mediAzioni 33 (2022)
ISSN 1974-4382

THE ETHICS OF WRITING AT HIGH RATES FOR FASHION PAPERS: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SHORT STORIES FOR *HARPER'S BAZAAR*

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Citation: Federici, Annalisa (2022) "The Ethics of Writing at High Rates for Fashion Papers: Virginia Woolf's Short Stories for Harper's Bazaar", *MediAzioni* 33: A80-A97, https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462, ISSN 1974-4382.

Abstract: In the mid-1920s, Virginia Woolf was engaged in a dispute with the American critic Logan Pearsall Smith on "the ethics of writing articles at high rates for fashion papers". *Harper's Bazaar*, a commercial magazine to which Woolf contributed four short stories between 1930 and 1939, was a feminine periodical that exploited modernism's distinction and high cultural capital to captivate a sophisticated, but essentially middle-class, readership by selling the illusion of upward cultural mobility. Although Woolf referred to her high-quality contributions to *Harper's Bazaar* as "pot boiling stories for America" written "to make money", it seems clear that her own engagement with a middlebrow publishing venue did not in the least affect her reputation as a highbrow intellectual and was indeed typical of the multifaceted, reciprocal relationship between the magazine and high modernism in a context in which mobility also meant redrawing the boundaries between intellectual and popular culture. The publication of modernist content within the glossy pages of *Harper's Bazaar* was advantageous to both modernists seeking to maintain their celebrity status and the periodical itself, which attempted to cultivate and sustain a refined audience. Much in line with her work of the 1930s, Woolf's short stories engaged with social and ethical issues such as the righteousness of penetrating other people's lives and innermost truths ("In the Looking Glass"), violence and decay ("The Shooting Party"), capitalism and antisemitism ("The Duchess and the Jeweler"), human and non-human worlds ("Lappin and Lapinova"). Though often considered as non-canonical in terms of both their rather prosaic plot as well as characterisation, and the commercial venue in which they appeared, the stories Woolf wrote for *Harper's Bazaar* reflect the preoccupations of the last decade of her career and are indicative of the tensions between high and low in modernist culture.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf; ethics; short stories; *Harper's Bazaar*; high modernism; middlebrow culture; intellectualism; commercialism; women's magazines; celebrity culture.

1. Modernism, Woolf and the Literary Marketplace

In the mid-1920s, Virginia Woolf was engaged in a dispute with the American critic Logan Pearsall Smith on the moral code of accepting lucrative commissions to write for popular journals or, as she put it, "the ethics of writing articles at high rates for fashion papers" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1977: 154). Although the argument mainly concerned the choice of a high-circulation, middlebrow periodical like British *Vogue* as publishing venue for five of her essays[1], Woolf's position in the contradictory, often vexed, but eventually productive relationship between highbrow modernism and the literary marketplace may be considered as particularly illuminating to explain her active and fruitful engagement with popular magazines also including *Eve: The Lady's Pictorial* (where her short piece "The Waxworks at the Abbey" appeared in May 1928)[2], *Good Housekeeping* (which published her "Six Essays on London Life" between December 1931 and December 1932)[3], or *Harper's Bazaar*, to which Woolf contributed four short stories between January 1930 and April 1939. Although her attitude toward these commercial publications, as well as the works she specially crafted for them, could range from mere detachment to downright disdain[4], Woolf nonetheless tied herself to

[1] The full passage, from a letter to Jacques Raverat dated 24 January 1925, reads: "I've been engaged in a great wrangle with an old American called Pearsall Smith on the ethics of writing articles at high rates for fashion papers like Vogue. He says it demeans one. He says one must write only for the Lit. Supplement and the Nation and Robert Bridges and prestige and posterity and to set a high example. I say Bunkum. *Ladies' clothes and aristocrats playing golf don't affect my style*; and they would do his a world of good. Oh these Americans! How they always muddle everything up! What he wants is prestige: *what I want, money*" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1977: 154, emphasis added). Woolf's lifetime contribution to the British edition of *Vogue* amounts to five articles: "Indiscretions" (November 1924), "George Moore" (June 1925), "The Tale of Genji" (July 1925), "The Life of John Mytton" (March 1926), "A Professor of Life" (May 1926), while "Flying Over London" appeared posthumously in *Vogue* in March 1950. These essays and, more generally, Woolf's relationship with middlebrow print culture have recently attracted conspicuous critical attention. See, for instance, Garrity 1999, Garrity 2000, Luckhurst 1998 and Dubino 2010.

[2] In spite of its vitality and versatility, *Eve* has been largely neglected by scholars and so has Woolf's commitment to it. Rare and notable exceptions are represented by Plock 2018, Sheehan 2018 and Wood 2020.

[3] Apparently commissioned by *Good Housekeeping* as a series, these essays include "The Docks of London" (December 1931), "Oxford Street Tide" (January 1932), "Great Men's Houses" (March 1932), "Abbeys and Cathedrals" (May 1932), "This Is the House of Commons" (October 1932) and "Portrait of a Londoner" (December 1932). For an attentive analysis of such contributions, which aided the popular magazine's marketing of Woolf's high-quality work as a cultural commodity, see for example Reynier 2019 and Wood 2010.

