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INVESTING IN “MODERNISM”: SMART MAGAZINES, PARODY,
AND MIDDLEBROW PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

Daniel Tracy

Throughout the summer of its first year, 1925, *The New Yorker* poked fun at experimental modernism in ten articles surveying fabricated avant-garde movements. Corey Ford's series carried subtitles emphasizing an ongoing study of "creative art in New York" or, mocking experimental modernists' perceived pride in their outcast status, "fugitive art." Ranging from scribbling on public telephone walls to drawings found in public library books and broken windows, the reports parodied the magazine's own self-advertised function as a transmitter of up-to-date high culture, and played off a common dismissal of aesthetic experiment as fraud effected by people without any real talent. The first two entries, "Blotters" and "Probing Public Murals," an investigation into scribbles on the sides of telephone booths, emphasized automatic writing and drawing.¹ In the latter, an "artist" named "Mr. Swackhamer" explains that while waiting for a number, "I just happened to have a pencil in my hand, and the next thing I knew, there I was starting to draw on the wall. It just sort of come, you might say. I had no idea what it was going to be when I started, except I know I asked for Longacre 3430 and they give me 3450 and I said no, operator, 30, not 50, and there I had it written out before I realized it, 3430, with a sort of circle around it and designs like rosebuds." After further describing his art he suggests, "you might call it inspiration." By appropriating the idea of unconsciously directed writing as a source of aesthetic genius, Ford suggests a possible sham in modernist rhetoric and blames it on the obsession with finding the next new thing in art.

Such parodies were by no means uncommon or limited to any particular publishing venue;² however, a satirical parody of modernist pretensions might seem strange for a magazine that, from its earliest issues, championed modernist experimentation, and nowhere more so than in the visual arts. Covering an “international exhibition of modern art” at the Brooklyn Museum, a typical art review glowed with the “wish there was a law” forcing people to see it themselves and offered the complaint: “In a week in which we waded through the latest Academy show we were forced to cross the river to see that this was the year 1926.”³ More than suggesting boredom with the “traditional” art of the Academy (an institution that represented resistance to modernism both in *The New Yorker* as well as *Vanity Fair*), the critic’s reference to leaving Manhattan alluded to a motif familiar to any regular reader: the complaint that New York had no Museum of Modern Art (complaints that continued until they got one, in 1929). And although the magazine would sometimes use the term “modern” to mean contemporary, here and at other moments it referred exclusively to the experimental, what it would at times term “modernism.” Suggesting the Brooklyn exhibit as an equal to the infamous Armory show of 1913, *The New Yorker* critic praised its experimentation even while offering a tongue-in-cheek warning: “We can say that some of the canvases are not square, that some seem to have a fourth dimension. None of the sculpture is what you have seen in gardens or standing on golden oak stands in the bay window.” This review asks its imagined reader to imagine *yet another* reader for whom even the relatively bland experiment of non-square canvases would shock, and recommends the show especially to the “coward” who needs to face up to his or her aesthetic fears. The reader, hardly the coward, gets the distinction of needing modernism’s shock of the new the least but desiring it the most. In his work on modernist parodies, Leonard Diepeveen treats them as signals of resistance, and in doing so ratifies Fredric Jameson’s description of them as a normative backlash.⁴ Yet, specific contexts, like *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*, reconfigured the evaluative work performed by such parodies. These magazines presumed the recurrence of a particular audience that would read and appreciate, alongside parodies, endorsements of modernism.

I argue that these magazines’ mixed message over aesthetic modernism and similar ambivalence toward other kinds of writing or art signals the solution to a dilemma facing the professionals producing middlebrow culture and their imagined readers in the first decades of the twentieth century. “Middlebrow culture,” here, includes the increasing number of

apparatuses for learning "high culture"—the literary and other artistic productions designated as legitimate, as well as the reading strategies needed to understand them—that appeared in the United States from the 1890s forward. New magazines promised national audiences outside the upper middle class that they too could read the best literature; book clubs kept gads of subscribers stocked in the best new quality reads; and writers started making money by summing up everything you needed to know, to be in the know, about history and art. This new middlebrow culture was not synonymous with mass culture but used the productive capacities of mass culture to capitalize on the new and growing obsession with cultural legitimacy. Richard Ohmann has offered a useful, multi-part definition of "mass culture" that I follow here: "voluntary experiences, produced by a relatively small number of specialists, for millions across the nation to share, in similar or identical form, either simultaneously or nearly so; with dependable frequency; mass culture shapes habitual audiences, around common needs or interests, and it is made for profit."⁵ Middlebrow culture, then, names a set of processes within mass culture directed toward a particular "common interest": identifying and teaching high culture. Middlebrow processes mediate between readers imagined to desire the pleasures of high culture and the varieties of writers and writing competing for recognition as high or "literary." Moreover, mass culture makes these processes possible because it widens the audience for high cultural productions previously limited by region and class.⁶

Yet middlebrow producers immediately faced the problem that "high culture" evolves in a competitive literary field defined by its contours—a contest in which middlebrow culture would now compete as well. Thus new mass magazines sometimes adopted writers of realist fiction sanctified by nineteenth-century monthlies, but they might champion other kinds of writing as well. As June Howard has described, middlebrow mass magazines were often selling different, sometimes antagonistic genres at the same time that they reassured readers that "high culture" was a stable, acquirable category.⁷ Middlebrow productions thus include a hodge-podge of literary ideals, although different locations of middlebrow production might develop their own specific range of tastes. Moreover, this negotiation of competing aesthetics is itself a more complicated form of a basic paradox at the heart of middlebrow culture: that, in Joan Shelley Rubin's terms, "people in search of self-reliance could attain it only by becoming dependent on a superior authority outside themselves."⁸ Likewise,

Janice Radway notes the anxiety, amongst middlebrow professionals at the Book-of-the-Month Club, over the conflict between the promise that high culture could be democratically accessible constantly and the necessity of creating “standards” to determine what culture was disseminated through middlebrow institutions.⁹

The rise of experimentation, what these middlebrow producers would eventually term “modernism,” exacerbated this dilemma due to its unusually high deviations from aesthetic norms. Amongst magazines that shared the middlebrow project of teaching “Culture,” *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* engaged and at times embraced modernism most enthusiastically: *Vanity Fair* earliest from its first issues in 1913, *The New Yorker* beginning in 1925, when modernism, if still not fully embraced, had a more established presence in the cultural imagination. My consideration of these magazines as middlebrow institutions is not unprecedented: Nina Miller, for example, discusses *Vanity Fair* and “smart culture” as middlebrow institutions of modernism. Yet for Miller, “middlebrow” comes to signify little *except* “popular modernism”; more extremely, for Mark McGurl, the entirety of mass magazine culture (including the far more genteel, and more conventionally “middlebrow,” *Harper’s Bazaar*) simply extends what he considered a modernist ethos of literary elitism.¹⁰ My understanding of the “middlebrow” hews closer to Rubin and Radway; it signifies a pedagogical function within mass culture rather than acting as a synonym for popular or (contra McGurl) another way of saying “modernism” (partly because these institutions had their own definition of modernism) or “realism.”¹¹ Like Radway’s book club editors, these magazines tried to map inhabitable, discrete genres; to mitigate the differences between those genres; and to mediate their authoritative role by taking up the tone of a friend.¹² Yet their primary method for establishing this friendliness, a cutting sense of humor, hinted that by reading these magazines readers might always already belong to the upper crust. If most middlebrow institutions tried to subsume their role in creating standards under a veneer of democratization, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* more transparently democratized the feeling of identifying with superior standards. They extend the aesthetic range and the general tenor of middlebrow pedagogy beyond that described by Howard, Rubin, and Radway. At the same time, this localized resolution of typical middlebrow professional anxieties produced a longer impression on the history of reading modernism among academic critics as well as, to use a middlebrow term, “general readers.”

