vogue* promises you a practical and useful magazine. It will show you how to make shillings to the work of pounds in dress and personal grooming, household management, cooking and gardening. But *Vogue*, in features and format, will continue to be *Vogue*—charming and civilized, a tonic to the eye and to the spirit—more indispensable than ever. Wartime conditions and transport problems make it impossible for magazines to be available, as before, for the casual reader to pick up wherever she pleases. The only way in which you can be certain of getting your *Vogue* regularly is by placing a standing order with your newsagent. (September 20, 1939: 8)

Looking back to the Great War, *Vogue* stated it would carry on as it had then, as a service to its readers (23). There were features on emergency meals, descriptions of the restrained atmosphere across the Channel, inspiring portraits of the king in military garb and retrospectives on the fashions of the last war. Garland, a pacifist, “first refused to attend air raid drills with the rest of the British *Vogue* staff”, and that same month Yoxall placed her “low in the table of succession for the acting editorship” (11 October 1939 in Cohen 2012: loc. 4121). The demotion soon turned into a dismissal:

In late December 1939, he fired her, largely at Penrose’s insistence. ‘It was a beastly job,’ Yoxall wrote in his diary, adding that ‘Madge took it well.’ Penrose set down her desire ‘to get rid of Madge’ in a scathing, thirteen-page, single-spaced document detailing Madge’s flaws, among them her ‘fundamentally artificial approach to life’; her poor ‘capacity for executive work’; her ‘lack of clarity of thought’ and of a ‘journalistic instinct’; her ‘uneven ... taste with its distinct leaning toward the chi chi’ and its absence of ‘what one might call for lack of a better word “breeding”—it has no sympathy with the traditions of elegance and conservatism.’ (Cohen 2012: loc. 4128)

Penrose’s own time at British *Vogue* was ended by the war, which prevented her from returning to London from New York in the summer of 1940. She stayed at Condé Nast Publications, first as associate managing editor of American *Vogue* and from March 1941 to 1954 as the editor of *Glamour*.

### 3.1.2. “A Delicious Sound to Our Modern Ears”: *Bright Young Vogue*

Fashion, after all, functions on perpetual renewal; it is no surprise that youth carried positive associations. As seen in the previous chapter, the *Vogue* of the early twenties had entangled youth and modernity by emphasising boyish styles and promoting the “younger generation of writers”, even when said writers were not precisely young. In the late twenties, however, the very notion of modern youth was incarnated in an upper class set, whose escapades “could be tracked all over” the society columns of the time and whose “trends and fads” were imitated by “the acolytes who followed in their wake” (Taylor 2007: 19). The Bright Young People included *Vogue* contributors Cecil Beaton, Robert Byron, Nancy Mitford, Eleanor Smith and Stephen Tennant, as well as recurring characters such as the actress Tallulah Bankhead, the socialites Baba d’Erlanger, Paula Gellibrand—sister of fashion editor Nada Ruffer—and Zita Jungman or the artists Oliver Messel and Rex Whistler. Though were based in London, they often retreated to “country houses or stately homes where the presence of weekending sons and daughters and their friends was guaranteed to shake up the rural torpor” (67). Calling the Bright Young People a distinct group, however, is to simplify the phenomenon: D. J. Taylor notes “periodic shifts of emphasis as different sets and subsets move in and out of the limelight” (19). Despite their distinct leisure and aesthetic practices, they were never a self-defined group, and much less a community with a shared program or ideology.

Rather, the Bright Young People were a “recognisable social phenomenon”, to use Taylor’s phrasing, understood by contemporaries to speak not only of themselves but of their zeitgeist, the doings of a few blown up to characterise the many (103). From their position at the heart of the British Empire, and from the privilege and prestige granted by their social class and ethnicity, these children of aristocrats, diplomats and

artists turned leisure practices into artistic production or, at least, into notoriety they could capitalise on. They were united not by “a shared political or social outlook or an economic standing but what Patrick Balfour called ‘a community of impulse’” (31). It was Beaton, Taylor argues, “who gave coherence to what had for the first two or three years of its existence been no more than a rather slapdash collection of personalities and parties. Caught in the wash of these individual trajectories, the movement had begun to enter a new phase” of press attention, in which Beaton’s snapshots, caricatures and society notes played a key role (62).

The days of the Bright Young People would be remembered as “a ‘wild party’ which lasted as long as their money did”; they “drove their cars around at high speed, when under the influence of drink, in the hope, if there was a smash, that the case would be reported in the Sunday newspapers. Publicity was the drug for which they chiefly craved” (Goldring 1935: 266-7 in Lucas 1997: 2). There was cocaine too, which, further reinforced their association with “arid hedonism” (Lucas 1997: 113). Among the wider public:

They were seen as another symptom of what was considered to be the moral dissolution of the post-war era, a time of increasingly open promiscuity, of both the homosexual and the heterosexual variety, and of a rising divorce rate. In their subversive defiance of authority the Bright Young People rejected the seriousness and obligations of adulthood. They adopted a pose of decadent infantilism embracing everything that was childish and hedonistic. They took superficiality seriously (Thomasson 2015: 91)

Their speech was particularly recognisable, marked by “inflated, explosive, idiomatic vocabulary”, as their “conversation leapt to a superlative, exclamatory pitch, anything and everything was ‘too divine’, ‘ghastly’ or ‘shame-making’. When not affecting boredom, they howled, screamed and shrieked with laughter”; in fact, Anna Thomasson associates their stylistic presentation with camp (*ibid.*). Perhaps surprisingly, their sartorial style did not rouse much interest in *Vogue*. It was their speech patterns and high-profile stunts that made them familiar to the reading public, resulting in the

stereotype of the “Bright Young Thing”—notice the last noun. The phrase was “variously employed as a means of identification, an archetype [...] and as an advertising tool designed to reach anyone between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five” (Taylor 2007: 17). In a startlingly short time, the Bright Young Thing was a stock character in novels, advertisements and, of course, satire.

Very soon the Bright Young People grew up, settled or bolted, and “the group’s alignment underwent a substantial shift, became at once more exclusive and more ‘artistic’, more image-conscious and more disparaged” (124). Some became well-known writers and artists, though in early in their careers their fame still depended—even more than other authors’—on mutual promotion. Aspiring writers who were not as well off, like Robert Byron and Brian Howard, “lined up an impressive gallery of Bright Young sponsors, keen to offer advice, introductions and publicity” (140). By contrast, their collective escapades dried up. Frances Partridge, then Marshall, wrote down her impressions of the Hermaphrodite Party, hosted by Edward Gathorne-Hardy and friends in April 1930: “all the creative energy of the participants goes on their dress, and there is none of the elaborate performance of earlier parties. Personally I think this is a sad come-down, a sign of decadence” (1981: 178 in Taylor 2007: 166).<sup>14</sup> That same year Evelyn Waugh satirised his milieu in *Vile Bodies*, which, surprisingly, was not reviewed in *Vogue*. All in all, the phenomenon only lasted until the early thirties. Taylor suggests different events as its death knell, as well as different stacked explanations: Elizabeth Ponsonby’s fall from grace, the divorce of Diana and Bryan Guinness and Elvira Barney’s trial and acquittal for the murder of her lover Scott Stephen, all in 1932. As

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<sup>14</sup> Frances Marshall (1900-2004), a translator and writer best-known for her diaries, was the sister of Rachel “Ray” Garnett and thus sister-in-law of David Garnett, an important *Vogue* connection. In the early twenties she worked at the Garnett & Birrell bookshop; there she met Hogarth Press employee Ralph Partridge, whom she would later marry.

the decade progressed, they became mythological creatures, symbols of an era of adventurous sophistication gone by.

At their height, though, interest from the press meant that;

The Bright Young People phenomenon offered almost limitless opportunities for social and professional advancement. In nearly every line of sophisticated employment – the arts, upmarket interior decorating, the fledgling BBC – influential sponsors stood by, happy to pipe the specimen Bright Young Person on board. Everywhere one looked, it seemed – in newspaper gossip columns, in publishers’ offices, in the ante-rooms of great hostesses – there were other Bright Young People to hand, ready to wave the neophyte on his way with an approving paragraph, a contract or an invitation. In an environment where the younger generation was ‘news’ merely for being itself, Bright Young writers and artists broke into print and on to gallery walls with almost indecent haste. (147)

*Vogue* provided an ideal platform, as it outright ignored their most outrageous escapades and seediest practices in order to highlight their stylistic experiments, such as the costume parties and staged country retreat. It is necessary to remember that the Bright Young People had not been alone in partying. As Georgina Howell puts it, “this was the heyday of hostesses”, of bizarre encounters at nightclubs and costume parties (1978: 66). As illustrated in *Vogue*’s portraits and society columns, “society in the twenties was large enough to be heterogeneous and international, but small enough for the prime figures to be well known to readers of gossip columns. It was a clever, amusing, worldly set at best, greatly improved by overlapping with the theatre and the new rich” (67). The Bright Young People, often born to celebrity, fit right in, and brought youth and sheen, as well as a harder—if perhaps brittle—sophisticated edge.

The first references to the set appeared, in fact, as early as Dorothy Todd’s editorship. A theatre review, “Flapper Love”, had an illustration in which a young man serenaded a flapper—armed with a cocktail shaker—with his ukulele: “These are the Bright Young People who object so much to the Bright Old People. If they had their way, no one over forty would be allowed a cocktail, no one over thirty a Night Club, no one over twenty a latchkey or a love affair” (late June 1925: 75). The phrase, it is clear, already referred not to specific people but to a generational perspective, with the shaker

and ukulele as further identifiers. Nonetheless, despite some references like this one, *Vogue* hardly ever referred to the original set by that name, and instead featured them as individuals or as friends without confirming that they were *the* Bright Young People. Again, *Vogue* was unwilling to attract salacious curiosity, preferring to highlight their artistic output and sense of aesthetics as far as they suited the magazine's values:

the agenda of the magazine was closely aligned with the iconoclastic sensibilities of the group and its emphasis on youthfulness, originality and subverting conventions [...] What was required, the magazine suggested, was a youthful mental elasticity. Identity and, it implied, sexuality, were equally transient and unfixed. Androgyny became the ideal and with it, dress, gender and ultimately life became a performance, played out in the gossip columns. Exaggeration, artificiality, affectation, superficiality, humour, idiosyncrasy, frivolity, masquerade, theatricality, all associated with the sensibility that was later defined as camp, were the order of the day. And their style was not just confined to dress but applied to literature, ideas, art and design. It was a way of life. (Thomasson 2015: 92-3)

The Bright Young People and the literary highbrows met in many occasions; for instance, among Beaton's first successes were his portraits of the Sitwells. *Vogue's* interest in this set, then, should not be read as a disavowal of modernism but as a continuation of its search of the amusing in art, fashion and social life.

Alison Settle's notes do not record her first meetings with her regular staff, like secretary and beauty editor Anne Scott-James and sub-editor Audrey Withers, but with celebrities and socialites. Though, as she put it, at this time "VOGUE was caught up between the original belief that the taste of 'the fashionables' – i. e. the much publicised women – dictated success for fashion, and the newer way of thinking that what trade wanted would win" (n. d., AS. R34), she continued to chase the former. "SOCIALITES = yes, but which?" she wondered, acknowledging that "as I dealt with women by day most of my social afterhours were in masculine company" (n. d., AS. R36). Among these society leaders and high-profile designers were the likes of Wallis Simpson, Elsie de Wolfe and her husband, Syrie Maugham, Jacques Worth and his wife, who was born a Cartier from the jeweller dynasty (n. d., AS. R40). Chase ordered her to "make great friends with Helena Rubinstein, who took double-page advertisements. We went out to



lunch together and I was terrified” (24 June 1973: 27, AS. 29). She was successful, however, just as she was in befriending the couturiere Elsa Schiaparelli and the florist Constance Spry, who became a frequent contributor to the magazine (1 July 1973: n. p., AS. 29). She also met artists; the composer William Walton and the sculptor Thomas Earp, “who (him or Augustus John) handed an article at night to Aldwych House to the surprise of the porter” (n. d., AS. R23). The poet and aristocrat Evan Morgan introduced her to Edith Sitwell in a “diningroom [sic] with malachite walls / I am unnerved! / She arrives in a long silvery dress and Evan presses into her arms a silvertied sheaf o lilies”; her awe was soon dispelled, however, when Sitwell told her about her housemaid’s abscessed tooth (n. d., AS. R36). Beaton served as the ambassador of his set in *Vogue*, but he also captured the older generation, which puts in question the supposed divide between the two. Though these names suggest a network that was more aristocratic and perhaps older than Dorothy Todd’s—Lisa Cohen notes Beaton’s discomfort at Settle, under Chase, “trying to make the magazine like a woman’s pictorial” (31 October 1926 in 2012: loc. 3824)—but it is not entirely dissimilar. Even in the thirties, “prestige not money should be the criterion” driving *Vogue* (Settle n. d., AS. R23).

Despite the prominence of fashion and society illustration, often from Beaton or Eric’s whimsical hands, photography gained ground. Staged in glamorous environments, fashion shoots were dramatic, suggesting characters at play. And just as fashion journalism grew in prominence and visibility, so did the women, professional mannequins but especially society ladies, who wore the clothes. The latter were shown attending dress shows or at fittings, speaking to the shift to a “behind the scenes” approach. By contrast, the formal portraits of aristocrats were replaced by fashion-oriented shoots, and it was increasingly clear that the former—save a fashionable handful—had mostly lost their appeal to film stars. Overall, *Vogue*’s cast of characters

had changed, its eye caught by the younger generation of up-and-coming writers, artists and debutantes turned society columnists. Guest editorials and highbrow signatures, meanwhile, all but disappeared.

Cecil Beaton was second only to theatre critic Herbert Farjeon in amount of contributions to Settle's *Vogue*—and this is not counting his sketches and photographs. Making his way towards the vantage point at the cross-section between high society and highbrow artists, he was both representative and commentator of the younger generation. His sisters, who were his earliest models, became a recurring sight in *Vogue*'s society pages: Nancy appeared in six formal portraits, Baba in three. Through his descriptions and snapshots, Beaton could both position himself as an arbiter of fashion and present his friends as artists worthy of the readers' interest. His “amusing and decorative portrait of a group of ‘Intelligent Young People’” (November 2, 1927: 57) showed Beaton, Zita Jungman, Rosamond Lehmann, Edward Sackville-West, Georgia, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, Stephen Tennant and Elinor Wylie lying on a rug, their bodies in a careless upside-down pile and covered in what looked like a leopard pelt. It may well be a statement of purpose: here he was an insider, and, by extension, so was *Vogue*. He was the ultimate insider at his own Ashcombe House. It was a space for creation and leisure, but he also shaped it into proof of his artistry. It appeared in *Vogue* textually—he described it in an essay (March 16, 1932)—as well as in many pictures of his picnics and parties, providing one of the most significant backgrounds of this period. His articles discussed every possible way one could express one's sophistication, from weddings to Christmas cards; he wrote about his journeys to Paris and Palm Beach and reported on the party styles of ladies and actresses. In his reporting, he often chose to write as an observer who had access to classified information rather than as an active participant:

The London Season hasn't changed materially in anyone's lifetime. It has survived the fall of three empires and the rise of the proletariat. [...] It is now that I learn for the first time that rebellion is seething among the *débutantes*, that many foolish girls, their heads turned by subversive propaganda, have flatly refused to be presented, stating that it is a complete waste of time and effort—an anachronism, in fact. By some means the dreadful news is kept out of the papers, but more than one well-known family is having secret trouble of this kind. (April 29, 1931: 53-4)

Other Bright Young People, like Robert Byron, Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh, contributed to *Vogue* on quite a few occasions. Byron had worked towards it since Todd's editorship, relying on Elizabeth Ponsonby—the sister of a friend—as she went to the editor's parties (Taylor 2007: 153). He eventually got an essay published on June 13, 1928, the first of eight travel and society pieces that appeared over two years. According to Taylor, Byron was “a pattern demonstration of his circle's ability to combine a thoroughgoing seriousness in one's intellectual pursuits with an incurably frivolous social life” (*ibid.*); in his case, as in many of his friends', “the baggage of his social life was always liable to spill over into consideration of his ‘serious’ work, to the point where the latter would seem to be compromised by the former” (154). Waugh's contributions were sporadic and more varied: there were a couple of review columns in 1928 and 1929, immediately after his success with *Decline and Fall*, and a couple of essays on travelling and high society in 1934 and 1938, mirroring his venturing into travel writing and his continuing presence in elite circles. As for Mitford, by the time she contributed her first piece she had already published the novel *Highland Fling* and could be introduced as “one of the wittiest young members of contemporary society” (November 25, 1931: 53). Her first essay was described as both “frivolous” and shrewd, which suited her writing and her persona, and which *Vogue* could gladly apply to itself (*ibid.*). Filled with observations on society types and written with glib humour, it would certainly have felt familiar to regular readers. Another of her pieces advised on ideal-stocking fillers to satisfy guests of different ages, listing an assortment of humorous objects rather than the usual cultural signifiers.

The contents of the stocking will vary with age and sex, but should be, roughly, as follows: A ball of string, a packet of safety pins, a golden sovereign, a chocolate baby, a paper book of funny stories, a French china ornament of the more questionable variety, a packet of Lucky Strikes, a banana, a whistle, Old Moore's Almanack, a bandana handkerchief, a lipstick and an apple (for the toe) (December 9, 1931: 37).

Boxing Day, as she put it, was every hostess's worst nightmare: "Her only hope will be to ensure, by sending to each bedroom a fresh hot-water bottle, a tasteful breakfast tray and a detective novel, that all the guests shall stay in bed till luncheon time" (*ibid.*). This was hardly fashionable reading, but a wink to a shared experience.

The strategy at work in *Vogue's* society columns was the same that had been used to stake a claim to the Bloomsbury group: celebrities were treated as acquaintances, with *Vogue* as the go-between. "Someone ought to publish a Guide to London's Sets", sighed a reporter;

I drank some super-charged Calvados in the Café Royal with Robert Byron and 'Johnnie' Churchill, who paints better than his uncle Winston, and whose rebellion against the parental office in the City has been almost as much argued among The Young as the pamphlet hurled by a well-known young woman in Paris at her even better-known mother in London.<sup>15</sup> And almost any evening I would expect to see at Rules', eating bacon and eggs after the cinema, a little group including Evelyn Waugh, Francis Rodd and his brother 'Taffy,' Simon Elwes and his wife, and Lady Ian Malcolm's sons Victor and Angus. [...] 'Peter' Baxendale's Circus Party, which turned out to be a viewing of her clever circus drawings, some of which appeared in a recent *Vogue*, brought together a pleasant company (February 3, 1932: 68)

The way in which these columns explained the doings of the young suggests that they were aimed at an older generation. In fact, they sometimes shared the vaguely condescending perspective of the chaperones:

For the sake of husbandly careers we have been to fifty-seven political parties, have flirted with a hundred and twenty-three financial geniuses and turned ears as attentive as they are beautiful to two hundred and seventy-two identical stories of interesting experiences [...] At what are technically known as young people's parties we have kept a benevolent but discreetly inattentive eye on our débutante cousin. We have only allowed her to dance with young men who are heirs to dukedoms, breweries, newspapers, gold-mines, or small but very perfect Palladian houses. We have helped her and her little friends (who are, we must confess, an even handsomer generation than we of the treasure-hunting and Diaghileff days) to wear out the parquets of houses in Belgrave, Eaton, Berkeley, Grosvenor, St. James's, Audley and Montagu Squares. (July 11, 1934: 48)

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<sup>15</sup> The pamphlet in question was Nancy Cunard's *Black Man and White Ladyship*, which, besides being sent to her mother and her circle, was also published in *The Crisis* in September 1931.

But there was more to the temporal structure of fashionable life than work and leisure. Time passed in two parallel streams, equally important to *Vogue's* journalism: there was the fashion year, which began with the collection openings each autumn, and the social year, brought about by the Season, when aristocrats and other worthies moved to the capital to attend festivities.

Empires may fall and crowns may totter, in the sacred name of Progress many atrocities may be perpetrated. Here in England, our loveliest houses, like duchesses beneath the revolutionaries' axe, pay their tribute to a glorious new era when all shall live in cardboard flats, eat the same food, use the same lift and be far removed from such reactionary influences as babies, dogs, or the sight of a green leaf. Social customs, religious practices, attitudes of mind, fashions, taste and conversation, all change prodigiously from decade to decade, but one thing, it seems, will go on forever—the London Season. [...] As everybody knows, the whole *raison d'être* of the London Season is the launching into society of about a hundred and fifty young ladies; and it is around these beautiful and accomplished creatures, destined no doubt to become the wives and mothers (or sisters and maiden aunts) of our most notable men, that the whole machine revolves. (Mitford May 27, 1936: 74)

The London Season brought to life the customs and practices that *Vogue* held up, and so every May of the interwar period was marked with at least one such statement. As Cecil Beaton described it;

For three months London is a whirl of elaborate festivities, huge caterers' vans are stationed outside grey-stone family mansions, emitting tubs of ramble roses, barrels of ice cream, and little gilt chairs; red carpets are unrolled, Bond Street is jammed with enormous limousines containing yawning beauties, the air is thick with blue petrol smoke and perfume; débutantes, surrounded by excited relations, school-friends and servants, are standing self-consciously on sheets in front of their dressing table, being admired while their train and feathers are affixed. Photographers work overtime retouching the society negatives, cutting little lumps off here and there, erasing shadows and wrinkles; brides are quivering and smiling; hairdressers are waving permanently, and a lovely scent of toasted wet hair is wafted from the heated tongs; the social announcements in *The Times* are scrutinised carefully by all and sundry; dress-makers have tightly clenched lips full of pins; first-night audiences are said to be more and more 'brilliant.' As the season advances charity balls with 'alluring' attractions are planned to materialise almost nightly at Claridges with the same old people perpetually present. [...] And in 1939, 1949 and in 1999 Lady ---- will still request the pleasure and be at home from time to time, and on January 1<sup>st</sup> Lady ---- will write 'Lady ---- presents her compliments to the Lord Chamberlain and begs to have the honour of presenting her daughter at one of the forthcoming June courts.' (May 1, 1929: 40-1)

He was wrong, though; courtly debuts ended in the fifties, and the Season as it was dissolved, leaving only the regattas, races, and the same old handful of surnames.

Though the *débutantes* were the fulcrum of the Season and, in some cases, were society reporters themselves, *Vogue* did not usually address them directly.<sup>16</sup> Instead, it described their glittering public life to those left outside because of their class or age, noting that “one usually reads about” *débutantes* “in faded weeklies at the dentist’s in October” (May 17, 1933: 53). “Data for Debs” went into a surprising amount of detail, considering *Vogue*’s usual reluctance to consider the less tasteful types of capital: lacking someone to introduce a young woman at court, “it is possible to ‘arrange’ a presentation (for a consideration, of course) but this practice is very much frowned on, and in deference to Court feelings, recourse is usually had to the primitive (but less crude) method of payment in kind rather than payment by cheque” (February 8, 1939: 23). Even after one had ensured an entry, there were serious costs to face:

The Press will be asking for photographs; so at the beginning of the season a *débutante* should go, if possible, to more than one photographer, choosing those whose style seems specially suited to her type. Clothes, coiffure and make-up chosen for her sitting, should be simple but excellent. The photographs will cost about twelve to twenty guineas a dozen. [...] A ‘dance’ may mean anything from a dinner-dance at the Berkeley for thirty people at £2 a head, to a ball for 600 people at 30s. a head. A wardrobe may cost anything from £150 to £1,000; the Season’s entertaining anything from £800 to £8,000. [...] £150 is probably the minimum on which the *débutante* can be dressed for the season. The most expensive item will be the court dress (23, 74-5)

Nancy Mitford argued that the “highly artificial world” these young women were “plunged into” was “no more like the real world which grown-up people live in than a public school is” (May 27, 1936: 74); not a “marriage market”, but “a musical-comedy world of their own” (126). Though according to Beaton they were easily impressed even after their unstylish schooling (during which they read “the *School Girls’ Own Magazine* and Angela Brazil boarding-school stories”, attended dancing

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<sup>16</sup> A fun exception was Virginia Graham’s advice, which gave a youthful edge to *Vogue*’s favourite attitudes: “Always have breakfast in bed, and make your mother do all your telephoning [...] After all, what is she there for, anyway? She probably enjoys it, anyhow. [...] Never be thrilled. Conceal enthusiasm as you would the plague. Otherwise you will look girlish, which is pathetic, if not actually shameful. Assume an attitude of nonchalant disdain, and you will earn the respect of your contemporaries, and the envy and admiration of your juniors” (June 10, 1936: 74). And when Mother turns her back: “go to a nightclub. When you return two hours later, she will be back by the band, quite unaware of your activities, or indeed, poor soul, of anything”; finally, “[m]ake loud defamatory remarks about the dance, the people and the supper, but stay, of course, until the end” (122).

lessons and musical matinées) and a Continental finish (April 27, 1932: 46), as the thirties went on they were said to have become more sophisticated. Time and again these columns brought up a generational change in values; unsurprising, given that “all our débutantes were born during the War” (May 31, 1933: 81). Small shifts, they said, were noticeable even from year to year: for instance, 1932 was announced as “the year of the Working Débutante”, as “most of the girls are thinking of careers” (March 30, 1932: 61). Unlike the giddy wide-eyed girls of previous generations, the débutantes of the thirties had received some type of formal education and entered high society with accomplishments and formed opinions, friendships and rivalries. They were;

all steered for sophistication. What other point, they will ask, can there be in growing up at all? They were expecting something very different from the posed and poised intricacies awaiting them. [...] They were full of preconceived ideas as to their sleek, severe future. They were expecting to wear tight black evening dresses, moulded at the hips, departing in fish-trains behind. They were hoping to swagger contentedly in a series of straight lines. They were determined upon the cigarette-holder, the cropped and burnished hair. And instead they are walking into a world of such elaborate artifice, of such studied effect, such unmodern design, that it is possible even the mildest swear-word will be denied them. (Frankau April 17, 1935: 63)

In contrast to schoolgirls’ stories, these débutantes were assumed to keep sports trophies, framed prints and “the Anthology of Modern Verse” in their rooms (65). As they enjoyed a few Seasons, they were expected to grow into their confidence: “So the modern débutante floats, important and beautiful, through her first season; her friends are lucky if she has not published a novel by the beginning of her second, and she enters upon her third with the finished aplomb which her mother took ten years of married life to acquire” (Mitford April 30, 1930: 37).

*Vogue* knew them well enough to highlight individual débutantes like Priscilla Weigall, “a fine squash player, a good dancer and a writer of stories”, and Karen Harris, “a very clever poet who studies seriously at the Slade” (March 30, 1932: 61). *Vogue* relied on young women of their set for their insight on society events and personalities, though this type of reporting was usually anonymous. Gillian Hansard’s essay “A

Young Girl Looks at Life” was an exception: Hansard was seventeen, just returned from school in France and entering society for the first time, though she had already published book reviews. Writing as if to a friend, she explained:

I am never in bed until one, work all day and find a few scattered seconds to go ‘jerst crazy’ over Cézanne and Gauguin at the Tate. [...] Our parents as a generation have certainly prepared unpleasant comings-of-age for us, crashes and crises and conferences and horrors of that kind. But surely those are the unfortunately inevitable progress of our civilisation and not fundamentally their own faults? [...] The conversation of a French schoolgirl is usually far more enlightening than that of an English girl when the subject is literature or maths., but if she is speaking of her own ideas on less intellectual matters, the English girl shows more imagination, and is therefore more novel as a person. (November 1, 1933: 76, 102)

These young women were commended for their combination of practicality, interest in the arts and whimsy. Such qualities were near the “smartness” that *Vogue* had praised after the war, with one key difference: matters of economy, politics and professions could now be openly discussed.

The Season turned after the Royal Ascot race, traditionally held in June. Before, it was “youthful, pretty and rather ingenuous”; after, “commencing, sophisticated and critical—even at moments a little bored” (June 24, 1931: 51). *Vogue* honoured this event with themed issues in which society figures looked nostalgically upon the Seasons of their youth, holding up British aristocratic life as essentially unchanging beyond its sartorial veneer: nature running its course. This does not mean that Ascot was unquestionable. Though the presence of the royal family brought out the most pompous writing in *Vogue*, Pamela Frankau acknowledged that “of all our seasonable institutions, Ascot is the oddest. [...] Admittedly this is a Royal occasion; an occasion for champagne, strawberries and snob-stuff” (May 26, 1937: 79). The parties continued well into the summer. “Personally”, reflected an anonymous reporter;

I love the silly season, the sampling of five cocktail parties in one (late) afternoon, the last moment chuckings, the unexpected invitations (at short notice). And the joyous informality of August London when one does the things one has ‘been meaning to’—the clever variety at the Leicester Square Theatre, the revived Café Royal, yes, even the films which have been rather dull this summer. And books! One does not read them, of course, but one talks about them (August 9, 1933: 31)



After that, the social calendar dictated a country or international holiday, perhaps inspired by *Vogue*'s travel features.

Besides the new fashion year, with autumn arrived the more highbrow, less structured "Little Season": "No one can explain why society becomes very cultivated every autumn and smart women spend hours at concerts who can't be induced to hear music at other seasons" (October 4, 1933: 76). There was the theatre, and gallery openings too, and, in contrast, the Olympia Motor Show: if right after the war *Vogue* had seen in cars the sleekness and independence of modern smart women, by the late thirties it sent reluctant reporters for comedy's sake:

The Editor of *Vogue* suggested to me that I should 'do' the Motor Show—though it is not 'my cup of tea'—for I CANNOT STAND MACHINES! I am not being coquettish about this—I simply don't understand them. My 'anti-talent' and a classical education mean that if I am confronted with a motor-car I pass through the whole gamut of suffering—I feel awkward, I blush, and worst of all, I try to assume an air of understanding (October 14, 1936: 84)

And then it was Christmas, taken up by "a multitude of parties, private ones, public ones, luncheons, children's, cocktailings, pay-parties (nasty hybrid affairs these), grand dress-up ones and, almost extinct, bohemian orgies. The smarter the noisier" (December 27, 1933: 31). It is significant that *Vogue* associated hedonistic excess with bohemianism, and, even more importantly, confirmed them dead. After all, though Bloomsbury had certainly influenced the trendiness of "grand dress-up" parties, *Vogue* had never quite peered into this manifestation of their art. After the Christmas glow, though, winter was a quiet period. "A few 'cocktails' and receptions with a 'music' or small dance now and then do not make a Little Season no matter what journalists may write in the early hours for our amusement at breakfast" (February 17, 1932: 47). *Vogue* thus acknowledged its role in puffing up these events, to some degree at least, and so it wouldn't be a large leap to infer that it was also pushing the notoriety of some of the Bright Young People through its society reporting, even if it kept its gossip respectable.

Come spring, of course, the social year could commence anew. As a herald put it: “The Merry-Go-Round Goes Round Again” (May 11, 1938).

Though *Vogue* presumably canted forward, towards progress and novelty, it simultaneously looked to a rose-tinted past—whether searching for historical references in contemporary trends or rhapsodising about by-gone beauties—and invariably associated it with romance and sentimentality. The British edition celebrated quite a few anniversaries in the thirties: its fifteenth birthday in 1931, its nineteenth in 1935, and its twenty-first in 1937. As always, anniversary issues provided an excuse to revise past fashions and reflect on the changes in the lives of upper and middle class women in society, as well as within the magazine itself, always with a pleasantly nostalgic filter.

“Do you remember those distant days of 1916?”, it asked; “The war had been on for two years and all *Vogue*’s sister débutantes were smart young W.R.A.F.’s and W.R.E.N.’s and V.A.D.’s. [...] Remembering is always a scoring game. [...] The clothes we wore then seem poignantly strange to the 1931 mind” (August 19, 1931: 17). Plenty of its staff had been born in the eighteen-nineties, so—if they had the social credentials—they would indeed have been debutantes around 1916. Thus *Vogue* suggested an affiliation, and, implicitly, a target readership, with women in their forties, who may find this nostalgia appealing. The anniversary issue proper carried an essay that developed the idea of a shared experience of historical momentum through fashions, for instance in the visible military styles. “Before *Vogue*, fashion news could only reach us in scraps from our friends working in French hospitals [...] and those who have managed to get up to Paris for a week-end at the Ritz, where, because of the shortage of coal, everybody, from the dowagers of the Faubourg to Marcel Proust, is living” (September 2, 1931: 23). A universal wartime experience for sure!<sup>17</sup> The essay

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<sup>17</sup> Though *Vogue* presented itself as a service, especially in wartime, this essay notes the creative alternative uses some readers had found for it: “The fashion of 1916 is idealised in those delicious early

then discussed the experiences of upper-class women as wartime volunteers, but paid most of its attention to a handful of individual women, the beauties of the time. Meanwhile, Cecil Beaton created a charming time loop with his illustrated versions of portraits that had appeared in *Vogue* fifteen years ago. “A strange forgotten world! where for years there has been no social calendar [...]; a world where it is not smart to be smart, where it is suspicious to be chic” (25).

The essay then moved onto 1921, “the threshold of the Witty ‘Twenties, seeing the dawn of the modern world”:

The Diaghileff Ballet was glorious—one went night after night—and everybody learnt from the pages of *Vogue* of modern art, the new revolutions in fashion, the new fabrics, Rodier, Dufy, the coming of tricot, the sensational rise of Chanel, Molyneux and Vionnet, the cult of simplicity and of line, profoundly influenced by the new appreciation of Cézanne and his successors. And after years of enforced action—and silence—we all of one accord spoke, wrote and painted.

My perfect day in that hot summer of 1921 includes helping an exhibition of paintings by well-known débutantes, where everyone chatters of Proust, Picasso and Joyce, looking in on a reading at the Poetry Bookshop and dashing out to Hurlingham to see the Americans retain the Cup. Then back to tea in Lady Colefax’s salon in Chelsea or it may be to meet Lytton Strachey at Miss Sands’. Then later a glorious party, given by Mrs. McLaren to house-warm her lovely new house, when I sit between Stravinsky and Lady Oxford, and eat with the greatest difficulty. [...] In Holland Park I sup with Conrad, Valéry and Raven, and one day persuade Paul Morand to visit Dublin. To his delight he arrives in the middle of a street-battle where he is met by Clare Sheridan, herself just returned from a visit to Lenin. George Moore gives tea at five every afternoon in Ebury Street to literary *jeunes-filles*. The rising chorus of Sitwells greets the poetic dawn. (70)

And so on. We were young then, *Vogue* said, smart and literary, and those aesthetically heightened days brought us closer to our contemporary sophistication. By 1925 “we feel almost at home”;

We have now reached the year of the *Green Hat*, of ‘Tea-for-Two,’ of the early Tallulah and wonderful suppers at the Eiffel Tower, of sleek shingles, of Chanel tweed, the blessed word ‘ensemble,’ banding, the new perfumes. We are very stream-line. [...] We discover Salzburg, Hollywood, Park Avenue, Harlem, Chekoff (at Barnes), Bee Lillie and Gertie Lawrence, Boulestin’s in Leicester Square, cocktail parties, Elsa Maxwell, Helen Wills, Anita Loos, Laddie Stanford, the Gargoyle Club. [...]

More and more brilliant young men appear on the scene—there is a cult for youth. (72)

Such retrospectives expressed pride in the highbrow stance of the early and mid-twenties, including in the prestigious signatures it had carried, through the golden glow of recollection and recognition, without acknowledging the conflicts of that approach. If Dorothy Todd or her friends ever picked up *Vogue* again, they would probably have seen this as a stinging hypocritical move. It ended with the columnist meeting Beaton, the representative elect of the young men of the late twenties and of *Vogue* itself, which suggests that Alison Settle wrote it. Notice, too, the growing presence of American culture, of cosmetics, clubs and drinks: the path of “smart” culture could easily be identified as the magazine’s.

While its nineteenth anniversary was understated, marked only by the gift of beauty samples for the first 5,000 write-ins, the twenty-first was a coming-of-age issue. The cover by Raymond de Laverrie showed a flying unicorn and birthday cake that represented “the spirit of youth”, though it could also be “an allegory of fashion”, “shy and fleeting”; “where, after all, would *Vogue* have been these twenty-one years without an element of phantasy?” (September 1, 1937: 31). It explored the same topics as the one from six years before, down to the enlisted débutantes.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, it not only reinstated *Vogue*’s original purpose but also marked it as a success:

*Vogue* does claim credit, however, for having schooled many women to clothes-consciousness, and for being responsible for much of to-day’s widespread fashion sense. By keeping ahead rather than abreast of the times, *Vogue*, like many of its readers [...] can claim to be twenty-one years the younger. [...]

It was said that so frivolous an enterprise must be doomed to failure: however, frivolous or no, American *Vogue* had been for some time in enormous demand here, since it offered a war-weary Europe the illusion of escape from realities that had become too grim. But things were becoming increasingly difficult. [...] Condé Nast, the proprietor, cut the knot of all these problems (against every prophetic croak) to launch a separate British edition. And so in September, 1916, in tiny, dingy premises off Chancery Lane, with a staff of ten enthusiasts (among whom was Madame Champcommunal, now known for her association with Worth) British *Vogue* was launched—a war-time débutante. (Blanch September 1, 1937: 35)

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<sup>18</sup> Besides a retrospective by Lesley Blanch, there were essays on the changing industries of beauty and retail; “The Smart Woman as *Vogue* Has Seen Her”; notes about the fashion, art and music of each year; two games of “Guess Who?”, one with high society portraits and another with ballet illustrations by none other than Lotte Reiniger; and even a note of appreciation to the advertisers who supported *Vogue* in its first issue.