[4] It is now widely acknowledged that "Woolf never participated in a full-scale repudiation of mass culture – even though she was consistently contemptuous of 'popularity'" (Garrity 2000: 195). In her correspondence, for instance, she recorded in neutral terms the emergence of her plan to contribute "The Waxworks at the Abbey" to *Eve: The Lady's Pictorial*: "I think I shall write a little article on Queen Elizabeth's nose for Eve" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1977: 468-469). However, she was apparently much more critical of the stories she sold to *Harper's Bazaar*, as will be shown afterwards, or of the essays she was commissioned to write for *Good Housekeeping*: "I'm being bored to death by my London articles – pure brilliant description – six of them – and not a thought for fear of clouding the brilliancy" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1978: 301). In the same vein, her relationship with *Vogue* was indeed quite contradictory, as shown by the caustic remarks, disseminated in her letters, concerning both the journal – whose commercialism she dismissed as "vulgar" and "shameless" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1977: 158) – and its editor Dorothy Todd, as well as the commercial terms she used to describe her commitment to popular print culture: "I shall sell my soul to Todd; but this is the first step to

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

middlebrow culture for such practical reasons as visibility and financial reward, which allowed her to achieve the intellectual and economic liberty necessary to receive acclaim as a professional, serious writer while also retaining her distinctive highbrow style. Moreover, she decided to do so by renouncing the stereotypes and ethical restrictions of highbrow modernist aestheticism, and choosing publishing venues which represent compelling examples of how high culture often employed mass cultural forms like fashion papers to publicise its values.

In line with Aaron Jaffe's – and of other scholars of modernism and celebrity[5] – view that outstanding modernists, far from being opposed to the economy of production and consumption, "were more canny about fashioning their careers [...] than is often appreciated" (2005: 3), it seems interesting to consider interwar feminine periodicals as platforms that provided contemporary writers and artists with a means to acquire prominence and promote themselves to a wider readership. These magazines' portrayal of Woolf as a signifier for high modernism was ultimately dependent upon a discourse illustrating that popular markers of femininity like fashionable clothes and accessories might coalesce with the middlebrow commodification of the female modernist icon. The way Woolf was showcased in commercial publications as a renowned, out-of-reach celebrity writer is ultimately in line with recent scholarly investigations of the presence of both "high" and "low" content in interwar women's magazines and their active engagement with modernist culture. In her illuminating *Modernism and Modernity in British Women's Magazines*, Alice Wood has demonstrated that "commercial women's periodicals debated, disrupted, and sustained contemporary hierarchies of high and low culture" by tracing their "participation in the construction of modernism's public profile" (2020: 2). Her informed analysis of interwar women's magazines in Britain highlights how publications such as *Vogue*, *Eve*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Harper's Bazaar* "disrupt the very notion of a struggle between intellectually demanding and easily consumable pleasures by encouraging their readers' enjoyment of both difficult and easy pleasures and presenting cultural activities perceived as highbrow and lowbrow side by side" (*ibid.*: 8). Other studies have equally emphasised that, in the interwar years, "a variety of women's periodicals – from upmarket fashion magazines to lowbrow pulps – promoted highbrow, middlebrow, and popular literary and cultural materials, often side by side", thus demonstrating that "periodicals produced for women readers were not unaware of the rise of modernism in the cultural landscape, and in various ways actively participated in its key discourses" (Clay 2018: 11). This wave of revisionist scholarship has also shown how earlier views of Woolf as an elitist author detached from the workings of the literary

being free" (*ibid.*: 250). Even so, Woolf's lifelong engagement with middlebrow periodicals demonstrates that the highly remunerative activity of writing short pieces for commercial magazines granted her the opportunity to achieve the intellectual and economic independence she always aspired to as a woman writer.

[5] In recent years, the materialist turn of the "new modernist studies" (Mao and Walkowitz 2009) has thrown light on the often neglected interactions between modernism and celebrity culture. See, among other compelling publications, Goldman 2011, Jaffe 2005, Jaffe and Goldman 2010, Hammill 2007, Rosenquist 2013.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

marketplace can be easily challenged and complicated by a critical focus on her active engagement with the commercial world represented, for instance, by women's magazines.

2. Commercialism, Intellectualism and Celebrity Culture in Harper's Bazaar

Harper's Bazaar, in particular, was an upmarket feminine periodical that exploited modernism's distinction and high cultural capital to captivate and flatteringly cultivate an affluent, leisured, sophisticated, but essentially middle-class, readership. Launched in October 1929, the British edition of the magazine printed lavishly illustrated features on the latest Paris and London fashions, etiquette and interior design; society and celebrity news accompanied by alluring photographic reports, as well as more culturally sophisticated contents such as fiction and articles by leading authors of the time, or essays and reviews of recent books, art exhibitions and theatre shows. In particular, in an effort to rival *Vogue*, which would not routinely print fiction, *Harper's Bazaar* assumed and at the same time expanded its audience's cultural awareness by welcoming contributions from both popular and highbrow writers including E.M. Delafield, W. Somerset Maugham, Harold Nicolson, Dorothy Parker, Vita Sackville-West, Evelyn Waugh and Gertrude Stein. It seems evident, therefore, that *Harper's Bazaar*'s interest in cultivating good taste and refinement equally applied to fashion and lifestyle, as well as literature and the arts, which accounts for the choice to publish four short stories by a renowned and highbrow author like Virginia Woolf. During the 1930s, *Harper's Bazaar* "offered readers an education in sophistication, within which modernism remained an important marker of advanced cultural knowledge" (Wood 2016: 372).