As Diepeveen argues, mass cultural discourses about modernism, especially parodies, reveal a public with a specific idea of what constitutes aesthetic modernism: experimental difficulty across artistic media that produced a "recurring *relationship* . . . between modernist works and their audiences."¹³ However, when read within their institutional contexts, many of these parodies lose their critical edge, becoming part of the general pedagogy of the magazines. Modernism becomes just one more variety, or genre, to be apprehended for its specific pleasures by magazine readers. As in my argument here, Diepeveen is interested in what parody implies for professionalism in the arts; however, he considers parody an indicator of modernism's professionalization, and of the parodist's reaction against such specialization.¹⁴ While I would not deny that modernist difficulty bears on the question of how writers participated in a rapidly expanding professional culture, here I emphasize the broader diversity of ways writers professionalized their work. Indeed, I call attention to the broader professionalization of parody itself: Corey Ford, Dorothy Parker, James Thurber, and others made careers by specializing in the ability to typify and satirize any kind of writing. Thus parodies of modernism in the magazines I analyze appear alongside parodies of realism and mass cultural genres—not always because those genres are being rejected outright but because writers are paid to perfect a specific form of blasé appropriation and critique. Something more complex than a reaction against modernism happens in these particular middlebrow magazines precisely because their makers jockey for professional authority that may differ from the modernist approach but hardly rejects professionalism in art *in toto*. Parody itself became a genre that signaled professionalized play by magazine writers: imitation, sometimes critical, provided the grounds for pleasure.

Likewise, while my argument shares with Michael Murphy a sense that parodies within "smart magazines" assist their pedagogical purpose by helping to identify "stereotypical *forms* of modernism" (83, his emphasis) for their audience, I depart from his reduction of their aesthetic pedagogy to "mediat[ing] the vagaries of high-modernist aesthetics to a popular audience" (63).¹⁵ Parodies within these magazines extended far beyond modernism and did similar work with realism and its subgenres as well as mass cultural genres, placing a limit on Murphy's claim that *Vanity Fair* "simply *became* modernism for many of its readers."¹⁶ Instead, it promised its readers familiarity with a breadth of genres that might qualify as high culture. To prioritize the magazine's attention to modernism as the basis

for what Murphy calls its “slickness” masks the professional interests and anxieties of the magazine’s producers that kept those editors and writers from that priority. The irony directed against experimentation in order to typify it was not an exclusively modernist phenomenon so much as an attempt to display a critical perspective for their readers that would validate writers’ decisions about what to represent as high culture. The payoff from the sale of multiple genres was an assumed critical attitude that could prefer and dismiss features from any variety of high culture. In the “smart magazines,” the subset of middlebrow culture I study here, professional authority accrues to expert classification and performances of reasonable compromise, to a mastery that can be proven through playful imitation.¹⁷

These magazines’ understanding of their cultural role can be summed up in a line from *Vanity Fair*’s statement of purpose in its opening issue: “our proclamation shall be a worthy forecast as well as an accurate reflection of the best that is favored by men and women of taste.”¹⁸ The magazine promises to do two things at once: forecast and reflect, make taste and mediate it. This contradiction unfolds in spatial and temporal terms. In fashion, the magazines might reflect current trends of Paris that forecast future American style. In literature, the reflection of today’s insider artistic debates could make tomorrow’s popular trend. Yet moreover, reflection is always inflection; conveying modernism or realism provides the opportunity to disseminate a mode of evaluating art that the magazines’ editors use to manage the problems inherent in trying to teach a contested “legitimate culture.” The smart magazines adopt competing aesthetic standards and adapt them to their own standard of sophistication: their professional standing comes from a cultivated image of rational eclecticism.

In what follows, I begin by discussing early mission statements by *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* in order to lay out what made them “smart magazines.” From there, I analyze primarily two kinds of writing that made up the bulk of the magazines: pedagogical or critical articles (including art and book reviews), and parodies. These articles and parodies often overlapped or blurred into one another: one *Vanity Fair* book reviewer I discuss wrote all his reviews in parody form; other critical arguments had moments of parody or witty aphorisms; and the parodies themselves participated in critique, even if I question the extent to which they can be read as wholly critical.¹⁹ In fact, positive and negative appraisals are not always uniform: these parodies often convey nuanced and conflicting opinions

about their objects. If, as Karen Leick argues, early twentieth-century mass culture included more frequent and specific references to experimental modernism than critics often assume, the stakes faced by different producers of middlebrow culture required specific methods for transmitting knowledge in their distinct print contexts. Parody, as much as straightforward critical discussions, moulds the smart magazines' pedagogical role and their editors and writers' anxiety over it. Indeed, parody transforms their anxiety over legitimate form into the confidence of sophistication, the critical ease of the smart professional. Parody becomes a professional skill, allowing tongue-in-cheek evaluations of its targets even while edging into sheer free play that models a critical confidence and aesthetic euphoria that can be shared by readers.

THAT WHICH MAKES THE SMART WORLD SMART

Vanity Fair appeared half a year after the event that most dramatically brought experimental art to widespread U.S. attention: the Armory Show. Appearing first as *Dress and Vanity Fair* in September 1913, its title changed four months later, just before Frank Crowninshield—a patron of modernist art, publicist of the Armory Show, and assistant editor at *Munsey's*—took over as editor in March 1914. In 1925, Harold Ross would fashion *The New Yorker* (although a weekly rather than a monthly) after *Vanity Fair* and the more persistently humorous smart magazine *Life*. These two magazines were not simply the same: *Vanity Fair* offered more nuanced discussions of art and literature in a variety of essays, often from outside contributors, beyond its review sections; *The New Yorker*, reflecting its debt to *Life*, was more persistently tongue-in-cheek from cover to cover. While original literary writing outside of parodic sketches or "light verse" was relatively infrequent in both, *Vanity Fair* did (re)print a fair amount of modernist and other poetry (rarely fiction), lending some financial support to modernist writers. Until Louis Bogan took over poetry at *The New Yorker*, the magazine published little but "light verse," with fiction limited mostly to short "casuals" that turned a humored eye to daily life (one exception is its publication, over three weeks in August and September 1930, of Robert Coates's "The Dada City"). Yet many of *The New Yorker's* regular features mimicked the older magazine: "Heroes of the Week," very close to *Vanity Fair's* "Hall of Fame," went so far as to include a warm appraisal of Frank Crowninshield, "Who, besides being the genius behind the practically perfect *Vanity*

Fair, has always found time to do good turns to the most out-of-the-way people.”²⁰ The magazine also offered homage to its precursor by mimicking *Vanity Fair*’s use of stories that turned out to advertise the magazine: a story would depict some social drama and end by noting that a smart character, or one needing to be, would read *Vanity Fair*. *The New Yorker* ended its own story with some reading “the latest number of *Vani*—No!—*THE NEW YORKER*.”²¹ In these ways *The New Yorker* signaled its appeal to the same audience even while it intensified and centralized the role of parody in its cultural pedagogy.