This description of early *Vogue*, with its escapist tone and its can-do “enthusiasts”, set up a contrast with the practical glamour of the thirties. As for the women who inhabited its pages, they were “plum-faced, calm, even bovine looking girls, with un-pruned eyebrows, tousled hair, pale mouths and roundabout figures [...] both matronly and un-groomed by modern standards” (*ibid.*). Unlike the previous retrospective, which had jumped from the war straight into high modernism, Lesley Blanch reflected on the return to luxury and eccentricity—the “frenzy of furbelows”—of the immediate post-war period (36). By the early twenties:

The pages of *Vogue* present a striking commentary on woman’s post-war metamorphosis. The beauty of repose, gentleness and thoughtfulness have vanished: already faces are harder, more vital, more aware, perhaps, but disillusioned too. There is little bloom left on the peach, and we see the first brittle mask-like tension so typical of ‘the roaring twenties.’

The ‘twenties’ were not without tension in *Vogue*’s offices, either, for an ever-increasing staff were still cribbed, cabined and confined in the original makeshift, ramshackling offices in Breems Buildings. There was no lift, and the five flights of narrow stairs between the editor’s office and the art department were all part of the day’s work. Heating was non-existent, and in the winter the fashion-artists at work on drawings of exotic *décolleté* sirens were themselves compelled to wear gloves.

The staff legends of these early days are many and magnificent, and Aldous Huxley, who joined us when he came down from Oxford, has recorded some of his office experiences in *Antic Hay*. (88)

The fact that the mechanisms of *Vogue* were considered of interest spoke to its confidence in its own success and authority. Blanch explained how all international editions drew their fashion insight from the Paris collections, though “each edition creates its own local fashions and features”; “[m]eanwhile, a complicated system of interchangeable material ensures that the latest information, other than fashion, is also received direct from its first source” (*ibid.*). In the early twenties, she explained, the British offices became more independent from American management. Then followed the familiar string of names and nouns: the Sitwells, Chanel, cocktails, waistlines, “ugly” modern decor, photographers, illustrators, and Cecil Beaton as the culmination of this evolutionary path (*ibid.*).

But we anticipate... for long before the then comparatively unknown, unsung Mr. Beaton was shyly proffering his portfolio, British Vogue had executed a marked side-step from the straight and narrow path of chic. This digression of occurred during the editorship of Miss Todd (incidentally, there have been only four editors in all these twenty-one years: Miss Todd, Miss Anderson, Miss Todd again, Mrs. Settle and Miss Penrose). It had always been maintained that Vogue's first function was to be, as it were, a sartorial primer [...] and secondly, to review the leisured interests of life, and to record 'the art of elegant living.' But looking back over the years between 1922 to 1926, we see that it once became the organ of the intelligentsia, the voice of High Bohemia. It circulated freely in Bloomsbury, one half reading what the other half wrote, and at this time, its tone was markedly *plus café que le Café Royale*. Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Raymond Mortimer, and Francis Birrell contributed regularly, and Augustus John occasionally. Man Ray's maddest 'object scenarios' went cheek by jowl with Modigliani, Swedish prison architecture, portraits of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce, and with prosody of a catalectic, trochaic, sporadic and even blank nature.

In 1927 the note changes again. Corseted back into its original mould of fashion there are more clothes and fewer canvases. A tone of almost earnest wantonness now sets the social pace, and the roaring twenties are having their fling. (90)

This was the first time that Todd's name appeared in the pages of British *Vogue*. Blanch knew that she had been its very first editor, but then she somehow skipped over Elspeth Champcommunal and named her interim substitute, Ruth Anderson, instead. There are further inaccuracies: Lytton Strachey did not contribute to *Vogue*, unless he did so anonymously. What matters, though, is that despite the errors and the exaggeration of its highbrow turn, it was firmly integrated into its own narrative. Then, again, there was the old litany: orchids, Hollywood, Schiaparelli, tanning, knitting, the rapid-fire succession of royal ceremonies from George V's jubilee to George VI's coronation, and Nast's growing list of publications.

In 1930 skirts sink and waistlines mount, and Vogue moves to its present premises at No. 1 New Bond Street, where a rapidly increasing staff (which to-day numbers about 70), soon catches up with the lordly accommodation, and is now, in 1937, finding itself cramped to the point of expanding yet further afield. [...] Meanwhile, the Bond Street offices and their personnel represent only half of Vogue in its entirety, for the City offices, in Fetter Lane, include the Pattern and Publishing departments, and house another seventy souls. [...]

Which brings us to the burning question—what shall we tackle next? *À votre service, Mesdames.* (*ibid.*)

*Vogue*, however, did not neglect the present and the future, but noted the minute shifts in customs that belied the apparent sameness of every Season. To some degree, it attempted to share insight into modern values and desires, and even into mental states,

but always in its signature high-handed manner.<sup>19</sup> “Modern manners might well be summarised as the convention of doing away with convention”, stated an essay on mourning (February 22, 1933: 71). Unsurprisingly, that was a rare topic compared to marriage, which was the subject of essays on fashion, changing gender roles and new expectations, including the prevalence of divorce. “They talk of Modern Marriage, but there’s no such thing. Protest as you will, marriage is first and last another word for monogamy; and ‘modern’ has come to mean polygamous” (M. M. April 3, 1935: 94). The greater change, then, was in romance and courtship. An essay by Aldous Huxley suggested that the relations between the sexes had never been very satisfactory “because men and women are not merely animals, but conscious, intellectual, generalising animals” (June 27, 1928: 49). He opposed consciousness, “that modern upstart”, to instinct, which can only be repressed:

The most conspicuous and obvious fact about our age is that it is an age of reaction against excessive repressions. [...] The new freedom is simply the old strictness, turned, so to speak, inside out. [...] It is a cold, deliberate libertinage, dictated by the head and seldom involving the deeper affective centres of the being. [...] Having been but recently admitted to social, political and working equality with men, modern women are particularly anxious to prove that they can beat, or at least compete with, the male at his own job [...] It is a question of feminine patriotism; and feminine patriotism is distinguished by that rather feverish and excessive ardour so characteristic of the patriotism of oppressed nationalities. Hence the excessive value placed by modern women on their conscious selves, their ‘personalities’; hence their dread of those physical-instinctive powers within themselves that are hostile to consciousness. [...] Living, as we do, too exclusively with our conscious selves, we have become dry, shallow, listless and at the same time restless, profoundly dissatisfied (boredom and discontent have never been so widespread as at the present), uncreative and finally strangely puerile. (70)

The symptoms of this sterile state were, he suggested, sentimentality and jazz. He also argued that, if human behaviours were a compromise between instinct and consciousness, they were mediated by context. Love was one such behaviour, and thus

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<sup>19</sup> “Once you become a psychiatrist’s patient”, stated Margaret Case Herriman, “you belong to him for ever. One reason is that you are tied to him by the bond of a thousand intimate revelations, and another reason is that, since he is treating your mind and soul—the fundamental You—there remains nobody to send you on to, except possibly God” (September 2, 1936: 33, 72).

was subject to socio-historical trends.<sup>20</sup> The younger generations were said to discuss sex in explicit terms; despite arguing that youth was something that anyone with an open, flexible mind could claim, *Vogue* definitely did not do that. Rather, it satirised their vanity and flightiness. “Sophisticated Ladies Kiss Everybody”, declared Mary Borden:

I AM speaking of manners because I want to leave morals out of this discussion; I say Ladies, because I mean well-bred women of assured social position, and when I use the term ‘everybody,’ it signifies any man whom the Lady may fancy for a moment that measures exactly sixty seconds.

All this may sound frivolous. [... But] what, after all, is more seriously interesting in a race or more significant of its culture than the manners of its leisured people? Their amusements and habits stand surely as a sign of what the nation has achieved in the way of a conquest over the world of Nature; their social technique is most certainly an art only less important than painting or music. They are, these darlings of fortune, artists in life, good or bad, and their manners paint a living portrait of a civilization. (February 3, 1932: 23)

Borden was so interested in “sophistication” that she traced its progress in the dictionary. As she summarised it; “the sophisticated man or woman is the subtly worldly wise person who is habituated to artificial or false values” (*ibid.*). Nowadays, even the most elegant of high society women “isn’t, as a rule, a harpy or a frigid monster of vanity”, but “a warm-blooded, generous, rather reckless creature under her sophisticated exterior” who doesn’t care much about her virtue or even her reputation (24). Because of her freedom, she was a new figure, and thus worthy of study. She was moral, Borden insisted, even if she showed different, more expansive manners: “to show off one’s charms and treasures, not to hide and store them up in secret, is the vice of our period” (25). The aesthetics of romance were, in fact, more widespread than actual affairs:

Nothing women say to each other means what it sounds like. Usually, it means the exact opposite, and that is another characteristic of the modern technique. It has become the

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<sup>20</sup> Huxley diagnosed the late twenties with two “distinct and hostile conceptions of love”, both noxious: a romantic, Christian and Victorian one and a “realistic”, highly individual, post-war one, which saw courtship as just another leisure activity (November 28, 1928: 122). He pointed to literature and philosophy for the answer: “Only a new mythology of nature, such as Blake, Burns and Lawrence have defined it, an untranscendental and (relatively speaking) realistic mythology of Energy, Life and Human Personality will provide, it seems to me, the inward resistances necessary to turn sexual impulse into love, and provide them in a form which the critical intelligence of post-Nietzschean youth can respect” (*ibid.*).



fashion in English society to assume a complete contempt for conventions, respectability, or grandeur [...] It may seem strange that solid and stolid and phlegmatic England should have produced such a subtle, artificial creature. Nevertheless, it is so. And, after all, strange as she is, this flower, growing out of the rich, damp, sodden soil of this island, is natural enough, for it is her nature to be incongruous. Smart society in any country is not the normal bloom one would expect the land to produce. [...] For that is the aim of such people. It amuses them to seem quite different, different from the rest of the nation, first, and then different from what they really are. [...] They are capable] of running big houses and bigger charities; good organisers, hard workers, keen politicians, very knowledgeable as to the problems facing farmers, colliers, or shipbuilders, and aware of the British Empire as a part of the show for which they and their husbands have always been responsible. Two lives? They lead half a dozen and switch from one to another with consummate ease. (65)

All around this essay were reports of costume parties and advice on cosmetics and wardrobes for every occasion. Fashionable ladies played with surfaces, shed their skin and showed the face that suited them best, but Borden insisted that this did not mean that they lacked a sensible core.

Despite its timidity regarding sex, *Vogue* discussed maternity in relation to fashion, even when the pregnant body had been ignored by glossies:

Frank expression of matters biologic were heresies in an earlier day. Mothers-in-waiting were relegated to seclusion and inhibited by ignorance and false pride. But to-day, research and progress have gradually dispelled this unwholesome discrimination; and women have come into the healthy sunlight of discussion, to dignify the profession of prospective motherhood with self-esteem, intelligence, good taste and, what's more, good grooming. (Stone May 13, 1936: 90)

Just as housewives of the interwar period were advised to run their homes hygienically and economically, *Vogue* told expectant mothers to wear clothes that exposed the skin to the sun to help to prevent rickets, and so to apply scientific breakthroughs to their lives. Overall, though, *Vogue* only vaguely acknowledged the effects of political, economic and social changes on women's quotidian lives. Daughters of well-to-do mothers were assumed to have a "bachelor apartment" (September 30, 1931: 58);<sup>21</sup> at dinner parties, women now smoked and took coffee with the men before eventually leaving them to their talk and drink (January 20, 1932). Aspiring beauties cultivated;

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<sup>21</sup> This essay dampens the picture of enjoyment and pleasure in conversation between men and women constructed in other features. Soon after marriage, it says, a husband becomes indifferent, unwilling to connect and bored. New brides are advised to save pin money and to establish their habits from the very beginning, as otherwise it will be their husbands' preferences that stay for the years to follow. Furthermore, they are encouraged to tease their husbands with jealousy. If all goes well, romance will return in their elderly age.

something more withdrawn, more mysterious, heavy lidded like the Marquise de Casa-Maury, and with an expression which indicated not perhaps a secret sorrow but at least a secret life; an air of cultivation, but without a hint of the *femme savante* [...] In spite of the photographs of fashionable beauties wheeling their babies in the park, the dominant ideal is still independence, which means childlessness. (Laver April 18, 1934: 128)

Another feature commended Heathfield School, Ascot for “its sensible but attractive” uniforms, pursuing “outward graciousness of manners” as well as “intellectual achievements” and encouraging its girls “to take an interest in current and political events; to read the papers carefully” (July 26, 1939: 32). The students there tried their hand at editing, designing and playwriting, and they were “neither hoydenish nor highbrow but, thanks to Heathfield, infinitely human” (33). At least one Heathfield Old Girl, Eleanor Smith, had become a *Vogue* contributor. There were also essays on the status of women throughout the world; rather than campaign for new rights, *Vogue* often praised their recognition after the fact with its signature blasé tone and colonising gaze. In her article on women’s lives in the Territory of Alaska, Elsie McCormick noted that “the typical Alaska woman of to-day is a college graduate, well dressed, well read and up to date”; to visitors, settlers in Alaska seemed “a sophisticated group set against a primitive background”, “a perpetual picnic” despite its inconveniences (January 24, 1936: 41). Throughout its pages, then, *Vogue* held up a set of ideas which could be summed up as intellectual curiosity, tempered by an established and naturalised sort of common sense.

The acquisition and display of certain material things was central to smartness: though, as explained before, *Vogue* politely glossed over the financial conditions that made that possible, it did explore the mechanics of economic, social and cultural capital to some degree. If one wanted to maintain or advance a professional or artistic career, it was not only necessary to wear the right set of clothes to work, but to engage in hosting and visiting. The hostess had been traditionally expected to advance her husband’s

career and her family's standing, but by the thirties *Vogue* was paying more attention to the ways in which taste and style could shape her own trajectory. It only takes a glimpse at its pages to realise that any figured distinctions between active production and passive consumption, public and private space, or professional and leisure practices were untenable. The essays, instructions and references to what we now call "lifestyle" grew in space, prominence and detail: by covering the social, leisure and living practices of society women *Vogue* was not necessarily inviting readers to mimic them, as that would have been unaffordable to the vast majority, but to see their value and find pleasure in them.

Although it had given advice to hostesses since the beginning, *Vogue* now began to emphasise how women could make life more practical and enjoyable for themselves and for their family. Supporting the enshrined image of this period as one of weekends and house parties, there were features on a surprising range of leisure activities, from bridge—including an essay by Elsa Maxwell, the famous American hostess—to amateur filmmaking. Golf and tennis had long been favourite social activities, while individual exercise regimes for slimming gained prominence. *Vogue* also appraised pets, particularly fashionable breeds like Siamese cats and Dalmatian dogs. Of course, it continued to visit the homes of the rich and influential, all the while exploring different strands of interior design. If under Dorothy Todd it had found the amusing in the eighteenth century while dismissing the nineteenth—with, granted, some exceptions—, under Alison Settle it was willing to reassess its sentimentality:

'How fickle is the academy of taste. What it admires changes from decade to decade, almost from day to day... our fathers despised the wax fruits and horsehair and antimacassars of our grandmothers. To-day we are beginning to think those things good.' So writes Rose Macaulay. [...] They may come—you never know. The strides that have been made lately by the furniture of the period towards appreciation and revival have been rapid. The centenary of the Romantic School—long hair, long skirts—turned our attention towards the unblushingly sentimental period that is in such delightful contrast with our own. It is clear that we have arrived at the point when our ignorance of the life of the early nineteenth century allows us to build a quite peculiar earthly paradise out of its setting. (January 6, 1932: 40)

Perhaps surprisingly, readers come across advice on gardening and cooking even more often than on decorating and dressmaking. The former was usually by Constance Spry, the famous florist, one of the most recognisable names of the period, who had a regular column in the late thirties—“You and Your Gardener”—and sometimes wrote about interior design. *House & Garden* editor Richardson Wright occasionally crossed over to *Vogue* as well. Other domestic practises, on the other hand, were not discussed: cleaning, washing and repairing were too prosaic and discreetly left to employees.

David Strauss explains that when glossy magazines introduced food columns they “emphasized from the outset a gourmet, as opposed to a nutritionist, approach to dining”, heightening the sensorial experience rather than its more practical aspects (2020: 46). American *Vogue* began to review restaurants and clubs in the early thirties, and when Prohibition ended in 1934 it embraced wine as well. British *Vogue* also expanded its coverage of fine dining and cooking, which must have suited Settle’s gourmet tastes just fine. June Platt, whom Strauss names among the experts who “crafted a new genre of food writing to encourage in their readers a new kind of dining experience” (47), was the food writer for *House and Garden*, a Condé Nast publication, which explains her frequent appearances in British *Vogue* between 1935 and 1938. While Platt wrote about everything from dinner parties to canned food, chops and bananas, others discussed international cuisines, food as art, and a variety of dishes to suit any palate and occasion. Guest contributors shared their experiences with foreign cooks in a series that began early in 1935: “My Cook is a Hungarian”, “a Russian”, “an Arab”, “an African”, “Three Mexicans”, “an Amateur”, and so on. By 1937, readers would have recognised Lesley Blanch’s “My Cook is a Catastrophe” as facetious meta-commentary. Other features were addressed to specific audiences, like men or “the

young bachelor women who live on their own, or in twos and threes, and do a job of work in the daytime” and would therefore need advice (January 22, 1936: 86).

This was an epoch that appreciated whimsy and glamour but increasingly valued practicality and independence. Unsurprisingly, there were a few essays on the changing role of servants in upper and middle-class households. The days of cooks, maids and governesses had passed for the majority, and so when Cecil Beaton turned the spotlight on the assistants to the few, he both reinscribed the ladies’ glamour and blew back the veil that mystified it.<sup>22</sup>

The pages of fashion magazines bloom with the beauties of the day, enhanced by gowns from Stiebel, jewels from Cartier, *décor* by Syrie, flowers from Flower Decorations. But invariably the most important person, perhaps, in the life of the professional or society beauty—the lady’s maid—goes unheralded and unsung. [...] So we gather together six comparatively ignored maids, fire a battery of questions at them, and blind them momentarily with the limelight. They speak up manfully for themselves and their mistresses, and we learn a lot of what they do from the moment they bring up the breakfast tray, pull the curtains, gather up last evening’s clothes that are strewn round the room, and run the bath, until the eye-pads dipped in witch-hazel have been affixed, the lights switched off, good-night said, and the door shut. On the whole, most of these maids consider that their mistresses need to be pampered and mothered, for mistresses seem incapable of making up their minds even about the smallest detail [...] They must be able to speak foreign languages and also be chaperon and secretary. Very likely she is asked to shake a cocktail, and, if she is perfection itself, she should also be a beauty expert and a trained seamstress. [...] Her position is of extreme importance. She is important to her mistress, and, downstairs in the servants’ dining-hall, she is honoured as such and considered the ambassadress of her betters. (August 21, 1935: 37, 74)

*Vogue*, then, picked at the practices that made up the lives of its recurring characters, but never actually tore them apart. The changes in the professional and domestic lives of its target readership provided new practices to aestheticize;<sup>23</sup> considering its willingness to advise busy women on how to dress, cook and host, it is perhaps surprising that it did not do the same regarding how to advance their career through education or networking or on how to save or invest their earnings. Despite acknowledging moments of crisis or

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<sup>22</sup> The interviewed maids were Marion Gerrish (maid to Lady Brownlow), Lena Hopson (Ina Claire, actress), Nellie Watkins (Lady Charles Cavendish, née Adele Astaire, dancer), Eva Surrant (Lady Castlerosse, née Doris Delevingne) and Felee Leticita (Misia Sert, née Godebska, pianist).

<sup>23</sup> Marjorie Hillis, assistant editor at American *Vogue* and author of the bestselling *Live Alone and Like It*, reflected: “Privacy—privacy that you are discriminating enough to appreciate—is a pearl of great price; like a real sable coat or a peaches-and-cream complexion or an Elizabeth Arden figure. You can’t even hope for it if you’re poor. You have to work for it if you’re popular. You’re depressed by it if you’re unimaginative. But you can adore it if you’re intelligent and resourceful and merely one half the woman you ought to be” (September 30, 1936: 73).

recovery in the economy and tailoring its advice to readers with limited incomes, *Vogue* focused exclusively on spending. It was reluctant to deal directly with the subject of money, but unpaid social work, which was much more respectable and ingrained among upper and middle class women, provided the topic for a few essays. After all, “committees of every description are springing up like mushrooms in the night—committees political, charitable, organisations for balls, jumble sales” (Toye November 15, 1933: 78).<sup>24</sup> For example, *Vogue* advised participants on how to host tea-parties for their colleagues, while another essay recommended that young women suffering from “nerves” due to having “too little to do” ought to “go to the Personal Service League and ask them to let her help with social work” (August 19, 1936: 42). As explained in the first chapter, it was expected of married middle and upper-class women to be in charge of household management, which included spending, and facilitating their husbands’ professional advancement through social engagements.

In any case, by the late twenties *Vogue* had come into its role of guide to modern urban life for women with disposable income, no matter its mode. Seasonal events notwithstanding, it was London that *Vogue* was concerned about, and therefore the location of its recommended restaurants, clubs and shops. Public buildings and landmarks were sometimes personified as witnesses to their populace,<sup>25</sup> and yet *Vogue* did not seem to care much for street life. No: glamour was secreted in hotels, nightclubs and the homes of the famous, places of leisure but also of intimacy and rest, suggesting that the line between creation and consumption, circulation and pause, had virtually disappeared. An evocatory essay, which described “a typical day in and around Bond

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<sup>24</sup> This comment brings to mind the occupations of the protagonist of E. M. Delafield’s *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, who runs her household, attends social engagements around town, and participates in the *Parish Magazine* and a Guardians Committee (“am expected to visit Workhouse, etc.”) (2016: 140).

<sup>25</sup> “I looked up at Eros”, the statue in Piccadilly Circus; “so lightly, so gaily posed there above the fountain. He seeming to be smiling, and saying: ‘That’s right. Go on, all you people. Have a good time. Life is fun. After dark’” (Montgomery May 13, 1936: 128).

Street in the life of a modern *élégante*”, began with a visit to Elizabeth Arden’s salon for a cosmetic treatment, where the atmosphere was dreamy and intimate, as such spaces were “confessionals in which women pour out their troubles to sympathetic ears” (December 25, 1929: 19). Then she visited a jeweller and a milliner—“there is something peculiarly tonic about hats” (21)—, bought stockings, went for coffee, had her photograph taken, had lunch at the Embassy, attended a dress show and ended her day at a tearoom. Similar pieces that remarked on the oneiric aspect of shops and placed consumption front and centre appeared throughout the thirties. Another reflected:

The shops sell atmosphere and atmosphere sells you [...] As if by magic everything is on display. [...] Yes, and behind this new face of London there is a new purpose—everything is luxurious, everything made easy for you, and everyone at your service. Shopping is arranged for the tired, catered to for the spendthrift, and made enticing for all, in this new London (August 5, 1936: 11, 13)

In the evenings, crowds sought the cinema, the theatre, the ballet and the music hall and kept a keen eye on what the actresses were wearing, or else tried the many restaurants and clubs London had to offer. The smartest people were found at the Eiffel Tower, where one could “easily become embroiled in some thrillingly intellectual argument which will continue, accompanied by squeaks from caged canaries, until tired waiters turn down all the lights” (October 5, 1927: 98), while the “more daring and ‘bohemian’” types preferred the Cave of Harmony (69). The Bright Young People could be seen at the Gargoyle, founded by one of their own, David Tennant, whose brother was a contributor to *Vogue*. Hotels often hosted balls and costume parties, offering chances for true extravagance, as shown in Beaton’s sketches of the costumes worn at the “Dream of Fair Women” ball at Claridge’s.

The urban nightscape did not dissolve at one’s doorstep. Rather, it was to be welcomed in, no matter where one lived.

It is zero hour, or ten in the morning, at the very height of the London Season. The place is the private sitting-room—it is almost an office—of the Lady of the Big House. Unlike her Edwardian mother-in-law, who could with difficulty be aroused to give orders from her bedroom, the great hostess of 1931 is early at her desk in the sitting-room which is

on the main bedroom floor. Though her life has all the glamour formerly reserved for the prima donna, she has to work hard for it! She is certainly busier than anyone in the City and at least as efficient. (June 10, 1931: 61)

Whether in London or in the country—the Big House was unlikely to be in the suburbs—the Lady arranged parties and visits; she may even have a secretary, though she telephoned and kept an engagement book herself. As explained, *Vogue* understood that visiting and hosting could help social and professional advancement, and so it discussed those practices in a variety of ways, from anonymous advice columns to sentimental or satirical essays by familiar names. Their authors observed the activities—preparations, dinner parties, parlour games, hunting excursions—and interactions—talking to the staff, ensuring the comfort of the guests, meeting new people, disguising one’s boredom—that took place at any Society party, and delighted in skewering them. For instance, it was fine to read if one wanted to take a break from the bustle; in fact, it was polite for guests to find their own entertainment at times. Pamela Hinkson recalled a hostess who had prepared rooms specifically for this purpose, “the books chosen for her, the writing materials arranged with a thought of her personal needs” (November 27, 1935: 88). These were the years, after all, of the Meynell’s *Week-End Book*, and *Vogue* supported the popularity of these activities by publishing essays on all sorts of parties—including “that old demoraliser of slick modern dogmas / and slick modern realism”, Christmas (December 9, 1936: 45)—countryside excursions, parlour games and dance crazes. By contrast, domestic pursuits such as knitting were seen as old-fashioned and unusual, and commented upon when practised by high-profile women.

*Vogue* and its contributors had privileged access to shops, workrooms, studios, factories, stations, post offices, art schools, and trade and administrative buildings, and yet it never featured them in the same way. Unsurprisingly, given its growing willingness to show itself off, the one exception were its own offices. The proof of the



magazine's prestige and commercial success was its much-publicised move to 1 New Bond Street.

Having dealt with all the business of changing telephone numbers, choosing furniture and colour schemes, and having successfully attended to the transport of all its pet office possessions and arranged them in their new surroundings, *Vogue* will be charmed and delighted to welcome old and new friends to its home on the top floor of Bond Street's newest buildings (November 26, 1930: 69)

This was a Mayfair address worthy of *Vogue*'s perpetually hatted employees.<sup>26</sup> The new office was said to be "another essay in modernity" comparable to the most lovely and swirling contemporary dress: "As most offices are predominantly masculine, while *Vogue*'s is almost entirely feminine, our solution to the problem of office decoration had to be quite different from most. To be feminine without being frilly was the aim of the decorator" (December 10, 1930: 35). As if to prove it, it flaunted them in a photographic spread in the following issue.

Despite its professed ideals and interests, the pages that *Vogue* had previously granted to the fine and literary arts were taken over by society journalism. Though it still praised the practitioners and sponsors of the arts with the familiar refrain that one's cultural practices reflected on one's openness of mind, reviewed gallery shows and exhibitions, reproduced paintings and sculptures and occasionally carried architecture features, it no longer covered cutting-edge developments nor approached artists as celebrities unless they had the social credentials to match. By contrast, as I shall explore in the final section of this thesis, the pull of cinema grew stronger and its most prominent figures began to be included in society columns. After all, it was "the movie and the motor, in contrast to the statue and the sofa" that symbolised the period (January 9, 1929: 17).

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<sup>26</sup> "Fashion journalist Ailsa Garland remembered that in the 1930s and 1940s all the editors at *Vogue* wore hats in the office at all times" (Dyhouse 2010: 77).

## 3.2. VOGUE'S BOOKSHELF

### 3.2.1. "Low Brows, and High Brows": The Middlebrow Turn

When *Vogue* published a feature on millinery under this same title on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, 1936, its editors could be sure that readers would get the joke. The magazine had, by that time, tried out cultural allegiances, sometimes observing highbrows from the outside, sometimes boasting of their contributions. Though those had been minimal since the late twenties as *Vogue*'s cultural journalism had been greatly reduced, outside its pages the Battle of the Brows raged on. Emma West calls it "the most sustained and vehement period of cultural conflict in British history" (2017: 12), when "issues of cultural classification and stratification captivated the nation, extending out beyond modernist coterie and into the homes of middle-class families via the booming British press" (14). It cannot be said that *Vogue* participated in the debate explicitly, but it was nonetheless committed to its mission of teasing out the subtleties of tasteful living, which meant it had to favour certain cultural practices.

The resulting features, then, cannot be separated from a conflict that was, at its core, stoked by "anxiety over an increasingly all-encompassing, lowest-common-denominator mass culture" driven and fed by the cultural practices of the working and lower-middle class, which included reading but also listening to the wireless or watching films, perceived as passive and not entirely improving pursuits (15). Even more worrying were the attempts from institutions and individuals to make high culture more accessible to the masses, which led to "genuine fear that these technological, social, political and economic revolutions threatened to dilute or even destroy (high) culture", cheapening it for easy consumption (*ibid.*). The last decades had made it clear

that, given enough economic capital, one could feign one's social status.<sup>27</sup> Taste gained importance as a classifier, displacing even money, but the resulting change in the social paradigm was not huge, as high culture was still associated with the upper classes, and low and popular culture with the working classes (16). Though this may suggest that those above were the ones to suspect and dismiss those below, John Baxendale reminds us that, in the press, "it was highbrowism which bore the brunt of the attacks" (2012: 71), carrying over the hostility from the heyday of aestheticism, now decades in the past. Highbrow art and its producers, which, in the context of *Vogue*, often meant Bloomsbury or the Sitwells and their circle, were accused of deliberate obscurity and pretentiousness, and also of "effeminacy linked to upper-class affectation" and "post-war decadence" (73). The battle was fought in various fronts and terms, from gravely serious essays by critics who believed that the very nature of art at stake to pictorial satire and farcical events:

On 4 June 1930, a mock trial in aid of charity took place in the main lecture theatre of the London School of Economics. In the dock was J. B. Priestley, already a well-established critic and essayist, who had recently become famous and was becoming rich through his runaway best-selling novel *The Good Companions*. Prosecuting Priestley was Harold Nicolson – former diplomat, writer and aesthete, currently slumming it somewhat as editor of the *Evening Standard's* 'Londoner's Diary'. The charge was that Priestley had 'made a vast success with a healthy book'. (69)

It was Priestley who, unwittingly, goaded Virginia Woolf into a forceful and now often-quoted articulation of the middlebrow. He did not have it out for Woolf—he had actually reviewed *To the Lighthouse* in highly positive terms—but, as Baxendale puts it;

fatally, unable to restrain himself from a further dig at the highbrow manner and lifestyle, Priestley proceeded to refer to the 'poetic' school of novelists as 'terrifically sensitive, cultured, invalidish ladies with private means', by contrast with more active, if less sensitive, writers such as, presumably, himself; and, as if to make sure that real offence was caused, he pinned on Woolf the detested label 'high priestess' of Bloomsbury. Priestley's remarks began in good humour and with the best intentions, but these had been overwhelmed by the conflict of classes and lifestyles. Just four days later, he broadcast a radio talk entitled 'To A Highbrow' which once again homed in on the cultural attitudes of the highbrows rather than on the kind of books they read or wrote, accusing them of bad faith in allowing cultural fashion to mould their tastes

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<sup>27</sup> See Sean Latham's "*Am I A Snob?*" *Modernism and the Novel* (2003) for a study of snobbery, simulation and the ways these social phenomena were represented in literature.

rather than their own authentic responses, and of rejecting out of hand anything that had become popular (Priestley 13 October 1932: 11 and 3 December 1932: 354 in 74)

Woolf then wrote a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation*, which she never sent, “which identified the main target of the highbrow fightback—not Tarzan nor Edgar Wallace nor even the *Daily Express* but the ‘middlebrow’” (74). According to this letter, “the middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige” (Woolf 1942: 199).<sup>28</sup> Considering how Bloomsbury and *Vogue* had gone separate ways after the departures of Dorothy Todd and Vera Meynell, and how its cultural journalism tended to cover socially prominent authors and artists, it seems likely that Woolf would have included it in that category. “In using the ideologically charged imagery of social class to represent the cultural life of England”, Latham reflects, “Woolf manages to blur the boundaries between the aristocrats of birth and the aristocrats of art, thereby cleverly effecting her own entry into the privileged world of the beau monde. Imagining herself as a member of a small literary nobility constantly under assault by the forces of modernity, she confesses to Lady Ottoline Morrell that ‘I am an aristocrat in writing’” (2003: 93). Though enticingly ambiguous, this figuration somewhat overwrites the existence of very real and quite respected aristocratic writers. Where does it leave, for instance, Vita Sackville-West or Marthe Bibesco? It would depend, I suppose, on the readership they attracted, not their work.

In any case, the thorny issue was not lowbrow but middlebrow culture. This aggravating category, “defined through its consumers” as well as through the content

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<sup>28</sup> Virginia Woolf’s dispute with J. B. Priestley is covered in John Baxendale’s chapter on the latter in Brown and Grover (2012), whose introduction also provides insight into the unsent letter. They point in turn to Melba Cuddy-Keane’s *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (2003) for a study on Woolf and middlebrow culture. Meanwhile, Caroline Pollentier’s chapter in the same volume articulates Priestley’s articulation of the “broadbrow” as a “positive rethinking of the middlebrow” (44) that he commended for its “ethical value, rather than cultural legitimacy” (45).

and style of works so classified, was understood “as a conservative realist form, aiming for moral complexity and artistic merit but really just easy, middle-of-the-road stuff”; the very term was “a nexus for prejudice towards the lower middle classes, the feminine and domestic, and towards narrative modes regarded as outdated” (Brown and Grover 2012: 1).<sup>29</sup> According to its detractors, the merit in question was “an aspirational form of imitation”, an appropriation of modernist modes, and not even a good one (Hammill 2007: 7). If these definitions struggle to find definitional elements both inside and outside the text it is because a recurring topic of discussion from all sides of the debate was the very meaning of “middlebrow”. Many attempts at a definition, West finds, were humorous, meant to poke fun at characters of the cultural landscape rather than at a genre or mode of writing. Even the more serious attempts:

rely on assumption and inference; they assume that we are familiar with the specific references cited and from them can extrapolate what high (or low) culture ‘mean’. Defining high and low is thus an intricate process of layering, a merging of the highly specific ([saying] Don Keehotay [instead of ‘Don Quixote’], [humorously naming] woodlice, [eating] nuts) with the generalised (conservatism, pretension, humourlessness). That does not mean, however, that individual portraits can be combined to reach a firm definition of the high or lowbrow. The idiosyncratic nature of these definitions rendered it difficult to reach any kind of consensus over what the terms meant, not just across groups but often within them as well. [...] As categories, high and low culture are transient, tangled webs of associations that can refer both to concrete texts, mediums or genres (sculpture, cinema, detective fiction) and to more intangible qualities and ideals (authenticity, originality, genius). (2017: 45-6)

Despite the vagueness of the term, it was clear that it was derogatory. According to a satirical piece from *Punch* that, in turn, supposedly quoted from the BBC, the “middlebrow” was a “new type” of “people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like” (23 December 1925: 673 in Brown and Grover 2012: 4). Though this is often cited as one of the earliest appearances of the word in print, West finds that there were others in the immediate previous years; by contrast,

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<sup>29</sup> Emma Sterry scrutinises the perceived conservative bent of middlebrow texts in *The Single Woman, Modernity, and Literary Culture: Women’s Fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s* (2017), where she finds genre subversion and stylistic experiment.

“lowbrow” can be traced to 1901 and “highbrow” to 1884 (2017: 12).<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, all three terms came into general use in the mid-twenties, appearing in the press in “exponentially” larger numbers for about a decade, with “a brief resurgence” in the forties (*ibid.*). It is important, however, to pause and note, as Ann Ardis does, that “the formal etymology of the term should not lead us to conclude that the phenomenon did not exist prior to its naming” (2011: 19). To summarise and simplify this topic as much as possible, some (Radway 1997, Trodd 1998, Humble 2001, Ardis 2002) have looked for its origins in the realist novels and cultural institutions of the previous century, while for others it is necessarily “a historically specific organization of cultural production that appeared only in the twentieth century when cultural entrepreneurs wedded a particular notion of culture to the production and distribution apparatus associated with supposedly lower forms” (Radway 1997: 367 in Hammill and Hussey 2016: loc. 2449). As used in the twenties, the three categories were entangled, by identification or contrast, with modernism. Though not exactly interchangeable, if “modernist” and “highbrow” could be roughly applied to the same referents, then “middlebrow” was necessary to “distinguish outworn products” in the realist mode against which modernism emerged “from the lowbrow output of mass culture” (Trodd 1998: 47). The brows, then, were ideological and commercial categories associated with a particular audience defined in terms of class (Hammill and Hussey 2016: loc. 2461). Caroline Pollentier explains that, despite some similarities in meaning and function, such as the centrality of differentiation and legitimacy, the middlebrow is not exactly the same as Pierre Bourdieu’s “culture moyenne”, which is deeply embedded in its own French context (2012).

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<sup>30</sup> Emma West finds that *The Oxford English Dictionary* traces “middlebrow” to the *Freeman’s Journal* in 1924; *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing* (Macdonald and Singer 2015) to 1923; *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (Rainey 1998) to 1906, though the author “does not reveal his source” (2017: 12).