The showcasing of modernist artists and writers among the magazine's glossy pages, and the way it moulded literary celebrities for an audience who would not necessarily have been exposed to them, can be considered as strategies through which *Harper's Bazaar* tried to extend cultural elitism to its middle-class readership. On a par with other women's magazines of the interwar period, *Harper's Bazaar* commodified aesthetic value through the mass popularisation of elite art and ultimately helped to construct and circulate an image of Woolf as a literary icon and a marker of high culture, while at the same time using this strategy to sell its aspirational readers the illusion of upward cultural mobility. Scholars have variously highlighted how fashion periodicals upholding modernity and exclusivity in relation to cultural matters as well as style often cultivated the public personae of contemporary writers and artists as highbrow celebrities. The profiling of modernist authors in interwar women's magazines frequently encouraged their reception as difficult, elite, avant-garde intellectuals and insisted on the high cultural cachet associated with their writing, while simultaneously making them more accessible to the magazine's non-specialist audience. As Wood contends, although "upmarket British fashion magazines facilitated the spread of modernism to new readers and equipped them with strategies to negotiate its

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

complexities, [...] they did not always present modernism as easy to access and understand"; quite the contrary, "it was in the editorial interests of these magazines to position modernism as difficult and the preserve of a minority audience even as they extended this audience to include their readers" (2020: 99-100). *Harper's Bazaar*, in particular, emphasised the perceived exclusivity of modernist literature and art while contributing to its mainstreaming. On the whole, the periodical "helped to assure the status of prominent modernists as highbrow celebrities by encouraging their reception as established rather than counter-cultural figures" (Wood 2016: 371). It is particularly instructive that the visibility granted to notable artists and authors in sophisticated, medium-circulation publications was part of a mutual exchange: as these periodicals moulded and marketed modernist personalities for their readers' consumption, they also provided literary celebrities with a means to boost their reputations and reach a wider audience.

In spite of the fact that Woolf described her commitment to *Harper's Bazaar* in chiefly financial terms and referred to her high-quality contributions to the magazine as "pot boiling stories for America" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1980: 252) written "to make money" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1984: 189), it seems clear that her own engagement with middlebrow culture did not in the least affect her style as a highbrow intellectual[6], and was indeed typical of the multifaceted, reciprocal relationship between the periodical and high modernism in a context in which mobility also meant redrawing the boundaries between intellectual and popular culture. Moreover, Woolf's short stories – whose ethics Christine Reynier (2009) finds in their openness to, and welcoming of, the other – were part of a project (then never completed) of writing a series of "caricatures"[7] and, much in line with her work of the 1930s, engaged with social, moral and ethical issues such as the righteousness of penetrating other people's lives and innermost truths ("In the Looking Glass", January 1930), violence and decay ("The Shooting Party", March 1938), capitalism and antisemitism ("The Duchess and the Jeweler", April 1938), human and non-human worlds ("Lappin and Lapinova", April 1939). Though often considered as non-canonical in terms of both their rather prosaic plot as well as characterisation, and the commercial publishing venue in which they appeared, the stories Woolf wrote for *Harper's Bazaar* reflect the preoccupations of the last decade of her career and are indicative of the tensions between high and low in modernist culture. As evidence of the fact that

[6] Although, in a diary entry dated 22 November 1938, Woolf recorded the bore of "rehashing Lappin & Lapinova, a story written I think at Asheham 20 years ago or more" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1984: 188), Susan Dick posits that she took the endeavour of contributing to *Harper's Bazaar* much more seriously than she would ever admit: "the multiple typescripts of these stories, and of others left unpublished, indicate that she put them through the rigorous process of revision she applied to all her work" (2004: xix). Unfortunately, however, Woolf's relationship with the magazine has not received adequate critical attention.

[7] On 29 December 1931, Woolf wrote in her diary: "I could write a book of caricatures. Christabel's story of the Hall Caines suggested a caricature of Country house life, with the redbrown pheasants" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1982: 57), clearly referring to her conception of "The Shooting Party". Dick also attests that "in January 1932, she drew up a list of titles under the heading 'Caricatures': 'The Shooting Party./ 2.Scenes from English life/The pheasants/Scenes: Life on a Battleship' [...]. She added 'The Great Jeweller' to a similar list of 'Caricatures' made in February" (2004: xix).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

Harper's Bazaar did not merely publish modernist content, but actively shaped its reception by assuming and enhancing its readers' intellectual refinement and familiarity with high modernist aesthetics, it seems particularly interesting to analyse the editorial apparatus – both verbal and visual – which accompanied Woolf's stories and favoured her appraisal as a glamorous and sophisticated celebrity writer. This essay, therefore, scrutinises the way in which the magazine mediated Woolf and her short fiction to its readers, thus shedding further light on the hitherto overlooked role of *Harper's Bazaar* in publicising and marketing modernist literature, and creating Woolf's reputation as as a highbrow intellectual who made frequent incursions into middlebrow territory.

3. Woolf's Short Stories for Harper's Bazaar

3.1. "In the Looking Glass" (January 1930)

When the magazine's editor Phyllis Joyce Reynolds printed Woolf's story "In the Looking Glass" in January 1930, she made sure not only to advertise her name on the issue cover, where it was placed at the top of a list of featured contributors, but also to employ a captivating subtitle – "A Phantasy of Fugitive Dreams" – on the contents page and to accompany the text with an elegant illustration by Cecil Beaton, as well as with the editorial header "Am I dreaming thoughts or thinking dreams?", altogether suggesting an idea of sophistication and intellectual refinement apt to boost Woolf's reputation as an aloof, upper-class author. By means of such editorial apparatus, modernist aesthetics obeys the capitalist ethics of the marketplace, according to which "the story is packaged and sold to readers as a high-cultural commodity that delivers a taste of modernist experimentalism" (Wood 2016: 379). These allusive paratextual elements employ the language of narrative psychologism and seem to be particularly appropriate, on the one hand, to the public profile of an experimental writer already known at that time for her brilliant attempts to penetrate her characters' innermost selves in *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and on the other to the content of the story, which clearly privileges interiority over plot.