Considering their lasting reputation as elite cultural artifacts, it is surprising that the magazines were priced comparatively to other popular magazines and maintained sales that far outstripped little magazines. On its appearance in 1913, *Vanity Fair*, at 25¢/month and \$3/year, fell between the traditional upper–middle-class monthly *Harper’s* (35¢/month, \$4/year) and its more popular sister monthly *Harper’s Bazaar* (15¢/month, \$1.50/year—also the price of *McClure’s* in the early mid-teens); but by 1920, at 35¢/month and \$3.50/year, it was cheaper than *Bazaar*, which had inflated to 50¢/month and \$6/year. *The New Yorker*, at 15¢/week in 1925, cost a good deal more than the pervasive *Saturday Evening Post* (5¢/week), but the same as its popular fellow-weekly *Life*. Both *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* struggled initially but grew influential even though their largest circulations through 1930 capped at around 100,000, substantially less than the other mass magazines but a hundred-fold those of the little reviews of modernism. Advertising space in both was quickly at a premium due to the relative social power of their readerships: *Vanity Fair* had more lines of advertising than any other magazine in 1915, and *The New Yorker* boasted its status as the fourth-largest advertiser in its second anniversary issue.²²

These mid-level circulation numbers and high advertising revenues draw attention to the unlikely mass magazines produced by cultural sophistication: they limited their audience less by price than by an air of superiority—and even then, a kind of superiority made easy to identify with through humor. *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* both set out to be unapologetically smart; while trying to reach a broad audience they (happily) recognized the potential for some exclusivity. In their opening issue, *Vanity Fair* proclaimed that “We shall not lack authority in those things which go to make the smart world smart,” a claim it extended to cover the arts at home and abroad, fashion, and sports.²³ Later, after Crowninshield became editor, the front page jokingly defended itself against accusations

of being a "snob," "frivolous," "obsessed with culture," and "not reforming anything."²⁴ The magazine proclaimed its critics to be "barking on the right scent but up the wrong tree," indeed insisting "we *are* trying to appeal to Americans of some little sophistication" and going on to distance itself from connections to social reform movements associated with previous mass magazines.²⁵ Instead of reform, and "unalterably opposed to gloom, and to gravity, and to all solemn and owlish attitudes of the mind," the magazine would offer "a good measure of humor." While acknowledging the benefits of "so-called muckrakers" within this same editorial, *Vanity Fair* proclaimed (only half-jokingly): "From our dizzy editorial elevation there appears to be only one reform in American life the need for which has remained unnoticed. . . . It has solely to do with bad taste. . . . We feel that in attacking, in our peculiarly mild and winning way, the questionable taste which we see flaunted about us, we shall not at all exceed the limits of our editorial preserves." Here, the magazine establishes its consumer niche, the service it renders. Yet, the joking tone that declares its goals in relation to progressive-era yellow journalism already hints at a middlebrow anxiety about whether selling "high culture" was a matter of uplift or amusement. It thus foreshadows the doubled role parody will play in teaching genre, disguising that pedagogical role with a humor suggesting readers already share knowledge of legitimate culture.

While more frequently discussing political issues, *The New Yorker's* opening editorial suggests its mimicry of *Vanity Fair*.²⁶ Where *Vanity Fair* had promised "to avoid insincerity, puffery and vulgarity, and to tell the truth entertainingly," *The New Yorker* declared a "serious purpose" but promised to "not be too serious in executing it" and "to be gay, humorous, satirical but to be more than a jester."²⁷ As with *Vanity Fair's* rejection of muckraking, *The New Yorker* dismissed "scandal for the sake of scandal." Also like *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker* flaunted—most notably through its well-known editorial credo, "not edited for the old lady in Dubuque"—its sophistication and relatively limited (even while national) audience. In this respect, *The New Yorker* highlighted what was usually implicit in the earlier magazine: a connection between sophistication and the cosmopolitan. The editors emphasized this connection in numerous jokes about Dubuque in the "Talk of the Town" section of the magazine, and, in the summer of 1925, a gleeful week-by-week dissection of the Scopes evolution trial in Tennessee—complete with an evaluation of the reading material one could (or, more importantly, could not) find in Dayton, Tennessee.²⁸

What did, to borrow *Vanity Fair's* phrase, make the smart world smart? Smart magazines were not just smart in the sense of being fashionable, or even of reporting the fashionable. The category does not, for example, include mass magazines like *Harper's Bazar*, which, while sometimes marketing itself as another place to find smart culture (notably in ads in *The New Yorker* in the late twenties), did not share the same emphasis on wit and satire of the other magazines. Humor is central to smart culture, and this emphasis on satire means "smart" takes on a range of other meanings such as "clever" and an older one that brought the language of physical combat to refer to concise and pointed attacks of language. Finally, smart refers to being impudent, a description attuned to the specific attacks through irreverent parody in *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*. However, we should not see this element of iconoclasm in the smart magazines as simply an adoption of modernism. Certainly they directed their ire against some foes of modernity—as in the laughs at fundamentalism in the Scopes trial, and also in their critiques of traditional form—but to describe the smart magazines as *aesthetically* modernist would be to overlook the extensive debunking of modernism that also played out in their pages.