Contemporary scholarship has proposed the middlebrow as “a productive, affirmative standpoint for writers who were not wholly aligned with either high modernism or popular culture”, whose more experimental manifestations “are often overlooked because they do not correspond to the experimental strategies of high modernism” (Hammill 2007: 6) and yet sometimes absorbed or parodied them, bringing them to a much larger audience and thus actually “changed the ways in which high culture was understood” (11).<sup>31</sup> It is indeed fruitful to use “middlebrow” to classify the works and agents at play in a cultural landscape, but, of course, “modernism” has been similarly reassessed to include previously middlebrow authors (231). Meanwhile, West warns against “reducing” this “cultural form which operates on entirely different terms altogether” to “a single, static, mid-way point between high and low” (2017: 65). It must also be remembered that “the categories ‘high’ or ‘low’ are regularly subdivided into different, often contradictory sub-categories: within high, there is traditional, modernist and avant-garde culture; within low, there is popular, mass and folk culture” (50). Nicola Humble proposes that it is no use “replicating the elaborate processes of ruling in and out which the guardians of the highbrow pursued so obsessively”, and that, rather, “those *acts* of inclusion and exclusion were absolutely the point” (2011: 43). Therefore, the middlebrow, like its sister labels, is not a stable concept but a dynamic, contextually-bound category.

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<sup>31</sup> In her study of interwar literary celebrity, Faye Hammill considers Dorothy Parker, Anita Loos, Mae West, L. M. Montgomery, Margaret Kennedy, Stella Gibbons and E. M. Delafield. She finds that their books “are frequently considered as odd, because they disrupt the usual categories of interwar literary history. Reasons for this include the generic instability of the novels, their achievement of both critical acclaim and commercial success, and their unusual cross-audience appeal (variously, to intellectuals and mass readerships; men and women; children and adults). These factors are compounded by their uneasy relationship with the (male) literary establishment and their complex attitudes to modernist and experimental art. Also, the largely humorous, nonpolitical content and broadly realist style of these authors’ work are discontinuous with the literary trends of an era remembered primarily in terms of the later phases of high modernism together with the politically engaged literature of the Thirties. It seems that literary-historical accounts of the interwar years have largely left these authors out because they do not fit with the broad paradigms used by critics” (2007: 207-8).

The *Vogue* of the late twenties and thirties is very seldom called a middlebrow magazine; Hammill uses the term for its earlier iteration, when it was so keen on promoting modernism, “on the basis of their combination of art and commerce, their eclectic mix of high and popular culture, and their emphasis on social aspiration and self-fashioning” (2015: 137-8).<sup>32</sup> For the rest of this section, I shall explore the cultural practices that *Vogue* chose to include in order to find the recipe of that mix. Despite a tendency to contradiction, it pushed forward an unequivocal message: it was in the know. It was familiar with modern social codes as well as with traditional propriety, and it could carry a conversation about the goings-on at the forefront of the arts. In other words, *Vogue* was sophisticated. “Sophistication”, like fashion, “works by relentlessly defining itself against its immediate past, or immediate context” (Burstein 2002: 234 in Hammill 2007: 8), and therefore requires knowledge of common taste and the currents that lead away from it. Hammill finds that “sophistication is most insistently invoked and explored” in middlebrow texts, as they were notably preoccupied with the rapid changes in values and manners of the younger generation (2010: 119). *Vogue* shared this preoccupation, and, despite its previous claims to youth, often sided with a readership that was understood to be older, torn between suspicion and fear of falling behind the times and committing a faux pas. That meant keeping the role of intermediary and the responsibility of explaining the differences between modern social practices and the way things had been done before.

Sometimes, an individual signature could push the discussion in favour of the younger perspective. Consider “The Vulgarity of Modern Life”, Aldous Huxley’s intervention in this debate: “Those who find modern literature distasteful, who dislike

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<sup>32</sup> Analysing the feud between Noël Coward and the Sitwells, Faye Hammill finds that “despite, or perhaps because of their conflict,” they “could not be kept in separate cultural categories: their reputations became interrelated, their social circles overlapped, and they received exposure in the same media venues” (2015: 141), which, even after the mid-twenties, included *Vogue*.



contemporary dancing, popular music and social habits, are constantly reproaching modern life with its vulgarity. Those who like modern life retort that it is not vulgar, and that anyone who says that it is vulgar thereby argues himself stupid, sentimental and old-fashioned. Having said which, neither side is any further advanced than when it started (October 5, 1927: 71). He did not address these “middle-aged or aged” potential readers but shamed them, removing them from his target audience and positioning the magazine as knowledgeable enough, from its middle ground, to pass judgement.

We may ask whether it is possible to discover, among these shifting judgements, a permanent scale of values, to discern behind all the relativities anything like an Absolute Vulgarity. I think it is. If we admit the existence of a natural hierarchy among human beings (and even the best democrats must confess that some human beings are naturally superior to others), then we must admit that there are habits of thought and behaviour characteristic of natural aristocrats and natural commoners. (*Ibid.*)

This hierarchy was not meant to correlate with social class, but it used its lexicon. Most importantly, it folded social mores into cultural practices. “Vitality”, the “motive power which drives the human engine” and, unlike “delicacy, half-shades and good taste”, necessary for good artistic production, could be found in authors such as Balzac, Chaucer and Shakespeare (*ibid.*), but also in the bestselling novels of Florence L. Barclay, which were very much lowbrow. Though he admits that “I would rather had written *The Rosary* than one of those conscientious, ‘well-written’ (there is a way of writing well which is only another and more pretentious way of writing badly) and thoroughly lifeless books which refined writers produce in such quantities every publishing season”, he considered it stupid, and thus vulgar—adjectives that he also applied, in the same breath, to jazz music (100). “In general it may be said that all vulgar sentimentality in art is the product of minds incapable of comprehending more than a few, and those the most obvious, aspects of reality. The minds that appreciate sentimentality are the same type as the minds that create it. There is a natural and absolute servants’ hall with its own servants’ hall artists to entertain and edify it (*ibid.*).

*Vogue* desperately wanted to be sophisticated, but it would not abandon vitality: it wanted to enrich the lives of its readers, not only inform them. Its coverage of cultured living was famed enough to be referenced in contemporary novels, like Stella Gibbons' 1932 comic novel *Cold Comfort Farm*, so often included in surveys of the middlebrow.

And Elfine obediently resumed her reading aloud of 'Our Lives from Day to Day' from an April number of 'Vogue'. When she had finished, Flora took her, page by page, through a copy of 'Chiffons' which was devoted to descriptions and sketches of lingerie. Flora pointed out how these graceful petticoats and night-gowns depended upon their pure line and delicate embroidery for their beauty; how all gross romanticism was purged away, or expressed only in a fold or a flute of material. She then showed how the same delicacy might be found in the style of Jane Austen, or a painting by Marie Laurencin.

'It is that kind of beauty,' said Flora, 'that you must learn to look for and admire in everyday life.'

'I like the night-gowns and "Persuasion",' said Elfine, 'but I don't like "Our Lives" very much, Flora. It's all rather in a hurry, isn't it, and wanting to tell you how nice it was?'

'I do not propose that you shall found a life-philosophy upon "Our Lives from Day to Day"', Elfine. I merely make you read it because you will have to meet people who do that kind of thing, and you must on no account be all dewy and awed when you do meet them. You can, if you like, secretly despise them. Nor must you talk about Marie Laurencin to people who hunt. They will merely think she is your new mare. No. I tell you of these things in order that you may have some standards, within yourself, with which secretly to compare the many new facts and people you will meet if you enter a new life.' (2006: Ch. XII)

Later, Flora brings her aunt Ada Doom in step with the times—not the thirties, but a vague and satirical forecast of the forties—by giving her "the copy of 'Vogue', the prospectus of the Hôtel Miramar in Paris and the photographs of Fanny Ward" (Ch. XX). *Vogue* had a response very soon after the novel's publication:

Yielding with apparent reluctance to the letters of congratulation that have reached us in our secret hiding-place on the references to *Vogue* and to these chronicles in books and plays of the moment, we read gratefully in *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons (Longmans), a passage where we find Elfine obediently reading 'Our Lives from Day to Day' in order to prepare herself to meet people who lead our rather strenuous lives and not be too overwhelmed and to have some standards of her own to judge by. And in *Strange Orchestra* by Rodney Ackland, now having such a successful run, Sylvia very sensibly remarks, 'I really feel *Vogue* is one's favourite book. If anyone asks me who is my favourite author, I always say 'the Editor of *Vogue*.' (November 23, 1932: 102)

The column then mentioned the Camargo Society, a keystone of British ballet at the time, "which I advise Elfine to join at once" (*ibid.*). These references prove that *Vogue*'s

status as cultural intermediary was not merely self-appointed, but it was perceived that way by outsiders, who in turn confirmed it in their works.<sup>33</sup>

Before going into literature, it may be simpler to first look at *Vogue*'s coverage of other arts, as it was less frequent and, to the eye of someone who is not an art historian, more straightforward. In the late twenties, it continued to show its interest in modern painters, collectors and dealers, though less often and in smaller doses, the most notable being a well-publicised series of essays by Augustus John. Paul Morand visited several French painters at home (Marie Laurencin, *Vogue*'s old favourite, was said to have "the typical young girl's apartment", "more of a boudoir than a studio, and more of a nursery than a boudoir") and conversed with them on quotidian, rather than artistic, subjects; their comments were not directly reported but summed up, and overall the piece demystified them rather than exalt them as geniuses (March 5, 1930: 59). While coverage like this waned in the thirties, there were looks into artists' studios and gallery openings, and at the close of the decade there were reproductions of paintings by Oswald Birley, Peter Blume, Salvador Dalí, Henri Matisse, Amedeo Modigliani, Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera and John himself, as well as of older artists like Cézanne, Goya, Renoir or Henri Rousseau, usually paired with in-depth essays by Frank Crowninshield or M. F. Agha, *Vogue*'s Art Editor-in-Chief.

This serious approach contrasted with essays that insisted that appearing knowledgeable about the arts—and appearing is a key word—was necessary to be perceived as sophisticated. Consider this feature, which expressed a preference for Surrealism, not only in painting but also in stage and fashion design:

You may go all superior and say, 'Oh, but surrealism was dead years ago. ... It's just like cubism and Dadaism and futurism and all the other isms that flourish like mushrooms on the Continent. ...' Yet the importance of a movement is measured not so much by the efforts of one small group of artists, as by the effectiveness of their ideas in

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<sup>33</sup> By contrast, *Vogue* is not among the magazines read by the protagonist of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) at the hairdressers', though she goes through quite a large selection.

many aspects of life and art. When you see surrealism in the films of the Marx brothers; in the writing of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf; in the presentation of fashion, well, then you must hand it to the surrealists; they're on to something which we shall go on hearing about in the near future. [...] At the Exhibition, don't bring any of your preconceived prejudices to bear on the pictures; if something seems too awful for words give it your close attention and see if it doesn't contain some sort of truth. [...] Try thinking 'I like a picture to *feel* like something...' then you may achieve pleasure and profit. (Fordham June 10, 1936: 110)

This is not exactly profound advice, but its lightly encouraging voice, willing to bring more conservative or less cultured readers into step, is actually quite revealing. Other pieces, by contrast, were outright flippant:

A lady of quality should be able to walk into any drawing-room, to look at the picture over the mantelpiece and to exclaim: 'Oh, what a charming Picasso of the early Blue period,' or 'I like your new Follower of Massaccio (circa 1420) immensely.' If she guesses right, she is a gentleman and a scholar. If she is wrong, her cultural standing is usually sadly impaired. It is more dangerous to be wrong about the author of a modern painting than of an old one. (July 20, 1938: 34)

In other words, it was better to be up-to-date than to cling to received wisdom. Covarrubias illustrated shops in the style of modern artists, educating readers by giving them a common reference. Picasso, for instance, "usually" resembled "a display room in a RUG AND QUILT department" (*ibid.*) while Braque was a "DELICATESSEN STORE" and Dalí an "ORTHOPAEDIC SHOP" (35). Lesley Blanch often devoted her section to current events in the arts, but claimed ignorance or amateurism to avoid coming across as pretentious: "I shall have to take a refresher course in chi-chi before I can express any opinion", in this case about a catalogue "so full of Serge Lifar, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Francis Rose, Louis Bromfield, Jean Cocteau, a merman, old Uncle Tom Cobley and all" (January 25, 1939: 65). Her apparent dismissal of the highbrow art of not so long ago as "chi chi" was simultaneous to more serious essays: in contrast to the contradictions and ambiguities of the magazine as a whole, her position as an individual critic was very much and very clearly middlebrow.

Most of the arts were approached in this way, in part with passionate expertise, in part with somewhat disparaging humour. There were divagations on ballet, an introduction to swing music, biographical sketches of photographers and orchestra

conductors, and so on. Theatre reviews continued to be very important, and Herbert Farjeon attempted to guess what may shape the genre in coming years, noting the successful but surprisingly “solid and sober and ‘unmodern’” *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot and the new plays by W. H. Auden, which were “not to be passed over as lightly as those critics who automatically praise all sure-fire musical comedies may think” (February 19, 1936: 56). The cinema, unsurprisingly, gained visibility: unlike most British “cinematic highbrow[s]”, who tended “to sneer at British films ever since there were any”, *Vogue* sided with “New Yorkers, most sophisticated of film audiences”, who actually enjoyed British films (Coxhead July 12, 1939: 45). The critic, though, was suspicious of a different sector of the audience:

Hollywood seems to think there is something in Great Literature, and is getting its teeth into Shakespeare, Jane Austen and, for all we know, *Paradise Lost*. Hollywood may be right, but it is ominously likely that Great Literature will be a smart success with the sophisticated town audiences, and a flop with the Common Person, and it is the Common People who make the cinema pay (October 13, 1937: 84).

Her “sophisticated town audiences”, it must be said, were not necessarily highbrows, but could well be readers of *Vogue*. Still, despite the handful just mentioned, the relative dearth and irregular tone of critical essays suggests a diminished interest in the arts, and literature was not an exception, as the next section shall explore.

Institutions and initiatives that “aimed to widen access to canonical writing, to mentor readers in their choices, or, more broadly, to encourage self-culture” were usually considered middlebrow (Hammill and Hussey 2016: loc. 2277); its practices involved the refinement of taste. Pollentier, in her look at middlebrow culture through the framework of Bourdieu’s *culture moyenne*, writes:

This hierarchy of taste is internalized by all cultural actors, so that the petit bourgeois, belonging to the middle class, reveres legitimate culture and aspires towards it, without possessing the knowledge of the elite. Understanding this aspiration as ‘cultural goodwill’, Bourdieu therefore categorizes petit-bourgeois taste as an intermediary position within a tripartite model of culture. On the one hand, ‘the petit bourgeois is filled with reverence for culture’: ‘[t]his middlebrow culture (*culture moyenne*) owes some of its charm, in the eyes of the middle classes who are its main consumers, to the references to legitimate culture it contains’. On the other hand, ‘middle-brow culture is resolutely against vulgarity’. (2012: 39)

Middlebrow practices were concerned not only with the more obvious expressions of “legitimate culture” but, as Hammill reminds us, “the whole area of lifestyle choices and cultural consumption, from interiors, gardens, design and fashion to preferences in entertainment and reading material” (2012: 232). Still, the Battle of the Brows was above all a question of the legitimacy of certain types of literature, driven by its establishment as an academic discipline. If it was “to be recognised as a serious subject, one capable of rigorous examination, then it needed to have boundaries, definitions, and—most importantly of all—it needed to establish and privilege a very particular way of reading”, that is, close reading (Humble 2011: 45). Though process unfolded in the thirties, Catherine Clay points to the year 1932 in particular as a turning point, after which “the middlebrow was progressively subjected to assault and ridicule by a powerful group of intellectual critics” (2018c: 191). This was the year of Woolf’s previously mentioned letter, as well as the launching of F. R. Leavis’s journal *Scrutiny* and the publication of *Fiction and the Reading Public* by Q. D. Leavis, his wife. In contrast to the professional, these critics often set up the “plain” or “common reader”, which West describes as “a trope” that “was used to connote the type of mythical individual with the kind of simple taste, basic education and unsophisticated desires which the elite imagined was characteristic of the masses” (2017: 10, N6). These general audiences, beyond rhetoric, could turn to individual critics, like Arnold Bennett,<sup>34</sup> or literary periodicals, like *John O’London’s Weekly*, which targeted a wide,

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<sup>34</sup> Looking at Arnold Bennett’s 1910 “thin and inexpensive book” titled *Literary Taste: How to Form It*, Sean Latham finds that he took “careful note of the fact that literature had become a valuable sort of cultural capital, highly prized by the upwardly mobile members of the urban middle classes. Calling a properly formed sense of literary taste ‘a certificate of correct culture,’ Bennett argued that most people looked on it ‘as an elegant accomplishment, by acquiring which they will complete themselves, and make themselves finally fit as members of a correct society’”, which for many writers, not only modernists, “was precisely the problem. Having been absorbed by the mass-mediated marketplace as just another commodity, literature had become subject to the intrinsically unstable rule of fashion” (2003: 215). In his study of Bennett’s reviews for the *Evening Standard* in the late twenties, Shapcott points out that “if Bennett’s literary tastes are held to reflect the aesthetic and moral values of a supposedly ‘middlebrow’

lower middle class audience and carried serious yet accessible stories and essays as well as “major new serialisations” that were publicised as “important cultural events” (Bingham 2012: 64). Critics like Leavis feared that the taste-making power of these periodicals would result in less daring and diverse art;

Fleet Street was driven by profit and circulation figures, and it encouraged a mindset in which sales and circulation became essential markers of value. The preoccupation with the bottom-line discouraged certain types of risk-taking, and especially the avoidance of moral controversy. Yet when interwar newspapers are viewed without Leavis’s presumption of cultural decline—and, indeed, with a consciousness of the evolution of the popular press in the second half of the twentieth century—one is struck not by their philistinism but by their commitment to the world of books. (65)

Because the Battle of the Brows was literary, and because the critical essays that it had published in the mid-twenties had all but vanished by the thirties, *Vogue* is not often included in studies of the middlebrow. Nonetheless, it devoted space to the refinement and correction of cultural taste and therefore still had stakes in this debate. Neither Lesley Blanch nor the other contributors ever said out loud that they aimed to teach readers how to acquire and display cultural capital, but they certainly guided them through the trappings of modern culture in most of its forms. Blanch’s main contribution as features editor was a regular section, halfway between a critical essay and a cultural review and aptly titled “Vogue’s Spotlight”, that first appeared in October 28 1936. There she discussed everything from artistic goings-on in London, such as new exhibitions, the theatre or the ballet, to fine wines. In between, she wrote about film adaptations of novels or other periodicals, mourning “the passing of that admirable weekly *Night and Day*” (February 2, 1938: 41), in a tone that blended the gossipy voice of the society columns with the familiar archness of her predecessors. She was not the only one: readers could search beyond her section if they had further enquiries into the how and why of modern culture.

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readership, then such a readership was far less conservative than this derogatory label suggests” (2012: 83).

“To be indifferent to one’s surroundings is a doctrine of perfection which is given to very few to attain”, began a critical essay by Augustus John that sustained *Vogue*’s identification of the home with the self:

In the walls and furniture of any room there is a complete symbolism of its inhabitants. By the manner in which he garnishes his abode even an illiterate can sign his name. [...] So expressive of the owner’s self, indeed, or at any rate of the manner in which he wishes society to judge him, is the decoration of the house, that there even exists such a thing as deceptive decoration. [...] The comfortable house is not a ‘treasure-house,’ and good taste should not fall into the error of ‘impeccable taste.’ (October 31, 1928: 51)

What one could not buy was “atmosphere”, which John associated with comfort and simplicity; in fact, it was “very hard to achieve deliberately”, particularly nowadays, when “the owner, like the house, is becoming standardised” (*ibid.*); “the only true index of the culture of a period is the intensity of its search for and discovery of what is vital in contemporary art”, even if “that in itself is not enough” (74). If critics on the “highbrow” side suspected that easily marketed aesthetics may result in uniformity, *Vogue* commended readers for exercising their taste—not merely parroting existing criticism, but using it to inform their preferences—in all aspects of life.

Outside of literature, it is on interior design that *Vogue* expressed clear views; after all, modern decoration in general, and modernist design in particular, was often discussed during this period. “Having gone all the way with modernism since 1917”, it declared, “Vogue believes that this style is unconsciously affecting taste everywhere, and that in its best phases it has profoundly influenced decoration for the better” (September 16, 1931: 56). In this instance it did not clarify what it meant by “unconsciously”, or what “its best phases” were, but it was clear that *Vogue* had moved on from the “amusing” strand of modernism to its more streamlined development:

What is all this talk about modern furniture? Why are we suddenly waking up to modernism? The answer probably lies in the fact that we are just beginning to appreciate how modern we are—that our manners are modern, our way of living modern, yes, even to the way we sit on chairs. [...] Eventually we shall evolve an harmonious modernism through the efforts of those who can combine technical knowledge, sympathy and understanding for modern manufacturing possibilities with the ability to reflect truthfully in line, form and colour the environment and real beauty of our present age. (Weber May 16, 1928: 80, 110)



Furthermore, *Vogue* recommended Curtis Moffat's "modernist" décor shop for Christmas presents, as it stocked "all the newest, most Vogueish gifts of metal and glass and china" (December 11, 1929: 63), and, at a larger scale, insisted on the necessity of modernising Victorian houses, which it described as ugly and unfit for modern life. Nonetheless, it acknowledged that "the mere mention of 'modernist' applied to furniture or decoration is enough to frighten people", as the uninitiated assumed it meant rigidity and discomfort (February 6, 1929: 32). Actually, it insisted, modernist design was light, free from fuss and self-consciousness. It was proportional to modern living spaces and adapted to modern needs, including the "luxurious low-seated sofas and chairs and tables constructed with an eye to their suitability for books and cocktails" that "we want" (*ibid.*). In a familiar manoeuvre, rather than outright declaring for cutting-edge design, *Vogue* soothed its readers, insisting that "'futurist' effects and heavy masses of colour are not essential" (*ibid.*). Visitors should not let interior design exhibitions put them off, as they served "to test theories, whether of decoration, economics, or relativity", unlike the home, where furnishings "must be less daring, and should never be allowed to sacrifice charm and convenience to the securing of striking effects" (33). Thus *Vogue* was willing to educate and compromise in this as in other areas. When it stated that modern decoration "offers an astonishing field to good taste, a field that has been only half explored as yet", it clearly meant that the field guide ought to be *Vogue* (April 30, 1930: 33).

For that purpose there were essays and illustrated features, but also reviews of new publications in which *Vogue* could respond to expert output, albeit indirectly. Anthony Bertram, the art historian, was said to be "the missionary of modernism"—"yet he can be disagreed with" (March 4, 1936: 100). Paul Nash, the famous artist, was commended for *Room and Book*, which surveyed "the present situation in the field of

applied art; the genuine modern movement with its hangers-on who are more dangerous than its enemies; the lack of organisation within and of intelligent demand without, and the resulting waste of time and talent” (May 11, 1932: 74). It is perhaps surprising that *Vogue* paid so much attention to this matter and so little, comparatively speaking, to fashion, but it seems that there were few theoretical and critical surveys available, unlike fashion history books, of which there were many positive notices. Therefore, academic approaches to fashion were considered of interest for its readers. J. C. Flügel’s *The Psychology of Clothes* was received with open arms:

The most interesting of books for anyone who is concerned with clothes, and therefore to almost everyone but the nude savage. Incidentally it includes a triumphant vindication of fashion, which is shown to provide the most exquisite adaptations to the physical needs as well as the aesthetic sense, in contrast to ‘sensible clothes’ of the type worn by men, for instance. Virtue is for once denied its own reward, which is handed over instead to the happily frivolous. It is all very exhilarating. (November 26, 1930: 114)

Of course *Vogue* would celebrate a study of fashion that provided strong arguments against accusations of frivolity! Even when, as in this case, a book was recommended through humour, the fact remained that the content was taken seriously enough, and that it pushed self-actualisation, one of the tenets of middlebrow culture, as a central reason to read.

Still, an even more important reason was to be able to hold a conversation about books. That had always been one of its beliefs, as explained in the second chapter, but now the point was pushed further: one issue organised its reviews in three sections, “You Must Have Read”, “You Will Be in the Modern Movement With” and “You Will Make Conversation With” (March 7, 1934: 118). Herbert Farjeon, the theatre critic, semi-facetiously advised audiences “to set down one or two questions” about *Hamlet*, “critical not of the production but of the play itself, which might be propounded in company to set tongues wagging. Begin by affirming your eternal admiration for Shakespeare’s masterpiece. It is amazing, it is marvellous, it is unparalleled. All the

same, you cannot help asking"... (January 23, 1935: 63). The joke was built on the assumption that readers must be anxious about having something smart to say, an experience shared by all but the highest of brows. Even guides to modern etiquette had something to say about literature, though of course etiquette—or common sense—had it that there were many times when one should not appear smart.<sup>35</sup> One such occasion was the shooting party, an event that certainly reinforced the stereotype of the upper-class philistine. Nancy Mitford wrote a scorchingly funny essay in which, assuming that nobody that had ever attended a shooting party had actually enjoyed themselves, she advised readers to interact with other guests as little as possible. If forced to talk, though, they should avoid politics and culture at all costs:

It is a mistake to begin a house-party on doubtful terms with another member of it, and a discussion on the respective merits of Sir Luke Fildes and Picasso might easily lead to such an estrangement. But do not be discouraged. It is tolerably safe to chatter away on such subjects as *The Toll of the Road*, the latest outrage perpetrated by the Bright Young People, and the Wall Street crash. (December 11, 1929: 52, 80)

Perhaps, she suggested, readers should learn about wine or gourmet food to be prepared.

What one may be willing to discuss in public was not necessarily what one liked or even knew in one's own literary practices. Both highbrow and middlebrow attitudes could be frowned upon depending on the context, but sophistication, or *Vogue's* version of it, demanded familiarity with the two. As mentioned, "modernist formal practices began to be imitated and appropriated as signs of sophistication by middlebrow artists and audiences" as early as the mid-twenties (Hammill 2010: 119), coinciding with Dorothy Todd's editorship. By Settle's, *Vogue* assumed that readers were familiar with Virginia Woolf's works; she was its most frequently mentioned modernist, not counting D. H. Lawrence, who tended to be discussed on the grounds of his persona, not his

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<sup>35</sup> In the essay "Talkers and Talking", the novelist Pamela Hinkson mused that the art of conversation ought to be taught in "our education", by which she did not mean school but *Vogue* itself: "I think *Vogue* should consider a Talking Book, or a Book of Conversation, uniform with *Vogue's* Dressmaking Book and *Vogue's* Books of Knitting. It might run into many editions, necessitating new patterns and fashions for talkers. (A good idea and I hope the Editor will give it to me to write.)" (April 4, 1934: 87)

writing. When Pamela Murray announced that “I, we, and they skate. It is an ice mania”, she immediately turned to Woolf’s recent bestseller as a point of reference: “An influenza of the feet, and often of the brain. The germ is concealed by the desire to excel mightily—to glide, like the glorious Orlando, who swept his barbaric Sasha ‘over the ice, faster, faster’; against a setting of kings, courtiers and commoners, all revelling in the Great Frost” (November 26, 1930: 84). Moreover, a feature on dog breeds began with a mention of the “tender” *Flush* (March 21, 1934: 80).<sup>36</sup> Once readers were familiar with highbrow signatures, they could not only hold serious literary debates but also appropriate them in order to spice up their conversation: “But the reward of disinterestedness lies in the interest of being disinterested. (A thought that might be developed in the manner of Gertrude Stein. ‘Disinterestedness. Decidedly interesting. An interesting disinterestedness. Capital yielding a handsome interest.’ And so forth.)” (Gerhadi April 18, 1928: 53).

There was an ambiguity to the way *Vogue* sometimes praised highbrow attitudes. It did something to dismiss conventional philistine attitudes, pushing readers to try out intellectual pastimes and undermining some stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> For instance, when Francis Meynell covered the launch of the First Edition Club, he attempted to reform the

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<sup>36</sup> Assumptions about readers’ literary experience, of course, also shaped *Vogue*’s literary criticism. Woolf was useful as a point of literary comparison, as in the review that said that R. D. Dorthing’s *Above and Below* was “modelled on Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* method, a deceivingly easy-looking but in reality extremely difficult style for a ‘prentice hand. The reader’s mind is apt to whirl at times with the unexplained meditations of unexplained people” (June 12, 1929: 82): unfortunately, Dorthing’s attempt was not quite successful. When *Vogue* recommended Charles Duff’s *James Joyce and the Plain Reader* it suggested that readers ought to have read some Joyce by now, or at least be acquainted with the style of this “literary sphinx”; it was commended for outlining “the entire work of the subject” as well as describing other writers’ and Duff’s own emotional and stylistic responses to Joyce (April 13, 1932: 74).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Tennant, for example, argued that the art of the cinema was gaining continental sophistication and producing more intelligent entertainment and finished with: “by all means let us play your flutes meanwhile, and by that I mean, be highbrow, if, as it seems, to be highbrow signifies to be intelligent (April 4, 1928: 95). “Nothing is so exhilarating to the mind as intellectual pessimism. Mark the word *intellectual*”, insisted William Gerhadi in his review of Russian greats, “for emotional pessimism is every bit as bad as forced gaiety, and exactly for the same reason; because it is forced. Intellectual pessimism, on the other hand, is supported by fact, demonstrated by reasoning, as it were, to our complete pleasure and satisfaction” (April 18, 1928: 53). Comments like these suggest that it was not exactly tasteful to be smart in that way, a suspicion that could only be countered with a dash of irony.

image of the bibliophile, who nowadays was “more likely to be a young man about town, or the young man about town’s charming sister” (June 27, 1928: 58). Collecting, he insisted, was not only fashionable but romantic, and investing in future classics would surely prove thrilling. “Miss Nancy Cunard”, that symbol of modish daring, “hopes soon to be setting up and printing her own and her friends’ work. It is good to be a poet for many reasons, not the least being that poetry is far easier for the amateur to put into type than is prose!” (79). *Vogue* continued to promote the Sitwells, the clear favourites among the highbrows, into the thirties. Besides reviewing their new works, it covered revised editions of rare early verse and uniform volumes. “I think that a taste for the Sitwells is born, never acquired”, posited the usually middlebrow Blanch: “You either dote upon their particular turn of mind, or you don’t. I dote upon them almost to excess” (December 14, 1938: 94). By describing them as “illuminating, erudite and witty” in a list of literary gifts for Christmas, she was clearly suggesting that *Vogue* readers would do well to dote upon them, too (*ibid.*). For the well-informed among them, books that dared to be more experimental, difficult and, well, modern, were singled out. As Alice Wood argues in her survey, magazines like *Vogue* “both challenged and were complicit in creating the cultural hierarchies that elevated modernism above other cultural forms”, as acknowledging the difficulty of those texts meant rewarding those readers who gave them a chance (2020: 179).<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>38</sup> “There is a peculiar kind of pleasure to be found in this experiment with language”, *Anna Livia Plurabelle* by James Joyce, “even to those who find it completely meaningless” (June 25, 1930: 78). Among them was Mary MacCarthy, who “read Joyce’s *Anna Livia Plurabelle* in the shop. The latter must be imbibed ‘on the premises,’ for who is going to give £3 3s. for a little book of experimental nonsense?” (May 1, 1929: 59). Proust, “a genius”, was commended for writing “some of the world’s most intricate prose” (July 23, 1930: 66); Pirandello’s stories in *The Naked Truth* rang true to life, even though—or perhaps because—they did not impose a narrative pattern to “the formlessness of life” (March 21, 1934: 108). *Soldier’s Pay* was “not a ‘literary’ book, but has a strange combination of powers and qualities to which the words ‘humour’ and ‘pathos’ are too hackneyed to apply. The author”, a “young, almost unknown” William Faulkner, was “said to be a house-painter” (July 23, 1930: 66); “everything Cocteau does is interesting” (May 3, 1933: 96). The inaccessibility of prose and author often went hand in hand. “Not perhaps for the general novel reader, but distinctly a find for the literary gourmet,” *Eva* was “at once forcible, delicate and strange” from a suitably eccentric author, Jacques Chardonne, who was said to live “on the bank of the Seine in a cottage which he has not left for ten years” (November 26, 1930: 114);

highbrow writing was homogenised and dismissed as often as taken seriously,<sup>39</sup> and before recommending a decidedly modern book *Vogue* took care to convince readers that it was neither boring nor pretentious. From insisting that readers engage with modern literature *because* it was modern and articulating what was new, complicated and interesting about it, *Vogue* began to reinforce stereotypes to win readers over, presenting successful modern works as exceptions. This is modern, yes, but do not worry: it is the good, solid type of modern.

Unsurprisingly, the negative qualities of “modern” extended to other arts, disciplines and the people who engaged in them. Pretentiousness, not dullness, was the most common charge levelled at highbrows, whether real individuals or the idea of them. Their ostentatiously modern manners, the aristocrat and translator Améthé von Zeppelin suggested, vanished in the face of the inconveniences of travel: “Even the denizens of the Bloomsburiest of Bloomsbury flats, who spend every moment of their spare time in the plumberless paradise of the U.S.S.R., develop a passion for two hot baths a day, demand *The Times* newspaper, and generally demonstrate qualities which

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Nina Hamnet’s *Laughing Torso* was recommended on the strength of the author’s bohemian credentials, as she was “one of the most vigorous survivors of a passing race and cult”, and, as befits that image, had told “the intimate story of her unconventional life in a steady rush of staccato sentences” (June 8, 1932: 76). Quite a few positive reviews straddled the categories of high- and middlebrow, revealing that experiment was not an exclusive trait of the former. Huxley balanced “modern sophistication and antique splendour of imagery” in his poetry (May 27, 1931: 104); *Frost in May*, the first novel by Antonia White, was “one of those interesting experiments in fiction which the far-reaching word ‘novel’ still covers” (July 26, 1933: 60). Disregard of genre conventions was the strong point of the stories by H. E. Bates, Stella Benson, A. E. Coppard, David Garnett, James Hanly, T. F. Powys and Sylvia Townsend Warner, among others, collected in *The Furnival Book of Short Stories*: “A great deal of the most distinguished work being done by contemporary writers in the way of short pieces of fiction never gets into the fiction magazines for various reasons, one of the chief of which is that they are too like life and not near enough to the accepted conventions of such material” (November 9, 1932: 90).

<sup>39</sup> Though Albert Buhner’s *Rosetta* was said to be a fine example of modern poetry, *Vogue* warned that “here are no stark lines, severe metaphors and angular similes. So perhaps this is not ‘modern’ poetry after all” (H.P. January 23, 1929: 62). Commending Sylvia Lynd for being “content with old and lovely rhythms”, “delightful in colour and texture” in *The Yellow Placard*, the reviewer immediately made a dig at “the new-fangled jangle of much modern verse” (September 2, 1931: 66). As for prose, another anonymous reviewer acknowledged that “we are becoming a little tired of novels that are simply descriptions of psychological states, and there is a decided reaction in favour of drama and incident” (April 17, 1929: 74).

have made the Empire what it is!” (May 15, 1935: 74).<sup>40</sup> Besides hypocrisy, pretentiousness also implied deliberate obscurity.<sup>41</sup> Said untenable snooty “attitude” was the target of every satire of the highbrows and their works. Paul Morand introduced one M. de Saint-Ysé, a guest at a Parisian party, as follows:

He is the social representative of advanced art. A kind of intermediary between *Montparnasse*, the *Rotonde* and the *Faubourg Saint-Germain*. He is the arbiter of all the Picassos and the most handsome of Marie Laurencin’s shepherd dogs. Hélène Perdriat and Foujita have no better impresario; the impresarios now being the ambassadors of art... [...He] can be heard speaking in a high-pitched voice: ‘We modern artists simply can’t stand the pedal in music, the impressionistic daub in painting, and sentiment in art. Volume, surface, syncopated rhythm: things well constructed: above all, things well constructed.’

‘He is an architect?’ Clorinda asks.

‘No, but let a man’s life be turned topsy-turvy nowadays like the sets for a German movie, and he will forthwith begin talking of things being well constructed, as the jargon *à la mode* would have it. Besides, Saint-Ysé *is* an architect to an extent: as he happened to own some old abandoned hovels on the quais which no one could rent even for warehouses, he had them repainted, called them ‘studios,’ furnished them with black divans, and now he rents them at handsome figures to young American girls who feel that they have a turn for sculpture and the pleasures of Europe. Europe is for Americans what the carnival of Venice was for Voltaire’s kings.’ (September 7, 1927: 47)

Morand described a much-changed Europe where “often the former masters have become the servants of the very people they employed before the war” (76); at salons, the old and the young mixed, and people came and went as they please.

Wit has been dispensed with. ‘General conversation,’ that flower of the French salons, is a thing of the past. No clash of ideas, no expert telling of anecdotes. Now the talk is of clothes, and the stocks of the North African copper mines, and the prices for Picassos at Rosenberg’s. When Jean-Claude was very young, if by any chance there was some mention made of literature in a respectable home, only Paul Bourget was meant. But no one ever invited intellectuals; and if Marcel Proust, with his orchid in his buttonhole and his beautiful linen from Charvet’s, would appear in a salon late, at the hour when all the others were leaving, this was because he was not suspected to be a writer. (*Ibid.*)

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<sup>40</sup> For the sake of the “intellectual entertainment” of her guests, who were said to include “a jumble of Victorian ladies, Frontier braves, literary dilettantes, communists, soft-riding Irish, a Scottish laird and family, a crazy crystallographer, one or two other scientists, a poet, several and various *femmes de trente ans*, a few Bright Young Things”, etc., she “summoned a psychoanalyst to prove the accessibility of the Freudian paradise which Vienna means to Bloomsbury” (*ibid.*).