As is well known, among Woolf's short fiction, "In the Looking Glass" is particularly interesting, in terms of her visual aesthetics and experimental narrative technique, also for its suggestive title (and chiefly the subtitle, "A Reflection", subsequently added)[8], which may refer, at the same time, to the mental processes (thought and imagination) activated in both the narrator and the reader by the enigmatic figure of the wealthy, middle-aged Isabella Tyson, or to the metafictional device according to which, as the mirror arranges the various scenes by determining what to include in its own frame, it also

[8] "In the Looking Glass" originally appeared in the American monthly *Harper's Magazine* in December 1929 and was then reprinted, together with four other items of fiction, in the January 1930 issue of British *Harper's Bazaar*. It was posthumously included as "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" in *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1943), where the other *Harper's Bazaar* stories were also collected.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

parallels the delimiting frame of the short story itself, since what the mirror does not display the narrative excludes. Moreover, it definitely alludes to the fact that the setting – captured by a sort of invisible camera whose eye coincides with the fixed point of view or the observing eye of the unnamed narrator – is reflected in the looking glass hanging in the hallway of Isabella's luxurious country house. With this brief modernist sketch in which she employs photographic narrative techniques, Woolf is presented to the readers of *Harper's Bazaar* as a sophisticated writer who engages with narrative experimentalism, allusiveness, introspection and verbal imitations of snapshots, as the editorial choice to accompany the text with the visual medium of Beaton's illustration also demonstrates. As Wood aptly suggests, this large line-drawn sketch represents Isabella standing in front of the mirror precisely as she does in the fiction, elegantly dressed and carrying a basket of flowers. However, it curiously includes elements not mentioned in the text – a stack of books, a pair of reading glasses and a small figurine of a female nude on the hall table – perhaps added to "suggest the literary and artistic milieu of Woolf and Bloomsbury" as well as the author's "contemporary reputation in Britain as a glamorous but elusive upper-class aesthete, crowned 'Queen of the High-brows' by Arnold Bennett in the *Evening Standard* on 28 November 1929" (Wood 2020: 158).

From the opening of "In the Looking Glass", the reader's view is circumscribed by the solidly constructed view of the mirror. However, not only does the picture provide a partial perspective; it also immobilises reality in an unnatural way, granting "stillness and immortality" (Woolf 1930: 98). The mirror sharply divides the setting of the story into two markedly differentiated spaces: the static, restricted space within its frame (the apparently fixed facts concerning Isabella's life) on the one hand, and the animated, open space of the hall and the garden beyond (the realm of the imagination) on the other. While everything outside the disciplined confinement of the frame is swarming with movement, light and colour like an Impressionist canvas, the mirror traps reality and deprives it of life. The ability of photography to cut out a segment of time and space, freezing them both intensely and unnaturally, is constantly suggested. Despite its fixity, however, the photographic image eventually allows readers to grasp an undisclosed truth, "invested with a new reality and significance" (*ibid.*). Since, in this short story, epistemological questions are closely related to the act of perception, the enigmatic figure of the protagonist remains largely unknown until the photographic/mirror image includes and captures her. After a long speculation about Isabella's presumably fascinating life, her authentic nature is disclosed in a final epiphanic moment when, coming back from the garden, her image is reflected in the mirror and the invisible camera placed on the sofa freezes her:

> One must imagine – suddenly here was she in the looking glass. It made one start. She was so far off at first that one could not see her clearly. […] all the time she became larger and larger in the looking glass, more and more completely the person into whose mind one had been trying to penetrate. (*ibid.*)

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

The inward movement of the protagonist – from the garden into the drawing room, then inside the mirror's frame – parallels the narrator's and the reader's act of penetrating her innermost being; it corresponds to an epistemological act of apprehension of reality leading to the sudden disclosure of a hidden meaning. In the end, one final snapshot arrests Isabella's figure in a mortal trance, erodes her deceiving appearance and reveals the inner void of her true self:

> At last there she was, in the hall. She stopped dead. She stood by the table. She stood perfectly still. At once the looking glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth. […] Here was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in the pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. (*ibid.*)

At the close of the story, Virginia Woolf lets readers understand that the picture, with its greater heaviness and solidity, has more authenticity and significance than the world outside its frame. Thus she reverses the initial opposition between the stiff artificiality of the photographic/mirror image and the sheer vitality of the external world by attributing incontrovertible reality and momentousness to the reflection itself.

Nevertheless, this act of psychological penetration, or unveiling of the truth behind "the mask-like indifference" (*ibid.*) of Isabella's face, is not devoid of ethical concerns. Although "it was her profounder state of being that one wanted to catch and turn to words" (*ibid.*), the unnamed narrator subtly casts doubt on the righteousness of such a forceful, outrageous attempt to disclose one's authentic personality:

> Isabella did not wish to be known – but she should no longer escape. It was absurd, it was monstrous. If she concealed so much and knew so much one must prise her open with the first tool that came to hand – the imagination. […] To talk of "prising her open" as if she were an oyster, to use any but the finest and subtlest and most pliable tools upon her was impious and absurd. (*ibid.*)