Both magazines vigorously promoted modernism in the medium of painting, often using art reviews to encourage sympathetic attitudes toward avant-garde techniques, or (more commonly in *The New Yorker*) even to chastise people for not buying more modernist art. In *Vanity Fair* this extended into a regular pedagogical program, with articles over the years that explained motives and techniques of movements like futurism and vorticism. Defending avant-gardes against their critics in the National Academy of Design, the magazines portrayed modernism as a bold and needed experiment that would shake up tired conventions in painting. In the inaugural issue of *Vanity Fair*, Guy Pene DuBois devoted a substantial section of his art review to a look back on the Armory Show, the exhibit of modernist work that had caused an outrage more than half a year earlier (and that *The New Yorker* sometimes wished it had been around to cover). The review glows, "Our art and artists and public alike needed badly just such an awakening bomb as this exhibition proved."²⁹ A few months later, in February 1914, he would comment upon the battle lines arising between the "Academy crowd" and the "insurrectionists": the former dowdy in its sense of "art [as] a sacred thing . . . must insist that it be referred to in the well modulated tones of reverence, and handled or dealt in, with the

greatest gentleness and care"; the latter "dare everything in art, are playful or rough, laugh at its fine old clothes, tear them to shreds, and, while art remains for a time naked and cold, proceed to make new ones. . . . Is it any wonder that the Academy crowd raises shocked hands and in the formal way, suppresses a groan?"³⁰ *Vanity Fair* in this way mocked the Academy's genteel propriety; the show of understanding the Academy's position ("Is it any wonder . . .") is undercut by the caricature of its members' dyspeptic outrage. Ten years later *The New Yorker* would still be complaining about the near-absence of modernist art from museums, lamenting the academic dominance of "all that is safe and sane and fireproof."³¹ Luckily by this point it had plenty of independently owned galleries in which to view modernist work.

That said, the February 1914 art review is revealing of *Vanity Fair's* capacious tastes. While he appreciates modernist movements like "Futurism, Cubism, Cosmism and the rest," it turns out DuBois thinks the Academy crowd to be pretty good at what it does, at least when they take a break from reactionary rhetoric. Making fun of the Academy's overzealous opposition to modernism, he also deplores the Academy's advertised desire to appear inclusive and thus avoid criticism for its catholic taste. Instead that taste should be preserved in its own right: "The most fair of us admit that it is lamentable that this [falsified display of tolerance] was found necessary. Any man selects his friends where he finds sympathy. . . . The Academy stands for a certain ideal. Whether this ideal is dead or dying, or neither, the one nor the other should not be brought into the question. It cannot be brought into the question. If this exhibition was purely literal and thoroughly polite we know that it was because the convictions that were brought to bear upon it were courageous. We must admire honest convictions." DuBois, in fact, spends the last half of his column explaining why he admired the Academy paintings beyond their display of "honest convictions." What stands out, though, is his recognition of different ideals that are equally tenable and ultimately only bad when they start attacking one another. For *Vanity Fair's* projected audience, the diversity can only be a boon.

In this sense, smart magazines tell us much about how those not wholly committed to modernist art and writing conceived of the aesthetic varieties competing for cultural dominance. Knowing "those things which go to make the smart world smart" entailed much more than understanding modernism.³² This dispersed interest is as true of literature as painting. Edmund Wilson's October 1922 *Vanity Fair* essay, declaring realism

(a la Willa Cather) dead in favor of experiments like *Ulysses*, helps introduce Michael North's study of that year as signifying modernism's permeation of popular culture; yet, we might also point to Hugh Walpole's attack on modernist "Messiahs of the New Faith" (indeed, on *Ulysses*) and proclamations on behalf of good old-fashioned realism (including Cather, Edith Wharton, Joseph Hergesheimer, Sinclair Lewis, and Dorothy Canfield-Fisher), which appeared in the same magazine only five months later.³³ Ignoring these moments when modernism is not triumphant, North sets *Vanity Fair* in a narrative of modernity as a progression of the new while eliding negotiations and adaptations of the old. Despite Wilson's prominence as the editor of *Vanity Fair*, his critical essays bumped up against those of repeat contributors like Walpole and created a sense of conversation that undermined partisan aesthetics. Indeed, the early and mid twenties witnessed a small British invasion of the critical essays in *Vanity Fair*, the overwhelming theme of which was to argue for an aesthetic compromise between modernism and traditional forms. Thus, while modernism's advocates and detractors both understood avant-garde movements as collectively committed to formal innovation, they also both pointed to a capacity for heartlessness in need of mitigation. Clive Bell could give limited praise to Cubism and to T. S. Eliot while also noting a lack of the "human" in both. Aldous Huxley and Walpole likewise emphasized that formal innovation could only be truly successful in pursuit of deeper emotion.³⁴

This emphasis on emotion, often tied to the ideal of character in realist fiction, had an even greater hold on the standards of *The New Yorker's* book reviewers. Unlike its reception of painting, *The New Yorker* did not have a real advocate of modernist literature until Robert Coates in the early 1930s (he defended Gertrude Stein and lauded Virginia Woolf, and devoted space to explain and reorient reader frustration with modernist experimentation in general), although earlier reviewers tried to pick out the good examples from the bad. For example, Agnes W. Smith, whose tenure immediately preceded Coates, found occasional modernist successes—including Coates's own dada/detective/sci-fi novel *The Eater of Darkness* (1929) and John Dos Passos's *The 42nd Parallel* (1930). Her praise for Dos Passos is indicative, as she singles him out and argues his book, like the music of Stravinsky, "lifts itself above the pyrotechnics of his contemporary modernists"; in other words, most modernist experimentation too self-consciously provokes via form rather than searching out what she calls "structural beauty."³⁵ Earlier, Ernest Boyd had similarly found occasions to mix modernist and other

pleasures: in a rare poetry review in 1927 he praised, back-to-back, volumes by Ezra Pound, Sara Teasdale, and Dorothy Parker, amongst others.³⁶

A stubborn contradiction underlies the "smartness" of these magazines: they tend to appreciate and attack modernist as well as realist (and traditional lyric) sensibilities, using the perspective of either one as it suits the occasion. They demonstrate commitments to different genres of writing, encouraging the antagonism between those genres within their pages. Smart could mean the turning of fashion against modernism, or at least needing to know the basic qualities of and arguments for realism as much as those of futurism or other avant-gardes. If *Vanity Fair* introduced its U.S. audience to modernism earlier than narratives like North's sometimes suggest (that is, before the 1920s, or by other accounts, the end of World War I), the magazine also shows that modernism was not quite the easy cultural dominant that North makes it out to be, even well into the twenties. Aesthetic modernism's startlingly new forms appealed to the smart magazines, yet they hedged their embrace of modernism with uncertainty even when most optimistic, signaling unease over its legitimacy. Having a pedagogical, rather than originating, role in modernist cultural production led to some attenuation of modernism's claims, in part because the magazines needed to teach competing literary and artistic genres as well.