<sup>41</sup> For instance, *Vogue* praised Peter Spencer precisely because “he is without the ‘intellectual snobbery’ which so many people affect” despite being “counted as a ‘high-brow’” (October 5, 1927: 67). H. T. W. Bousfield was said to be “at the same time highly accomplished and quite unpretentious”; his short stories were not like “those atmospheric and rather boring trifles that occur so frequently in the literary weeklies”, but “good” and “straight” (July 12, 1939: 66). A glowing review of Isak Dinesen’s *Seven Gothic Tales* levelled similar charges, noting that “after those stacks of terse, understated, underfilled and thinly conceived ‘modern’ novels it is a curious liberation to find oneself walking in the cloudy halls of a deep and rich imagination, a mind not afraid of symbolism” (November 14, 1934: 96); meanwhile, in *Frost at Morning* by Beatrice Kean Seymour, “the psychology is modern but not so much so that it need deter anyone from reading an excellent novel” (November 13, 1935: 114).

Writers, once disreputable, had become central to society life, but artistic pull was often mistaken for sartorial eccentricity, costume or character, rather than seriously recognised. Even so, Morand concluded, the Paris of nowadays was more human, more likeable, and charming at its core. Similarly, the “Personages of Paris”, one of those satires of types sketched by Covarrubias, included “The Master”, “Baxter, the great leader of the Odoristes, whose poems deal exclusively with smells. Between sniffs he talks on free love, until the purchasing power of his audience is exhausted” (December 28, 1928: 41). Another one, illustrating “A Pack of Five Inveterate Tea-Hounds”, showed a “Miss Witherspoon, poetess, who holds tea-audiences spellbound while she explains free verse and illustrates it with her own works. For her bays are already won”; she drank china tea, “—of course” (November 16, 1927: 71). Though both characters wore round glasses, nothing in their dress was particularly noticeable, except perhaps there was something of Nancy Cunard in the poetess’s bangles; their key attribute, is their lecturing attitude.<sup>42</sup>

These representations, though satirical, are not cruel. As outside its pages the Battle of the Brows became more complicated and serious, inside the magazine highbrows seemed to be picturesque fossils. André Maurois, for one, argued that the English temperament was inescapably middlebrow,<sup>43</sup> and that highbrows were extinct:

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<sup>42</sup> While these satires became less frequent in the thirties, as late as 1938 *Vogue* declared that: “‘Absolute time... was abandoned by the relativity theory,’ said Albert Einstein. We’re abandoning absolute time, too. For time is out of joint. It’s been bowled over, knocked silly. Super-speed plays havoc with it. [...] Keep pace with time by reading, in this issue, *Vogue’s* Primer of Art, which tells you—not too seriously—how to recognize a modern artist at a glance” (July 20, 1938: 17).

<sup>43</sup> “The English are much less given to literary snobbishness than are the French. In France, there is a vast army of readers who want to know what is going on in the world of books merely because of the important place that literature holds in conversation, side by side with those genuine book-lovers who feel a need of spiritual nourishment. [...] Englishmen have more assurance and serenity as regards their ignorance, and, generally speaking, know little about their modern literature. In England, a new novelist is slow to gain ground. Successful men, such as Forster and Baring have a comparatively small following, and one has to attain to the glory of an Arnold Bennett or an H. G. Wells before conquering the masses. [...] In England, with a few rare exceptions, a circle of readers grows more slowly, though more surely, and other country pays such attention to its classic novelists. The younger generation are beginning to desert Dickens, but Scott, and above all, Jane Austen, are sacred. To say that one does not like Jane Austen is to admit that one does not understand a whole English viewpoint” (June 13, 1928: 61). In his



The small group of English people who live only for literature (a very small group indeed, two or three thousand at most) have the finest and most exacting taste in the world. The high quality of this taste is due to the small number of individuals possessing it. There are, of course, periods when refinement becomes preciosity. Four or five years ago the English intelligentsia went through a phase of pretentiousness. Such importance was attached to detailed perfection that anything on the grand scale was dreaded. The genius of a writer so obviously worthy of admiration as Kipling was denied. All that is over (June 13, 1928: 61)

Fortunately, they were now ready to appreciate the likes of Arnold Bennett in public.

Side by side with this minute number of the élite, lives an immense public that thrives on a type of book best described by the generic term ‘thriller.’ A ‘thriller’ is either a detective story or a complicated tale of sentiment and adventure. It is the kind of book that intrigues the reader to such a degree that he cannot put it down, and even forgets his own existence. [...] In England the ‘thriller’ is an institution; it seems to be almost a necessity. (*Ibid.*)

All classes shared this necessity, a phenomenon that Maurois attributed to the weather; after all, frequently forced to stay indoors, the English must find distraction:

I have noticed that the greatest wisecracks have a keen liking for the novel of adventure and mystery, perhaps because it gives their minds an almost mathematical problem to solve. [...] The circulating library has a marked influence on the English literary output. It robs the novelist of the large number of buyers that he would find in France, but on the other hand it favours the publication of the very long book and of books on art. The Englishman therefore has more frivolous and more serious reading-matter than a man of any other nationality. (*Ibid.*)

Though in a different tone, Seymour Leslie’s essay “The Return of Culture” reached a similar conclusion. As it described the rise and fall of highbrowism in fashionable social circles, it came as close as openly choosing a side in the Battle of the Brows as *Vogue* ever would, making it a rarity in its cultural journalism of the thirties:

Higher brows are being worn and polite conversation is heard in the land. For, as a consequence of our isolation, we Prisoners of the Island must now cultivate our gardens and drop the affectation of illiteracy, recently deplored by Mr. Aldous Huxley in his spirited defence of the highbrow attitude. Yet the lowering of brows, deliberate and fashionable at the time, was in itself a protest against the precious early ‘twenties when some drank too deeply of Proust and Joyce, other chattered unwisely of Cezanne, and yet others were led into strange places by M. Diaghileff. I think it must have been about 1926 that the poetry bookshops closed and the flying clubs opened. [...] A certain well-bred toughness was prevalent in the very highest places. [...] The dialogue of those vanished times is embalmed in the works of Ernest Hemingway and Evelyn Waugh. It was all very public-schoolish and eager and adolescent. And very thin.

There now comes a sharp reversal in fashion. The gods in the machines have grown older! There is less money and less excitement. We are no longer ‘amusing’ and as we must remain in this small country we find no point in racing by air, land or sea. (February 3, 1932: 36)

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list of relatively successful modern writers, Maurois also named David Garnett, Aldous Huxley, Harold Nicolson, the Sitwells, Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, but, interestingly, he omitted Vita Sackville-West.

For those that must remain, Leslie proposed a visit to Burlington House:

But if the luncheon party is just the ordinary London affair of this time of year [...] it is surprising how interesting, witty and informed people can be, confirming our impression that culture can now be open and unashamed. [...] At one party it was finally agreed that the effect of these exhibitions [like the one at Burlington] would be felt chiefly in the realm of Manners. That awkward adolescent grace must go—it belongs to the ‘twenties. The simplest movements of everyday life must be rounded off to delight the artist. An original and thoughtful article that appeared in *Vogue* some years ago, which will be quoted in future histories of Manners in the early twentieth century, pointed out the profound changes that had taken place in such gestures as the holding of the cigarette or the simple act of sitting in a chair. (37)

The conventions of tasteful modern living, here tied to the economic situation as much as to the rise of modernism and consequent backlash, had changed for good. Leslie did write that fashionable brows were rising again and *Vogue* recommended that readers show an interest in high culture, but its allegiance to the avant-garde was certainly over, and its approach was, all in all, middlebrow. This changing perspective was also revealed by the contributors it invited and the sorts of essays and features it commissioned. Herbert Farjeon’s regular theatre columns, where he informed readers of developments in the theatre and attempted to explain the qualities that made a play a success or a failure, together with his other cultural journalism, were enormously significant; so were Lesley Blanch’s critical essays, with their range. Despite being *Vogue*’s two most repeated signatures, their other work was not reviewed in the magazine, identifying them as regular critics rather than celebrity guests.<sup>44</sup>

Sophistication, like chic, was one of the ideas that splintered from smartness, the concept that had underpinned *Vogue*’s notion of good taste in style and behaviour, now near its end. One of the last attempts at a definition came at the close of 1928:

In this present age of powder, paint and petrol there is one word which we all find indispensable. That word is ‘smart.’ It has succeeded such words as ‘elegant’ and ‘distinguished’ because it means something new which neither of these words can connote. ‘Elegance’ belonged to another more leisured way of living than ours, and ‘distinguished’ is not something you can be in a hurry. But smartness is a quality and a

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<sup>44</sup> The one exception was a reprint of two poems from the eighteen-thirties, admittedly not very good, that *Vogue* recommended because they were illustrated by Blanch, “who combines in an astonishing manner the right kind of jollity with an exquisite porcelain elegance” (January 20, 1932: 58).

word that especially fits the needs of rapid action and an existence as swift, as highly geared and as brightly coloured as a racing-car.

The pitfall about smartness is that while it has an appearance of extreme ease and simplicity it is in reality a highly organised and carefully cultivated quality. (November 28, 1928: 63)

“Chic”, which gained prominence as “smartness” began to fade, shared a significant number of conditions, which eased the transition. According to *Vogue*, chic depended on open-mindedness. “Some are closed by one preconceived opinion, some by another; some by lack of interest, some by lack of knowledge; some by laziness, and some by the occurrence of occasional flashes of fashion insight that first reveal and then obscure the truth” (April 18, 1928: 73). In other words, chic required an education—or at least an effort, a degree of curiosity—for those who were not adventurous by nature. As always, one must not follow guidelines blindly but rather know one’s age and body, and listen only to the advice given for one’s type. Possible errors one may commit when angling for chic included dressing with too much personality—“expressing themselves in dangling earrings, extra colours, strange hats, and fringe whenever possible” (*ibid.*)—or, by contrast, “dressing their husbands’ positions, always being a bit more elaborate than the rest of the world” (*ibid.*). They could also be blinded by what they feared they could not wear, resulting in self-inflicted invisibility: “she has too many fears, too many inhibitions, and she sinks into the background like a pale little old-maid shadow. *Vogue* exhorts her to forget her rock-ribbed convictions, to choose any one of her ten or more fashion commandments and smash it deliberately” (*ibid.*). It would not do to keep altering perfectly good clothes, to over-rely on the value of “Frenchness”, to be too conservative or to be too fussy (89-90). “Chic” demanded awareness and a response to developments in fashion, but, unlike “smart”, that importance was not extended to other artistic manifestations. Its specificity to fashion was further articulated in an editorial essay significantly titled “CHIC: A Defence”:

The French started it. They have a faculty for starting things. [...] They knew what they meant when they said it. The advertising writers, who soon took up the hue and cry,

were not so sure of 'what they meant when they said it,' but they liked the sound of the word. [...] the oh-so-Parisian combination of those four letters always seemed to lend a certain glamour to their copy. [...] Chic is a very twentieth-century word, a frequently employed and expressive modern word. [...] The edges of its meaning are blurred; it has acquired a thousand nuances of sense. [...] To us, chic means 'having the sense of the picture.' A chic person is one who responds to her background (we use the possessive *her*, because some possessive *has* to be selected and chic is usually associated with the feminine), one whose sensibilities constantly provide her with a clear mental picture of herself silhouetted against this background. She relates herself to the colours, masses, lines, design, and underlying emotional feeling of the particular picture in which she lives and moves. She is not self-conscious in a gauche sense, but conscious of self in a sophisticated sense, aware of herself as an integral part of the modern 'whole.' Such a person is an artist of externals; she reveals her 'sense of the picture,' or chic, not only in the colour harmonies (or contrasts) and lines of her clothes, but also in her walk, in the shape of her finger nails, in the way she handles a teacup or smokes a cigarette. (Such apparently trivial actions also reveal the quantity and quality of modernity latent in this particular person's mental make-up.) This consciousness of self as part of a picture is sometimes so innate a quality of an individual's mind that it seems, paradoxically, to be an unconscious, or sub-conscious, quality. [...] But this quality is the cause of its possessor's fitting into her surroundings, not always ostentatiously, as is suggested by report, but naturally, easily, and with the sort of detailed perfection which comes from good taste—the taste that takes account of both common sense and artistic sense. Chic is an outcome of the two, joined to modern ideas of suitability and modern spirit. (June 12, 1929: 61)

To be chic, then, is to interiorise a fashionable outside even more than to exteriorise an inner quality: surface becoming depth, rather than expressing the opposite. Chic continued to be the ideal throughout the thirties, even when it was substituted by other words which meant the same thing:

Fashion is not all—not by long odds. Fashion is transitory and superficial: the icing on the cake, as it were. But style is the cake itself, solid, permanent, the substance of the mode. Style is not a matter of hysterical headlines, catch-penny tricks, this whim and that... style remains gold-standard in the fluctuating market of chic. But fashion alone is so much boloney, hooey, spinach, or what have you: that is, according to Elizabeth Hawes, the American dress designer, whose impudent, entertaining book 'Fashion is Spinach' has debunked the legend that to be elegant you need only be fashionable. We maintain that to be elegant you must first impose your own individual style upon the vagaries of the moment. (July 20, 1938: 27)

Notice the emphasis on individuality from both sides of the decade: whereas the smartness of the twenties had been associated with a uniformity and sharpness that turned silhouettes from boyish to abstract, the chic of the thirties was increasingly discussed in relation to women's actual bodies. In fact, *Vogue* singled out specific women as having "triumphed over mere fashion" and praised them for staying true to

their strengths, all the while insisting on a fashionable return to femininity.<sup>45</sup> It repeatedly reported that women preferred to buy men's shoes and underwear and chose men's tailors for their riding outfits and pyjamas, as well as "smoking jackets of velvet or velveteen and lounging suit of soft wool velours" (September 19, 1928: 84); the reasons given were smartness, comfort and higher-quality materials and cuts. Outside sports and rest, though, "a full and rich" silhouette gained ground, "which will make more demands on your body and carriage than heretofore. As you have become more feminine, the masculinized female body is carried in a more alert manner, and you have left your debutante slouch behind you" (July 25, 1928: 26). Femininity was thus associated with maturity, as masculine silhouettes had been previously associated with boyishness and not necessarily mannishness. "The mode", *Vogue* announced, "is growing up. She has let down her skirts and put up her hair. She becomes a young woman of infinite grace and charm, whose sweetness and appeal now command more admiration than her former tom-boy swagger" (January 22, 1930: 21). The clothes shaped the body, showcasing it "as a superb piece of sculpture with breasts, a definite waistline, and emphasis on the behind"; most importantly, it was "smart to be feminine in a new, calm way" (October 14, 1936: 73). The fashion of the thirties was expressed

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<sup>45</sup> *Vogue* chose "What are you going to wear?" as the "Feminine Question Number 1": "You hear it behind Stalin's back in Russia. You hear it asked by non-kimono wearing Japanese. You hear it flying back and forth over telephone wires in every big and little town in England" (September 30, 1936: 57). Thus *Vogue* reified the association between fashion and femininity, and forecasted the return of women to the heart of fashion—whether they had ever been left out is, of course, questionable. "The new mode will play up the woman, and the woman will play with the mode. No longer will fashion be a cut-and-dried thing. It will be responsive to the woman's touch, spontaneous and alive" (January 21, 1931: 19). Its editorial voice flattered as much as reported. Halfway through the decade, it insisted that "We Englishwomen could do with more pride—in our nice long legs, our funny long faces, our small eyes, short eyelashes and mousy hair. There's a type for you. Marvellous, full of character, toughness and poise. Yet instead of its full development, you get a lot of wispy middle-aged women, gawky as schoolgirls, with no colour and less taste" (August 21, 1935: 15).

in terms of poise and sense, proving a shift in *Vogue's* central values.<sup>46</sup> These values were aligned with nature and authenticity, in other words, a lack of pretension:

Having endured through ten years of prosperity, this simplicity and economy of fashion seemed a thing to be taken for granted. In those ten years, however, women proved their fitness for an active world, and, having established their place in the competition of business and sport, they can now adorn that place with their natural assets of grace and beauty. [...] The exaggerated, almost masculine simplicity and severity have been replaced by a more feminine, a more natural mode; artificial in no way, natural in its outline, its intricacies, its textures, and colours. We look to Nature now. (Twynell April 15, 1931: 57)

Despite these appeals to nature, there was room for the expression of personality through well-placed artfulness, for romance and sentiment, for childhood favourites, even for eccentricity. After all, though previous explorations of smartness had emphasised the importance of knowing oneself, personality peaked as an attractive trait in the glamour-oriented culture of the thirties. On the one hand, all these qualities can be associated with the middlebrow; on the other, they can also be linked to the amusing style, which survived in fashion and décor despite the reported death of the highbrow.

Common sense and practicality may work for most of *Vogue's* readers and even, as I shall show, for a some of its literary celebrities, but they fell short for others. Like the rest of the British press, *Vogue* “conveyed” to its readers the “stylised and self-mythologising” world of the Bright Young People (Taylor 2007: loc. 854): the costume parties, where eccentricity and extravagance were the baseline, the glittering homes and eyelids, the mannered language they used. Their glamorous world was that of London and the aristocratic country estate, though *Vogue* continued to travel to the Riviera, to Paris and to Venice, and increasingly often to Hollywood. In her study of Paris and the fashion industry, Agnès Rocamora reflects that magazines like *Vogue* “narrowed down”—that is, edited—the city to “its luxurious side”, thus participating “in this taming of the city through practices of consumption”, mapping it so that “fashionable

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<sup>46</sup> The word “poise” never replaced chic, but it became more and more frequent in the mid-thirties. Indeed, fashion reporting from the middle of the decade on consistently highlighted “sleek and strict and urbane” pieces (February 7, 1934: 39).

readers” were allowed “ultimately to possess it” (2009: 81-2). Despite nods to the pastoral and to international travel, the most bohemian of *Vogue*’s celebrities lived in urban spaces and relied on their possibilities. Pamela Murray, reporting on the royal exodus to Scotland in the summer, wrote that “the War made London Season safe for plutocracy. It is also safe for Green Hats, Green Carnations, Gate-crashers and (of course) Greeks. In Bond Street there are more Gossip-writers praying for paragraphs than policemen holding up Hispanos [...] Not so in Scotland” (June 24, 1931: 52). Thus London—meaning upper-class London—was the chosen milieu of charmingly scandalous bohemia, by now not truly threatening but containable in gossip columns.<sup>47</sup>

Stylistic quirks associated with the highbrow, whether they responded to a true artistic bent or to mere pretension, were also subject to scrutiny. Strong individuality and historical references had potential for chic, but more often than not *Vogue* warned against excessive eccentricity.

A type of woman who is all too complacent about herself is the woman who is called ‘soulful’ by her admiring friends and ‘arty’ by the rest of the world. And she is to be found in great numbers, from Chelsea and South Kensington right across to Newlyn and St. Ives. She may go in for art, or literature, or music, for being an inspiration, or merely for being picturesque—almost invariably she goes in for something. She has an unlimited amount of confidence, which is a valuable asset; but, nine times out of ten, she has very little taste. (Early April 1927: 42)

This highbrow woman—because she *was* highbrow, only wrongly so—tended to wear too much fringe, too many outdated scarves and shawls, too many colours; her jewellery was “more suitable for a fortune-teller than a modern woman”, and “in the matter of line this type inclines towards the long and dripping, the peasant and smockish, or the period dress” (*ibid.*); in other words, she was the walking embodiment of the bohemian, except she had not caught up with her more urbane sisters. Not to worry:

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<sup>47</sup> For studies of bohemianism and its commodification, see Elizabeth Wilson’s *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (2000). For an analysis of the middlebrow in relation to bohemianism, see Nicola Humble’s *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (2001) and Emma Sterry’s *The Single Woman, Modernity, and Literary Culture: Women’s Fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s* (2017), among others.

Properly directed, she may be exceedingly chic, for there are costumes that are both smart and picturesque [...] For eccentricity is always to be deplored. It very easily becomes bad taste or makes its wearer ridiculous. It is a difficult thing to be conspicuous and well bred at the same time. *Vogue* advises women to be very wary of attempting to be 'artistic.' If they do attempt it, then *Vogue* urges a more careful study of the mode than any other type would require. (43)

As always, *Vogue* was that very guide. It is significant that this cautionary note appeared most likely during Meynell's editorship, as she knew those crowds first-hand. This current of thought continued: later that year, under Settle, *Vogue* noted that "smart women who are dressed with great chic, and eccentric, fussily dressed women are all personifications of one quality—vanity. The former possess wise vanity and are visions; the latter are possessed of foolish vanity and are nightmares" (November 30, 1927: 67). Fuss in dress was akin to sentiment in literature; embarrassing at best, false at worst. Besides warning against excess, *Vogue* also advised that there was no point to novelty for its own sake if it did nothing for the wearer: "smart women are too sophisticated and too sensible to embrace the entirely new unless it offers some advantage over the old" (March 21, 1928: 33). It could be an asset, and it was enjoyable, but it had no value on its own. As fashions supposedly became more diverse and feminine in the early thirties, *Vogue* warned that despite the "season of audacities in dress", and though "the chic woman is as audacious as anyone", "she knows which audacities are chic and which are not", and would not confuse "an out-of-place fancy dress" for "an elegant and wearable costume", as less informed women may do (September 2, 1931: 21).

Nonetheless, it acknowledged the delight of choosing clothes and arranging bold outfits, often describing it as a game and noting that expertise made it more enjoyable. Sensorial luxury signified escapism, though also an anchor to nostalgia: the "glamorous clothes, clothes of lovely materials and enduring beauty of line" of the new season were its respite against the looming "world crisis", which "seems to whet rather than wet the



spirits of the dress world” (March 16, 1932: 39). Thus *Vogue* openly and repeatedly celebrated fanciful styles, especially in contrast to the sleek and trim mid-twenties.

Fashion, says Sylvia, is first of all what saves us from weariness, a relaxation, the recreation which is more necessary in life than study. [...]

To kill indifference, to reawaken attention—inattention is the end of the world, Sylvia says—there, according to our philosopher, lie the undeniable benefits of our long visits, our exercises in perseverance among the dressmakers.

To give back to people’s eyes the pleasure of seeing—that is the charitable trick played by Sylvia and certain others on society when, at each change of season, they ask, not like the Servile: ‘What is being done this year?’ but like the Exacting: ‘What will be done to get away from what has been done?’ [...] In her struggle with the insensitive, Sylvia is waging a campaign against death. She explains fashion in this way: A gigantic, minute and continuous effort to regenerate the mind, to refresh the senses and to combat the film over the eyes, that dangerous lethargy into which poor human beings so often fall. [...] Novelty, the study she pursues with passion, has made her a singularly intelligent woman: following the best scientific methods, she supports her theories by the observation of facts. (Bibesco early April 1927: 45)

The act of dressing up, or of plain dressing, was thrilling, even when it was kept in check by the possibility of embarrassing failure. Sylvia, the character, confessed her joy at causing a sensation in the street; by contrast, when she wore “Too-Familiar” clothes, she “no longer presented an image of myself, but a replica; I was an impression struck off in thousands of copies” (*ibid.*). Clothes could reveal the self, but they did not always do so. In fact, *Vogue* continued to discuss the possibilities of costume as masquerade, or, at least, to present the version of the self that best fit each situation: “Every woman has to ‘produce’ herself afresh every season in a new comedy of clothes”, *Vogue* considered, and “the play, let us note, must vary with the time and the place. A clever woman can convey the most delicate shades of meaning by her costume” (March 20, 1929: 33). There was the adventure of cutting-edge headwear, for which “the vogue of the fantastic has a humorous mind and high heart” (Moore December 25, 1935: 11); the solitary thrill of putting on clothes; the “charming absurdities” that designers came up with once “the business of covering the body has been accomplished” (58). The dressed self, however, was more often than not under the scrutiny of others, which made merely living in society a constant performance: “In Paris, once, Isadora Duncan danced in a black-velvet room hung with many mirrors that reflected every part of her beautiful

body—and in such a room, psychologically, the woman of to-day stands and moves. She can hide no detail, so every detail must be perfect. In her toilette she is meticulous and in her stepping forth complete and prepared and gay” (11).

Long-time readers were well familiar with the notion that their stylistic choices were a physical manifestation of themselves, or, at least, that they may be read as such. The piece that began by asking them to consider “whether you are conservative or modernist, cautious or daring” was not referring to their cultural allegiance, but to sartorial fashion (October 1, 1930: 55). Preferences in the arts, in décor, in social practices and leisure activities all built the same display of the self. Readers ought to ask themselves who they were, and how they wanted to be perceived. Though ostensibly concerned with novelty, and despite its tendency to favour snobbery, sometimes on purpose and sometimes by accident, *Vogue* took care to include a complicated notion of “truth”, “honesty” and “practicality” in its continually problematized discussions of “elegance”, “sophistication”, “chic” or “smartness”.

To wear your gloves tight, to wear your shoes tight, in effect to wear any of your clothes tight, it all means the same thing! It is the confession of a small nature. This confession Lisa unconsciously makes, showing herself in the full daylight of democracy a mass of inherited habits, of slavishness and little meannesses. A person of nobility, to whatever class he or she may belong, is above all else a being who cannot and who will not tolerate any form of restriction. [...] The clothes of the workmen are free and adapted to all the varied movements of their bodies; those of the bourgeois, on the other hand, are restricted by the spirit of narrow mindedness and pretension. (Bibesco November 2, 1927: 53)

The unfortunate “Lisa” was opposed to the real elegance of “Laura”, who chose comfort and practicality and was therefore true to herself. If to be elegant was to match one’s necessities to one’s preferences, then there were as many ways to manifest elegance as there were women. As I have discussed, *Vogue* liked to define types of women so that it could give more appealing advice to its readers. “At 7 o’clock” Mrs. Business-Woman “arrives home exhausted, tired and dusty”, but after having a five-minute bath and being “helped by a handmaiden from Cyclax” she “applies make-up, fixes her own hair, takes

a cocktail and leaves for the party”; Miss Limited-Income, by contrast, “finishes a novel after her bath, before getting ready to go out” (May 16, 1934: 53). Despite acknowledging their differences in social class and lifestyle, the routines it presented as fashionable were not that different. Elegance disregarded distinctions and preferences: it would emerge as long as there was a beholder. The writer and journalist Marcelle Auclair, who would found *Marie Claire* only two years later, described a girl’s observation of her own reflection as a first meeting with a “Second Self”:

A mirror attracts me as it does a bird. I’m not looking for a satisfaction to my vanity, what I find in a mirror is a point of support. I haven’t found much stability in life except within myself. I feel lost in a multitude of people; my own vision reassures me. [...] A woman before her looking-glass is not entirely a frivolous person. [...] I am talking of echoes, reflexes, influences; the spirit seduces the body, the body magnifies the spirit. It is necessary to blend one with the other [...] Look at yourself! Follow closely the progress of the sun upon your skin. Why not recognise in the hollow creases at the corners of your lips, in the heavier look that comes into your face (if you pass your hand before your eyes, it gives the illusion of a bird flying), the mark of love? (March 20, 1935: 112)

There was an inside and an outside to the self, though they were not entirely separate; the looping outside was first encountered as a stranger that one could make their own. The same applied to clothes, as the wearer could take on their symbolic qualities and draw strength or sophistication from them. *Vogue* mused on “the disproportionate exhilaration from a bit of well-cut felt. The unaccountable rise in self-esteem from a twist of colour. The sudden strength, born of a fuchsia feather, to vanquish wildcats” (January 25, 1939: 7).

At one point, *Vogue* claimed to have consulted “a score of separate authentic documents, varying from mere fragmentary notes to quite full-length and detailed descriptions” as contributed by “great dressmakers, artists, society photographers, fashion reporters, shrewd men of affairs whose business interests depend on their knowledge and foreknowledge of ever-fluctuating woman” (January 22, 1936: 39). The *élégante* of 1936, they concluded, would be youthful and unaffected, slim and long-legged, chameleonic, with curled and sculptured hair, busty yet narrow-hipped; artifice

would certainly be required to create such a silhouette, but the overall impression would be close to the authentic. Meanwhile, cosmetics, diets and physical exercise grew in importance, and readers were advised to inspect, survey and target areas of the body in increasingly scientific terms. “To be smart without being fit”, *Vogue* admonished;

is a modern contradiction in terms. Having once and for all rid herself of clothes that constrict, hamper, and discomfort, the chic woman realizes that she must replace tight lacing by tight muscles, firm flesh, and supple sinews. [...] In fact, we get an inkling of what the smart world of the future will be like: a world of sun-bated, firm-bodied, well-grown, and intelligently nourished beings to whom the idea of unfitness will be more heinous than that of dowdiness (June 13, 1928: 43)

Just like any woman could aspire to good taste, “a matter of knowledge and culture”, she could aspire to beauty; in fact, both qualities became entangled, as they were discussed in terms of “good lines, good proportions, good quality, suitability, and simplicity” (September 21, 1927: 68). There were myriad ways of being beautiful in this modern age, though all fit neatly the widespread discourse around efficiency and hygiene, both in domestic and personal technologies.

It is a Utopian thought: Every day in every way the feminine public becomes better and better looking. Good health, activity, smart simple clothes, and just that use of cosmetics which is art and not artifice—all these are elements in bringing about the peaceful revolution which seems to be implied—in bringing in an Age of Beauty more creditable to our century than any apparently unique Beauty of the Age (Thompson December 28, 1928: 35)

Beauty was increasingly presented not only as an admirable quality, but as a necessity that *Vogue* insisted would benefit women in their professional and social lives.<sup>48</sup>

Fortunately, though achieving beauty and taste was a complex process, they could turn to professionals for help. Moreover, setting fashions could be “A Career for Women”:

There is a group of chic women, international, some French, some British, some American, some Spanish, who set fashion. If they buy *and wear* a new line in dresses, hats, jewels, shoes in colour or in fabric, the rest of the world follows. [...] She is not well off—often she is poor—yet she has been brought up in an atmosphere of chic. She knows who forms the group of universally followed women. She knows instinctively what a chic woman will choose. That woman is employed by stores in London and all

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<sup>48</sup> The advice given ranged from the vague to the specific. Women with busy schedules would do well to keep their hair polished by not touching it and by sleeping and bathing with a cap on; to set an established time for their makeup routine, keeping every brush and pot at the same place; to keep day and evening wear separate; to brush their clothes before putting them away and to have their maid press them in the morning; to choose a wardrobe palette of only two colours, among other things (June 10, 1931: 79, 92).

over the country, by manufacturers, dyers, accessory makers, to inform them about the progress of fashion. [...] The career for these 'fashion-conscious' women began in America. There a 'stylist' is employed at the equivalent of £1,000 or £2,000 a year to devote a couple of days a week going through all departments showing what things are in a passing trend of fashion, what are right for the future, or 'keying' the goods in each department to a standard of taste, the taste of the well-dressed woman. Then London stores began to use these stylists, the rest of whose time is spent observing the smart world in its whole round of life. [...] The stylist who can sketch is the most valuable. (October 17, 1928: 73)

Certain ladies of the international set were famous beauties or fashion plates, and roughly once a year *Vogue* featured their advice:

In London, Paris and New York, there are a handful of elegant, well-dressed women who are the living fashion plates of our day. For these women the great company of fashion creators work, as they are their *mannequins de ville*, so to speak, and launch every new fashion, accept or reject ideas, and make popular the things to which they give their approval. [...] Fame for being chic and well dressed is theirs by consent of other women, who are quick enough to recognise flair when they see it. But what is this flair, why is theirs the last word, and what makes *them* better dressed than all the rest?

Generally speaking, chic, like beauty, is God given. But in this day of specialisation, like beauty it must be 'presented.' The natural beauty and the 'manicured' beauty are two different things—one is like talent without training, while the other is a combination of the two. Our famous-for-chic women are professionals, in the sense that they have become experts in matters of dress. They have passed the amateur stage, their taste has been tried out, they understand the true meaning of the word elegance, they have a philosophy of dress—in other words, *flair plus knowledge*. Such women have their own chic and they hardly ever depart from it. That is their secret. They accept the fashion—but in their own measure. [...] Most of the well-dressed women in the world actually are about thirty, for it takes time and a great deal of experience to perfect that most desirable of all feminine achievements; the knowledge of how to present oneself [...] It is, after all, the cosmopolitan type of woman who is well dressed—and *never* overdressed. (July 10, 1935: 31-5, 92).

Many of these women were among the most often photographed for the magazine,<sup>49</sup> and some of them shared their cosmetic routines and diets or lack thereof. *Vogue* confirmed their beauty time and time again, but their appeal also depended on their aristocratic pedigree and high standard of living. Professional models gained prominence and some were even named. Artists and actresses were occasionally featured in this way, though more often than not they were presented as representatives of the modern age in beauty rather than as active fashion plates.

Since its founding, *Vogue* had covered the world of the theatre and promoted its celebrities—most often actresses, but also actors, as well as playwrights, singers and

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<sup>49</sup> Lady Abdy, Iya de Gay; Moira Combe; Lady Diana Cooper and her niece, Lady Ursula Manners; Mrs. Leo d'Erlanger, Edwina Prue; Lady Plunket, Dorothe Lewis; Clare Tennant; or the Countess von Haugwitz-Reventlow, Barbara Hutton, among others.

dancers—as examples of said fashionable living.<sup>50</sup> By the late twenties, though, even the British edition had turned to Hollywood for glamour, and also to reflect on the changing nature of celebrity. Carl Van Vechten and Cecil Beaton reported on the Hollywood scene; Douglas Fairbank Jr. contributed a biographical sketch of his film star father (May 28, 1930); *Vogue* compared the “real” and “reel”—that is, before and after make-up—faces of actors, simultaneously reinforcing their celebrity and demystifying it (September 20, 1933); and covered the entry of writers like Elinor Glyn and Jean Cocteau into the film industry (June 11 and October 29, 1930). Of course *Vogue* was concerned with the effects of the film industry on fashion, both through costumes and the sartorial practices of the stars, though it granted its respect grudgingly:

One hears on either hand, and especially from the hinterland of Hollywood itself, that Hollywood is originating fashion. The deity that rules over clothes knows that it was not always thus. There was a day, not too far from yesterday, when, at any fashion show, the bad numbers—the worst hats, the most lurid dresses, the fantastic shoes—were always greeted with the whisper ‘Whew! Pretty Hollywood.’ [...] Through a combination of forces—the talkies, the influx of talent from the legitimate and civilised stage, the engagement of new costume designers, besides a new and anonymous spirit which only the brains behind it could account for—Hollywood seemed gradually to realise how very Hollywood it was. [...] The movies became reasonable. They became smart. At length, they became more than these, they became worthy of study and even of imitation. (April 19, 1933: 43)

This way, not pondering the respectability of its players but agreeing with their taste in fashion and upholding the higher status of the theatre, *Vogue* legitimised its growing coverage of the film industry. By the end of this period, readers were expected to be

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<sup>50</sup> From the late twenties on, Noël Coward became a fixture of the theatre and society pages: he was photographed with Beverley Nichols at a house party in Le Touquet (June 27, 1928), there was a full feature on his “Casual Kentish Cottage”—“The Author’s Setting for His Own Private Lives” (October 31, 1934) and his status as a signifier of modishness was fully cemented with an essay by Lesley Blanch, “Bull’s Eye Boy”, accompanied with his paper doll (March 2, 1938). Though no other individual playwright received that much attention, *Vogue* did express interest in them as a strand of literary celebrity. “The spotlight switches on to the Westminster theatre and the tweed clad Mr. Auden is the cynosure of all eyes”, reported Beaton (December 11, 1935: 53), right by Auden’s portrait. His notoriety had to do with his politics; “his *Dog Beneath the Skin*, in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, will be given when difficulties with the censor are overcome” (53, 96). “Should Playwrights Be Seen?”, wondered Herbert Farjeon: “in common with the public, I find that I have a curiosity to see what the fellow looks like, and I am glad when that curiosity is satisfied. [...] Why should not authors make up? Why should they not come before the public with faces well bronzed or delicately rouged in order that, when they are on the stage, they may look like what they look like when they are off the stage? [...] We are human. We want to see the author. We might even be quite interested if he would bring on his wife and children too” (March 16, 1932: 53, 90).

familiar enough with film stars to be able to guess their faces from stills of a variety of movies from the past four decades (January 25, 1939). Its favourite leading ladies, sartorially speaking, included Marlene Dietrich, Gertie Lawrence and Vivien Leigh, but special attention was paid to Elissa Landi, who “has all the gifts: she can act and write novels: she is beautiful and has a talent for the talkies, even bilingual talkies” (May 14, 1930: 50). Through her appearance in *The Price of Things*, she was connected to another celebrity who bridged literature and film, Elinor Glyn. Landi was repeatedly photographed for *Vogue*, and her developing literary career was also noted. Meanwhile, the singer Olga Lynn—“who knows everybody, who has a rare feeling for social life, and can recognise glamour when she sees it”—reported a conversation she had at an aristocratic dinner, where the guests tried to pin down what made Greta Garbo so special:

Glamour won. We all agreed; and then tried to agree what glamour was. Our hostess, Sybil Colefax, said the essence of glamour was that you couldn't pin it down—it's the quality of illusion. It's not just beauty, many beautiful women have not got it. It's not just personality. Hitler has personality, but you couldn't call him glamorous. On the other hand, Jean de Reszke, Madame Patti, Diaghilev, Pavlova, Paderwski are some of the artists and celebrities I can remember who remain glamorous [...] Lady Diana Cooper has it more than anyone I can think of. [...] So there you have a clue to glamour. It must be aloof and unfathomable. It must have a sort of elusive quality. [...] Are there any glamorous débutantes? Personally, I don't think so, through their young beauty, the romantic circumstances of making their first curtsies to the world, gives them just a baby glamour [...] But to be glamorous, surely, one must be *femme achevée*. One must *be* somebody, have done something, or make people think one could. [...] The whole modern feeling is towards a greater interest and complexity of character (July 10, 1935: 52)

Like the rest of *Vogue's* ideal qualities, glamour was hard to define. Unlike chic, it was associated to the wide appeal of theatre and film stars, as well as of opera and ballet personalities; it went well with an aristocratic name and bearing, or an aura of high-octane drama, but not necessarily with innocent charm or sensible propriety.