Moreover, if, on the one hand, Woolf alludes to the easy, apparently unproblematic attractiveness of appearances – Isabella's comfortable life, expensive possessions, "exquisite" (*ibid.*) clothes and "fashionable" (*ibid.*) shoes – over blunt reality, on the other hand she seems to level her criticism at *Harper's Bazaar*'s outlook and cultivation of superficial cultural sophistication. As Wood persuasively remarks, "when read within *Harper's Bazaar*, 'In the Looking Glass' also delivers an oblique critique of the leisured, fashionable lifestyle idealized by this magazine and epitomized by Isabella, who is 'rich', 'distinguished', well-travelled, a collector of distinctive and costly furnishings" (2020: 131), an alluring picture which ultimately proves to be a fake.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

3.2. "The Shooting Party" (March 1938)

No less complex or ambivalent is Woolf's portrayal of aggressive male aristocracy in "The Shooting Party", printed in the March 1938 issue of British *Harper's Bazaar*. The sinister atmosphere of this story of violence and decay with its brutal finale is also suggested by the Gothic font chosen for the title, while the author's name is in elegant italics, in line with the advertisement for "Rosebank Fabrics" promoting "artistry in weave, form and colour ... to those who appreciate fine furnishings" (*Harper's Bazaar*, March 1938: 100), appearing on the second page. Julia Briggs interprets "The Shooting Party" in the context of the short fiction Woolf wrote after *The Waves*, which mainly focused – as if to compensate for the almost exclusive attention she had previously paid to her characters' interiority – on "the fabric of the material and social world" as well as on her caricature vein "satirizing aspects of the British establishment – in particular, its militarism, capitalism, patriarchy, and decaying aristocracy" (2004: 179), which she would criticise even more harshly in *Three Guineas* (1938). In this story, based on gender and class oppositions, Woolf subtly ridicules the lifestyle of Edwardian nobility, with its declining extravagance represented by lavish shooting parties. Her attitude, therefore, seems to be in contrast, once again, with *Harper's Bazaar*'s outlook, its appetite for gossip and high society news at glamorous sporting events, to which she obliquely alludes when describing the enigmatic "M. M." in the railway carriage as dressed in the way "women dressed years ago in pictures in fashion plates of sporting newspapers" (Woolf 1938b: 72). In particular, the author connects the moral decay of the British upper classes, whose ardour for imperial conquest mirrors the eagerness for blood sports, with what she perceived as the vile and essentially masculine practice of hunting. "The Shooting Party", therefore, clearly engages with social, moral and ethical issues, and represents the massive shooting of pheasants, with their "soft warm bodies, [...] limp claws and still lustrous eyes" (*ibid.*: 100), as "an example of wanton brutality, an indulgence in mass destruction that ultimately recoils upon those who practice it" (Briggs 2004: 185), namely the last members – a squire and his two elderly sisters – of the ancient Rashleigh family, portrayed in their decaying stately home.

The Rashleigh women are confined to the house and represented as victims of their brother's viciousness, especially in the final climatic moment when the squire accidentally knocks old Miss Rashleigh into the fireplace, causing her death: "she fell against the mantelpiece. Her stick, striking wildly, struck the shield above the fireplace. She fell with a thud upon the ashes. The shield of the Rashleighs crashed from the wall. Under the mermaid, under the spears, she lay buried" (Woolf 1938b: 102). On the one hand, as helpless victims, the two sisters are metaphorically described as clawed and feathered, and thus likened to the doomed pheasants: "their bodies were warm and languid underneath their feathers as they drank" (*ibid.*); "their hands gripped their hands like the claws of dead birds gripping nothing" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the old women participate in their brother's perpetration of violence when they cruelly feed on the game, untroubled by the hunt raging outside and chuckling

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

at the tragic events that befell their family: "Miss Antonia drew the carving knife across the pheasant's breast firmly. […] She took a mouthful of pheasant. […] She drew her knife down the other side of the breast" (*ibid.*: 100). Briggs aptly remarks that the Rashleighs' luxurious lifestyle "dramatizes the danger of separate spheres that Woolf would expose in *Three Guineas*: the men are preoccupied with war, womanizing, or hunting and shooting, while their womenfolk sit by the fire and sew, complacently, even complicitly, gloating over their brother's sexual exploits" (2004: 185). In particular, their degeneracy is symbolised by "the emblems on the shield – grapes, mermaids, spears", which "indicate the family weaknesses for drinking, womanizing, and war making" (*ibid.*).

Though "The Shooting Party" relies much more on facts and a subtle orchestration of plot than on interior monologue, the narrative technique employed in this tripartite story, with the first and third sections providing a frame to the central one, is by no means conventional or linear. Woolf's short fiction, therefore, is sold to readers of *Harper's Bazaar* as a high-quality, sophisticated piece of modernist writing which deviates from mainstream examples of the genre commonly published in commercial women's magazines. It is particularly interesting that the story both begins and concludes with the typical Woolfian figure of an unnamed woman sitting in a railway carriage, "telling over the story now, lying back in her corner" (Woolf 1938b: 72), which is obviously the story of the Rashleigh family occupying the central part. This enigmatic female figure provides a link throughout the three sections: the clues introduced at first – the initials on her suitcase, the long scar on her jaw and her brace of pheasants – subsequently allow readers to identify the woman as Milly Masters, the Rashleighs' housekeeper and squire's mistress. Moreover, the definitive fall of the house of Rashleigh is subtly foretold by both Miss Rashleigh's words also prefiguring her own tragic death – "'Falling,' old Miss Rashleigh chuckled. 'Falling.'" (*ibid.*: 102) – and the final sentence of the central section: "the wind lashed the panes of the glass; shots volleyed in the Park and a tree fell. And then King Edward in the silver frame slid, toppled and fell too" (*ibid.*). Just as "In the Looking Glass" foregrounds a series of dichotomies – imagination and reality, inner and outer, truth and appearance – central to both the story itself and Woolf's aesthetic vision, "The Shooting Party" calls attention to gender and class oppositions which represented a matter of growing concern to her during the 1930s.