Retrospectively, one of the most noticeable ways that smart magazines transformed modernism in their transmission was to name it as a coherent relation between artistic work and audience. Current criticism tends to focus on *modernisms* in the plural to indicate a diversity of experimental aims (and some non-experimental ones as well), but while *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* recognized idiosyncratic styles and described numerous specific avant-gardes, they saw the specific variations in form as sub-genres producing similar effects on the audience. In one of the first *Vanity Fair* appearances of the term "modernist," Max Eastman described "A Dramatic Career in Modernist Art," a parodic description of an artist rejecting "copying on paper" and "representation" for a series of avant-garde identifications, from impressionism to futurism, that all do exactly the same (unsatisfying) thing: attempt to shock the audience into a new awareness of reality through dramatic formal innovations.³⁷ If Eastman writes satirically, he nonetheless signals the magazine's understanding that whatever the diversity of "modernism," its audience could identify it by a specific recurrent aesthetic pleasure: shock. And though Eastman and others started using the term in the magazine only in 1916, it replaced synonyms like

"independent art" and "individualist art," or even "cubism" and "futurism," which were treated as elastic catch-alls for experimentation as often as they described specific avant-gardes. "Modernism" and its synonyms began to designate a genre encapsulating many formal variations that nonetheless produce the same aesthetic relation between artwork and reader.³⁸ From a twenty-first century critical perspective, these magazines jar against our author- and movement-centered desire to see a propagation of experimental forms for very different purposes. And to be certain, they conflated aesthetic agendas that we might valuably distinguish in other contexts; nonetheless, they could be very savvy in the connections they drew, and in drawing them they helped set the initial terms for understanding "modernism."

While some articles in these magazines were parodies (such as Eastman's), and others were directly critical reviews or freestanding essays (DuBois), the frequent witty aphorisms within both types blurred the line between them, revealing them to be part of the same debate over aesthetic value. In a feature article, "Some Italian Futurists with a Past," James Huneker dismissed the "Congo telegraphic code which Marinetti calls a new Italian prose style" even as he reported futurism's history and aims as a movement.³⁹ He suggests that none of its goals are very original anyway, "except the doctrine of simultaneousness." He ends by insisting on the "amusing" aspects of futurism: "Marinetti . . . has invented a 'prose' which while it is not so voluptuous as that of 'Tender Buttons' by Gertrude Stein is dynamic, after the fashion of an armament factory in full operation. . . . Pratella has also written a symphony, of modern noises said to be scored for 42 centimeter cannon, subway trains, lawn mowers and rug beaters. Futurism is kaleidoscopic mystification." Modernism, here, produces plenty of targets for the satirical eye, and his redescription of futurist simultaneity (providing multiple perspectives on one moment in the same representation) as "kaleidoscopic mystification" exemplifies the magazines' frequent explication of defining characteristics of an avant-garde only to undermine them. Likewise, they sniped at demands, by avant-garde minimalists, that readers or observers use their imagination to add form to fill out minimalist shapes and suggested that artists were failing to live up to their job descriptions, e.g., a *New Yorker* sketch had its narrator trying to understand a modernist painting but then "renounc[ing] [his] claim to open-mindedness. . . . Hereafter the painter has to do the work. I won't do it for him."⁴⁰ These magazines imagined an audience capable of understanding but skeptical enough not simply to swallow modernist explanations for their work.

Likewise, another typical smart magazine parody (and playful appropriation of modernism) distinguishes for readers a set of genres for the purpose of practical criticism. P. G. Wodehouse's 1914 column on "The Literature of the Future: Or Every Man His Own Futurist" begins by observing that artists specialize in stylistically embellished statements that anyone else would say more simply.⁴¹ He takes as his case in point the sentence, "Jones crossed Thirty-third Street." He then gives brief parodies of how popular authors such as Arnold Bennett, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert W. Chambers would write it. For example, Bennett "would treat it as a trilogy. Vol. I, Jones' childhood. Vol. II, Jones, after a manhood in the Pot-teries, comes to New York. Circumstances bring him to Thirty-Third Street. Result, dollars per word, and instant sale of dramatic and moving picture rights" (49). We might be tempted to see this, and the following dissections of Doyle and Chambers, as a typical snide critique of "middlebrow" literature in its more derogatory sense—the profit-driven stories that take up pages of paid-per-word magazine space (Bennett), mystery plots (Doyle), and romantic stories featuring "an extraordinarily handsome man" (Chambers). And Wodehouse does so, but not to endorse modernism: the bulk of the article parodies a futurist Jones crossing the street, which he winds up needing to translate into a realist idiom to make any sense at all.

Wodehouse's futurist prose, like Corey Ford's fake avant-garde movements, shows smart magazine writers as attentive to the signal discourse that surrounds modernism as they are to the typical qualities of modernism itself. Borrowing from the genres of the manifesto (in the case of both Wodehouse and Ford), the high art reporting in which smart magazines specialized (in the case of Ford), and from experimental forms themselves, the parodies establish generic ways of talking about and doing modernist art. A key tenet of modernism is, of course, a refusal of genre—the unique style of the author replaces the traditional style of other writers. If anything, modernists are supposed to take established genres and upend them. However, the smart magazines recognize this move in itself as a product of genre. That is, if genre is the accumulation of habits of reading and writing for particular reader purposes, then these magazines recognized in modernism an appeal to reading and writing for ruptured form.⁴² The fact that different texts with modernist qualities might go about this in different ways—that is, the fact that different modernists might have distinctive styles—does not reduce the fact that those styles share a certain relation to normative textual production, and, more importantly, to normative

reading. As Diepeveen argues, parodies of modernism in this sense show audiences recognizing a predictable form of engagement with “modernist” literary texts.⁴³ Smart culture presages Bakhtin’s argument that “Any style is inseparably related to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres.”⁴⁴ As he goes on to argue, literary genres encourage more individual style than other speech genres, to the extent that the emphasis on style becomes a classifying feature of literary genres—an idea suggested also by Wodehouse’s remark about authors as stylists. Indeed, the smart magazines suggest that individual style offers precisely a way to identify a particular author’s writing within a particular genre.

Parody, in other words, interweaves the marketing and critical agendas of the magazines: by understanding various kinds of writing *as* kinds, with formal regularity even across authors’ different styles, the magazines can promote them as varieties of amusement and aesthetic experience. It thus moves beyond what Diepeveen understands as the critical function of modernist parodies. As he argues, such parodies demonstrate a familiarity with the formal features of modernist art as well as the circumstances of such art’s social status: “everyone recognized that questions about scandal, decadence, marketing, and elitism shaped the public debate about modernism’s difficulty.”⁴⁵ “Everyone” indeed (at least the audience imagined by the smart magazines) was understood to be able to identify parodies of specific styles and their genres. But beyond manifesting anxiety over how to approach difficult modernist art, parodies of modernism within smart magazines are not direct normative reactions against modernism; as Murphy suggests, they critique, tongue-in-cheek, an aesthetic discourse that they are in fact promoting. Where the article on bohemianism analyzed by Murphy parodies bohemianism’s business side only to make the self-ironizing suggestion of “the article’s *own* implication in the ‘business’ of bohemianism,”⁴⁶ Wodehouse and Ford likewise promote modernism as much as they laugh at it: indeed, the parodies themselves itemize and teach salient qualities of modernism for their imagined readers, clamoring for knowledge of “high culture.” Parodies offer the reader a sense of sophistication because they both teach the object parodied and deny the reader ever needed to be taught.

Parody could also signal outright admiration. Such admiration is already implied in the way knowledge of various styles functions as a basis for the reader’s accumulated cultural prestige in the above examples. Moreover, parody filtered into directly pedagogical moments of the smart magazines.