Bearing in mind the disappearance of the formal portraits of ladies of the aristocracy, the ascendancy of film stars signals a shift not only in celebrity culture but in what *Vogue* considered good taste. In her book on glamour, Carol Dyhouse mentions

that a 1939 press release from Mass Observation “announced that the fashion leaders that housewives were following at that moment were, first, the Duchess of Kent, second, the Queen and, third, Joan Crawford” (2010: 77). Perhaps *Vogue* would not have openly identified housewives as its target audience, but it did mirror this shift to the highest rungs of royalty and the cinema.

The fierce light which once beat on thrones now finds few left. Fattening upon fame, it must transfer its beams to less august yet no less sensational subjects—dictators, film-stars, quintuplets, deep-sea monsters, all-in wrestlers, peers who wed commoners, commoners who wed peers, or the latest miracles of Harley Street. These are the headlines of the day. Biggest, brightest, largest, loudest—the superlatives tumble over each other, keeping pace with the pace of this age—the pace that kills.

Yet there are undertones, faint harmonies which are the more powerful for their very lack of emphasis. The unpublicised personality still compels, and confounds all the rules of publicity and press-agent. Some of those persons of whom we know least, we would wish to know most. [...] Of course, there are certain distinguished people whose avoidance of publicity amounts to a life's work; people whose every ostentatiously unobtrusive move is NEWS: people such as Garbo and Bernard Shaw, who are doing nicely that way (July 6, 1938: 48-9)

Thus *Vogue* stepped further away from the mass publications that expanded the concept of celebrity and kept it within the boundaries of middle- to highbrow culture.

Understated maturity, fashion knowledge balanced with sense; poise and propriety in all settings: this was the set of qualities that marked good taste in the *Vogue* of the thirties. After leaving the magazine, Alison Settle expanded on these same ideas in her book *Clothes Line*, in which she “urged that the well-dressed woman of good taste should avoid looking anything like an imitation of a film star” (1937: 60). Most women were advised to eschew all-out glamour for practicality, as suited their lives and schedules. “Every woman”, or at least every woman in *Vogue*'s target audience, “has her pet charity for whose good cause she will work day and night, will attend committee meetings when she longs to be on the golf links, will lose her friends by pestering to buy tickets, will give up bridge to rehearse, for that charity's sake, in some quite ridiculous amateur play. And women are now prominent as speakers and as organisers for their political party as well” (July 11, 1928: 60). It did not do, then, to be only leisured: the truly smart woman was active and exercised her chic in public life.



Now that the fashionable woman was down-to-earth and busy, if not always professional, she must take money into account, and so *Vogue* had to acknowledge economy more openly than it had before. That is only one way to view it, though; from the management side of things, the magazine must adapt to the needs of its readers in a severely depressed context. The old adage that “often the large income does not imply a high measure of success in the art of dress” survived, though balanced, even before the Crash, with the acknowledgment that “life is varied, amusing, active, but also elegant, exigent, and expensive” (October 17, 1928: 39, 41). The following crisis, with its consequent high rates of unemployment, meant that poverty was visible and government strategies to improve the situation were often referenced.<sup>51</sup> *Vogue* showed an unforgivably light-hearted attitude early on, stating in its society column that “some of us are enjoying the New Poverty and are developing an unsophisticated manner. It is as different from the blasé manner of 1928 as the innocent open-browed beret from the knowing and furtive cloche” (November 26, 1930: 87). This position was softened as the decade advanced, with frequent nods to necessary economies and soothing reassurances that *Vogue* took economic concerns into account:

Two almost paradoxical maxims are much in the air:—

- (1) That smartness must never be relinquished under whatever financial stress, since elegance is worth almost everything to a woman.
- (2) That recent developments in fashion are so sensible, practical and charming that chic can be achieved without extravagance by those who will take the necessary trouble. (January 25, 1933: 17)

It praised the drive of the young woman who “though holding down a job or running a house by day”, was “out rivalling the idle rich at night. Burning the candle at both ends, her elders call it; keeping up to date *she* calls it, and very successfully and economically too”; “to her, new clothes are a tonic”, and she’d rather choose new ones than paying “its cleaner’s bill” (December 22, 1937: 52). Besides the frequent shopping wisdom

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<sup>51</sup> See Juliet Gardiner’s *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (2010) for an in-depth look at the socioeconomic state of Britain in this decade and its effects on its cultural life.

imparted and the regular section for limited incomes, *Vogue* also commended savvy readers who could actually make their own clothes:

We are not one to bleat much about the old-fashioned virtues; we feel that the modern ones are really superior, and more expedient to modern living. But we resemble the biological sport so far as sewing is concerned.

Somehow, the other domesticities didn't take with us, but we have lived to thank the gods and the ancestors who saw to it that we could cut, fit, and stitch. Ever since '*la crise*' we have designed and whipped up our own clothes—and we derive great satisfaction and a little guilt when our garment is attributed to a *couturier*.

Anyway, if you don't know how to sew, *learn* by all means. It's almost the only way you can become a distinguished dresser, unless you can afford expensive clothes. [...] You can, if you choose to, consider yourself as cultivating a hobby, or laying foundations for a creative career—and you'll reap satisfying results under any subterfuge. Even if it isn't an economic necessity, knowledge of *couture* gives you untold satisfaction when it is the means of achieving subtle distinction and individuality in your own dressing. [...] After you get a garment going, the more or less rote sewing is very conducive to that same creative thought that Dorothea Brande says accompanies listening to music, taking solitary walks. We become a feminine Einstein when sewing. [...]

But there comes a time when we feel that new garb for the spirit is more important. It is much more valuable to be reading *Wake Up and Live* and *Live Alone and Like It* than to be making new clothes to try to cover a shabby old mental attitude. At such times, we take to bargain-hunting. But *our* bargains always need a stitch somewhere. We read a chapter; then do a bit of fitting while we argue solitarily, but not silently, with the author. [...] *If* you can sew, there's material and spiritual satisfaction enough to save you from the psychiatrists. (James April 14, 1937: 132)

The untrained eye could turn, beyond *Vogue*, to the advice books mentioned above. It continued to state its purpose throughout the years, and in fact, its confidence in its knowledge of the elegant world went as far as to blame the “many pitfalls in fashion” of the last decades on modern journalism, as “fashion has become more and more a daily ‘news’ feature, and the papers that feature it too often seize on sensational items which are silly and unwearable, but provide the news editor with material for splashing headlines” (October 2, 1929: 57).

*Vogue* still catered to “that limited section of society, the cosmopolitan”, who led a “more luxurious existence”, but it increasingly claimed to respond to the concerns of “the very practical life of Englishwomen”; nonetheless, those same Englishwomen seemed to drive their own cars and spend their leisure time flying aeroplanes, shopping and partying, which casts some doubt upon that claim (April 2, 1930: 47). Reflecting on changes in women's fashions from the point of view of the leisured aristocrat, Marthe

Bibesco noted that “the spirit of the age has produced a hitherto undreamt-of resemblance between the woman of leisure and the woman who works”; nowadays, “the great lady herself mingles with the crowd, where she can learn something from the practical fashion achieved by youth and poverty combined” (March 16, 1932: 84). Imagining the reaction of a nun, visiting the worldly city for the first time in a long while, allowed Bibesco to express a fictional fearful view of progress: “boldness and even a certain degree of heroism is needed for a woman to face the world despoiled of the old magic which has helped her sex for so long”; though she mourned the loss of romance, she also flattered the women who dared to be modern (*ibid.*).

Throughout the decade, through honest praise and parody, *Vogue* commended a mature sort of sophistication, adaptable and down-to-earth, ostensibly simpler and more authentic, and sought out that set of qualities in literature. Its appreciation of solid storytelling and believable characters constructed through detailed observation was nothing new, but, considered with the aspects above, underscored its shift to the middlebrow.

### 3.2.2. “The Reading Season”: Literary Criticism

The Battle of the Brows was, in part, stoked by the concerns of critics for whom “the underlying cause of the cultural malaise was the steady growth from the eighteenth century onwards of the cultural marketplace, whose values had now infected writing which claimed to be, and was accepted as, proper literature. As a result, the general public knew nothing of ‘the living interests of modern literature’ and the ‘critical minority’ was, for the first time in history, threatened with extinction” (Baxendale 2012: 76). By that point, *Vogue* was no longer commissioning highbrow reviewers and essayists—though it sometimes reminded readers that it had previously done so; as it was obviously commercially driven, it could be perceived as one of the forces that

threatened this critical minority. “Turning Over New Leaves”, the full-page signed columns that had been so important in Dorothy Todd’s *Vogue*, managed to survive beyond 1927. Less than a year later, however, every other “New Leaves” was substituted with “Vogue’s Bookshelf”, a much shorter review section.<sup>52</sup> Anonymous and relegated to the back end of the issue, this section offered one-paragraph notices with a summary of the plot and a very brief opinion. This format obviously did not allow for in-depth discussions of each book’s merits and place in the literary landscape. Nonetheless, the change made it possible to cover more publications, from an average of about five per column in the mid-twenties to over ten—and often over fifteen—in the thirties. During this period, it could happen that a book given a short notice would be found of interest and taken up again in “Turning Over New Leaves”, receiving two reviews from different perspectives.<sup>53</sup>

By 1930 this type of column, renamed “Books in Vogue” or a seasonal variation, had completely substituted “New Leaves”. As the decade went on, even these short utilitarian columns became sparse, to the point of almost disappearing, attesting to the displacement of literary fashions from the core of the magazine’s interests. From a height of 24 review columns in 1930, almost one per issue, *Vogue* carried one single “Books Reviewed” in 1939.<sup>54</sup> Another central difference was genre and hierarchy: whereas “New Leaves” had preferred modern fiction, poetry and the occasional

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<sup>52</sup> During this transitional period *Vogue* relied on a large number of reviewers, most of which were writer-critic-journalists in their thirties and forties, and men. They included Martin Armstrong, Vernon Bartlett, John van Druten, William Gerhadi, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Bohun Lynch, Naomi Mitchison and probably the older journalist T. Michael Pope, whose name appeared without the T. There were familiar names as well, like Mary MacCarthy, Lon Pembroke, Vita Sackville-West, Edith Sitwell, G. B. Stern, Evelyn Waugh, Amabel Williams-Ellis, Humbert Wolfe and none other than D. H. Lawrence. There was also the frequent and mysterious signature “H.P.”.

<sup>53</sup> This was the case of a new edition of *Robinson Crusoe* illustrated by E. McKnight Kauffer, *The Rebel Generation* by Jo van Ammers-Küller and *Mornings in Mexico and Fantasie of the Unconscious* by D. H. Lawrence.

<sup>54</sup> Though it unfortunately falls just outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting the list of “Books to Beat the Black-Out” signed by Lesley Blanch in December 1939. Compared to the review columns of the late thirties, it was surprisingly long and comprehensive; though it did not discuss every item in the list in depth, it suggests a keen interest in a diverse range of genres and reading practices and sets them in the context of wartime escapism and self-improvement.

biography or history, “Books in Vogue” was a miscellany. Issue after issue, *Vogue* made clear its interest in variety, as long as it made for a charming arrangement, and in craft, even squeezed out of apparent trivialities.<sup>55</sup> Quite frequently it covered startlingly different yet highly specific categories—embroidery and scientific advances, profound German novels and sandwich recipe books—under clear headings to guide the reader’s eye. Most were new releases, but there were plenty of reprints and new illustrated and collected editions, which gained popularity near Christmas and the summer holidays. *Vogue* was a keen supporter of omnibus volumes, which appeared to be enormously popular in this period:

If autumn bears out its early promise the publishing season which is just beginning should produce a great number of ‘omnibus’ volumes. The omnibus book is a modern literary invention which is supposed to meet the needs of the human being with a small house, a large literary appetite, and a passion for getting a lot for his money, and according to publishers’ statistics the figures of its sales even outstrip the colossal aggregate of its pages. (October-November 1929: 82)

As a whole, the selected books reveal that novelty, quantity and visual appeal were prioritised over cutting-edge content.

Even with the explosion of genre and the decreasing number of reviewed publications, it is still possible to reconstruct *Vogue*’s position on literary currents and debates. Some important manifestations of middlebrow culture, like book societies or prizes, were spoken of with scepticism: “it is said that prize novels are generally dull, owing to having been chosen by committees” (February 17, 1937: 102). Some reviewers discussed their opinion on literary hierarchies quite frankly. “How very competent we all are!” began Naomi Mitchison in her single contribution: “Here are three English books, one high-brow, and two mezzo-brows, and an American book

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<sup>55</sup> Though *Novels and Novelists*, the posthumous collection of Katherine Mansfield’s criticism for *The Athenaeum*, covered “books that are often only of the most ephemeral kind” and “might have been disjointed and trivial in effect”, it turned out to be a “body of criticism of sustained interest by a craftsman dealing with one aspect after another of a beloved craft”, so it is not surprising that *Vogue* appreciated Mansfield’s approach—many of the authors she covered, by the way, had been appraised in *Vogue* as well (July 23, 1930: 66).

which is either very high-brow or very low-brow, or perhaps both. And all have this remarkable quality of efficiency; they are well made as really good bits of machinery, needing the least possible oiling from the reader's imagination before they start functioning" (March 6, 1929: 53). The ambiguous American book was *The Set-Up*, by Joseph Moncure March, and the decidedly highbrow one was *Gold Coast Customs*, by a *Vogue* favourite: "Everyone ought to know by now that Edith Sitwell is, of all our poets, almost the most accomplished in her craft. She uses words and stresses bright enough to dance to, internal and echoing rhymes that make patterns one must follow carefully to miss no beauty; she no more slurs over difficulties than Milton did" (*ibid.*). Both Milton and Sitwell, Mitchison writes, were "aloofly and intellectually angry, never quite reaching into the common stock of emotions, pity or violence or ordinary tears, plainly shed and simply described" (*ibid.*); neither of them were moving. The "mezzo-brows" were *Portrait in a Mirror*, by Charles Morgan, and *Vivandiere!*, by Phoebe Fenwick Gaye. The former was "the most competent of the lot"; "an absolutely straight novel, progressing decently in old-fashioned Newtonian space-time among emotionally normal people" (*ibid.*). The way Mitchison used "competent" is very telling: she made it sound like a necessary quality for a successful middlebrow novel and, simultaneously, like faint praise. Her column exemplifies *Vogue's* usual strategy of bringing together books from different places in the literary hierarchy, and yet it differs from the rest in that it directly named the "brows". Even rarer, she stated her opinions vividly, reaching beyond the books in question to make a political statement: "Even if one has a passionate feminist hatred of Tolstoi, as I have, even if the last volume of *War and Peace* has ended in the fire, in vain anger against the old man for his abominable treatment of his women characters [...] If we really, and seriously this time, believe in efficiency, of body and mind, of machines and ideas and art and literature, we must

abhor waste, we must be pacifists” (53, 80). Most reviewers preferred to be oblique, and though *Vogue* covered literature in translation very often it hardly ever discussed literature and interior or exterior affairs together.<sup>56</sup> Rather, it articulated its position regarding class, gender, nation and so on by praising certain cultural practices and dismissing others.

It must be said that even in this period *Vogue* sometimes reflected on the function and value of critical practice, though its standards would hardly have impressed the Leavises. It introduced Gillian Hansard, the “authoress” of *Old Books for the Young*, as “a very young person of no authority whatever, who gives her grave and considered opinion on some of the masterpieces of English literature. It is surprising that an immature human being with no experience of life should pronounce judgments which frequently appear so shrewd, though they are at the same time often pert and always childish” (September 28, 1932: 92). Though readers were not exactly asked to take her judgements very seriously, it is significant that this was one of the few reviews of criticism: the point of reading it, then, was not to bow to its authority but to be entertained. Though in a different manner, Humbert Wolfe was equally vogueish in his reflection on how contemporary literature would be remembered in a century, “if the illustrated papers and the wireless have not destroyed the ability to read at that date”: “I can at least anticipate the professors of 2028. I read them first, and before they had become a part of a University curriculum. What did I think? I didn’t. I just enjoyed. But perhaps the fact of my enjoyment (important as it is to me) is not enough for the

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<sup>56</sup> In fact, as previously discussed, *Vogue* discussed political affairs so seldom that even Mitchison’s reference to pacifism, vague as it is, seems remarkable. An odd exception was the essay “Let’s Go to Russia”, by Denise Émile-Schreiber, who in her account of a visit to the USSR described the apprehension shared by other journalists, the highly organized and comfortable trip managed by an official tourist agency, the many curious sights and an appreciation for the status of worker women, particularly mothers, despite emphasizing a lack of individuality and creativity (April 27, 1932: 58-9, 84).

exacting unborn” (May 16, 1928: 55). He cracked a joke before finally announcing: “Nonsense! Let us have a little serious literary criticism” (*ibid.*).

These mentions of immature enjoyment and immersion, in contrast to grave scrutiny, suggest that the question of how people read was as important as what and why they chose to do so. Difficult or easy; complex or shallow; attentive or distracted; sitting up at a desk or lying down on your bed; improving or escapist; quiet or shaken by the movement of public transport: reading, inseparable from other literary practices such as accessing, circulating and displaying books, was also under fire in the Battle of the Brows. Some feared that the majority of the British public simply could not concentrate; they may be reading more, but they read *worse*. Nicola Humble argues that the necessity of analytical skills, “the initial point of entry into the literary academy”, is in practice what divides the brows; “middlebrow and highbrow books are distinguishable, fundamentally, not by any stable intrinsic differences, but by *how they are read*” (2011: 46). For critics like Leavis, relaxed reading, with its associated physical postures and spatial contexts (the bed, the train, the holiday), was passive and uncritical; by contrast, “the highbrow or professional reader, alone in his scholarly pursuits, descends ultimately from the lone monk in his bare cell, transcending physical discomfort through force of will and intellectual focus” (48). Though middlebrow culture did associate leisure with self-improvement, the two modes of reading were increasingly distinct (48-9). *Vogue* presented certain types of reading as fashionable and rejected others by parodying or ignoring them altogether: its preferences, as one might guess, were firmly middlebrow, both in result and in the reasoning behind them.

Let us begin with the question of when, always tied up with where. There was no clear rule as to how often review columns would appear. They declined in frequency over the years and they skipped entire months as often as they appeared in quick



succession, but there is a pattern: October and May carried more review columns than the other months, suggesting two publishing seasons. Autumn was for quieter indoor activities and looked forward to Christmas, when books were common gifts, whereas late spring was the time to stock up on books for the summer holidays. By contrast, January and August were the sparsest months, suggesting that smart readers would have done their book-shopping by then. The references to reading in the social columns, critical essays and the reviews themselves back up this claim. “October, November, those are the sanest months of the year”, stated one society report: “Instead of the entirely unnecessary treadmill regularity of social events, there is quiet with leisure for sculpture and pictures and house decoration, children’s parties, house-parties, hunting, writing, reading” (October 30, 1929: 51). Such activities were described as a welcome respite, not from work but from more active and demanding types of leisure. By contrast to this sector of the reading public, Evelyn Waugh described the buzz of the publishing industry at its busiest:

The summer is over; for two sunny months we have not had to bother ourselves about other people’s books; those astute old satyrs, the publishers, have all been at their play awaiting the gestation of their spring adventures. For two happy months we have been engaged with our own books or old books or with no books at all. [...] The autumn publishing season has begun; with the proud trepidation of parish workers decorating the church for the Harvest Festival, the publishers bring out their produce. And what a harvest! Each year this autumnal spate of literature becomes more formidable and so, no doubt, will continue to become until that salutary day when the expansion of broadcasting puts out of work all the amateurs and dilettante and professional hacks and journalists, and literature again becomes the slightly discreditable pursuit of those who really have something to say. Meanwhile the granaries are bursting (October 17, 1928: 59).

Quantity, for Waugh, was explicitly separated from quality. The colder months could have been reserved for more demanding reading, but *Vogue* preferred to highlight cosy novels instead.<sup>57</sup> If the end of the year was to be warm and nostalgic, summer was consistently associated with light and easy reading as well.

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<sup>57</sup> “Just as the prudent put by a little for a metaphorical rainy day”, it advised, “the wise reader may well lay aside a story of two of Ring Lardner’s for an actually wet one or treat himself to a couple of tale when he gets the mumps or the toothache” (November 13, 1935: 114). Similarly, *Brought Up and Brought Out*,

At this moment of high summer when holiday clothes are being packed and a corner in almost every trunk, suitcase or knapsack is being reserved for books, one should spare a moment for a rapid review of the best fiction of the present publishing season, so that gaps in one's reading can be filled in and novels one always meant to read but somehow missed can be procured in time. Here, then, is a short list of suggestions for holiday reading—necessarily inadequate and intentionally kept to the lighter side. (July 22, 1931: 64)<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the social columnist declared their love for “the joyous informality of August London when one does the things one has ‘been meaning to’”, including, of course, “books! One does not read them, of course, but one talks about them. (The reading season depends on the thermometer)” (August 9, 1933: 31). That year, the social thermometer pushed “everyone” to read Harold Nicolson’s *Peacemaking* and Edith Sitwell’s *English Eccentrics*, suggesting that highbrow signatures were not necessarily equated with highbrow reading but with an enjoyable degree of snobbery (*ibid.*). So, if light reading was for cold days, hot days, and rainy days as well, when was difficult reading to be done? Signing off from their column, a reporter boasted: “When these words appear I shall be in a lofty valley in the Tyrol—far from all things social [...] A feather bed, a *stein* of ice-cold beer from the neighbouring monastery (best of breweries), Rebecca West’s brilliant new book beside me” (August 8, 1928: 30). The book in question was *The Strange Necessity*, not a novel but a collection of her literary criticism. Some found concentration in the mountains. Others, like Lesley Blanch, argued that challenging reading required “leisure” that “the snatch and fitter of London life” could not provide, and so was better left for a cruising holiday (December 14,

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by Mary Pakenham, was said to be “a book for a wet holiday, an excellent light tonic for a dull spell. It is constructed of high spirits, complete candour, and some well-lighted amusing pictures of the recent past” (October 19, 1938: 92).

<sup>58</sup> The subsequent list included very few surprises (in fact, many titles had already been reviewed) with the exception of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, which fell on the side of aspirational reading: “tough reading but magnificent writing. Not for lazy days” (July 22, 1931: 64). *Faraway*, by J. B. Priestley, was described as “rather inconsequent”; it is understood that it “should make excellent holiday reading” precisely for that reason (July 6, 1932: 60). Michael Arlen’s horror novel *Hell! Said the Duchess* was recommended for being “just long enough to curdle your blood between dinner and bed on a hot summer evening” (July 11, 1934: 82).

1938: 53). Readers would not pick heavy books over socialising, but they might finally get to them if they were in the middle of the ocean.

This is not to say that books were not subjects of conversation at the height of the London Season, in the spring. In between preparations for parties and races, readers should catch up with literature:

April is the appointed time for reading the new books, so that we may hold our own at May dinner-tables. Perhaps a safe guide to the books soon to be in vogue will be a list of those seen recently in Lady Cunard's house. Harold Acton's fantastic *Cornelian*, Boyd's *Marching On*, of course Harold Nicolson's (Hogarth) essay on biography, Maugham's *Ashenden*, Strauss's letters to Hoffmansthal, Stephen's *Etched in Moonlight*, Elinor Wylie's *Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard*, W. B. Yeats's *Tower*, Maurice Baring's *Comfortless Memory* (a comfortable book), new books by Rose Macaulay, 'Vita' Sackville-West, Margot Oxford, and E. M. Forster, Dreisler's *Chains*, enchanting little Anita Loos' *But Marry Brunettes*, Kensal Green's indiscreet *Premature Epitaphs*, which have caused so much speculation, Margaret Kennedy's new novel and the Rev. Montagu Somers' witchful essays. Finally, an exquisite little masterpiece from America, *Porgy* (Cape's Travellers' Library), which has been dramatised into the New York sensation of the year. (April 18, 1928: 40, 89)

The discourse around reading is revealed to be somewhat inflected by guilt and appearances; one *meant* to read, one *ought* to read, but one did not always do so. Actually, when one *did* read, one almost always turned to something on the lighter side in search of respite. *Vogue* did not chastise but rather included itself in the joke, further suggesting a middlebrow position: one ought to be familiar with developments in literature, and reading was done both for leisure and self-improvement, but it was not life or death.<sup>59</sup>

Fashionable reading was therefore leisurely, and descriptions of reading in *Vogue* support Humble's idea of "sitting back", as they frequently mentioned reclining on a train seat, a couch, a sunlounger or a bed. When suggesting books for particular environments, *Vogue* tended to take into account their content and format. *The Dream-World*, by the critic R. L. Mégroz, was concerned with dreams and went into

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<sup>59</sup> This perception survived into the war: "To many, this war has meant leisure—for the first time in their lives. There are many kinds of war-work which have, so far, turned out to be but interminably long hours of waiting. [...] to the many who stand and wait, books come as an especial blessing. That being so, we offer a selected list." (Blanch December 1939: 81)

psychoanalysis, which made it “a perfect bedside book” (July 12, 1939: 68); so was Osbert Sitwell’s new collection of stories, said to rival “the telephone on every bedside table” (November 12, 1930: 71). “I do not know who the man was who first invented the admirable phrase ‘bedside books,’ but it has certainly proved a labour-saving device for which the reviewer should be appropriately grateful”, said T. Michael Pope about Arthur Ponsonby’s diaries, which were “books to be nibbled rather than studied, and many choice and delicate morsels will fall to the lot of the persevering nibbler” (November 16, 1927: 65). Heartier, more lowbrow entertainment was also associated with the last moments of relaxation of the day:

Bed? Bed at night. At that time and place I am not so sure about these new-fangled ways. If you like being shocked at night, something homely with blood and pistol shots is perhaps best. Edgar Wallace’s *Forger*, though he is scarcely perhaps the fellow for a very critical time of day, then becomes admirable company. Or say you have a cold: nothing could be better for your chest than a thick application of forged currency notes laid on with Mr. Wallace’s gentle persuasiveness. (Williams-Ellis January 11, 1928: 72)

As they provided entertainment and heightened emotion for less time invested, short stories were recommended for railway journeys: *Roaring Tower*, by Stella Gibbons, “a writer well equipped with wit”, “would make excellent company” (April 14, 1937: 118). A deliberately didactic alternative were the “sixpenny booklets published by Routledge”, “intended to keep the reader’s stock of knowledge up to date. These handy little condensed surveys of important matters enable one to fill in odd corners of time which would otherwise be wasted in boredom, for they are so small that they can be slipped into one’s pocket or handbag and read at odd moments when waiting for trains or people” (H.P. May 15, 1929: 100). Readers may well prefer thrilling novels for such journeys: a reader in search of solid entertainment was used as a comic figure in a review by Vernon Bartlett, who noted that he “could not conscientiously recommend *Disarmant*”, by Salvador de Madariaga, “to a man who [was] in the unfortunate position of having read everything by Edgar Wallace” (May 29,

1929: 49). If they had greater concentration, readers might pick up Ernest Hemingway's *Fiesta*, which apparently belonged to the category of "fiction which makes a semi-solemn claim on your attention, that you can read with a clear conscience during a journey and need not be excessively perturbed if you happen to forget and leave behind" (Quennell late August 1927: 37, 64). Other reviewers were less brutal. Mary MacCarthy shared a personal experience that attempted to balance leisurely reading with attentive reviewing, all in a surprising setting:

I shall be able to take my books there [to the zoo] and bask near the Japanese pond where these coral creatures [flamingos] paddle. [...] Arrived at the seat on the grass in the Zoo near the flamingos however, I really do not want to read anything at all (I should like just to dream and look about), unless it is perhaps something as easy and exquisite as 'Merrilie, merrilie shall I live now / Under the blossom which hangs on the bough.' (May 1, 1929: 59)

Not even a seasoned writer and critic would prefer her books—Disraeli's letters, Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, Fournier and Mauriac—with such enchanting distraction. She did manage her review, inserting herself in it: "My shadow is lengthening on the grass, this beautiful first day of summer is over, I must go. The gates of the Zoo are closing and I must lay down my pencil" (88).

*Vogue* was concerned with the placing of books—not only for display, but for comfort and temptation—as much as with the bodily location of the reader. Walter de la Mare's *Come Hither* "might have a special corner, carefully dusted, in the attic among the apples; it would be the very thing for the hayloft on a rainy summer afternoon or to take with you into the old boat on the lake on a drowsy, sunny day" (H.P. January 23, 1929: 62). The society columnist, attending a gathering, noted that the conversation turned as follows:

With coffee we reached the subject of books—books that lie on the right tables—books that will be on the lists of dowagers and chauffeurs who wait patiently at the circulating libraries. The book of the month seemed to be the Grand Duchess Marie's memoirs. We who knew her slightly before she left Paris for New York thought her very attractive and courageous, but this book is astonishing, it is literature. The book list of the moment—assuming one has passed on one's copy of Eleanor Smith's *Flamenco*—includes Yeatman's *1066 and all that* for those who like their history funny, Boulestin's *What Shall We Have To-day*, Sacheverell Sitwell's *Beckford*, Mrs. Crawshay-William's

*Night in the Hotel*, Grace Stone's *Bitter Tea*, and *Rachel Moon* by Lorna Rea, whose *Six Mrs. Greenes* destroyed our sleep two years ago. Armed with these books one has only to pick a good yachting cruise or one's favourite country house. (February 18, 1931: 77)

Every now and then *Vogue* mentioned how difficult it was to find the time and concentration to read; during this period, it went beyond commiseration to warn potential readers when books were "difficult". *And Co.* by Jean-Richard Bloch, a "Balzacian romance", was "not to be read in a light and skipping manner, but pored over with due deliberation" (April 30, 1930: 74); *The Travelling Companion* by Norman Walker was "rather literary and mannered" but worth the effort, as it was "pleasant to read" (March 21, 1934: 108); similarly, *Major Operation* by James Barke was called a "wild thicket of narrative"; though it "might well have been improved with pruning", "those who fight their way through its densely packed pages will have their reward, for it has many excellencies" (November 11, 1936: 126). "The scope and intensity" of *The Furys*, by James Hanley, also required effort and deliberate reading; they were "enough to make it a serious problem in a time-restricted reading budget, for it almost elbows lesser and lighter books out of the way, but it is one of the novels that it is well to have read" (May 29, 1935: 124). The difficulty of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* became the central theme of its highly positive review:

everything is made as difficult as possible to read. Only the persistent and dogged reader will be able to appreciate it. But one need not blame the author for that. The obscurity of the first part of the story is not a pose; it is inherent in the method employed, which is later seen to be a magnificent experiment in narrative. Mr. Faulkner pursues his own way, his books are like no others and should not be missed by the connoisseur of modern fiction. (June 10, 1931: 94)

The "connoisseur" was revealed as a type. "Your Friends Who Think—Even At Christmas" was even a category in a list of books as gifts; sandwiched in-between snack-sized entertainments and books about bridge, the pacifist volume *Challenge to Death* was one of *Vogue's* recommendations for one's more intellectual acquaintances (November 28, 1934). The term "highbrow" was not used in this case, though the

meaning was the same: this way, *Vogue* avoided its connotations of pretence while sneaking in a jab at excessive intellectualisation.

So one read to be entertained, to find aesthetic pleasure and intellectual challenge, to make time when one could not do anything else, and to have subjects for conversation. Some pleasures one could only get from delving into a good book: “Intelligent curiosity as to how other people lead their lives provides the chief lure of novel-reading”, wrote a reviewer who highlighted the importance of a believable narrative (February 6, 1935: 82). Though outside the scope of this thesis by a narrow margin, it is worth mentioning Blanch’s refusal to explain the plots of the books she reviewed: “as the correct reader usually embarks on fiction in the hope that a tale will unfold, I shall not spoil the sport” (December 1939: 82). As a whole, *Vogue*’s reviews reveal a respect for readers who read out of sincere enjoyment, even if uncritical; by contrast, reading out of a necessity to impress others was treated like a joke.

“Our critics (and there are many) often complain that women are so restless—always feeling that there is something desperately exciting round the next corner, and so eager to be on to it that the prosaic here and now only gets half their attention” (September 1, 1932: 13). These words, though they referred to fashion, may have been about contemporary reading practices, which associated modern life with scattered, distracted reading or, by contrast, absolute absorption. Escapist, “rapid, all-consuming reading, far from being a positive mark of readerly attention”, was associated by critics like Leavis with the passivity and mindlessness of the drug user (Humble 2011: 50). As explained in the first chapter, women were more associated with unthinking, devouring consumption, and women’s reading habits, it seems, have always been suspicious. For *Vogue*, however, losing oneself in a book was a delight:

Certain books need peace and repose for their adequate enjoyment, and a degree of concentration undisturbed by telephones. Perhaps perceiving how few modern readers can attain to such conditions, the skilled novelists of to-day tend to develop a technique

that will ensure attention for their pages in the middle of an earth-quake, on the edge of a volcano about to erupt, on ships at sea during typhoons, and in rooms looking on London streets being 'taken up' by pneumatic drills. (Pembroke October 2, 1929: 81)

Neither did *Vogue* have a problem with escapist reading. It described “two schools of thought” about how to approach P. G. Wodehouse:

One is that it is best to devour it at once, otherwise you may be found lacking in essential knowledge. The other school considers that the latest Wodehouse should be treated like the savings of the thrifty and put by for a rainy day, so that when your best hat is ruined, your best beau proves fickle, or your Aunt Dahlia leaves all her wealth to a home for lost cats you can still take out your Wodehouse and be happy. (August 6, 1930: 58)

In her analysis, Humble mentions that readers in middlebrow novels tend to eat in bed, or when eating. *Vogue* similarly portrayed moments of reading while eating or drinking, consuming both at once. When it stated that “what we all want to do; what only some of us can do” was to “sit in the shade, a book near at hand, a long drink still nearer” (July 6, 1938: 23) it strengthened the association of reading with leisure and comfortable abstraction; it is difficult to imagine *The Sound and the Fury* as the chosen book for this idyllic scene. Consequently, it tended to recommend books that could be picked up, browsed and left at will: story collections, letters, historical anecdotes, miscellanies and art books.

When a novel came out that was particularly readable, lively or amusing, *Vogue* took care to say so: these adjectives were granted to Lorna Rea's *First Night* (November 23, 1932: 92), Vicki Baum's *Martin's Summer* (May 3, 1933: 96), Mary Morison Webster's *The School House* (September 20, 1933: 98), John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* and Peter Delius' *Boarding House* (April 3, 1935: 114), among others. This is not to say that these lighter books were presented as mere trifles: it noted and praised the technique that sustained them, acknowledging that, in many cases, the sense of ease was deceptive. “Perhaps” because of its readability, “one hardly realises” the “cleverness” of Barbara Blackburn's *Marriage and Money* “until it is laid aside, so unpretentious and matter-of-fact is its manner of writing” (April 1, 1931: 88). In David



Garnett's collection *The Grasshoppers Come*, "the writing is as transparently clear as water and we seem to be crystal-gazing rather than reading" (June 10, 1931: 94); it is smooth reading, but not at all shallow. *Vogue* thus complicated the more accessible prose of these authors, inviting readers to consider their technique, to approach supposedly "light" reading as one would any obviously highbrow title. Though Colette's *Mitsou* "can be read easily in an hour", "one might ponder the manner of its telling interminably" (July 9, 1930: 72). Though reviews in the thirties were not long enough for their authors to explore the construction of a given book, critical analysis was extended as a potential activity for readers who may want to try their hand at writing. *Cosmopolitans*, by Somerset Maugham, was "a book of short stories written to fit the pages of a magazine without having to turn over—an exercise in ingenuity by a consummate craftsman"; readers "who take pleasure in such things will find added satisfaction in studying the form and manner that developed from such space limitations" (May 13, 1936: 106).