3.3. "The Duchess and the Jeweler" (April 1938)

The idea of a pervasive moral decay hidden behind the glamorous lifestyle of the affluent and leisured upper classes connects "The Shooting Party" to "The Duchess and the Jeweler", which appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* just one month later (April 1938). In the former, Miss Antonia's exclamation "'Rotten at the heart!'" (*ibid.*), referred to her family and its many losses on the battle or the hunting field, resonates in the latter with the fakeness of the pearls as symbols of moral corruption, "rotten at the centre – rotten at the core!" (Woolf 1938a: 118), sold to Oliver Bacon by the Duchess of Lambourne. Both these characters

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

represent caricatures of the type Woolf had planned to compose since the early 1930s. Moreover, her impulse to social satire is even more disturbing in "The Duchess and the Jeweler", considering its underlying racism and explicit antisemitism, which were controversial from the beginning[9]. As is well known, this story is told from the perspective of a repulsive social climber, a Jewish jeweller ironically named Oliver Bacon, who is duped by an unscrupulous noblewoman into purchasing fake pearls owing to illusions of social ascension achieved through consumption. While Dean Baldwin somehow dismisses "The Duchess and the Jeweler", maintaining that Woolf conformed to the conventions and appeals of "slick magazine fiction" by using "flat characters" aimed at mockery, and employing only "occasional stylistic flashes that raise the story above the merely commercial level" (1989: 62), more recent and perceptive readings have highlighted instead that "Woolf's depiction of a transgressive cross-class and ethnic encounter in 'The Duchess and the Jeweller' acknowledges the commercial context of *Harper's Bazaar* and, simultaneously, indicts readers' practices of consumption" (Henderson 2008: 1).

The title page of this story is adorned with an illustration of a loupe and pearls scattered across the text, which seems particularly apt to introduce readers to its content, and to recall the numerous advertisements for "Ciro pearls" or other fine jewellery often scattered across the pages of a magazine encouraging fashionable behaviour in all domains. This is also demonstrated by the ads for "Bird Iles furnishing decoration", "Hennessy brandy", Herbert Johnson's "supremely smart and distinctive hats for ladies of discriminating tastes" (*Harper's Bazaar*, April 1938: 116) and "first class cruises by the Viceroy of India" (*ibid.*: 118) appearing on the following pages beside Woolf's text, which is clearly "embedded within a larger framework of consumption" (Henderson 2008: 4). More generally, the illustration is also instrumental in conveying an ideal of elegance and sophistication coveted by *Harper's Bazaar*'s aspirational readers, who desired to achieve refinement in fashion as well as literature and the arts. However, while, on the one hand, the positioning of "The Duchess and the Jeweler" within this magazine context seems to imply that its audience can (at least aspire to) imitate Bacon's social and material ascension by means of that "education in sophistication" offered by the magazine itself, on the other hand, by addressing an implicit criticism to the

[9] Both "The Shooting Party" and "The Duchess and the Jeweler", for which Woolf received a total of $960, appeared simultaneously in the American and British editions of *Harper's Bazaar*. Although she recorded with great enthusiasm "a moment of the old rapture [...] over copying The Duchess & the Jeweller for Chambrun, NY. [...] there was the old excitement, even in that little extravagant flash" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1984: 107), her New York literary agent Jacques Chambrun initially approved the synopsis of "The Duchess and the Jeweler" he received in 1937, but later rejected it "on grounds that it was 'a psychological study of a Jew' and thus, because of widespread racial prejudice in America, unacceptable to his (unnamed) client" (*ibid.*, n. 6). Several critics have focused on the troubled publication history of this short fiction and on the extensive revisions Woolf had to make, removing all explicit references to Jewishness, in order to comply with the publishing market. On this point, see Briggs 2004, Lojo Rodríguez 2001-2, Trubowitz 2008 and Schröder 2003, who nonetheless remarks that "much as the narrative tries to write out the Jew, it can't avoid foregrounding the terms of Jewishness" (*ibid.*: 306). When quoting Woolf's story throughout this essay, I retain the spelling "Jeweler" of the original *Harper's Bazaar* publication, which was changed into "Jeweller" when the text was subsequently reprinted in *A Haunted House*.

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fashionale materialism modeled in *Harper's Bazaar* through her story's plot, Woolf also leads readers to acknowledge that "commodities do not represent character or morality, and that consumers are ultimately corrupted by their misplaced belief in surface value" (*ibid.*: 1). In doing so, the author "encourages the consumers of *Harper's Bazaar* to question their own practices of self-fashioning and consumption mirrored in a detested figure, and, implicitly, the impulse to rely on caricatures that falsely praise the aristocracy and vilify the Jewish 'other'" (*ibid.*: 3).