When *Vanity Fair* first introduced Gertrude Stein's poetry, the editors did not simply give an advance reprimand to resistant readers; they did it in her kind of language: "the individual, male or female, who begins foaming at the mouth at Miss Stein's second 'page,' who shrieks 'This is insanity' at the third or fourth, and ends by writing a letter of protest to the Editor of *Vanity Fair*, IS one [a philistine]. Decidedly this second individual is one. Is one decidedly."⁴⁷ The repetition and rearrangement of key words in the last two sentences, especially the adverb "decidedly," signals a commitment, as direct as the explicit support, to Stein's style: something enjoyable to take up and play with on your own.⁴⁸

We can see the same parodic combination of pedagogy and critique in the approach to writers from a range of genres competing for recognition as high culture in smart magazine pages. In the wake of Edna Ferber's historical novel *Cimarron* (1930), depicting the Oklahoma land rush, *Vanity Fair's* chief book parodist-reviewer in the late twenties and early thirties, John Riddle, joked that she had initiated a new genre of "biographical novel—in which the novelist finds a period of American history with a lot of local colour, and then goes out and rolls in it till the facts stick like burrs to his fur."⁴⁹ With that, Riddle begins his parody of Ferber's style as emblematic of this new school of writing: his sketch depicts Ferber promoting historical fiction as an open territory for literary settlement, shouting at the center of a town square for joy that "The entire past of our glorious nation, stretching four hundred years from Columbus to Hoover, [is] being ploughed and exploited and cultivated by our novelists at last!" The narrator wonders at her speech: "Edna was talking. She had been talking for the better part of an hour. . . . Perhaps it was the musical quality in her prose that lulled the group of listeners before her; for though Edna was verbose, frequently even windy, and though much that she wrote was sparse enough in actual content, she had those priceless gifts of the born novelist, a vibrant and flexible style, great sweetness and charm of manner, a reporter's eye, and the power of making each critic feel that what she wrote was an important contribution to the history of the American scene. Something of the charlatan was in her, much of the actor, a dash of the romantic." Riddell parodies Ferber's tendency to use narrators that induce sentimental awe in their romanticized character descriptions; the myth-like tone of the "Perhaps it was" that he uses to describe her characteristics in combination with the long "windy" sentences suggest a larger-than-life figure. Yet, as a book review, the tone is mixed. On one hand, the content of his description

reduces Ferber's hyperbolic stature by commenting on these very features of her prose. On the other hand, his emphasis on Ferber as a "born novelist" hints that she is in fact a distinctive writer worth the attention paid her: as a book review, the passage translates to the not uncommon sentiment that a writer seems gifted and worth following, yet wastes her talent in this instance. This ambivalence allows the parody to detail features of Ferber's writing and of the genre Riddell associates her with, yet in its joking tone assume that readers always already knew those features and are laughing along with Riddell on the basis of previously shared knowledge. Sophistication, which presupposes knowledge of everything and an inability to be surprised, houses itself in the pedagogy that it disavows needing. Moreover, much like parodies of modernism revealing modernism's market-savvy, Riddell here reveals Ferber's literary hucksterism as part of the regionalist project she, and through his parody he, sells.

The treatment of styles as codes, moreover, could make all styles equally valuable; if parodies signal an obsession with distinguishing genres of high culture, the magazines' fluctuating targets, sometimes even within a single article or review, also made those targets equally desirable for consumption. Wodehouse's parody of futurist prose began by mocking other varieties of writing, suggesting he and the reader stood above them all. And, a few months earlier, Louis Untermeyer parodied prose styles by G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Edith Wharton, and Jack London, none of them associated with modernism by smart magazine calculations.⁵⁰ The ability to recognize one author or genre is not more or less valuable than the ability to engage another: all signify the cultural prestige of general knowledge. Readers become "smarter" not by knowing a limited number of writers but by knowing how to identify and classify more and more of them. All forms critiqued and parodied also get embraced as cultural reference points.

This multidirectional parodic pedagogy is a result of the specific way smart magazine editors and writers approached their role as middlebrow professionals. Smart magazines attempted to be distinctly modern but not distinctly modernist. When *Vanity Fair* proclaimed in the opening issue quoted above that it planned to give attention to "all that is new and worthy in the Fine Arts and in Books" among other things, it meant that it would cover all "new and worthy" artistic productions no matter the aesthetic allegiances of the artists. Its "new" was more strictly temporal than the modernist "new" even while incorporating avant-garde forms within the

framework of the smart. Thus, in the smart magazines, if parody does, as Diepveen suggests, reveal an anxiety about what is parodied, it is not for the reason he argues. Smart magazine producers were not simply anxious about modernist art; rather, they project a professional anxiety about acquiring—and transmitting to audiences—legitimate culture in general.

This point might be made differently, and emphasized more directly, by noting that the variety of parodied targets were not simply a product of smart magazine editors' range in taste—choosing an anti-modernist to parody modernism, or an anti-realist to parody realism; rather, the various recurring parodists themselves had a professional interest in diversifying their targets. Wodehouse and Ford, and others like James Thurber, Dorothy Parker, and Robert Benchley, did not each single out a least favorite genre to mock and maim; all participated in creating the whole array of smart magazines' taxonomy of aesthetic kinds. They had a professional interest in the ability to classify and judge through a heavy helping of wit. Parker, for example, though best known for her modern love lyrics that parodied conventional romance and lyric poetry, published just as frequently parodies of modernist as well as Romantic and Victorian poetry. Moreover, "John Riddell," *Vanity Fair's* book reviewer who wrote the parody of Edna Ferber, is in fact a pseudonym of Corey Ford, the creator of *The New Yorker's* fake avant-gardes. His parodies for the magazines ranged broadly, motivated less by a normative aesthetic judgment than by a professional role that required the display of expertise in witty, ironic taxonomies. The diversity of parodies signals a genre of middlebrow mastery and playful display of expertise in a variety of forms. It communicates the sense of a circle of well-informed friends, as when other contributors to *The New Yorker* parodied Parker's modern love lyrics, even as she published those lyrics and her book reviews as "Constant Reader" in the same pages. When James Thurber rewrote "The Night Before Christmas" in the style of Ernest Hemingway's suppressed hostilities and Marion Sturges-Jones followed, two years later, in the style of the slang-ridden and scandalous novelist Viña Delmar, they created a sense of a nation-wide coterie of eclectic readers perpetually exchanging one formal lens for another.⁵¹ Finally, the diversity of parodies inspires readers' pleasurable engagement with a range of aesthetics they may then go on to explore outside of the magazines: they gestured, that is, toward other kinds of pleasures beyond those of imitation.