More than before, *Vogue*'s literary reviews took into account a book's value as social currency and material object, encompassing practices other than reading, such as buying, gifting, displaying and lending. A very particular perspective was that of hosts at country houses, who were expected to have books for their guests to borrow. Those books were of the holiday type, that is, entertaining and engrossing, and appealing to a wide range of audiences, which did not necessarily mean cosy. *Vogue* proposed *The Ochrana*, an account of the Russian secret police, describing it as a "thriller" that was "disturbing the sleep of many country-house guests" (August 20, 1930: 72); it also advised readers to "leave" *White Face*, by Edgar Wallace "around on a table with almost any half-dozen borrowable new novels and it will be the first to disappear" (August 6, 1930: 58). Lighter options "for the spare room at the week-end cottage" were

*They Were Not Amused* by Hylton Cleaver (April 18, 1934: 112) or *Stardust* and its sequel *More Stardust* by Julia Cairns (March 4, 1936: 100; January 6, 1937: 58). It must be remembered that *Vogue* contributors sometimes joked about how guests had to keep themselves entertained, and recommendations like these illustrate the practice of private reading even in the midst of such a social activity. Hosts were sometimes challenged to share interesting books: *Madman's Drum: A Novel in Woodcuts* by Lynd Ward, was “a provocative book to leave lying on the morning-room table, and a suggestion for a gift to the man who boasts he never reads—for its long series of episodes are unfolded without a word being set in type” (November 26, 1930: 114). Not so much a novelty, but still “blandly audacious, was *The Technique of the Love Affair* by Doris Langley Moore, recommended for its pleasant production and comfortable size for travelling (October 18, 1933: 110). And if a host wanted to “make an excellent (if illusory) impression”, why not scatter “the new Evelyn Waugh, the new Harold Nicolson, Duff Cooper’s *Talleyrand*, Sonia Keppel’s *Sister of the Sun*, Vita Sackville-West’s *Family History*, Zweig’s *Young Woman of 1914*, Romily John’s *The Seventh Child*, Lord David Cecil’s *Victorian Novelists*, the important *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Wilenski’s *Modern Sculpture*, T. F. Powys’s *Two Thieves*, and Ernest Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon*” (October 26, 1932: 104)

Near Christmas, *Vogue* always considered gifts. The format of these sections changed from year to year: sometimes they were similar to critical essays, sometimes simply catalogues, and sometimes they claimed to be real wish-lists from anonymous readers. Regardless, books were invariably potential gifts. Gift ideas in the thirties included all sorts of daily items, such as stationery, gramophone records, sporting equipment, bath salts, powder cases, a kettle, a gas stove, or new sheets; more luxurious items like a fur coat and, shockingly, a monkey, described in a horribly racist manner;

as well as “a batch of new books, including Virginia Woolf’s new volume of essays, *The Common Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series; *The Lost Generation*, Ruth Holland’s war-time story; and Rose Macaulay’s *They Were Defeated*” (November 9, 1932: 70, 104). As these books were supposedly desired by a specific reader, they suggest a deliberately formed reading taste, politically and intellectually-minded. Some years later, a similar feature listed a puppy, a tropical aquarium, “a whole library of Penguins—a pound buys forty volumes” and “subscriptions to the Ballet, to the Opera, to the Times Book Club; to magazines on your friends’ pet subjects, gardening, motoring, riding or just simply dressing—and, by this, of course, we mean a subscription to *Vogue*” (November 24, 1937: 57). In this case, the Penguin library suggested not only the prestige of the young publishing house, but the importance of collecting and displaying sets, and associated the library with the *Vogue* outlook. “People read more, and more people read, every year”, thought Gerald Gould;

and, even if they don’t, they like to have books for shelf-protection. Not that we come recommending those ‘books which are no books’ of which Charles Lamb wrote [...] Give her a *book!* With some presents, one is often told, one can’t go wrong. But with books one can. That is part of the thrill and delight in giving them. [...] Re-issues of old favourites, illustrated editions of the classics, we must leave aside with the Draught-Boards. Not that we would not urge you to give them. They make worthy presents. But you know the old favourites for yourselves. Ours is the humbler task of guide among new favourites—new works that ask your favour. [...] Your novel-borrower wants something that will last. She likes something to *re-read*. The year has seen a few novels that arrive as stories and remain as friends. (December 14, 1927: 51)

Gould therefore began by recommending new releases—including *Red Sky at Morning* by Margaret Kennedy, *Cups, Wands and Swords* by Helen Simpson and *The Flower Show*, by Denis Mackail—for that abstract “she”, but he soon moved on to more specific tastes, relying on *Vogue*’s well-established formula of dividing people into types. “Is she politically-minded—a ‘flapper,’ as it were? H. G. Wells’s *Meanwhile* will make her think” (*ibid.*). As for detective fiction, “you can’t do better” “if you happen to know that your she likes the sensation of having cold water poured down her back while she is doing cross-word puzzles” (*ibid.*). “If she thinks and feels”, she would appreciate

Humbert Wolfe's *Requiem*; of course, "to readers of these pages, we shall not cry 'Wolfe' in vain" (*ibid.*). The use of "she" suggests an interesting play on perspective: *Vogue* implicitly addressed the "she" in question who kept up with middlebrow authors, already appreciated Wolfe, was willing to acknowledge the thrill of detective fiction, and who cared about politics to a degree. Therefore, it would seem that Gould was suggesting books the reader herself ought to ask for disguised as gifts for others.

*Vogue* made the case for gifting books every year, hoping the habit would spread. It insisted that books made excellent accompaniments to a main gift, likening them to snacks: "Serious or frivolous, according to the recipient, this volume may be the meat of the repast or merely an appetising *hors d'oeuvre*, a delicious sweet or a light garnishing, but its inclusion adds a special zest to the whole" (November 27, 1929: 132). In fact, "every person in your Christmas house-party will be flattered by a present of a specially chosen book, and a few chic but not costly volumes laid in before Christmas will be the best possible insurance against the embarrassment of the unexpected and giftless guest on some festive day" (December 8, 1937: 92). To give out small presents to one's guests was the duty of the hostess, and books signified culture and sophistication. "There is always a distinction about giving books" that was accessible even to those with smaller incomes, as;

quite small sums can be expended with a dignity that can be achieved in no other way. [...] And as for the recipients, one can hardly ever go wrong with this kind of present, for if they like books they will be delighted, and if they don't care about books and never read one the chances are that they will still be tickled to death to think that you think they do and will display the offering with the greatest pride and pleasure. [...] The bookwise present-giver will give herself the excitement of buying them with her own hands at the booksellers, for books can be very charming decoration as well as literature, and publishers' catalogues are forced to leave out all the colour of jackets and bindings and pictures. [...] She will] have all the volumes chosen sent to her own address, where she will herself for some days enjoy the cream of the plunder. [...] there is a definite thrill in receiving a mint-new publication covered in the latest thing in jackets, while it is not so flattering to be given an 'established success' in its 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> edition. (November 26, 1930: 114)

*Vogue* thus underscored newness as a core aspect of fashionable reading; moreover, it made a point of the future value of the recommended books as collectible items,

foreseeing their status as modern classics. H. W. Yoxall noted that “many who in any other month would regard it an eccentric proceeding are known to practice the purchase of books” when Christmas arrived: “Whether this is due to a seasonable feeling of charity towards authors and publishers; or to some cultural urge stirred by the approach of the New Year and its resolutions; or simply to the fact that books are the gifts most easy to pack and post; it is not certain” (November 14, 1928: 69).

Such features had to categorise books somehow. Sometimes they were divided by type of reader, as mentioned, though Lesley Blanch preferred “classing them by subjects rather than by suitable recipients—you must work that out for yourselves” (December 14, 1938: 53). More than once books were divided into gifts for him and her. Both categories included story collections and detective novels, while books specifically recommended to women were *Some Flowers* by Vita Sackville-West, “so delightful in subject and appearance, that it might be almost any woman’s gift, with its coloured cover of old-fashioned flowers, its fine photographs and practical information”, and *The Festival* by Mary MacCarthy, “in a pink and white candy-striped jacket [...] as elegant as the literary style of the essays and stories it contains” (December 8, 1937: 92). Yoxall chose to create even more specific categories, suggesting books according to the recipient’s perceived intellectualism—class was more or less taken for granted—and relationship to the giver. One’s mother, he wrote, ought to get Edith Wharton. “For one’s aunt, who belongs to the P.E.N. Club and works on a number of advanced committees, the obvious choice is Low’s *Lions and Lambs*”, whereas her “country” equivalent should receive something jollier, like *Gallimaufry* by H. R. Wakefield (November 14, 1928: 69). “One’s younger brother at Balliol wants—or needs—Aldous Huxley’s terrific *Point Counter Point*”, which will push him out of cynicism through catharsis; if he attends Cambridge, he should get *In the Beginning* by

Norman Douglas instead. Meanwhile, “for one’s sister just out of Roedean *The Technique of the Love Affair* will be a too utterly *marvellous* choice. *She* will not complain that neither the ‘Gentlewoman’ in her episodes nor William Gerhardi in his epilogue have attained the requisite originality of thought or deftness of phrase. And the book has a pleasant format” (*ibid.*); the condescendence of some of these recommendations suggests that this was as much a comic portrayal of society “types” and their tastes as much as straight-forward recommendations. Consider the following: “To your friends in the intelligentsia, who live, in fact, quite near to Gordon Square, it is no use sending Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*; they will certainly have subscribed to a copy before publication” (*ibid.*) Instead, the giver should try Eugene O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* or T. F. Powys’s *The Dewpond*.

Now what about the nice, ordinary people you know? That couple—he does something successfully in the City, she does nothing gracefully at home? And the young stockbroker who shoots with your husband and compensates for his inattendance on ‘change with his skill at golf and bridge? For him Gollancz’s *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* will form an ideal accompaniment to the final whisky and soda on his midnight return to his chambers after the inevitable dinner out. For them, cheerful souls, I hesitate between Ring Lardner’s *The Love Nest* and the Belloc-Chesterton extravaganza, *But Soft, We Are Observed!* (104)

The words “highbrow”, “middlebrow” and “lowbrow” never appeared in Yoxall’s list, and yet the concepts, which underpinned the entire publishing landscape, would be recognised by the attentive reader, who would certainly know where she ought to be aligned in terms of class and taste. And if that were not clear enough, Yoxall concluded: “Now as you write your order to your bookseller add one more gift—for yourself. Why not F. M. Ford’s *A Little Less than Gods?*” (*ibid.*).

The act of ordering books or visiting bookshops became increasingly visible as the thirties advanced and *Vogue* placed heavier emphasis on shopping. “Is it possible that fiction is bought and kept, instead of being borrowed from libraries?”, asked Lesley Blanch: “Apparently so: yet, with notable exceptions, yesterday’s fiction fades fast, a transitory pleasure, to be snatched greedily and relinquished” (December 14, 1938: 94).

The references to specific bookshops, however, were few and far between. Birrell & Garnett, though open throughout the thirties, was not mentioned again. “Shop-Hound’s Guide to Buying British” highlighted instead long-lived establishments: Bumpus, “the most famous bookshop in town: holds the Royal Warrant: encyclopaedic and helpful staff: and a continuous history since 1790. Hatchards in Piccadilly is about the same age, and also holds the Royal Warrant. Among many honoured members of the antique book trade, Maggs of Conduit Street has great fame” (April 28, 1937: 152). A feature on “Young Talent” singled out Christina Foyle among young athletes, singers and foreign royalty, noting that she was “indefatigably enterprising, was eighteen in 1930 when she launched Foyle’s Luncheons, bringing author and reader together cosily. She rounds up celebrities like a cattle rustler, bags her lions in hundreds, and founded the Book Club, the Right Book Club, and the Catholic Book Club” (August 3, 1938: 46).

When a publication caught its eye, *Vogue* insisted that books could be displayed in their full materiality, regardless of their content, and noted fine design even outside the context gifting. *Adam and Evelyn at Kew* by Robert Herring was “a combination of literary and artistic felicity, written, illustrated and produced lightly like a flower. Its green printed jacket (and cover to match) should give it a place on the most exquisite of modernist silver tables” (February 19, 1930: 78); *The Jade Mountain*, a collection of Tang dynasty poems translated by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-Hu, “wrought and polished like jade, must have a place among the most elegant *chinoiseries*” (March 5, 1930: 84); both were associated to furniture, as if the elegance within would flow onto the rest of the house, and thus envelope its owner. Cecil Beaton’s own *Book of Beauty*, “in a white cover splashed with gold spots and backed with ragged-robin pink”, “will be found lying on the tables of many distinguished women this Christmas, or rather will spend most of its time being snatched from the table and pored over. A very sociable

book this—people will crowd round it” (November 26, 1930: 116). Choice words were reserved for bad designs as well. “Can nothing be done to make book-jackets safe for readers?”, lamented an anonymous reviewer; “The present fashion for using papers in such violent shades as orange blood-red, poison green and passionate petunia has its own dangers” (October 3, 1928: 98). So bothered were they by the virulence of the colours and the danger of ink stains that they described the colours chosen for each book throughout that column. While *Vogue* much preferred to highlight the positive, Lesley Blanch also criticised the British edition of *Life Class* by Ludwig Bemelmans: “Do not be put off by the wrapper. For some reason, the publishers of the English edition have substituted the author’s own drawing (used in the American edition) with the present ignoble banality, utterly at variance with the mood of the book. What a gaffe!” (August 23, 1939: 42, 64). During this period *Vogue* considered the arranging and decorating of libraries even less frequently than it had done before, a surprising omission. On the one occasion it did so, however, it found an interesting—if comical—halfway point between the inclusion of modern highbrows and the actual function of the library as a source of aesthetic and emotional comfort:

Small collections usually include the classic English authors (editions of 1720-1938) and such moderns as Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence, Maugham, Wilde, Shaw, Syng, Yeats, the Sitwells. And when they are well gathered together, what an exhausting but delightful day or two can be—must be—spent in arranging according to sizes and colours, and experimenting with strip lighting to show them to advantage. Of course, you will catalogue them. But what a good alibi is there here for refusing tiresome callers and invitations—‘I’m at work in my library...’ (Leslie January 25, 1939: 63)

Lending libraries, by the way, were simply not mentioned. Humble brings up a comment from George Orwell that suggested that “people may buy books for mixed motives of pretension or display, but they borrow the books they really want to read” (2001: 12). As a practice, borrowing did not cause the same anxieties buying did, because it did not expose the reader’s true preferences. Moreover, *Vogue*’s lack of discussion of the subject can be explained because it saw itself as a guide to wise



shopping, and therefore the materiality of the book, which could be displayed, was more important than the personal reading experience. When *Vogue* recommended a book, it took into account two overlapping criteria: the chicness of the title and its author, and its worth as an object, as an extension of its owners' style.

As for visual representations of reading, they continued in the same vein as before. They were relatively uncommon, and when they did appear they usually showed women, posing formally or in supposed leisure, looking away from their books, not at them. Tilly Losch was snapped with an open newspaper in a well-stocked library, surrounded by "bibelots, books, embroideries: her beauty emerges like a clear jewel in a filigree setting" at Beaton's own Ashcombe (March 7, 1934: 91), and her pose gave her access to the pantheon of "Blondes Without, Brunettes Within". Mary Borden, herself a novelist, was photographed lounging on a couch, head carefully supported in her hand, with a book on her lap "in her drawing-room in College Street, Westminster"; something about her pose suggest she'd rather be left alone (December 28, 1928: 23). Another notable non-reader was Gertrude Lawrence, "The Well-Dressed Actress" (November 28, 1928: 76). Cecil Beaton sketched the "Viscountess Curzon as she sits in her boudoir wearing a tea-gown and reading poetry with Mr. Guppy on her lap" (April 4, 1928: 63), an illustration of pleasant dreaminess. In fact, tea-gowns were the ideal choice for reading: "Who can lie back, full length, in an evening dress, with dignity? But tea-gowns are seen at their best advantage with their draperies flowing over sofas and cushions, and, in them, reading and lolling are considered suitable behaviour. More than any other garment worn to-day, they are redolent of feminine caprices and wifeliness" (Beaton April 15, 1931: 52). He also sketched Hazel, Lady Lavery, holding "Osbert Sitwell's new novel as she sits for her portrait in the downstairs sitting-room while her husband paints upstairs in the giant studio" (December 11, 1929: 55). This

was the only instance in which the prop-book was identified, and it is significant that it was a Sitwell work, which identified the sitter with the most prominent signatures of lush modernity. Another subject that held an open book was Elizabeth Maugham, the daughter of the writer W. Somerset Maugham and the interior decorator Syrie Maugham, both recurring figures in *Vogue's* social pages (January 11, 1939).

The handful of exceptions were a snapshot in the society column of Mary Agar, Baroness Furnivall, reading her own play, *The White Lady*, on a bench in her garden (March 6, 1929: 57); one Miss Julia Dutton reading a magazine, too obscured to identify (June 14, 1933); and American interior designer Dorothy Draper reading in a feature about her own apartment (Hillis December 23, 1936: 39). Very rarely were the reading habits of these ladies reported in text, though Lady Cunard and her daughter Nancy were “seen leaving that well-known bookshop in the King’s Road by one of our agents (who are everywhere)” carrying “*Look Homeward Angel*, *Water-Gypsies*, *Other Man’s Saucer* (by a young man said to be still at Oxford), and *The Life of Lord Balfour*” (August 20, 1930: 72). Two of these books had been reviewed in *Vogue*, and one would soon be, which suggests some degree of dishonesty. Perhaps the only trustworthy witness was the camera—and of course Pamela Bowes-Lyon was photographed in Hyde Park “studying her copy of *Vogue*” (23).

Models were occasionally shown reading or otherwise perusing books in fashion photography, even when props were rare. There was a woman lounging under her beach umbrella, ostensibly reading, again without actually looking at her book (June 27, 1928: 36); an outdoors snapshot by Hoyningen-Huené had two women being shown a book by a vendor “Along the Paris Quais” (May 29, 1929: 46); a woman in suede and satin pyjamas, representing “Luxury for Leisure Hours”, covered part of her face with a book (December 25, 1935: 36); a Cecil Beaton photograph of two women in Mainbocher

lamé dresses showed one of them reading, tying up the practice with the height of elegance (January 22, 1936: 65). The clearest instance of the chain of associations between reading, leisure, sensual enjoyment, display and elegance was an illustration that accompanied the review section in February 17, 1932. It showed a woman reading in an armchair, comfortably reclined: she held her book in one hand and smoked with the other. There were two other books piled up in an armrest, suggesting that she was either a voracious reader or that she switched between various books, following her whims; two ways of reading that were coded feminine during this period (72).

Just like *Vogue* consecrated manners of reading as fashionable or at least as part of a shared repertoire of practices, it did the same with literary forms and specific novels. The most obvious way to do so was to reference them in passing, taking familiarity for granted, though often the unknowing reader would get enough information to understand it. There was a feature on bridal shopping that mentioned Colette's heroines, a photoshoot based on Robert Louis Stevenson's 1885 collection *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and a feature on hats that began: "Every woman has an immoderate passion for hats. She can't have too many (do you remember how young Antonia in *The Constant Nymph* put eight hats on her trousseau list and no underclothes?)" (September 4, 1935: 37) Even more directly—usually not in the review section but in the society columns—*Vogue* occasionally appointed "the book of the season", or insisted that a book ought to be read *now*.

Among the first enquiry of those who love good talk in its right season is for the new books, and every year there is the same battle of the books through October, so that it is November before the established successes can be told in order of popularity. Every country house *must* have a copy of *The Letters of Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield*, edited by Lord Zetland, and published a few days ago. They are fascinating and will be of permanent importance, so that every effort must be made to search departing visitors for 'borrowed' copies. (Pembroke October 2, 1929: 108)

The prestigious category of books so fashionable that guests may well risk friendships over included biographies of great historical personages and more recent literary greats,

namely Alice Meynell, “the new Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*”, John Cowper Powys’s *Wolf Solent* and J. B. Priestley’s *The Good Companions* (*ibid.*). Some books were topical for a reason, which could be explained (“The present interest in Dutch life excited by the Exhibition at Burlington House makes this a favourable moment for the publication of *The Rebel Generation* by Jo van Ammers-Küller”, H.P. February 20, 1929: 66) or not (*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was called “the greatest book of the year” some months after T. E. Lawrence’s death, December 11, 1935: 104).

Other seasonal titles included “Maurice Baring’s *Coat without a Seam*, the new Isadora Duncan, M. P. Shiel’s *Purple Cloud*, and *Cities of the Plain*, with the best party in fiction” (April 3, 1929: 55), as well as DuBose Heyward’s *Porgy*, coinciding with the staging of its adaptation. An adaptation to the stage or the screen was a significant reason for *Vogue* to reference a novel: the stage version of *Pride and Prejudice* inspired *Vogue* to publish “Bride and Prejudice”, a feature in which the characters discuss Lizzie’s wedding dress, showing each other that same issue of *Vogue* and pointing to the pages readers could turn to (April 29, 1936). In the late thirties, influenced by the release of the 1933 film, it was *Little Women* that *Vogue* referenced time and time again. A book could also absorb the celebrity status of its author or subject: this was the case of Eve Curie’s “astonishing” biography of her mother, “one of the not-to-be-missed events of the spring publishing season” (May 11, 1938: 104),

Of course, a book was fashionable if it responded or somehow expressed what *Vogue* identified as “our” taste: the first person is significant, as it signalled that it was not only fashionable but voguish. When the Nonesuch Press brought out *Hazlitt’s Selected Essays* in “a very comely” edition overseen by Geoffrey Keynes, *Vogue* noted that it happened at “a good moment”, as, despite the hundred year lag, “the essays not only wear well and read freshly to-day but the peculiar tang of his writing, half-spiteful,

half-ironic, wholly vigorous, is particularly to our present taste” (February 4, 1931: 68). More vaguely, it noted that “when the present has been too much for us”—say, in the severely depressed early thirties—“we have been wont to take refuge in books about the past—in history and romance. Now the alternative escape is offered of books that look ahead” (February 6, 1935: 82). Therefore, while *Vogue* could identify a fashionable tone, one that foregrounded wit and detachment, and which could be called middlebrow in its familiarity of highbrow forms, the subjects that it described as “modern” were too diverse to form a recognisable category. The same happened with literary genres.

“There are fashions in publishing as in dress”, it stated for the umpteenth time; “and at the present moment the short story would seem to be coming in as the short skirt is going out, for new volumes of short stories are appearing on every hand. It is a welcome fashion to many people who appreciate the art of the short story as something entirely separate from, but not inferior to, the art of the novelist” (November 27, 1929: 134). The trend continued throughout the following years, though waning, and *Vogue* no longer considered it its own. A later review wondered “if short stories are now as popular as their present importance on newspaper placards would seem to indicate”, no longer considering *Vogue* itself the weathervane of literary fashions (September 20, 1933: 98). A few years later the “long short” was said to be an “alleged unpopular form” (March 3, 1937: 138). Trends could coexist: *Vogue* reported that “plays are said to be more popular than novels with many readers at the present time” (June 25, 1930: 78), referenced “our modern appetite for autobiography and personal memoirs” (March 5, 1930: 84), driven by both nostalgia and curiosity, which manifested in a fashion for collecting “Victorian bibelots” that extended to letters (May 31, 1933: 106) and in the continuing popularity of childhood recollection (May 1, 1935: 180), all roughly at the same time. From these statements one may infer that the novel was the most

unfashionable form. That would be false: most of the books *Vogue* reviewed or otherwise discussed were novels. It is not that the appeal of the short story, the play and the personal memoir were made up or inflated; rather, I believe, they were presented as fashionable because they matched elements that readers would find in *Vogue* itself.

*Vogue* did not aim to debate the popularity of the novel in its entirety, but rather promoted certain genres which all fell somewhere in the spectrum of the middlebrow.

Humble argues that:

There is often an implied pecking-order within the middlebrow category: so, ‘country-house’ novels, because dealing with aristocrats, appear to have ranked rather higher than domestic novels, with their averagely middle-class heroines. Detective fiction ranked high as it was the preferred leisure reading of men, particularly intellectual ones. Children’s fiction, and novels read in childhood, such as those of Jane Austen and the Brontës, score highly for their cultish, quirky associations; while anything with a daring or racy atmosphere [...] offered the reader the reassurance of being up-to-the-minute. Romance was probably bottom of the pecking order because of its regrettably lowbrow associations [...]: to be appropriately middlebrow, romantic fiction needed to be redeemed by the more literary qualities of a du Maurier who could interweave a love story with nostalgia and an intense evocation of landscape. (2001: 13-4)

*Vogue* certainly reflects that hierarchy; besides childhood classics, which were repeatedly and fondly mentioned,<sup>60</sup> it appreciated society, domestic and detective novels but barely touched romance. These genres had something in common: an “elaborate characterization of the lives of the upper classes” (Latham 2003: 176), conspicuous in both detective novels and the feminine middlebrow. Society novels were populated by the types readers could find in *Vogue*’s society columns and satire. As Sean Latham notes, “these popular images of the aristocracy” had been “drawn from the conventions

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<sup>60</sup> In the essay “The Critic in the Crib”, Aldous Huxley recalled his childish enjoyment of Walter Scott (“It seems hardly credible. I doubt whether I could get through twenty pages of Scott to-day”) or Charles Dickens (whose “work is like a wine that improves with age, not of the bottle, but of the taster”) and argued that “children’s taste is generally bad”, except for when they rightly despised saccharine children’s literature (May 15, 1929: 71). He then reflected on how some novels, as the years passed, become known as childhood classics and were no longer read by adults (“I myself should be delighted if I could be shown a prophetic glimpse of some young mother of the twenty-first century reading my works aloud to a group of wide-eyed and attentive babes”, *ibid.*), while adults learnt to love “mush” (110). As for the time in between: “Adolescence is the most priggish period of human life—the period during which even those ‘with foreheads villainous low’ come near to being high-brow. One must have had a certain experience of life and, still more, of the things of the mind (the newly intellectual are as snobbish and arrogant in their way as the newly rich) before one can return with a good conscience to the simple amusements of childhood” (*ibid.*).

of the popular stage in general, and from the comedies of Oscar Wilde in particular”, and “fashioned for their largely middle-class audiences an elite and humorously stylized milieu” (*ibid.*). These genres also shared an emphasis on character, that is, the heightened manifestation of a personality that may well be drawn from one of the aforementioned “types”.

What Camp taste responds to is ‘instant character’ (this is, of course, very 18th century); and, conversely, what it is not stirred by is the sense of the development of character. Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence – a person being one, very intense thing. This attitude toward character is a key element of the theatricalization of experience embodied in the Camp sensibility (Sontag 1999: 61 in Humble 2012: 220)

Humble teases out the association of “character” to camp, which can in turn be linked to the amusing, and continues:

So many middlebrow texts can be described in these terms – the Provincial Lady novels, and those by Nancy Mitford; the works of Margery Allingham and Agatha Christie (in fact, detective fiction in general, which has no real interest in character development); *Cold Comfort Farm*, with its ludicrous character ‘types’; the weirdly static world of Ivy Compton Burnett, and, of course, the campiest of all interwar novels – those by E. F. Benson. [...] It is, as seems to me, a key element in the sophisticated wryness which characterizes the tone and attitudes of much middlebrow fiction. (220-1)

Throughout these twelve years’ worth of reviews, it was middlebrow novels of “sophisticated wryness” that emerged as fashionable. Hammill, too, writes that “camp style is designed to provoke a sophisticated, amoral form of laughter, and it does this through artifice and frivolity” (2015: 136).<sup>61</sup>

The conflict between generations had been a popular theme since the beginning of the century, and by the twenties “youth novels” had widespread appeal:

If the Bright Young People were considered a class apart, it was largely because of their speech. Part of the appeal of the Mayfair novel was that it allowed readers to decode the language of a social group that was otherwise exclusive and hermetic yet known through the media. For the novelist, though, this language was difficult to capture because the speech of the Bright Young People seemed undisciplined—like a jazz riff—and yet remarkably standardized. (Hentea 2014: 99)

Edith Sitwell had something to say about that trend:

For the last twenty years, and perhaps for an even longer period still, the English fashion in writing novels has tended towards an inquisitorial meddling and an

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<sup>61</sup> Faye Hammill finds camp turns and modes in Noël Coward’s works, which I would argue are not that dissimilar to *Vogue*’s characteristic voice.

uninterested inquiry into muddled and muddy minds. [...] Novels have become heavier and heavier. [...] Novels are written, too often, by people like shocked and caddish curates, by people with the ideals of a perfect head-waiter, by strong-minded, well-groomed, clean-shaven women with no nonsense about them. Many of these people believe that they are writing about 'Society.' Well, they are not. Or at least they are writing about persons who have been accepted in Society since the war, but who would have been barely tolerated before the war. The people whom they write about are those hard-faced, lacquered 'smart' people who are to be seen, for the most part, in expensive restaurants and night clubs. They are people with new houses, and not even new breeding [...] they are without roots, and their authors appear to have seen them only in the restaurants and night clubs that are the homes of such mushroom growths. (January 9, 1929: 43)

In general, though, society novels were praised because of their vitality, directness, wit and sheer readability.<sup>62</sup> For instance, *The Happier Eden*, by Beatrice Kean Seymour, was said to be:

Bright as a June garden and as full of sweetness [...] though in fact cocktail-drinking in London flats occurs in it more frequently than the imbibing of tea, the book is pervaded by a pleasant five-o'clock family atmosphere of meeting together and talking things over. [...] There is nothing here luridly unbelievable, and the writer has a gift for putting the reader at once at ease with her characters, like the right sort of hostess (June 23, 1937: 84)

*Vogue* reported that "the Novel, people keep saying, is Dead", a one-off statement that was never backed up. The important point is the one that followed: *14A*, by Laura Riding and George Ellige, was "an attempt at resuscitation [...] made by cutting a Café Royal-Soho-Chelsea novel into chunks and calling it a cinema unrolling of intimate modern life. It's rather amusing" (March 7, 1934: 120). Whether *14A* was a society novel does not matter as much as the implication that the "Café Royal-Soho-Chelsea novel", with its stylishly bohemian spaces and subjects, was a recognisable genre that, by 1934, was familiar enough to be cut up and rearranged. These novels were judged on

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<sup>62</sup> Successful examples of the genre included Henry Green's *Living* and *Party Going*; Inez Holden's *Sweet Charlatan* ("in a sense, a society novel; that is to say, it deals with very fashionable people, but they are not, thank heaven, set down with the gossip writer's idea of social values. It deals with their emotions, mostly with that sub-order of very slight physical sensations. It is the most 'ninety-ish' book I have read for some time, but it is the 'nineties dressed-up in modern clothes", Waugh September 4, 1929: 43); Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies* and *A Handful of Dust*; Sylvia Thompson's *Winter Comedy*; Nancy Hoyt's *Bright Intervals*; Theodora Benson's *Which Way?* and *Shallow Water* (which "consists mainly of youthful conversation of the 'bright' variety, concerned with beaux, schooldays and what-not. It has the correct cynical outlook and often a neat turn in flippancies and should make good holiday reading, being readily relinquishable to the stray book-borrower", July 8, 1931: 72); Margery Maitland's *Full Board*; Edward Shanks' *Queer Street*; Nancy Mitford's *Highland Fling* and *Christmas Pudding* ("not for aged aunts", December 21, 1932: 52); Daphne Lambart's *Francis*; Ferenc Molnar's *Angel Making Music*; Anthony Powell's *Angels and Patients*; and Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*, among others.



whether they successfully recreated bright conversation and modern living. A cynical or sour tone was not necessary for literary stylishness; the important thing was to draw the reader into the very world *Vogue* showcased in the rest of its pages. Though reviews often made a point of calling these novels light-hearted and easy, they also acknowledged the history of the genre: *Evelina* was called “the fashionable novel of its day, and forerunner of all feminine [sic] best-sellers”, and readers were invited to take a look at the lively diary of “the delightful Fanny Burney” (February 18, 1931: 74).

Throughout the thirties, *Vogue* noted “the fashion for longer novels” that chronicled “all the details of daily living”, such as *Farewell Romance* by Gilbert Frankau (August 19, 1936: 70). The domestic novel, though with its own conventions, could overlap with the society novel, and both could be termed manifestations of the feminine middlebrow. Humble points out that;

In its overriding concern with the home, it worked through the middle-class woman’s anxieties about her new responsibility for domestic labour, and helped to redefine domesticity as stylish. Its feyness and frivolity and its flexible generic boundaries allowed it to explore new gender and sexual identities which were otherwise perceived as dangerously disruptive of social values. Its construction of the family as an eccentric, essentially anti-social organization allowed it to reflect the still covert dissatisfactions of several generations of women whose new social, physical, and educational freedoms were not matched by their employment prospects: women who were all hyped up with nowhere to go. [... It] indulged in a curious flirtation with bohemianism, a fantasy about the imagined life of the creative artist that allowed new radicalisms concerning sex, gender, and class to creep into a literature that simultaneously prided itself on its ineffable respectability. (2001: 5)

There were family sagas “that seem to be gaining popularity, at any rate with their writers” (January 20, 1932: 58) and rural novels “written by those who live in ducky little cottages and report their own reactions to the opening crocus and the burgeoning bush”, which were actually ignored in favour of their parodies, like *Mon Repos* by Nicholas Bevel or *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons. These novels were usually described as mature, distinguished—though not as often as in the mid-twenties—and praised for good descriptions and psychological precision. Rose Macaulay’s *Personal Pleasures* “glows with ripeness and drips with honey as the author describes in a series

of short essays all her favourite delights”, but balances the sweetness with “some ironic twist, some salutary touch of salt” (November 13, 1935: 114). They could also be light and cosy, sometimes comically so: “Never, surely, have so many logs and so much coal been burnt in any novel. Perpetually to be found upon the hearthrug, Miss [Pamela] Hinkson is the perfect pussy-cat among authors” (October 26, 1932: 94). This was, it must be said, a highly positive review.

As stated above, *Vogue* acknowledged the standing of the detective story, calling it “one of the most interesting literary forms of modern times” while noting “that capable writers in this kind are sometimes astonishingly clever but not as yet very numerous” (May 14, 1930: 74). Readers may be used to the “numerous and satisfying fruit” from “the prolific branches” of many low to middlebrow publishers, but *Death of My Aunt* by C. H. B. Kitchin, published by the Hogarth Press, was “a much rarer specimen” (October 16, 1929: 84). Not all detective novels came with the ready-made prestige granted by a Hogarth edition, and so more than once *Vogue* assuaged readers that “many detective stories are now written by competent novelists with a talent for characterisation and can therefore be read without mental cramp” (April 1, 1936: 102), meaning they were neither too flat nor too complicated. Dorothy Sayers had “the awe-inspiring reputation of being read by those who bar other crime books” (August 18, 1937: 64); as this was not the only review that presented its object as an exception (others were Charles Williams’s *War in Heaven* and Margery Allingham’s *The Fashion in Shrouds*), it seems that *Vogue* took on the role of intermediary to vouch for the prestige of its approved selection and to invite readers who may think themselves above the genre to give it a try. As a whole, though, the genre was consistently associated with railway reading:

The detective novel, that modern product of the pen which combines the pleasures of romance, a cross-word puzzle and an afternoon at Maskelyne and Devant’s, seems to be steadily on the increase. There used to be a theory that this type of literature was

demanding and produced for one purpose only—the mitigation of boredom on long railway journeys. This theory can no longer be supported, for while we take fewer railway journeys [...] we read more and more detective fiction. But there is a possibility that the situation may soon be reversed and that people will be found inventing railway journeys for themselves so that they shall have the seclusion necessary for the latest and more involved murder story. For these, at their best, should always be read at one uninterrupted sitting. If you fear callers and the telephone, do not open the latest Gollancz until you have taken a penny ticket and your seat in an Inner Circle train. You can then ride round oblivious till all is discovered. (April 17, 1929: 74)

There is something immensely appealing about the idea of riding endlessly, Sayers in hand, all else forgotten. The association between detective stories and trains continued throughout the decade: *Poison Trail* by Anthony Armstrong was praised because it “plays fair with clues and does not take itself too seriously and is altogether a very satisfactory train-journey companion” (April 5, 1933: 94).

The feminine middlebrow, Humble finds;

is full of descriptions of reading: as pleasure, as indulgence, as part of the fabric of life. Characters are often understood and judged by way of their attitudes to reading, with snobbish self-declared highbrows usually wrong-footed, and the simple-minded adherents of the definitively lowbrow gently mocked. The ideal reader as imagined by these novels is one for whom literature is an intelligent passion: she is a re-reader, devoted to the literature of the past (the Brontës, Charlotte M. Yonge, Jane Austen) and of her childhood (with childhood reading denoting an abandoned immersion in textual pleasure that is more difficult to recreate in adulthood). She understands the intimate connection between bodily and readerly pleasure (2011: 50)

This description matches *Vogue*'s representations of reading surprisingly well. With the exception of its male literary critics, who sometimes discussed their preferences, the periodical was concerned with the reading practices of women. *Vogue*'s figured readers often returned to old favourites or threw themselves into new releases, all the while smoking, eating and drinking, well-informed but unpretentious. Moreover, they were expected to be interested in fictional and non-fictional accounts of the publishing industry, on the life stories of other writers and readers in turn. Brown and Grover note that as “if there is one trope which pervades writing labelled middlebrow it is the representation of the act of writing itself” (2012: 15);

When modernism gained the critical ascendancy, romantic prejudices against the professional writer intensified. It is possible that this was not mere social snobbery but closely connected with fears that representing the act of writing would tip the narrative uncomfortably into the realms of realist representation and desacralize the text under

construction. [...] Anxieties about the middlebrow are linked with the uncertain class position of any kind of writer, ourselves included. Marx briefly debates whether or not an author should be classified as a 'productive worker' and therefore be assigned a class identity; his conclusion is that he cannot be so classified unless his works become marketable commodities. [...] The implication is that texts of high cultural status will not be marketable and therefore the avant-garde author floats above class structures, free to choose whether to align himself with one class or another. In contrast, the texts that insistently anchor the fictionalized author in the study and the marketplace thus invite dismissal as middlebrow. (16)

Clearly *Vogue* had no such modernist qualms, as it not only showcased writers as public figures and their works as marketable commodities—in fact, it actively marketed them—but also promoted their biographies and memoirs, featured booksellers and publishers, and reviewed many novels that included fictional writers, publishers and journalists. The anonymous *Papers of a Bankrupt Bookseller* was described as a “human document”; “the author’s own expressions of opinion reveal an odd but amiable character; and the names of the book he mentions remind us of delectable hours enjoyed in the reading of them” (January 20, 1932: 58). On the other hand, *The Great Day* by Georgette Carneal, which dealt with the sordid American press, was said to be “desperately clever and remorselessly brilliant, but no one should read it for fun” (May 3, 1933: 96), while *A Whip for the Woman* by Ralph Straus was “a kind of literary joke. It describes the various processes of writing and publishing a ‘best-seller’ modern novel, and undertakes to let you know, among other useful things, what a publisher is really like. The book is amusing and readable, besides being ironically informative to the literary aspirant” (October 28, 1931: 82). The protagonist of *A Woman on her Way*, by John van Druten, was “an untidy and no-longer-young bachelor authoress”; the book “faithfully reports the appropriate curses and cynical pleasantries of the various literary and other cliques described” (November 12, 1930: 100). Indeed, *Vogue* praised those writers who observed their social milieu with the knowing detachment it had always used in its approach to the fashion industry. E. M. Delafield, for instance, was said to be; “one of the best de-bunked observers of modern life. She has a way of showing up

the nonsensical aspects of everyday affairs that induces much enjoyment in her readers, and has a deft touch in deflating the pseudo-sublime”; her *General Impression* even included “some good parodies of the modern manner in literature” (May 17, 1933: 74). Adrian Bell is another interesting case: *Vogue* noted his Bloomsbury origins without sneering, but praised him for showing “the eye of an artist, a little of the poet and a good deal of the practical man” in his farming books (May 27, 1931: 104). It implicitly approved of P. G. Wodehouse’s admission that he wrote “not only for cold immediate cash but for posterity. This, however, will not deter the serried ranks of his readers (who according to statistics the author has compiled consist mainly of dog-stealers, convicted criminals and persons afflicted with painful illnesses) from enjoying themselves as much as ever” (March 30, 1932: 82). The joke was, of course, that commerce and art could go together, and did very often.