The opening of the story describes in quite conventional terms the protagonist's social (from street urchin to successful merchant) and geographical (from the Jewish ghetto in the East End to a shop in Bond Street) climbing. All the main markers of Oliver Bacon's acquired wealth, ease and social distinction are displayed: his exquisitely furnished flat "overlooking the Green Park" (Woolf 1938a: 40) and expensive possessions, his leisured morning routine and glamorous lifestyle, but most of all his jewels, "all safe, shining, cool, yet burning, eternally, with their own compressed light" (*ibid.*: 116). Moreover, his "perfect trousers", "boots" and "spats", "all shapely, shining; cut from the best cloth by the best scissors in Savile Row" (*ibid.*: 40), signal his affluence as a consumer who can afford to buy the highest quality clothing from the most exclusive tailoring district in London, which fashion-conscious readers of *Harper's Bazaar* would most probably recognise. As with Isabella Tyson, however, appearances soon turn out to be deceptive, and the atmosphere of spectacle of Bacon's life is revealed to be just a pretension adopted to mask his repressed Jewish identity: "but he dismantled himself often and became again a little boy in a dark alley" (*ibid.*), recalling his childhood spent in a lower-class Jewish neighbourhood "selling stolen dogs to fashionable women in Whitechapel" (*ibid.*). Such reminiscences align Bacon with the world of capitalism and consumption, and alter readers' perception of the character. In this story, not only does Woolf engage with ethical and moral issues, but she also ultimately compels her audience to identify with the socially-oppressed Jew, while, as critics have variously suggested, "the Duchess is the story's real criminal" (Schröder 2003: 310). The Jew's stereotypically repelling body is described in animal terms somehow anticipating the animal world of "Lappin and Lapinova", which appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* the following year (though drafted much earlier). Despite having succeeded in fashioning himself into "the richest jeweler in England" (Woolf 1938a: 41) and continuing his attempts to ascend into the upper classes, Bacon cannot use his expensive possessions to conceal the clearly recognisable markers of Jewish identity which represent an obstacle to his assimilation into the aristocracy. In what Kathryn Simpson has interestingly labelled "Woolf's anti-Semitic bestiary" (2012: 187), the jeweller's nose is "long and flexible, like an elephant's trunk" (Woolf 1938a: 41) and quivers with greed, snuffing "in the rich earth of Mayfair" like that of "a giant hog in a pasture rich with truffles" (*ibid.*). Moreover, Bacon's chuckling is "a sound like a horse neighing" (*ibid.*: 116), while his swinging down the streets of Piccadilly is compared to that of a camel: "he swayed slightly as he walked, as the camel at the zoo sways from side to side" (*ibid.*: 41).

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It is equally noteworthy, however, that the overdressed, luxurious, decadent Duchess of Lambourne, the "daughter of a hundred Earls" (*ibid.*: 116), is portrayed in no less derisive terms: "she was very large, very fat, tightly girt in pink taffeta, and past her prime" (*ibid.*: 118). Her magnitude as a signifier for aristocratic lavishness amplifies Woolf's satire of the upper classes, common to her *Harper's Bazaar* stories: "she loomed up, filling the door, filling the room with the aroma, the prestige, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the Dukes and Duchesses swollen in one wave" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, her comparison to "a peacock with many feathers" (*ibid.*) extends the animal metaphors employed in the text. At the close of the story, the plot "enacts a *miscegenation* that is commercial, political, and sexual" (Schröder 2003: 308). As soon as the duchess and the jeweller shake hands to seal their commercial transaction, the underlying connection between them, charged with clearly sexual overtones, is definitively established:

> And as their hands touched the link was forged between them once more. They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other; each felt this and knew this every time they touched hands thus in the little back room [...]. (Woolf 1938a: 118)

In the end, Woolf seems to implicitly refer to the fact that *Harper's Bazaar*'s strategy of selling its aspirational readers the illusion of upward intellectual mobility by including "high" contents (such as quality fiction) alongside "low" commodities may reveal as delusive as Bacon's strive to climb the social ladder and gain cultural recognition as well as monetary capital. Despite her serious concerns regarding the commercialisation of literature, however, Woolf could not resist the lure of remunerative publishing venues allowing her to consolidate her reputation on the literary marketplace.

3.4. "Lappin and Lapinova" (April 1939)

"It is undoubtedly a great freshener to have my story taken by Harper's", Woolf wrote about "Lappin and Lapinova" in a diary entry dated 18 January 1939, "I heard this morning. A beautiful story, enchanted to have it. 600 dollars made then. But the encouragement, I must note, [...] is a warmer, a reviver" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1984: 200). Her words record both her delight at the financial reward of this commission, published in the April 1939 issue of British *Harper's Bazaar*, and the incentive she received from its warm reception. "Lappin and Lapinova", not unlike "In the Looking Glass", focuses on a sharp contrast between facts and the imagination, or the real and a fantasy world jointly constructed by Ernest Thorburn and his wife Rosalind (whose name evokes the metatheatrical fiction set up by Shakespeare's Rosalind in the forest of Arden) during their honeymoon. This romantic illusion "made them feel, more even than most young married couples, in league together against the rest of the world" (Woolf 1939: 37), over which they hold control by transforming all of its disagreeable aspects into fiction.