Nonetheless, if these magazines treated different genres as equally preferable and amusing, the specific criticisms leveled at them through

smart magazine parodies should not be neglected entirely; to evacuate the critical function of these parodies is to rob them of a key role—and not only when parodies were used explicitly in the place of book reviews, as with Riddell. When parodies taught readers various genres to know and discuss, their wit nonetheless signaled to readers the smart magazines' contract to exercise judgment over aesthetic forms, exposing any weaknesses even in the most legitimated. These editors and writers secured professionalism through a primary appeal not to a particular aesthetic program but through their commitment to critical reason that anyone might exercise; the irony and iconoclasm came not from modernism but from a common-sense rationality that could see coolly through pretension. The smart magazine appeal to critical reason secured professional authority and readers' trust—for all wit's potential to draw lines of distinction, it also would make a chatty friend.

SMART INVESTMENTS

The past twenty-plus years have witnessed a resurgence in modernist studies that has raised questions about the supposed "great divide" between modernism and the market, the presumed arena of popular culture. Two primary types of studies have contributed to this movement. The first explores how the various artists historically known as modernist, and demonstrating a kind of market phobia, were in fact highly invested in the market of which they had no choice but to be a part. Thus studies by Lawrence Rainey and Mark Morrisson have shown that modernists, developing their own approach to the market at times (in little magazines, limited editions, etc.), and making full use of more commonplace marketing schemes at others, were always more a disguised outpost of mass culture than a source of resistance to it.⁵² A second type of criticism, however, poses different problems. If the first shows how modernism emerged within mass culture, the second works to show how other texts and objects of mass culture that have little history of association with modernism (if any history of interpretation at all) were in fact modernist all along.⁵³ This scholarship itself breaks into two camps. The first includes critics who use a traditional understanding of modernist generic features to extend aesthetic status to nontraditional texts and objects—Murphy's study of *Vanity Fair*, for example, or Michael North's examination of a modernist popular culture in *Reading 1922*, both of which take "modernist irony" and redefine it as crucial to the field of

market culture more generally. The second includes critics who examine texts not usually seen as modernist in order to expand the definition of modernism to make it more inclusive—a prominent strain of which can be seen in the recuperation of sentimentalism as a *part* of modernism in the work of Suzanne Clark and Jessica Burstein.⁵⁴

My argument builds on and complicates these last kinds of studies, maintaining their recuperative power by further historicizing the naming of and investing in "modernism" within middlebrow mass culture. Smart magazines saw clear distinctions between modernism, realism, and other mass cultural genres that all clamor for cultural legitimacy. Genres fulfill particular kinds of functions for readers through formal devices, and the best individual texts for the smart magazines were often those that could combine competing genre functions. These magazines try to accommodate and question each of these genre categories rather than privilege or embody one or another. Because of these multidirectional investments, they offer one model for modernist cultural studies that, as Rita Felski argues, must understand "that aesthetics is conjured in the plural. It pushes us to look beyond our professional predilection for irony and artfulness and to explore other registers of aesthetic experience."⁵⁵ Likewise, Jennifer Wicke advocates our attention to literary valuation, but rejects the study of literary value as a limiting factor in the production of an exclusive canon; instead, she encourages us to recognize a variety of literary values; she calls for "Judgments of value that . . . arise from a mental economy of abundance, not scarcity, from a sense of the possible, not measurement, and with an absolute lack of shame about expressions of pleasure, emotion, and wonder."⁵⁶ Where I am most likely to differ with Wicke's call is in her desire to call this abundance modernism. And I say so because to be true to historical and contemporary readers' experience of literary abundance, as she rightly wants to do, we need to treat seriously the terms those readers used to think about that abundance. Modernism, by the middlebrow definition, included a diversity of avant-garde programs (which could sometimes be recognized as synonyms for or subgenres of modernism), but it could also be conceptualized as a unified pleasure—as a genre—that provided only one of the abundant literary possibilities of the early twentieth century. Limiting our definition of modernism allows us to be true both to the middlebrow understanding of modernism as well as to middlebrow readers' desire for a broader solar system of literary wonders. If it limits modernism's inclusiveness, it also places limits on experimentation's grip when we narrate twentieth-century

literary history. It demands that we recognize the ongoing competition for what could be recognized as “high culture” rather than telling that literary history as if the rise of experimental modernism immediately displaced claims of other kinds of writing to aesthetic status.

Moreover, I have tried to show how smart magazines’ refusal to become straightforward modernist advocates indirectly contributes to the lasting prestige of modernism, filling in our understanding of the roots of modernism’s long-term influence. If recent critics including Rainey and Aaron Jaffe have shown how “high modernists,” including Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, developed formal, rhetorical, and institutional means to secure long-term appreciation, the smart magazines suggest how popular audiences could be introduced to modernism best by presenting it as a potential source of aesthetic pleasure among several.⁵⁷ The magazines’ critical appraisals that limit their appreciation of some qualities of modernism work in tandem with the suggestion that other qualities make it a real contender for status as “legitimate culture.” Middlebrow smart magazines set the terms for thinking of modernism as somehow both a calcified set of formal codes and as a model for the capacity of texts to rupture our experience of reality—preceding, respectively, the modernism retroactively constructed and then assimilated by New Critics and “postmodernism,” as well as the modernism of poststructuralism.⁵⁸ Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, in their recently edited anthology on *Bad Modernisms*, have called this paradox a defining one for modernism: in the naming and recognition of any aesthetic of the new, there is a sense of dulling its edge—modernism could lose its badness just by being organized as “modernism.” In the wake of the legacy of postmodernism’s (and postmodern criticism’s) view of modernism as a set of “dead” forms ripe for “blank” appropriations—combined, moreover, with Theodore Adorno’s not infrequent dismissals of middlebrow culture’s approach to modernism as a destruction of its innovative impulses—some might worry that the smart magazines, developing a version of “modernism” as a genre directly alongside the emergence of experimental writers, produced an avant-garde impulse dead on arrival, even earlier than imagined. Yet the expected reader of smart magazines was not supposed to access modernism (or any other literary or artistic category) *only* in their pages, as part of a taxonomy useful for social distinction; rather, the playfulness of these magazines facilitated a confidence in approaching modernism’s texts and enlivened hope for finding a different kind of literary pleasure in them. I am skeptical that we can best judge modernism’s

relevance or success by the reactions against it by other middlebrow venues more hostile to experimentation—say by *Harper's Bazar's* genteel reactions against it for much of the period I have discussed—and whose readers might be more inclined to buy into outrage over modernism without even looking at it. Modernism's greatest potential for achieving changes in perspective by aesthetic means comes not by provoking censors but by engaging readers who, even if provided with a line of approach by *Vanity Fair* or *The New Yorker*, might still find themselves facing the shock of the new in texts exceeding their expectations for the guise "the new" will take.

NOTES

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1. Corey Ford, "Blotter: An Absorbing Medium," *The New Yorker*, May 9, 1925, 22; Ford, "Probing Public Murals," *The New Yorker*, May 23, 1925, 22.

2. For one especially extensive study, see Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and, more recently, Karen Leick, "Popular Modernism: Little Magazines and the American Daily Press," *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 125–39.