Just as in fashion, *Vogue* tended to search for modern expertise and detailed realism balanced with briskness, personality and wit.<sup>63</sup> For instance, readers were promised they would enjoy Rosamond Lehmann’s *Invitation to the Waltz* unless they were “insensitive to a gentle but delicious brand of humour and blind to the charm of a direct and simple narrative” (October 12, 1932: 96). This review did not acknowledge the stylistic quirks of the novel or its structure that deliberately recalled the work of Virginia Woolf. Technical fireworks or ultra-modern forms, it seems, would not do any longer, as *Vogue* quizzed readers on detective and comic novels (December 25, 1935) and even noted “how right” the many readers of Edgar Wallace were “to prefer him to almost any other writer” (November 12, 1930: 100). The late twenties, coinciding with

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<sup>63</sup> *The Bridge*, by Naomi Royde-Smith, was recommended for her skill in “rendering domesticity without dullness and unconventionality without outrage” (December 21, 1932: 52). *Love and Death*, by Llewelyn Powys, was said to be “a rare and lovely book, full of a burning sense of beauty”, as “its language and imagery are steeped in a profoundly poetic emotion” without “none of that almost sadistic pettiness, that harsh stridency which is all too often the voice of our times” (July 12, 1939: 64).

the transition in review format, appear to be the turning point in which reviewers considered the past decade in the terms that would shape the next one.

We are witnessing at the moment two violently diverging movements in contemporary fiction. We have on the one hand in the popularity of the detective novel proof that a large body of readers more than ever welcome a plot, and a plot articulated to the last almost invisible mesh. On the other hand, we have some of the most serious writers of fiction progressively discarding the plot. So that if the two forces continue their ravages unchecked they will meet at the point of common unintelligibility—the plot of the first-class surpassing the capacity of the mind because it contains everything, of the second because it contains nothing. (Wolfe September 21, 1927: 63)

Vernon Bartlett was the prime example of the former, Virginia Woolf of the latter.<sup>64</sup>

It may be (it is indeed asserted) that a new form is being evolved which will supersede the novel, as we have known it. The whole of this movement shows traces of Proust and Joyce, though it has not yet plunged into Gertrude Stein and *surréalisme*. It corresponds to the later Impressionism in painting. It seeks to produce its effect by recording a series of vivid personal sensations, only slightly connected by a story. The unity imposed on the whole is no longer one of plot but rather of atmosphere. It resembles clouds recklessly scattered by the wind, and suddenly drawn into a whole by the unifications of a sunset. It resembles that, however, only when the creating mind has some of the temper and life-giving quality of the sun. Without that we are apt to be left with clouds only. (*Ibid.*)

Evelyn Waugh, by contrast, was more sceptical of this current and its imitators:

In spite of the publishers' announcements, all trumpeting the appearance of bigger and better masterpieces, it is very rarely indeed during the last ten years than an English novel has justified any higher praise than 'agreeable' or 'interesting.' Sound literary competence, a fairly satisfactory sort of slap-stick psychology, evidence of acute observation, are the qualities we have learned to welcome, while novelists themselves, for the most part, read no fiction except detective stories (September 4, 1929: 43)

As soon as the following month, Humbert Wolfe guessed that "literary historians a hundred years since will comment on two things in our contemporary literature—its abounding fertility and its stubborn barrenness. It is doubtful whether even in English letters there has been so large a harvest of such indigestible grain" (October 30, 1929: 49). Even *good* books, he felt, were hampered by immaturity, self-consciousness and fear of sentimentality. Significantly, he noted that Priestley's *The Good Companions*

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<sup>64</sup> Virginia Woolf, Wolfe warned, was not to be imitated lightly. "What is an aim, an inspiration or a mistake in the others is the accomplished fact with Virginia Woolf. She has not to force herself or to creep into the revolution. She is the revolution. She writes as naturally as she breathes, but behind the casual breath is the steady pulse of the living organism. [...] At any rate it is a dangerous path, bounded on the one side by the precipice of sheer nonsense, on the other by sheer unintelligibility. She walks evenly and certainly on her eminence, though even she makes the spectator draw his breath in frightened gasps, till she has crossed the razor-edge. But she is a perilous guide to follow" (Wolfe September 21, 1927: 84).

“stands for everything” that Rebecca West, Richard Hughes or Richard Aldington “deny” in their own novels (76): “It is so jolly, so full of cheerful life, that one looks suspiciously at the date of the publishers’ imprint, ‘1929,’ one mutters uneasily, ‘but Dickens,’ and then quite properly one raps oneself over the knuckles. After all, gaiety is not necessarily a crime, nor inattention to the details of psycho-analysis a confession of failure” (*ibid.*).

None of this is to say, though, that *Vogue* turned away from highbrow signatures and difficult novels in their entirety; even if it was sceptical in its society reports, the review columns continued to embrace complexity and experimentation in a genuine way. Mary MacCarthy opened hers with a scene in which she went to a Bloomsbury bookshop for her summer books:

When I get there the literary genius at the counter, to my disappointment, cannot help me. What a wintry collection they still have! [...] Frenzied Strindberg! Tragic James Joyce! Mr. Wyndham Lewis, master of snubs! East wind and frost! Where are summer and sunshine? [...] The next time I set out for the bookshop the canopy of heaven is blue, the streets are deliciously warm; everyone has grown agreeable, for summer has come. Its arrival is a great event. [...] On this second visit the book table is piled with delicious books. A Shakespeare produced by the Nonesuch Press is there; a beautiful reproduction of the text of the first folio. (May 1, 1929: 59)

It was not hard, cold modernism that *Vogue* preferred,<sup>65</sup> but amusing and eclectic as always, “Sitwellian—urbane, civilized, meditative, appreciative, caustic and jibing” (June 8, 1932: 76), warm and colourful, bridging the gap with more middlebrow modes. It appreciated “the real tender beauty and aching sorrow, the exquisite perception in the descriptive passages, the horror and the wild brilliance, the sharply-scissored snippets of character and humour” that could be found in the likes of Sylvia Townsend Warner, David Garnett, John Cowper Powys, Walter de la Mare or E. M. Forster (Stern April 3, 1929: 84), proving the survival of the old Nonesuch Press personal and stylistic connections even after Vera Meynell’s editorship. In fact, near Christmas 1928 it had

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<sup>65</sup> There were, of course, exceptions. Edith Sitwell found herself quite gravely “wondering how I could ever have been insensitive to the extraordinary fluency, elasticity, and fitness of Mr. Pound’s technique, or to the deep and experienced beauty of his imagery” (January 9, 1929: 62).

recommended the *Chatto and Windus Miscellany* of the year, an academic survey of fashion history and the none other than the new edition of *The Week-End Book*, which was, after all, Meynell's résumé (H.P. November 28, 1928: 114). Besides these richly ornamented works, *Vogue* appreciated the delicate insight of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*,<sup>66</sup> Italo Svevo's *The Confessions of Zeno*, Stevie Smith's *Novel on Yellow Paper* and *A Good Time Was Had By All*,<sup>67</sup> Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and *The Waves*,<sup>68</sup> and the many posthumous anthologies and memoirs of D. H. Lawrence, of which there were so many that "one tends to forget that Lawrence the prophet is also, and how shinningly, Lawrence the writer; how his words are as bright as light, illuminating the darkest corners of the unconscious mind" (November 14, 1934: 96). It also received positively texts that were quite shocking either in tone or in matter, like Wyndham Lewis's *Time and the Western Man*, Richard Aldington's *Soft Answers*, Colette's *Chéri*, Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, John Dos Passos's *The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* or William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. In fact, it embraced the "general sense [...] of vigorous excitement, of passionate interest in life, and of standing at the threshold of adventure" of what Wolfe called "the outbreak of Parisian Americanism" (March 7, 1928: 55).

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<sup>66</sup> "There is nothing to offend the susceptibilities even of Mr. James Douglas in the treatment of the subject. Thomas Mann is much too great a performer either to apologize for his interest in abnormality or to be misled by it into propaganda. Nevertheless it is odd to reflect that while an Englishwoman is heavily punished for looking over a wall, this great German is allowed to steal a horse with impunity" (Wolfe December 12, 1928: 55).

<sup>67</sup> Stevie Smith "could never be anything but refreshingly original in matter and method" (May 26, 1937: 126), and her *Novel* was said to be "written in a style that owes something to Gertrude Stein and something else to that Blonde that Gentlemen Preferred, by one who appears to be both worldly and naive, with a vein of kittenish drollery and no sense of any obligations to the conventions in life or literature, a surrealist who babbles of ivory haystacks and revels in wisecracks, anecdotes and quotations" that one would either love or hate (October 28, 1936: 108). Lesley Blanch informed readers that: "It is the fashion to take Miss Stevie Smith seriously: her *Novel on Yellow Paper* was held sacrosanct by some schools of thought. Her latest verses are, I am assured, in part serious. If that is so, her engaging illustrations mislead. *Tant pis*" (December 14, 1938: 92).

<sup>68</sup> "The question, 'What is a novel?' grows more and more difficult to answer with every batch of books that comes from the publishers", among which was *Orlando*: "The person with a tidy mind may well wonder whether to put this under biography or fiction. Perhaps the best solution is to list it under Virginia Woolf, which at once puts it in a class apart and gives it the strongest recommendation to the reader" (October 31, 1928: 72).



Of course *Vogue* did not forsake its own contributors, even if it did not push them as much or as often as it had before. Marthe Bibesco was not only a princess, but “(well-loved by *Vogue* readers)” (March 7, 1934: 118); *Shining and Free*, a “rich and rare entertainment”, “comes from the pen of a *Vogue* contributor”, G. B. Stern (April 3, 1935: 114); *Live Alone and Like It* was “practically a book *by Vogue*—for it was written by one of the most valued members of *Vogue*’s New York staff” (December 9, 1936: 94), Marjorie Hillis, “a very accomplished woman of the world who knows everything there is to be known about current manners and modes” (May 11, 1938: 104). Nonetheless, though Alison Settle’s *The Clothes Line* was very warmly received, her editorship of *Vogue* was not mentioned: perhaps it was still a sore subject (June 23, 1937: 84).

A quantitative look at *Vogue*’s reviews during this period reveals that, despite the considerable changes in format and values, they did not really affect its most reviewed writers. In first place, with eight reviews, are Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Edith Sitwell, Somerset Maugham and Walter de la Mare; then follow Evelyn Waugh, Pearl S. Buck and Vicki Baum; with six, Adrian Bell, Colette, Thomas Mann and Osbert Sitwell; less prominent, but also recurring, A. A. Milne, Christopher Morley, E. V. Lucas, P. G. Wodehouse, R. H. Mottram, Richard Aldington and William Faulkner; finally, with four reviews, familiar names would have been A. J. Cronin, A. M. Low, Beatrice Kean Seymour, Beverley Nichols, David Garnett, Eleanor Smith, Elizabeth Bowen, Francis Brett Young, Hans Carossa, Hector Bolitho, Helen Ashton, Leland Hall, Margaret Kennedy, Maurice Baring, Naomi Mitchison, Paul Cohen-Portheim, Ronald Firbank, Rose Macaulay, Stella Benson, Vita Sackville-West, Eleanor Farjeon and the other Sitwell, Sacheverell. This list suggests a turn from European literature in

translation to American works and confirms its inclusion of different genres, its balance of highbrow and middlebrow and its loyalty to its favourites.

### 3.2.3. “*Vogue Appeal*”: *Literary Celebrity*

*Vogue*'s articulation of “smart” and “chic” was relatively consistent, so it would be reasonable to expect the celebrities it promoted in this period to match their associated qualities, filling its pages with trim, sophisticated, sensible women. This, it turns out, was only partially true. There had been a noticeable absence among *Vogue*'s celebrities before and during Alison Settle's editorship: fashion designers. 1936, however, was a turning point, as just as *Vogue* recommended readers acquire sewing skills and wrote about the increase in professional opportunities in the fashion and beauty industries, it began to feature photographs, biographical and society pieces on them. Chanel was, unsurprisingly, the favourite: her portrait accompanied the report on the Paris mid-season openings of 1937, and she was visited “At Home” by Bettine Wilson and shown wearing “smart spectacles” in 1938. She, Madame Rochas, Maggy Rouf and Elsa Schiaparelli were photographed modelling their own new creations in 1937, and from the autumn of 1938 on there was a series of “Who's Who of Designers” that included portraits of the couturiers, a brief biography, and their most recognisable stylistic traits. No such pieces were published on literary celebrities. Though *Vogue*'s review columns had revealed a preference for middlebrow novels, more specifically society, domestic and detective novels, authors of these genres were not given the same space as highbrows had received in the previous period.

Rather than approaching the notions of genius or artistic purpose with any degree of seriousness, writers were attributed comical reasons, commercial, temperamental or otherwise, for their careers. Aldous Huxley stated that: “For the shy

and retiring [...] the profession of writing has special charms. [...] The retired and solitary writer can wield more than the power of a king or a general without ever issuing from his lair, without ever making himself personally known to anybody” (August 22, 1928: 35). This was by then blatantly untrue, and the following argument that “this is a state of things which, for my part, I find exceedingly attractive”, coming from one of *Vogue*’s most visible authors, added to the irony.

But, much as I enjoy these privileges of authorship, I can see that they have their dangers. The impersonal author, unknown and invisible to his readers, is a being relieved from most of the salutary responsibilities of active life. [...] He is no longer a man. He is promoted from mere humanity and has attained the apotheosis of print. [...] The great majority of human beings are simple-hearted, trustful and unsuspecting folk for whom the printed word still has (in spite of newspapers, in spite of hyperbolic advertisements) a certain mystical and almost sacred authority. (*Ibid.*)

The public, Huxley wrote, is more susceptible to written suggestion than to a speaker: “Universal education has made us all readers. But familiarity with words has not bred contempt” (*ibid.*). He moved on to discuss the fallacy of an objective, universal truth, which may be disguised by the invisibility of the author, and admitted that he found it amusing to imagine the man behind the type.

If I become the dictator of my country I should promulgate an edict to the effect that all newspapers must publish exhaustive and truthful biographies of their proprietors, editors and writers, showing their financial positions, specifying their business relations, naming their friends and setting forth their private, political, moral and philosophical opinions. I should insist on all articles being signed and accompanied by a photograph of the writer. I should order the daily publication of chatty bits about the owners’ and journalists’ private lives. In this way the prestige of the printed word would soon be broken. (58)

*Vogue* only did these things to a very small, very discreet degree. Sense, poise and discretion were appreciated in writing and quotidian life, but not so much in photographs or society appearances.

That is not to say that writers could not be considered authorities in chic. A September 19, 1928 essay on beauty culture began by quoting the latest book by Rebecca West, for instance, and there was a delightful piece in which Colette “Tries Her Hand in the Paris Kitchen”. “Colette watches the pot”, said the note at the foot of a very

domestic snapshot, and even shared her recipe for truffles au champagne (January 8, 1936: 45). “She is an enviable sight, apron tied round her waist and contentment on her face, as she prepares the *galettes* and *vin chaud* for her tea-parties. Or perhaps it’s just the periodic yearning of complex minds for simple pleasures. At any rate, cooking has become the new social accomplishment of Paris” (44). Rather than showcasing empty Bloomsbury interiors in their amusing splendour or reporting on intellectual yet charming street encounters, *Vogue* demystified the celebrity author, turning their stereotypical image into a shared joke:

It is indeed my plain duty to the future to say something intimate about the personalities of these authors. And I would, did I but enjoy their acquaintance. Mr. [James] Stephens, I know, is Irish. But is he tall, grim, black and silent? Has he the rolling eye of a poet? Does he part his hair in the middle? Does he eat a peach? Alas! posterity, I do not know. Nor can I gossip to you of Miss [Rose] Macaulay. That she is not like other women I know, because she has frequently assured us in print that no woman is like another, a new form of self-depreciatory Pharisaism. But as to how she keeps up her appearance I cannot guess, nor whether her brilliant wit is original or borrowed from some even brighter source. And of Mr. [William] Gerhardt I have only what I presume is his photograph in the dust-cover, looking sideways with an un-Gioconda smile. On the other hand, it may be the photograph of a Russian of his acquaintance, or of Mr. Hugh Kingsmill. I apologise, posterity, I cannot help you. (Wolfe May 16, 1928: 79)

That there was a dearth of writers outside of the literary pages, however, does not mean that there weren’t any, especially if they socially prominent and, consequently, of interest by birth, or somehow connected to *Vogue* staff. F. Tennyson Jesse (“in literary circles”), Mrs. Harwood (“in domestic circles”), was photographed twice at home with her pets (September 7, 1927, October 17, 1928: 52); Beverley Nichols’s picture included dog and garden as well (August 9, 1933). Mary Borden, holding her dog in her arms, was “wearing chic green under a silver broadtail coat” (December 18, 1931: 24), a rare instance of a description of a writers’ dress, as was the report of Sylvia Thompson in “her neutral coloured Schiaparelli coat and skirt, which fastens with leather hooks; her hand crocheted hat came from the same house”, marking her as very fashionable indeed (June 27, 1934: 58). G. B. Stern, as a guest of Lady Colefax’s, was “a splendid conversationalist”, as befit a *Vogue* contributor (J. McM.

[McMullin] October 30, 1935: 75). Both Edith Olivier, sketched by Cecil Beaton (May 30, 1928), and Eleanor “Baba” Brougham (October 19, 1927) were said to be anxious about the reception of their new novels. Lady Clodagh Anson, “a very delightful Irish author of reminiscences which have been in demand at the book clubs”, was known for going out and finding young unemployed men to help, which she claimed was “a sensible solution for sufferers from insomnia who should in this way turn their wakefulness to account” (March 16, 1932: 86). These snapshots and reports were all taken at domestic or social settings rather than in contexts that could be directly linked to their profession: there were no images of lectures, receptions, libraries or bookshops. *Vogue* rarely went inside their homes either, though there was a photograph of the entrance hall of Rosamond Lehmann’s house, “an essay in modern decoration”, with mural paintings by John Banting (October 15, 1930: 57).

Faye Hammill argues that “the personal style” of interwar writers like E. M. Delafield, Stella Gibbons, Margaret Kennedy, L. M. Montgomery, Anita Loos, Dorothy Parker and Mae West—all but two covered in *Vogue*, by the way—could be “a function of their literary style” (2007: 4). Studying the construction and representation of their celebrity, she finds that while the latter three built up a legend of cosmopolitan glamour, the former four tended to be approached in terms of their “conventional respectability”, “undramatic life story”, “early dedication to a literary career”, modesty, and family life (142). Vike Martina Plock, who also analyses the feedback of sartorial and literary style, notes that the two fields “share many common threads: democratisation, secularisation, technological innovations and middle-class aspirations” that resulted in “mass production” (2018: 23-4), and adds that “a writer’s self-image, reputation and critical reception hinged on what was considered fashionable” (30). Their arguments are supported by the evidence in *Vogue*, which, as it settled into a middlebrow perspective,

increasingly highlighted domesticity, common sense, a satirical approach to snobbery and pretence—that demanded being familiar with them in the first place—not only in reviewed books but in their writers themselves.

Nonetheless, the highbrow celebrity did not entirely disappear from the social pages of *Vogue*, nor did it cede its place to glamorous entertainers. As it showcased aristocrats at the Riviera and actors in Hollywood, *Vogue* continued to feature international artists, mostly from France,<sup>69</sup> and the goings-on of London literary highbrows continued to be considered of interest. Its journalists at “The Riviera Season” reported multiple celebrity sightings on the train, underscoring the importance of intellectuals and writers among the smart set, sharing insight on their private lives and interests. Mary Borden was seen “on the platform, in a huge black hat”, saying good-bye to her husband; Hilaire Belloc ran “wildly”; though “grit and grime surround us for hours”, Clive Bell discussed “the paintings of Segonzac with a friend in the rocking restaurant car” with “enviable enthusiasm” (February 22, 1928: 44). When Lady Howard de Walden organised a poetry reading for charity, *Vogue* casually promoted the event, noting that; “tickets will entitled you to hear all your favourites, from Mr. Belloc to Miss Sitwell, from Mr. Robert Nichols to Mr. A. P. Herbert” (March 21, 1928: 82). It was obvious that readers of *Vogue* already knew who they were and had a positive opinion of their work, but the way the activity was framed also implied that those who aspired to this urban upper-class milieu ought to engage in patronage, if not necessarily in artistic creation, as part of their role in society.

The hub of highbrow activity continued to be London: production, promotion, circulation and leisure all blended in the halls, galleries, clubs and restaurants of the city, as did middlebrows and avant-gardists, aristocrats and tradesmen. The audience at

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<sup>69</sup> A piece by Alice-Leone Moats on the Mexican scene included photographs of Frida Kahlo and Rosa Rolanda, but they were referred to by their husbands’ names and no mention was made of their artistry (October 27, 1937).

a chamber orchestra concert included “most of our literary *dilettanti*, whom one met again at the series of lectures by Roger Fry on Cézanne, organised by Lady Colefax at Sir Philip Sassoon’s, where no really elegant high-brow was absent” (March 7, 1928: 84). They wondered at what one of the first seasons of the decade, marked by the Depression, would bring: “As we look round the luncheon Ritz or the supper Embassy we feel there is a new world in an old setting, a rise in the social temperature, the first stirring of a new vitality, a little of the exciting ferment we used to have in the Witty Twenties and without which our poor gossip writers wilt...” (September 28, 1932: 69). Activities would have to suit the changed budget and mood, but the people of interest were not exactly new. At the opening night of the London Philharmonic Orchestra the expected audience included “the Sitwells, Leonard and Virginia Woolf”, among many aristocrats. “Which plays will be in vogue?” Well, “Shaw’s play will impress, bewilder and distinctly weary a great many. The new Somerset Maugham play will have It (vogue appeal)” (*ibid.*).

At a similar event, attendees were promised that “there will be present Mrs. Spears (Mary Borden), who appears miraculously from her hermitage, having written another novel”, and, startlingly, “Mrs. St. John Hutchinson, who the Press has not yet discovered is a queen in Bloomsbury” (October 15, 1930: 57). *Vogue* was some steps ahead, of course, as it had counted on the insight of “Polly Flinders” for years, suggesting that the Bloomsbury connection had not been fully severed. Consider the later essay on “English Romanticism”, which began with the familiar questions on the benefits and risks of eccentricity:

It is of course fashion that lets us into the secret of acquiring this air, this look of perpetual newness, freshness and chic, in fact the whole art of re-creating ourselves. Yet you may wear your fashions with a difference [...] For the Englishwoman, it seems, is by nature something of a rebel and an individualist—one who insists on wearing her rue with a difference. She follows fashion but takes a step or two here and there away from it. She experiments, she improvises, and to her the essence of elegance is often a kind of picturesque perversity that does not conform to any existing mode. [...] Obviously there

are dangers. [...] It may run wild to extremity and eccentricity, the merely quaint and the too self-consciously picturesque. (February 20, 1935: 73)

The chosen representative of this style was none other than Mary Hutchinson, whom no one could imagine “without her barbaric jewellery and sleek hair, both of which so well suit her type” (74). It is surprising that *Vogue* did not feature Nancy Cunard instead, who matched the description and was certainly better known. The accompanying portrait of Hutchinson was said to have “caught the gleam of her polished personality” (*ibid.*). *Vogue* doubled down on this adjective, saying that she “gives the impression of being superbly polished, like ivory. Her oval face, with its high cheek bones, has a magnolia smoothness; her dark gold hair shines. So the ebony gleam of black satin is appropriate and we like the veil just shading her widely-spaced eyes” (75). Though Hutchinson was presented as an embodiment of interwar modern sleekness, no mention was made of her accomplishments, not even of her relationship with *Vogue*.

It is not my intention to overemphasise Mary Hutchinson’s presence in *Vogue*, intriguing as it is, but she does serve as an example of the survival and continuing fashionability of bohemian aristocratic circles into the thirties, as figures from other sets also gained fame. The magazine, continuing to praise eccentricity in dress and artistic interests and patronage in behaviour, added to the growing coverage of the Bright Young People while promoting the artists that had taken them under their wing. The society column that reported on the first concert of the autumn season of 1930 wrote:

The Interval—let us anticipate—has commenced and from our front row seats in the Grand Circle we enjoy an amusing modernist View of Society from above. In the first dozen rows of the Queen’s Hall stalls sit familiar expectant faces all rather too conscious of the fascinated stare of the circle-ites. For a moment one wonders if they have been sitting here since the previous year’s concerts. But it is all alive because one bond links them all—an intense enjoyment of life. Only those who go out seldom are too critical. Only the really sophisticated are never bored. We espy Osbert Sitwell, very George IV to-night, sitting next to Mrs. McLaren, her lovely hair gleaming, in contrast with her ermine coat. [...] At a party in Portman Square] Our talk is continually interrupted by a flood of fresh arrivals, including all those we have mentioned, and the moment comes when the Wiser Ones, like—well say Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. Edward Knoblock—feel it is the right moment to descend to the supper-room. (September 17, 1930: 53)



If the phrase “an amusing modernist View of Society” were not interesting enough, the list of celebrities sighted suggests that *Vogue*’s preferred blend of highbrow and well-established middlebrow was very much alive.

It is also true, however, that Bloomsbury names had become ever rarer, and those that reappeared were only of their most aristocratic associates rather than *Vogue*’s old friends. Lady Ottoline Morrell was sketched by Cecil Beaton in a suitably artistic, or deliberately Victorian, “picture gown of bottle green taffetas trimmed with tea dipped lace; in her hair and at her waist are bows of black velvet and over her arm a shawl” (early April 1927: 31). Some years later, she was spotted in conversation with George Bernard Shaw and George Moore at Seaford House, “a salon in a corner” (June 25, 1930: 51). Even in the thirties, she was photographed leaning decoratively against a column and noted for being “her usual striking self, in looks and dress” (September 6, 1933: 63), suggesting that her fame was, by that point, sustained by her style rather than her role as patroness. Though the aristocratic and diplomat patrons at the Savoy included “Mrs. (Vita) Harold Nicolson”, her writing was not mentioned (October 16, 1929: 64); she was among the few of Dorothy Todd’s associates that had not completely cut ties with *Vogue*, contributing a nostalgic piece, “The Edwardians Below Stairs”, some years later (November 25, 1931). Though no more than a decade had passed from the high modernist scene of the early to mid-twenties, *Vogue*’s references to that milieu suggested closure, an era firmly gone by.

In Gertrude Stein’s autobiography she remarks that artists to-day are so well dressed in comparison with those of the last generation that they are not now, as they were then, recognisable by their clothes, and she goes on to quote Picasso as saying that it cost artists much more to dress in those days than it does the conventionally tailored lot of to-day. If you go into the Café Royal any evening you will find that this observation of modern artists is as true of London as of Paris. They are there just as in the days when Epstein and Augustus John were its regular frequenters, but it is far more difficult to pick them out than formerly. Artists have become conventionalised too. (November 14, 1934: 54-5)

If *Vogue* was to be believed, now it was near impossible to distinguish between patrons and artists, intellectual aristocrats and chic secretaries: the smart set and even young professionals had absorbed the aesthetics of bohemia. The smartest may deplore excess and fuss, but highbrows were not only suited but central to the appeal of urban nightlife. Bohemia had changed, not only in values and inhabitants but also in physical location, and *Vogue* had followed it in its pages:

Since the earliest day of London's life, the world of fashion has continually moved its tents—Bloomsbury to Soho, Soho to Mayfair, and now from Mayfair it has gone to Westminster. Pursued by the menace of skyscraping blocks of flats, and led by a love of old houses and their atmosphere of tranquillity and romance, the inhabitants of Mayfair have established a big colony in the quiet and historical streets of Westminster [...] More and more old houses are bought up, renovated, scrapped or rebuilt according to the taste and conscience of their new owners. (Barnby February 8, 1928: 42)

The new literati population of Westminster included Walter Runciman, of whom it was said that his “political career pales before the fact that his daughter-in-law is Rosamund [sic] Lehmann, who wrote that successful book, *Dusty Answer*” (43); “General Speirs and his authoress wife, Mary Borden” (*ibid.*); Stephen Tennant, who “also lives at Mulberry House with his mother, and has a much-admired silvered bedroom” (68); there was also the Manor House, which “became a hot-house for authors—Compton Mackenzie, Hilaire Belloc, and Maurice Baring all lived there. Now, alas, it is no more” (43). Their modernity had a noticeable romantic side, and favoured wit and knowledge of history, rather than stark novelty. Seymour Leslie compared contemporary “peer-poets, composers, painters” to the likes of Lytton and Byron, listing Lord Dunsany (whose work “will be in the repertory when the Coward classics join the Wilde classics”), the younger Lord Lytton, Lord Derwent, Lord (Bertrand Russell), Lord David Cecil and Lord Tredegar, Evan Morgan (May 26, 1937: 93).

*Vogue* of course favoured the literary celebrities that lived in London. The many appearances of Christabel McLaren, author of *The Divine Gift*—a best-selling “story of desperate adventure” (May 15, 1929: 73)—often showcased her Mayfair home, with a

grand spiral staircase, where she hosted social events. The most important was a ball that was attended by “six hundred of the cleverest and most decorative people in town”: “It was like a celestial first night, and quite magical to see the accidental groupings of all the celebrities. Aldous Huxley, who secretly adores parties, but dissects them from his Tuscan stronghold with a Savonarola fervour, was enjoying every moment of it. Mr. Arnold Bennett was so pleased that he seemed to be at distant points at the same moment”; also among the guests were Marie Belloc Lowndes and Edward Knoblock (May 28, 1930: 79). Huxley, whose appearances in London were at this time rare, was the central figure of another such column which also took place in an affluent neighbourhood, full of tantalising references:

I stepped into a fairy house—not far from Belgrave Square—from out the wet and foggy street of Sunday London. Each tiny floor had been stripped of useless walls and doors, it was all dead white and luminous with modern lamps, modern French drawings, a polished floor, and the latest leather-plaited pine chairs from Curtis Moffat. Against the cocktail bar of mirrors and glass shelves in a corner leaned Aldous Huxley, and on a grey sofa sat a lovely and most attractive visitor to our shores, the young Duchess de La Rochefoucauld, one of the literary hostesses of Pars, herself a poet and novelist [...] Aldous Huxley was on one of his rare visits to London, where he hides in quite the darkest corner of the Athenaeum, from which he emerges slightly dazed to look on a world that can no longer shock him. [...] Years ago, or so it seems he and I were associated in a little bookshop which proved so venturous that he wrote me one day that he preferred to retire in order to write and make his career. (February 19, 1930: 50)

The column then shifted its interest on the Duchess, originally Mattie Mitchell, the daughter of an American senator, who “had lunched with the Duchess of Atholl [Katharine Stewart-Murray] to talk over ‘le mouvement feminist,’ had taken tea with George Moore and visited the Chelsea Book Club, where she picked out Maurois’ *Byron*, Paul Morand’s *New York*, and Miss Allanah Harper’s new international review, *Echanges*, as three of the latest and most typical new arrivals from France” (*ibid.*). As signified by Harper’s little magazine,<sup>70</sup> *Vogue* sustained an interest in the more avant-garde doings in Paris. This was also made manifest by its note of Nancy Cunard’s visit:

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<sup>70</sup> See AnnKatrin Jonsson’s “In the Backdrop of Modernism: Allanah Harper and *Echanges*” (*The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 2011).

though she “spends most of her time in Paris”, she “lately came to London to buy more barbaric bracelets”, which were of course illustrated (October-November 1929: 52).

Other literary celebrities glimpsed in London included Maurice Baring, “one of the most popular of men, as all who love his writings will readily believe”, who “loves to sing jolly choruses, to speak Russian, to mimic and to master the intricate steps of difficult dances” (January 11, 1928: 22); Sylvia Thompson, “very pretty, very young”, “who literally did wake to find herself famous, for they brought her cablegrams for breakfast one fine morning” (July 25, 1928: 68); Betty Askwith and Theodora Benson, co-authors of the society novel *Lobster Quadrille*, at Cadogan Gardens (November 12, 1930); Eleanor Smith and A. E. Mason at Kettner’s and a foursome of famous actors and “the very fair daughter of Mrs. St. John Hutchinson” (April 1, 1931: 63); *Vogue*’s own “literary follower of the divine god, G. B. Stern [...] in the mediaeval twilight of Fortnum’s *cave*” at a wine tasting that turned the columnist’s “later luncheon with Rosita McGrath to meet Mary Borden and the Sultan of Jodhpur” into “a hazy memory” (October 28, 1931: 88); Rosamond Lehmann and her husband at Sabini’s (May 31, 1933); Viola Tree drinking champagne with Elsa Schiaparelli (March 20, 1935); a vaudeville show put on by Augustus John’s family, attended by a glittering aristocratic audience that included the poet Edward James (January 8, 1936); the birthday celebration for H. G. Wells at the Savoy, attended by Capek, Huxley, Maurois, Priestley and Shaw (October 14, 1936); Lord Carlow and his “printing press where he publishes limited editions of rare works, such as hitherto unpublished letters of Lawrence of Arabia, whom he knew intimately” (March 17, 1937: 88). These encounters took place in the street, in parks, department stores and restaurants, suggesting that *Vogue* staff was always out and about; if they met such celebrities in the relative privacy of house parties, like Dorothy Todd had done, it was not revealed to the readers.

As *Vogue*'s social eye was so firmly set upon London, the bohemian-aristocratic circles of Paris were not given much attention, perhaps because of the relative inaccessibility of their works as long as they were untranslated: two literary celebrities were repeatedly showcased, but none was actually Parisian. One was a familiar name, the Romanian Marthe Bibesco—though *Vogue* never forgot a respectful “Princesse”—who appeared as a character in the social pages as well as a celebrity author. “That brilliant, delightful, woman” sent the social columnist “her new book of letters from Marcel Proust to herself, to Madame Sert and to her cousin Antoine Bibesco (husband of Elizabeth [Asquith])”, meaning that she was a key player in the circulation of Proust’s writing (January 23, 1929: 34). Bibesco herself was described as “a writer of exquisite powers” with the privileged insight of “a woman of fashion in a luxurious city, with every refinement of elegance and curious detail of modernity” (October 29, 1930: 37). *Vogue* of course relished the romance of her family name and visited her at its seat at Mogoșoaia, where it found her “sitting up in bed writing”; this was more of a travel and design feature, as it described her rooms and furniture, as well as her “precious books with long hand-written dedications from Anatole France, Paul Valéry, Marcel Proust” rather than her books or her person (September 17, 1930: 82). Besides her close relationships with continental highbrow circles, *Vogue* also noted that she “always sees our rulers when among us”, thus bridging bohemia with the actual monarchy (March 8, 1933: 80).

The other non-Parisian Parisian was Violet Trefusis, “a witty brunette and a novelist in French and English” (April 19, 1933: 60). Like Bibesco, she was a recurring character of the social scene, a picture of mid-thirties elegance, linked to royalty—readers were often reminded that her mother was the notorious “Mrs. George Keppel”—and to literary circles. As always, despite their prominence, the magazine never touched

their many notorious romances. As Bibesco gradually faded from *Vogue*, Trefusis appeared in its pages more frequently, most often in 1933. She was featured among the upper-class women, most of them French, who had found distinction in the arts: “For the modern society woman is not content not to be an amateur. If she writes, she publishes; if she is a musician, she gives concerts; if she paints, she exhibits; and if she does none of these things very well she leaves them alone” (May 17, 1933: 54). Leaning against a statue and looking directly at the camera, she was introduced as the author of *Echo*, “a runner-up for the Femina Vie Heureuse prize”, and *Tandem*, which would be published that same month (*ibid.*). A feature on writers’ homes by Sylvia Lyon included both Trefusis and Bibesco (October 30, 1935). Besides her writing career, her status as a “brilliantly clever woman” was cemented by her role as a hostess, and she once held a luncheon attended by Clare Sheridan, “that clever German writer Siburg”, and the Duc d’Harcourt (January 24, 1934: 44).