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Such a rich metaphorical scenario, where Ernest has an alternative identity as a king rabbit named Lappin and Rosalind is a queen hare called Lapinova, persists as a shared "private world, inhabited, save for the one white hare, entirely by rabbits" (*ibid.*) for some time after their wedding, until fantasies definitively collapse. Unlike Virginia and Leonard Woolf's common use of animal nicknames as terms of endearment, which lasted throughout their marriage, in the fiction Rosalind becomes more and more emotionally dependent on her husband's and her own alter ego, while Ernest gradually loses interest in sustaining the sham. After attributing to Ernest a fictional identity and name – "'Lappin, Lappin, King Lappin,' she repeated. It seemed to suit him exactly; he was not Ernest, he was King Lappin. Why? She did not know" (*ibid.*: 36-37) – Rosalind starts to extend the fantasy and "let her fancy play with the story of the Lappin tribe. [...] they became very real, very vivid, very amusing" (*ibid.*: 37). In the meantime, Ernest's figure acquires increasingly threatening connotations: he is described as "above all [...] a great hunter" (*ibid.*), who chases and traps a white female hare – Rosalind's fictional identity – in a sexually aggressive act alluding to women's subjugation in marriage:

> "A woman hare," he added. "A white hare!" Rosalind exclaimed, as if she had been expecting this. "Rather a small hare; silver grey; with big bright eyes?" "Yes," said Ernest, looking at her as she had looked at him, "a smallish animal; with eyes popping out of her head, and two little front paws dangling." [...] "Ah, Lapinova," Rosalind murmured. "Is that what she's called," said Ernest, "the real Rosalind?" [...] "Yes; that's what she's called," said Rosalind: "Lapinova." (*ibid.*)

At the story's climax and close, Rosalind feels her fantasy world crumble beneath her feet and even experiences a metaphorical death at the hands of her husband, who kills her by shattering her illusions:

> Then there was the crack of a gun ... She started as if she had been shot. It was only Ernest turning his key in the door. She waited, trembling. […] "It's Lapinova..." she faltered, glancing wildly at him out of her great startled eyes. "She's gone, Ernest. I've lost her!" […] "Oh, that's what's up, is it?" he said, smiling rather grimly at his wife. For ten seconds he stood there, silent; and she waited, feeling hands tightening at the back of her neck. "Yes," he said at length. "Poor Lapinova..." He straightened his tie at the looking-glass. "Caught in a trap," he said. "Killed," and sat down and read the newspaper. So that was the end of that marriage. (*ibid.*: 98)

In this story, therefore, Woolf interrogates the validity of fiction, and even more subtly addresses ethical issues she also dealt with pervasively throughout her career, such as the unequal relationship between the sexes and between the human and the non-human world. Michelle Levy posits that "'Lappin and Lapinova' examines the effect of marriage on women, but it does so by condemning all forms of hunting and entrapment, whether perpetrated by men on women or by human beings on animals" (2004: 150). In line with this view, Simpson reminds us that "Woolf's fictional menagerie has been variously considered as a means of challenging social norms and as revealing repressed

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desires and creating a space for unruly behavior" (2011: 151). In particular, she convincingly argues that the animal imagery employed in "Lappin and Lapinova" "is double-edged and all references to rabbits and hares are violent and destructive – they are animals to be shot, sold, eaten and used. Rabbits are commodities, comestibles and in both their fantasy and real worlds Ernest is a metaphorical hunter" (*ibid.*: 154). While the threat of violence and destructiveness – represented by the frequent mentions of poaching, hunting and shooting – exposes the disturbing undercurrent hidden beneath romanticism and comedy, thus connecting "Lappin and Lapinova" to the other *Harper's Bazaar* stories, the commodification of the animal world is definitely in accordance with the display of lavish gifts at the Thorburns' golden-wedding anniversary party – "candlesticks; cigar boxes; chains; each stamped with the goldsmith's proof that it was solid gold, hall-marked, authentic" (Woolf 1939: 96) – all symbolising their greed for wealth and power, as well as with the larger framework of consumption within which the story was originally embedded. In the commercial context of magazine publication, Woolf's quality fiction – embellished by a drawing of hearts and crowns on leaves encasing the first and last capitalised letters of the title – is showcased as a commodity among others, particularly "Peggy Sage's new polishes" (*Harper's Bazaar*, April 1939: 96) or "Barri Ltd. clothes for maternity" (*ibid.*: 98), advertised in two entire columns beside the story's text.

Both human and non-human hierarchies and the commodification of high art certainly represent ethical issues which were among Woolf's most pressing concerns throughout the 1930s, especially considering the commercial success – received with both delight and suspicion – that she achieved also thanks to her fictional biography *Flush* (1933), a canine divertissement in which she exposed the way Western anthropocentrism underpins the phallocentrism of the literary canon, and changed the human perspective on non-human animals from hierarchical to relational. In "Lappin and Lapinova" – a story Woolf revised under the threat of a new conflict approaching and in the aftermath of the publication of *Three Guineas* (1938), where she had explored the close connection between capitalism, the violence of totalitarianisms and the patriarchal tyranny to women in the private sphere – gender and species relations are represented in much grimmer tones. Even so, Woolf's perceived ability to conceal such unsettling traits beneath the appearance of a lighthearted fantasy definitely worked to confirm her stature as a writer of unparalleled brilliance and ascendancy.

4. Conclusion

As this essay has tried to show, Woolf's *Harper's Bazaar* stories deal with social, moral and ethical issues which speak to the concerns of the last decade of her career, and ultimately refer to the author's ambivalent relationship with the literary marketplace as well as her growing anxieties about the commercialisation of high art. By publicising Woolf's works among other commodities with the aim of attracting and cultivating an aspirational

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15462

readership, *Harper's Bazaar* contributed to her reputation and, in turn, benefited from the intellectual prestige accorded to her figure. Exerting a considerable influence over what was regarded as fashionable, *Harper's Bazaar* and other women's periodicals of the interwar period were definitely instrumental in moulding and marketing Woolf's iconic status, and worked to consolidate and disseminate her public profile as a modernist of serious imprint. Woolf's engagement with commercial magazines, far from being unethical or demeaninig her stature as Logan Pearsall Smith would have it, ultimately fashioned her into a true modernist icon.

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