Outside European capitals, the literati on holiday were a reliable source of interest. The travel writer Rosita Forbes was photographed in “a white jersey suit for bathing at Antibes”, side by side with the journalist Sir Henry Norman (September 30, 1931: 60). Forbes was in friendly terms with at least one of *Vogue*’s society journalists, who reported having received a letter from her about a house party gone wrong (October 1, 1930: 73). It was written of Jean Cocteau that he “always spends his summers at Toulon” and that he “takes his pet monkey with him when he dines on a yacht” (61). Michael Arlen, whose books *Vogue* never showed much interest in despite their success, seemed to live in perpetual holiday. He was invariably photographed with his wife, the Countess Atalanta Mercati: at St. Moritz in Switzerland (January 25, 1928 and February 6, 1929) and “on the terrace of their villa in Cannes, where they have been spending the summer and where Mr. Arlen is now finishing a new book”, in “a little

linen mesh upper, like an undervest, cut to the waist under the arms”, and a little cap (August 22, 1928: 20; also in March 19, 1930 and September 6, 1933). Anita Loos, “an attractive little figure in blue”, had been with the society reporter at some point of her summer holidays (July 11, 1928: 43). One year later she was photographed in her bathing costume, back to the sun, “in the process of acquiring a dusky colour regardless of her belief that male preference is for blondes” (May 1, 1929: 57). The travel writer and sculptor Clare Sheridan and her “palm-sheltered villa in Morocco” were repeatedly photographed for *Vogue* (November 30, 1927: 73). The house was described as “delightful”, a place of “stone columns and low rounded arches” sitting “on the edge of the desert”, which made “a romantic setting” (May 13, 1931: 53). Sheridan herself was photographed both in Western and Eastern clothes, alone and with her daughter Margaret. The latter contributed an essay in turn, “Nomad at Home”, on her life in Biskra, for which she was also photographed in local dress (March 6, 1935). In any case, most of *Vogue*’s author-spotting took place in Great Britain. Geoffrey Moss was photographed “playing with a pet goat in the grounds of his beautiful Charles II house in Sussex” (August 8, 1928: 30), a picture of rural charm. Lady Eleanor Smith, a successful author and “the wittiest company”, was part of the “Summer Scene” at Fred Cripps’s Moor Farm, and shown leaning back and smiling widely (July 11, 1934: 50); that same summer found Bryan Guinness, “a talented young writer, and the eldest son of Lord Moyne”, at Biddesden House in Andover (July 25, 1934: 41). Elinor Glyn, for one, was photographed at dinner with Olga Lynn and their host, Michael Duff, at his estate of Vaynol in Wales (October 17, 1934).

The aforementioned celebrities were scattered, or, at most, only loosely connected through social class or professional relationships. But, as it had done with the Bloomsbury group and their affiliates before, during the thirties *Vogue* continued to

showcase an identifiable bohemian-aristocrat community and to relate its practices. It continued to be interested in the Sitwell siblings, no longer presented as hyper-modern youths but as patrons and hosts for the next generation, who bridged their older avant-garde connections with rising celebrities with wider appeal. The social columnist reported meeting “Mrs. Knopf, the attractive wife of the American publisher [...] at a little party given by the Sitwells at Boulestin’s, when Anita Loos was in town” (July 25, 1928: 68). “Sachy Sitwell” was spotted at a concert and said to be “busy working on several new books”; “all the Bright Shirts” attended a cocktail party “in force, and the air was full of *Isis* or *Eau de Genée d’Or*, the two hair lotions favoured just now. Edith Sitwell and Allanah Harper looked quite severe by contrast” (July 10, 1929: 72). Osbert Sitwell supported Beverley Nichols and Michael Arlen in arguing that women should not, in fact, be allowed to do as they please, in a debate held at the After-Dinner Club, one of “the more spirited social encounters of this winter”, opposite Rosita Forbes (December 24, 1930: 37). The snapshot that introduced Sacheverell’s son to society referred to the father as “the famous poet” (February 18, 1931: 48), and either all or at least two of the siblings attended a “most original party” at Boulestin’s with a glittering host of guests, including aristocrats, actors and Alec Waugh (June 8, 1932: 84).

But the group that overran *Vogue*’s pages from the late twenties to the mid-thirties were the Bright Young People. Their performance of upper-class bohemia and stylised unconventionality brought aesthetics into their every leisure practice, which were food for society columns and interesting portraits. Moreover, and more to our point, many of them took up artistic careers, including in publishing and writing, which in turn brought them into the review and cultural pages as well. A review of Robert Byron’s *The Station* by none other than D. H. Lawrence provides insight into the



qualities that were extended to the author's generation, and which tinted their celebrity, both as a loose grouping and as individuals:

Luckily Mr. Byron belongs to the younger generation, even younger than the Sitwells, who have shown him the way to be young. [...] He settles on [ancientness] like a butterfly, tastes it, is perfectly honest about the taste, and flutters on. And it is charming. [...] But the butterfly, airy creature, is by no means a fool. And its interest is wide. It is amusing to watch a spangled beauty settle on the rose, then on a spat-out cherry-stone, then, with a quiver of sunny attention, upon a bit of horse-droppings in the road. The butterfly tries them all, with equal concern. It is neither shocked nor surprised, though sometimes, if thwarted, it is a little exasperated. But it is still a butterfly, graceful, charming, and ephemeral. And, of course, the butterfly on its careless, flapping wings is just as immortal as some hooting and utterly-learned owl. (August 8, 1928: 35)

Byron's view, and by extension that of his friends, was said to be worldly, even cynical—a tone *Vogue* was sure to appreciate, as it had long been its own—and its interests, though flitting, could be summed up as the heightened pleasures of everyday life. His main flaw, according to Lawrence, was the occasional excess in wit when simplicity would have served better.

Robert Byron was a travel writer, well-versed in art history; Harold Acton, another protégé of the Sitwells, was a poet. Interestingly, as it regards questions of literary prestige, they were not treated differently from their peers who had chosen the society novel as their preferred form. They appeared in much the same way, as individual celebrities, doing their nightly rounds. During a sequence of December evenings, the society reporter came across so many famous writers from so many positions in the contemporary landscape they may well have felt whiplash: Bernard Shaw was seen at a charity ball, and “Mr. James Joyce *may* have been there too”; meanwhile Cyril Connolly, “an important reviewer” at the *New Statesman*, which “all men and women with literary taste read”, was also photographed in “the attractive town house” that he “had redecorated in the Italian manner” with Patrick Balfour (December 14, 1927: 31, 33). One particular column gave a vivid impression of their milieu: “When I finally climbed over various bodies into the supper room I found a little group of serious thinkers near the hot dishes, notably Victor Cazalet, Noel Coward, Beverley

Nichols, and Harold Acton. Now and then our hostess, like a bright torpedo, scattered and dispersed these groups (when does a group become a clique?)” (June 13, 1928: 49). The Sitwells were said to be there, as well as “several bright young men who explained to me that they belonged to a doomed generation” and “Diana Bridgeman, who is *fort littéraire* and therefore delightful to talk to (she is a great friend of George Moore’s)” (*ibid.*). A few years later, “on the top of the world, or rather in Robert Byron’s flat in the Adelphi, where if you have time (he hasn’t) you can see all London by moonlight, a pleasing little cocktail party gathered” that included Clare Sheridan “and a sprinkling of women lawyers, rising wits and ‘coming’ young people” (November 11, 1931: 71). These reports are especially important compared to the narratives around the Bright Young People pushed in other periodicals, because *Vogue* hardly ever covered their more outrageous exploits as a set. Instead, it preferred to show them as modish individuals, in relation with artists and public figures from previous generations and other social milieus. It begs the question of who, exactly, reported on these meetings, if Settle had moved on from her previous role to take up the editorship.

Meanwhile, the poet and actress Iris Tree appeared in the same snapshot as the socialites Paula Gellibrand and Nancy Beaton and the designer Oliver Messel; visitors to the Goupil Gallery included Harold Acton, but also Duncan Grant and Ottoline Morrell, as well as Lady Cunard; her wayward daughter, Nancy, was seen “at the preceding party”, “in a dark red frock and turban to match, wearing, as usual, the largest bracelets ever seen” (January 8, 1930: 64). Zita Jungman, now married, was said to spend “all day in a bookshop”, but was sketched relaxing on a couch (July 22, 1931: 42). As shown by these notes, whether they had a literary career could be irrelevant: their significance was first and foremost social, as it must be remembered that many of them appeared in *Vogue* as society figures before they came near literary fame. Both

Inez Holden and Nancy Mitford, for instance, were noticed before their first publications. The former was described as “a charming little lady who photographs most beautifully and should certainly go on the films” and was sketched by Cecil Beaton slouching in her seat, a shoe almost kicked off, wearing “a red dress, red beads, a gold belt and gold bracelets” (July 11, 1928: 43); the latter appeared “stockingless” at a party at Castle Grant (June 12, 1929: 62).

The writing careers of the younger set, though, were not always side-lined. Theodora Benson, photographed in the park “wearing a smart tweed suit”, was said to have joined “the mode for being a talented young authoress” (April 16, 1930: 51). Six years later she had “made a name for herself as a writer”, as noted in a stylish photoshoot of “Well Known and Their Dogs” where she appeared with her spaniel Miles (July 8, 1936: 61). That spread also included Nancy Mitford and Lottie, her bulldog, but in her case her successful beginnings as an author of society novels went unmentioned. Perhaps they were taken for granted, as they had been mentioned in other occasions.<sup>71</sup> Mitford’s public appearances, her tidy, smart looks and always confident expression, together with her contributions to *Vogue*, confirmed her credentials as a clever commenter on her own milieu and her privileged position as a satirist. A snapshot of Evelyn Waugh and Dorothy Lygon at a house party explained that he was “the novelist” (February 3, 1932: 39). Waugh also appeared in an interesting column that turned into meta-commentary on society reporting:

We were already late—two of us to lunch with that most gentle and sociable of writers, Evelyn Waugh, and two at ‘Punch’s,’ of which the great advantage—or disadvantage, according to one’s temperament—is that full accounts appear in the next day’s papers. For it is at Punch’s that our social-column writers, those sleek young men in tight

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<sup>71</sup> “She wrote that clever and amusing novel, *Highland Fling*, and another is promised shortly”, said a footnote that also commented on how “good-looking” she and her sisters were (March 2, 1932: 50). Her “next novel is awaited with much gleeful anticipation”, insisted the note next to a similar snapshot (July 6, 1932: 64). Yet another one referred to her as “Lord Redesdale’s attractive daughter”, “one of our most entertaining novelists” (March 22, 1933: 72), whose works were “most amusing” (Beaton September 20, 1933: 70).

heather mixtures, rest from their labour of telephoning the young marrieds and teasing the débutantes. Half the stories of London start at Punch's. (November 9, 1932: 52)

Also caught on camera were “Miss Edith Olivier and Mr. Charles Birkin—writer and publisher”, both associated with but not quite part of the Bright Young generation (April 3, 1935: 99). “Vogue’s Spotlight” turned to Eve Curie, “an unusual combination of beauty and brilliance”, who came “to the peace of the Savoy Hotel to write the memoirs of her mother, the discoverer of radium” (Beaton July 8, 1936: 41). The final result was “an enormous success in America”, that confirmed Curie as a celebrity in her own right. She was described as “chic-er than anyone in neat, dark cloth suitings of exquisite cut” (February 2, 1938: 34), and later photographed “in a fragile dress of white metal gauze and organdie by Vera Borea surrounded by aristocrats” (August 24, 1938: 29); she was even the subject of a full-length essay by André Maurois (May 11, 1938).

Considered as a whole, *Vogue* definitely preferred the bohemian-aristocrat type of celebrity. Some of them, like Nancy Mitford, could be, and often were, pictures of modern sleekness and outward propriety. Sometimes, however, they openly flouted its instructions on good taste in dress and demeanour—and it praised them for it. The trick was, it turns out, to do so in very specific contexts, and of course from the position of privilege awarded by birth, friendship, or successful career as an entertainer. The period is remembered, after all, as “the great age of the fancy dress party, an obsession with glad-rags and bizarre finery”, even “far beyond the relatively enclosed world of the Bright Young People” (Taylor 2007: loc. 2104). The idea of a fancy dress party may conjure up a small affair, meant for the host and their friends, but these could be grandiose balls and galas, private or organised by institutions or charities.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Agnès Rocamora explains that in March 1929 the *Chambre syndicale de la couture* hosted a ball at the Palais Garnier, not a costume party but “a fashion show followed by dining and dancing”, where “glamorously dressed models” showed “their outfits to the audience, with a view of a beautifully lit theatre in the background” (2009: 39). Fashion houses thus used spectacle and playfulness, blurring the lines between business and leisure, design and high culture, to cause an impression.

The costume parties, revues and pageants of the late twenties had a modernist predecessor in the ones held in Bloomsbury after the war, which Todd's *Vogue* had definitely been aware of.

In those days after the end of the first war there was a frenzied kind of excitement and relief from everything. The parties were mostly fancy-dress parties, and there were charades, and people wrote plays for them. They went on absolutely all night, and were very enjoyable. I can remember a marvellous party, called the Sailors' Party, in which we all had to go wearing naval costume. [...] On one occasion I wrote a satirical account of what went on in the Hogarth Press basement, the series of people who had been there and only lasted six months and been thrown out – of which I, needless to say, proved to be one. I wrote it as a little sketch, which we did, and I think it was taken all right by the Woolfs. [...] Of course the great thing about Bloomsbury was that they had no nonsense about impropriety, I mean you really could say anything. In fact, it took me quite a long time not to be shocked by their conversation. (Rylands in Noble 1972)

The delightful thing about these parties was not only the unconventionality, eclecticism and joy in display, but the encounters between surprisingly different people. George Rylands himself, when he lived with Douglas Davidson “at the top of the house in Gordon Square kept by Duncan and Vanessa”, gave a party attended by “about two hundred people”, drawn from “the ballet, and Margot Asquith, Mary Pickford, Lady Ottoline Morrell, and all Bloomsbury and everything else”, as well as Berta Ruck, “a very famous popular novelist”, who “although not as famous as Ethel M. Dell she belonged to the Ethel M. Dell world of bestsellers” (*ibid.*).<sup>73</sup> That same party was recorded in Leonard Woolf's pocket book, where he noted his and Virginia's social engagements (Bell 1972: 113). As early as 1919 *Vogue* had noted that “modern fancy dress is an art” and that its devotees were very serious about it (late April 1919: 59). A decade later the craze had only grown, and despite its popularity as an institutional event, in *Vogue* it was clearly associated with the Bright Young People. Simon Harcourt-Smith explained it with a need to compensate the practical bent of most aspects of modern quotidian life:

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<sup>73</sup> Interestingly enough, Raymond Mortimer reviewed Berta Ruck's *The Immortal Girl* for *Vogue* (late June 1925), while Ethel M. Dell was never reviewed at all. See Diane F. Gillespie's “Virginia Woolf and the Curious Case of Bertha Ruck” in *Woolf Studies Annual* (2004).

This age of hundred per cent efficiency, of taxation, public opinion, and the ‘talkies,’ is also the Golden Age of fancy dress balls and extravaganzas. We live in a world of automatic calculators and spangles, of pneumatic drills and harlequinades, of ferro-concrete factories and gelatine bustles. Perhaps one is the natural outcome of the other, and our lives are crazily balanced in scales, one side of which, loaded with drab utilitarianism, chains us to the damp earth, while the other, buoyant with air balloons, whisks us up to a painted sky pasted with tinsel stars. [...] We are as much at home in fancy dress as we are in any other dress, perhaps more so, for it affords us a chance to give our personalities an airing, nor does the problem of inventing witty and charming costumes still hold for us any terrors. [...] Never since Adam has there been an age when clothes, or, at any rate, men’s clothes, were so lacking in nonsense, and in order that we may escape from their intolerable perpendiculars, ‘dressing-up’ has become for us a necessity. It is difficult to believe that our ancestors ever knew this compulsion, so eternal a masquerade do their distant lives appear. (December 25, 1929: 33-4).

Cecil Beaton, by contrast, did not look for socioeconomic explanations, but instead focused purely on the joy of dress-up:

A change! a new costume, the actual dressing up is an ecstasy of bliss. A new person, a new hairdressing, a new face—pile on the grease paint, build up the eyelashes with hot liquid bog. Plaster the lips with cerise stick, make the cheeks look like strawberry ices and weighten the eyelids with pomatum. Wave the hair, cover it with gold dust, be for one night a dizzy blonde, fizzle it, crimp it, burn it, it does not matter for this once. Hurry, it is time to go. (December 28, 1928: 27, 60)

There was an Impersonation Party, where Stephen Tennant went as the Queen of Roumania; a “sailor party” where, in “a glorious conglomeration of wet white, sun-burnt painted skin, gold dusted hair and sticky eyelashes”, was “Raymond Mortimer vivacious in transparent celluloid” (early April 1927: 31); the Hyde Park Pageant, 1765-1928, with “Stephen Tennant as a fragile lovely Shelley” and “Osbert Sitwell as the Regent”, among others (May 16, 1928: 61); a “freak party”, vividly described by Robert Byron (June 12, 1929); a “Heroines of History” ball at Claridge’s (June 26, 1929); and a “1860” ball, where Nancy Mitford went as a Victorian ancestor (November 13, 1929). Of particular interest are Olga Lynn’s “Literary Cocktail Parties”, where guests wore “badges more or less subtly representing the titles of books, films or plays” (July 24, 1929: 39). On its first edition, there were seven “(not too) *Quiet on the Western Front*”, and Lady Carisbrooke wore “an amusing drawing—*Gentlemen preferring blondes*”, which attests to their shared frame of reference (*ibid.*). The party was a success, and so it was held again in the following summer:

Lady Eleanor Smith won the first prize for guessing (she herself was *Vile Bodies*), Lady Kennard the second, and Mrs. Wilfrid Ashley, who was *The Man in Possession*, the third. Evelyn Waugh represented Wyndham Lewis's new book which is so expensive no one can afford it.<sup>74</sup> Lady Diana Gibb was *The Seats of the Mighty*, Lady Ravensdale *Rouge et Noir*, Miss Bankhead *The Open Book*, and, most charming of all, Lord Knebworth, who sported a photograph of a very August Pair, was *The Good Companions*. (August 6, 1930: 35)

Historical themes seemed to be especially prominent, both in balls and charity pageants. In fact, there were so many of these events that Cecil Beaton, himself a fan of dress-up, wrote about their drawbacks for *Vogue*. There were so many committees, he wrote, led by society ladies who did not have much else to do but wanted most of all to appear fashionable, that the resulting stress brought out the worst in everyone. "There is an intense feeling about who shall be photographed with whom. The photographers are quietly excited; their victims are propped against the backcloths. 'All caps off now,' their leader commands. There is a war-like explosion, a blinding flash, a cloud of smoke, and follows the scribbling of names on the covers of black papier-mâché plate-holders" (March 30, 1932: 45). Beaton himself was responsible for the portrait of Edith Olivier, "who writes such good novels", in Elizabethan costume (October 26, 1932: 59). Incongruous in the rest of the magazine, it is both grand and somewhat funny. In 1933, rather than travelling too far back, though, the fashion both in costume and in dress was Edwardian, a trend that was noted all through the autumn. Violet Trefusis was photographed in one such dress: the puffed sleeves and gigantic feathered hat create a very deliberate contrast with her cigarette and challenging look (July 26, 1933).

So many of these reports were taken up by the same set of names—Beaton in particular seems to have had a foot everywhere—that they bring to mind *Vogue*'s tight and symbiotic focus on the Bloomsbury group a decade in the past. In other words, though its sympathies had changed, the mechanisms of construction and promotion of

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<sup>74</sup> Wyndham Lewis's book was *The Apes of God*, which had only appeared two months before. It was famously a satire of the cultural landscape, and it particularly attacked *Vogue* favourites like the Bloomsbury group and the Sitwell siblings. See Emmett Stinson's *Satirizing Modernism: Aesthetic Autonomy, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde* (2017).

literary celebrity remained. But the type of celebrity *Vogue* was interested in had changed too: its simultaneous insistence on common sense and thought-out dress and its persistent appreciation of astoundingly lush, playfully referential costume parties, mirrors, I argue, its figuration of literary celebrity. On the one hand, there were middlebrow writers, proficient in their technique and quite chic in their style: their novels were perfect to read at leisure, as they brought genuine pleasure without the anxiety of needing to impress others. They were sophisticated but unpretentious, and knowledgeable enough to see the foibles of the fashionable world quite ironically, as *Vogue* itself did. On the other hand, *Vogue* had expanded its focus, both geographically—with features on travel and world fairs as well as reports from abroad—and thematically, as it added sections on luxurious living. Of course it then favoured the younger set that made the most of their wealth and glamour, and that appropriated, refined and popularised the bohemian parties and masquerades of the previous generation. The literary output of these up and comers can be labelled middlebrow, as so much of it took the form of society novels, with the corresponding sophistication and sharpness. Nonetheless, the literary aspect of their celebrity was subordinated to the other reasons of their fame, usually lineage, shocking wealth or social notoriety. That is not to say, though, that *Vogue* abandoned highbrow texts and its producers, but it enclosed them in the review sections. Outside, they were critiqued and sometimes mocked; within those columns, their books were still proposed as rewarding intellectual challenges.





## 4. CONCLUSIONS:

### LITERARY SOPHISTICATION IN *VOGUE*

All throughout this thesis, I have felt some degree of guilt that I was reading *Vogue* against its purpose. Modernity, in the sense of the word I have used, is the heightened awareness of temporality, the experience of living in modern times. Few forms make so much use of this experience as fashion magazines, as they scrutinise the present, write expertly of tomorrow, follow the traces of the past to reference it or to irreverently play with it, and, sometimes, even take wild guesses at the distant future. The *Vogue* of the interwar period expected its readers, faithful subscribers or casual, to pick up the freshest issue, to read it in whichever order and depth suited them best, to cut out their favourite pictures, to copy sketches or to pass it on to their acquaintances. Of all the possible ways to read it, I doubt the people who made it thought of a researcher poring through page after page of bound issues, in strict order, a hundred years in the future.

Nicola Humble contrasted sitting forward to analyse a text to leaning back to read, drowsily and pleasantly, in bed: for the past five years I have sat upright to read *Vogue* and laid down to stroll through the highbrow novels it reviewed, and I cannot deny there is a sort of presumptuous pleasure in it. That sort of reading, though, may have resulted in a characterisation of *Vogue's* insistence on its role as a guide as somewhat repetitive, or in an annoyance at its breezy tone in discussions that I believed merited more depth. That is not the impression that I would like to give with this thesis, as it is only logical that it would change its line on certain topics over twenty years and its purpose, after all, was to be entertaining. I must also acknowledge, before moving on to my conclusions, that close reading 480 issues of a fashion magazine through the question of its treatment of literature is unfair to its richness and value in many other

areas. I may have sounded disappointed when I reached the point in the late twenties when its cultural coverage shrank. The decade that followed, it must be said, brought out stunning collage-like spreads; gorgeous photographs of moth-like creatures, haloed in neon and cellophane; delightful whimsical sketches; and some of the most glamorous designs that I have ever seen. The British *Vogue* of the interwar period is an enormously rewarding text to go through, and I have never intended to present its lessened interest in literature as a failure of any kind.

With this thesis, I set out to explore fashionable reading and literary celebrity in *Vogue* through the theoretical frameworks of Fashion, Celebrity and Gender Studies. As one of the best-known fashion magazines in history—perhaps the most famous of all time—I was certain that it would include literary practices in its discussion of fashionable living. After all, why else would Sylvia Townsend Warner have met Virginia Woolf at its editor's soiree?

I thought it necessary to situate it among its contemporary periodicals in order to find out whether its treatment of literature was exceptional; therefore, I have relied heavily on surveys of modernist and middlebrow periodicals, particularly women's magazines, and taken a lighter look at some of those periodicals, like *Time and Tide*, *Eve* or *Tatler*. Through a close reading of British *Vogue* in chronological order, my aim was to answer four research questions. The first was: "How did writers interact with fashion and ornament in *Vogue*, and how did different axis of identity affect that interaction?" I have found that writers seldom discussed fashion in their critical essays for the magazine, preferring other topics, but the clothes they wore in their portraits and the other ways they articulated an aura of being up to date—for instance, by showing off the interior design of their homes—did much to place them within or outside certain movements. This was the case for both men and women, but women, and particularly

aristocratic women, were more frequently represented in portraits. Age, on the other hand, was not as strong a factor, as youth was often said to be a state of mind. The second question, “to what extent did that interaction with fashion shape the presence of writers in *Vogue*, both as contributors and as figures of interest?”, is in fact necessarily entangled with the third, “how did *Vogue* promote writers and construct them as fashionable, and what role did its editors play in the process?”, as I have concluded that their presence in the magazine hinged on their being perceived as somewhat fashionable or at the very least modern, of the time. *Vogue* editors could legitimise writers as “fashionable” by commissioning them, featuring their portraits, reporting on their doings in the society columns and, sometimes, even by advising them on dress. The fourth and final question was: “What was *Vogue*’s position in the cultural debate around the value of literary practices, and how does the resulting analysis fit into existing scholarship of modernism and the middlebrow?” My intention was to bear that last question in mind throughout the thesis and to address the rest individually, one per chapter. In practice, all four questions have shaped my analysis of *Vogue*, and every answer feeds from and is enriched by the rest. I will answer the last question, then, with the summary below.

As explained in the introduction, I divided the interwar period into three eras and the thesis in three corresponding chapters: the parts are unbalanced in scope, as the first and second eras are very short while the third spans over a decade. They correspond to editorships of British *Vogue*, but because of their significant continuities and lesser amount of available information, the editorships of Alison Settle and Elizabeth Penrose are both covered in the third chapter. There are others who took on the role of editor for short periods in between, so I also included them despite not giving them their own

sections. Notwithstanding the length of the eras, I believe I have treated the main subjects of each character—taste, modernism and the middlebrow—with equal depth.

The first chapter introduced British *Vogue* and described its contents under Elspeth Champcommunal, who is normally credited as its first editor. Though her editorship began in 1916, my analysis started immediately after the Armistice, in November 1918. It discussed *Vogue*'s function as a guide to modern practices of consumption and taste and explored the interplay between those practices, individual identity and social affiliation. *Vogue* predicated that acquiring and displaying knowledge and cultural goods was a viable strategy for women to present themselves as modern subjects: those goods, of course, included books. Throughout the interwar period *Vogue* proposed “smartness” as the key to modernity, the approved expression of taste, and articulated it both on the page and behind the scenes. This chapter explored those ideas through Fashion Studies, drawing in particular from Joanne Entwistle's historical and theoretical work as well as from critical readings of Pierre Bourdieu.

With *Vogue* as a seal of legitimacy, its editors and contributors could promote certain writers and approaches to literature as “fashionable”. Through practices that were both professional and personal, like hosting or introducing friends to dressmakers, they built mutually beneficial relationships, but while they had a degree of freedom to choose which modes to support they were also expected to live according to the values of their managers; for this section, I turned to recent sociological work regarding aesthetic labour. The literary content of *Vogue* during this first period was very limited, but I have concluded that, despite not reviewing women writers more frequently than men, it presented them as subjects of particular interest.

The second chapter explained how British *Vogue* became a modernist project during the editorship of Dorothy Todd (1923-1926) as well as during the transition

period that followed. Todd developed a network of contributors that included the Bloomsbury group, the Sitwell siblings and other avant-garde artists, writers and critics. Under Todd, literature was granted more space than ever: reading and discussing books was a core aspect of smartness, that all-important quality. *Vogue* promoted literary figures as celebrities even beyond its extensive critical essays and reviews, supporting different visions of modern authorship by including portraits of writers or visiting their homes. Consequently, the bodies and sartorial tastes of featured writers were interwoven with their artistic creation and reception. A very interesting feature of this period was the “Hall of Fame”, brought over from *Vanity Fair*, which made highbrow names accessible and memorable while still showcasing middlebrow writers. Because as a cultural intermediary *Vogue* made a point of explaining high culture to the uninitiated, and because it displayed a teasing familiarity with highbrow forms, I have argued that its project could also be read as middlebrow.

My main sources for the second chapter were both biographical and critical, and I especially relied on Lisa Cohen’s work on Madge Garland and Amanda Carrod’s thesis on modernism in Todd’s *Vogue*. In secondary scholarship, Todd’s period has been presented as an exception, and the “modernist project” of *Vogue* has been portrayed as very much her own. While it is true that its experimental and amusing features can be attributed in large part to her, I have found two so far overlooked moments in *Vogue* history that contradict that narrative. First, Condé Nast attempted to launch a British edition of *Vanity Fair*, called the *Patrician*, which would have fulfilled the role of guide to modernism, but it failed. Its existence proves that Condé Nast knew about this gap in the market and was willing to fill it. Second, after firing Todd, the official story was that circulation had dropped because of her excessively highbrow sympathies. However, she was first substituted by someone with a very similar aesthetic

and social profile, Vera Meynell, which reveals that Todd's milieu was not truly the problem. The idea of *Vogue* as an amusingly modernist publication was only dropped as unsuitable after Meynell's failed trial (1926-1927), not immediately after Todd.

Finally, the third chapter located the magazine in the "Battle of the Brows", the debate over the value of different cultural practices that raged in the press during the less studied editorships of Alison Settle (1927-1936) and Elizabeth Penrose (1936-1939) and continued beyond the scope of this thesis, which ends with the start of the Second World War in September 1939. The format of British *Vogue* changed, shaped by persistent tensions with its management and widespread socioeconomic hardship, and its content shifted through its alliance with younger, glamorous writers, artists, and socialites, the Bright Young People.

The space allotted to literature was reduced, and so was the attention granted to modernist texts and writers, though they did not disappear completely. Although I have defended that *Vogue* always had a middlebrow bent, it is in this period that the editorial line began to lean even more firmly and unambiguously towards middlebrow tastes, pushing a sensible sort of sophistication front and centre, making its tone even archer, and enclosing sartorial eccentricity within the context of the costume party. Its vision of literary celebrity split into two models: middlebrow writers, chic and proper, and glamorous society figures that happened to be writers. Because this last period is often overlooked, I offer this thesis to fill the gap in existing scholarship, at least to an extent, and to invite others to include the *Vogue* of the late twenties and thirties in their surveys of the middlebrow.

Besides addressing the research questions that I laid down at the beginning, I have found that British *Vogue* discussed dress both in fashion journalism—of course—and in more unexpected sections. It was scrutinised in its material sense, as fabric, cut

and colour were of great importance, and in relation to the fashion system. Furthermore, it was often cross-referenced with art and social history, and integral to wider debates of taste. Other frequent subjects in women's magazines, like housekeeping and beauty, were given minimal coverage, speaking to *Vogue's* purpose as a luxury or class publication. *Vogue* focused, almost exclusively, on what could be outwardly displayed: dress, but also interior design—of the parts of a house a party guest would notice—, lifestyle, and modern culture, which was expected to be part of polite conversation. Cooking and gardening were only covered within outward-facing practices like hosting. Over the years, responding to the changing economic situation, *Vogue* increased its sewing and shopping sections, becoming not only a guide but a practical service for its middle and upper class target readership. Its vision of smartness, which in later years splintered into the related notions of sophistication, chic and glamour, was not really presented as natural or as inherent to femininity. A lucky few had it, but it could be learnt and very purposely projected, and no less authentic for that.

The language used to discuss dress and fashion could be direct and descriptive, florid and fantastical, or, as in *Vogue's* cultural coverage, sophisticated and jocular. Readers were spoken to in the same way, addressed by a voice that sometimes included them in a very wealthy and very English—or at least very aspirationally so—“we” or sometimes, more distantly, as “you”. The fashionable or smart woman was usually a third person “she”, abstract or codified into an archetype with a becomingly French name. Only rarely did a reviewer or social reporter drop an “I”, which was not always assigned to a signature. Within a single issue, then, *Vogue* could shift between soothing intimacy, pleasant conversation and superior prescription.

Though in contemporary scholarship it is common to place interwar writers in sets, like the Bloomsbury group, the Sitwell siblings and their protégées, the Bright



Young People and so on, those affiliations were much vaguer in *Vogue's* pages. Even writers who contributed regularly did not portray themselves as a community of *Vogue* writers; in fact, particularly the more highbrow ones, they resisted such an idea. Nonetheless, through stylistic similarities—including sartorial tastes and shared frames of reference—and personal connections, sustained and fed by the editors, they still revealed their affiliations. Though these guest celebrity writers sporadically described sartorial practices in their pieces, those were minimal. It was in visual and textual depictions of these celebrities that *Vogue* mentioned the clothes they wore, particularly if they were somehow unexpected.

During the height of its cultural coverage in the mid-twenties, *Vogue* relied on a writer's gender and social class—not so much age, which was associated with tasteful curiosity, nor ethnicity, as writers of colour were simply ignored—, their usual genre and readership demographics as well as their sartorial style to fit them into an implicit type. Writers could let themselves be decadent or eccentric to a degree, but only if sustained by acceptable social origins or heavily codified in their artistic and personal expression, as in the case of the camp or amusing modernism preferred by many queer contributors. Nancy Cunard, for instance, was featured in *Vogue*, but the black artists and critics she drew from in her style and collaborated with throughout her career were not—in fact, even she faded from its coverage. Later, in the thirties, two models of literary celebrity emerged: sensible, middle to upper class writers, mostly women, who wrote middlebrow novels—never called middlebrow but sometimes identified by genre, historical, rural, and so on—and eccentric aristocrats who sometimes wrote—more often than not society novels. Though there were exceptions—Nancy Mitford bridged the two types—the way writers engaged with fashion in their public lives, as celebrities

out and about or as contributors to *Vogue*, can be understood as a reflection of their chosen mode and genre, one more manifestation of their artistic persona.

It is impossible to say whether interest in literary celebrities was something that drew readers in and made them pick up, from all possible choices, British *Vogue*. As the magazine would have it, it introduced writers to readers: it was a guide, a cultural intermediary, not influenced by what readers were interested in but the other way around. It sometimes used its most famous contributors as a marketing tool, teasing their presence to convince readers to pick up the following issue, but they were not its main draw. After all, one had to open the magazine and read through it to find out who was writing for it, and usually even that remained a mystery. Neither did *Vogue* include the salacious details of its celebrities' most notorious escapades—some of which were very serious scandals at the time—in the society columns, as it never wanted to be tainted by gossip. Eccentricity was important, but had to be contained within aesthetic experiment, and rebelliousness was fine as far as it was not too outrageous. This boundary shaped *Vogue*'s journalism, but it had even greater effects on the professional and personal lives of its editors, who were expected to embody the values of *Vogue*.

There are more continuities than breaks in the tone and content of *Vogue*'s literary reviews, despite their rise and fall in its priorities. Reviewers tended to look for the same set of qualities, which included a sense of authenticity and a realistic representation of interiority, as long as the pacing was good and engrossing. Most reviews were positive, as *Vogue* recommended rather than critiqued. If anything, the author with most perceived "failures" was also its most frequently reviewed name, D. H. Lawrence. Considered in their totality, *Vogue*'s most reviewed authors reveal, on the one hand, an eclectic but proper middle- to highbrow taste, and on the other, a tendency to recommend the work of its own contributors—even beyond Dorothy Todd's

supposedly clique-ish editorship. After Lawrence, and in order, they were Aldous Huxley, Osbert and Edith Sitwell, Somerset Maugham, Richard Aldington, Vita Sackville-West, Walter de la Mare, David Garnett, Evelyn Waugh, Pearl S. Buck, Stella Benson and Vicki Baum. My focus has been on fiction, but it must be remembered that *Vogue* also covered non-fiction, from cookbooks and fashion histories. Fashionable reading had, to put it simply, two aspects. The first was personal, turned inward: one read, breezily, for entertainment or for pleasure, to achieve a state of heightened and aestheticized awareness of quotidian life. Serious self-improvement, by contrast, did not play as large a role. The second aspect was social: one read to impress others or to escape from them, but hardly ever to engage in deep critical discussion. Literary sophistication, consequently, was very similar to sartorial sophistication, as it required knowing what was current to then judge it and suit it to one's lifestyle and personality. The worst thing one could be, I have found, was pretentious.

Before closing up, I would like to acknowledge the limits of this thesis and my own emotional response to them. I am not a biographer: though I have provided rough biographical sketches and historical scenes when relevant, I do not believe they do justice to the people who wrote about their vision of modernity for *Vogue* a century ago. Many articles were unsigned, or signed only with initials, and thus cannot be properly credited, nor were they meant to be. Others were hidden behind pseudonyms, and I am not convinced that it is uncomplicatedly right to analyse them in light of what I know now of their authors. It is beyond the scope and purpose of the thesis to go into the career and life of every participant beyond their time at *Vogue*, and yet it feels disingenuous to sidestep the richness of their lives, even if they were painful. Many of their stories were marked by addiction, illness, war, or were cut short by an early death; others held politics that even in their historical context can only be called shameful; a

few heroic ones took enormous personal risks under the threat of fascist regimes. The majority, perhaps, had more or less uneventful lives, and yet even in their case I must remind myself that it is not my place, as an individual researcher undertaking a doctoral thesis, to offer a full critical and biographical perspective on every single one.

I firmly believe that this project sheds light on all sorts of winding paths and rabbit-holes for others to follow, though the problem of accessing primary sources, both *Vogue* itself and other archives, and the widespread lacunae in names and dates, will continue to complicate scholarly work in this area. Nonetheless, research on *Vogue*'s lesser known editors—Ruth Anderson, Vera Meynell and Elizabeth Penrose—would surely be fruitful and contribute to a richer understanding of the inner workings of the interwar periodical marketplace. Other threads to pull could be its contributors outside of Bloomsbury, particularly the eclectic Lesley Blanch. Aldous Huxley is obviously a very well-known figure, but his relationship to *Vogue* seems longer and deeper than is usually assumed. Finally, the Nonesuch Press, so connected to *Vogue* through style and collaborators in the twenties, has not been the subject of an in-depth scholarly study for decades, and it seems due a reappraisal.

The purpose of this thesis was to argue that British *Vogue* positioned itself as a cultural intermediary and to explore how. I have argued in favour of its inclusion among middlebrow periodicals all the while calling its mid-twenties period both a modernist project and a middlebrow one. These categories are famously unstable, so I do not believe that these contradictions are flaws in my argument: to elide the variations and changes in *Vogue*'s editorial voice would be to go against its nature as a long-lived periodical. Even more important is the latter half of my original thesis statement: that throughout the interwar period, and despite its changing values, *Vogue* always counted literary practices as expressions of taste and continued to value playfulness both in

literature and in daily life. Those expressions were campy and discreet, referential and fresh, glib and deadly serious: there was always a new leaf to turn.

## 5. WORKS CITED

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