3. M. P., "The Art Galleries," *The New Yorker*, December 11, 1926, 98–100.

4. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 16–17.

5. Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), 14.

6. Although he does not use the term "middlebrow," Ohmann shows how mass magazines, the first instance of mass culture in the United States, tended to fill a pedagogical role that solicited a broader audience for legitimated art. These new magazines capitalized on legal changes and technological advances to sell cheap copies. The 1879 postal act gave magazines second-rate postage rights, the roller press sped up and cheapened production, and—perhaps most crucially—better illustration techniques made more, and more elaborate, advertising possible, and magazines in turn could be sold to readers for under the cost of production. As Nancy Glazener has argued, the cost of established nineteenth-century magazines devoted to cultivating reader sensibilities had limited them to the upper middle class in urban centers of production, creating one constraint in access to cultural prestige. The new magazines, flashier and cheaper, solicited new mass audiences. And as Ohmann's title, *Selling Culture*, suggests, they could appeal to this new audience by marketing access to and understanding of good taste. Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). For histories of material changes in magazine print culture, see Frank Luther Mott, *History of American Magazines 1885–1905* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) and James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1971).

7. See Howard's work on the collaborative novel *The Whole Family*, published at the start of the century in *Harper's Bazar* (spelled with only one "a" until 1929), which included chapters from writers of competing literary genres who were sometimes unhappy with one another's contributions. June Howard, *Publishing the Family* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

8. Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 14.

9. Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

10. Nina Miller, *Making Love Modern: The Intimate Public Worlds of New York's Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 88; Mark McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 111.

11. A much earlier, mid-century, example of treating smart, or "quality," magazines as exemplars of the "middlebrow" comes from Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954). See, in particular, its chapter "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow" (310–33), which originated in *Harper's* in 1949. There, Lynes offers the subcategories "upper middlebrow" and "lower middlebrow," mostly divided by their respective roles of production and consumption: the upper middlebrows "are the men and women who devote themselves professionally to the dissemination of ideas and cultural artifacts and, not in the least incidentally, make a living along the way" (320). *Life* covered this article and, with Lynes's assistance, put together a chart mapping the tastes of high-, upper middle-, lower middle-, and lowbrows—including an upper middlebrow taste for "quality magazines": "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow," *Life*, April 11, 1949: 99–102. Lynes goes on, in his chapter, to distinguish the ways that middlebrow anxieties over taste play out in these two groups: "If the upper middlebrow is unsure of his own tastes, but firm in his belief that taste is extremely important, the lower middlebrow is his counterpart. The lower middlebrow ardently believes that he knows what he likes, and yet his taste is constantly susceptible to the pressures that put him in knickerbockers one year and rust-colored slacks the next. Actually he is unsure about almost everything, especially about what he likes" (331). Lynes imagines himself as writing about a high/middle/low distinction that is emerging in postwar culture, replacing class with taste. I would follow Radway and Rubin in tracing this emergence earlier, but my use of the term might be specified to his "upper middlebrow" in that I am primarily interested in producers (editors, writers). Although I am not drawn to that upper/lower distinction in particular, I think it is useful in that it offers a sense that "middlebrow culture" is not just one taste but a range of tastes produced in different institutions for different audiences. These institutions and audiences share an anxiety about culture, but resolve it through different solutions (that is, different tastes).

12. For one application of this friendliness to a particular writer, see Nancy Walker's discussion of Dorothy Parker's book review in *The New Yorker* (Parker had earlier written for *Vanity Fair* as well). Nancy A. Walker, "The Remarkably Constant Reader: Dorothy Parker as Book Reviewer," *Studies in American Humor* 3.4 (1997): 1–14.

13. Diepeveen, xi, his emphasis.

14. Mark McGurl and Thomas Strychacz make a similar argument, but Diepeveen takes the point farthest, since the other two critics limit the identification of modernism and professionalism: in Strychacz's formulation, modernism is best seen as arising from a "matrix of historical imperatives" homologous to professionalization in reaction against mass culture (26). Thomas Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

15. Michael Murphy, "'One Hundred Per Cent Bohemia': Pop Decadence and the Aestheticization of Commodity in the Rise of the Slicks," in *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, and Rereading*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 61–89. For a more recent formulation, see McGurl, who also describes middlebrow magazine culture as a whole as committed to disseminating modernist ideals (111).

16. Murphy, 64, his emphasis.

17. In his discussion of smart magazines, George H. Douglas also includes *The Smart Set* (1900–1930), *Life* (1883–1936), and *Esquire* (only appearing in 1933). I discuss the definition of smart as it applies to smart magazines more extensively below. George H. Douglas, *The Smart Magazines: 50 Years of Literary Revelry and High Jinks at Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, Life, Esquire, and The Smart Set* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1991).

18. "In Vanity Fair," *Vanity Fair*, September 1913, 15.

19. I do not attend to departments of the magazines that are not centrally focused on aesthetics in some form—for example, both magazines had a sports section—although even those departments provide the same smart tone for readers as a lens for seeing the objects they covered.

20. "Heroes of the Week," *The New Yorker*, October 17, 1925, 6.
21. "Visualization of Vivienne," *The New Yorker*, March 14, 1925, 23.
22. Aside from smart magazine studies such as those by Murphy and Douglas, and general magazine histories like those by Mott and Wood, see David Reed, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States 1880–1960* (London: British Library, 1997). Judith Yaross Lee has written a history of *The New Yorker's* "contributions to American comic culture" in its first years, but explicitly eschews its "sociocultural dimensions" where I am interested in the way the magazine's comedy intersects with the sociology of literary production and reception. Judith Yaross Lee, *Defining New Yorker Humor* (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2000), 14.
23. "In Vanity Fair," *Vanity Fair*, September 1913, 15.
24. "In Vanity Fair," *Vanity Fair*, May 1914, 19.
25. An exception to this tie was, in fact, Crowninshield's editing of *Munsey's*, one of the few mass magazines that Matthew Schneirov notes opted out of muckraking. Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America 1893–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 203.
26. However, it always addressed politics from an ironic distance that did not heavily intrude; the two issues the magazine repeatedly took up with snide attacks were prohibition—it published an almost weekly record of the running prices for bootlegged liquor to close out "The Talk of the Town"—and censorship, which *Vanity Fair's* critics also complained about. The latter is a predictable concern considering the centrality of censorship to questions of artistic taste.
27. "In Vanity Fair," *Vanity Fair*, February 1914, 15; "Of All Things," *The New Yorker*, February 21, 1925, 2.
28. "Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, July 11, 1925, 6–9.
29. Guy Pene DuBois, "Art At Home and Abroad," *Vanity Fair*, September 1913, 47.
30. Guy Pene DuBois, "Art At Home and Abroad," *Vanity Fair*, February 1914, 43.
31. "Art Review," *The New Yorker*, August 22, 1925, 17.
32. "In Vanity Fair," *Vanity Fair*, September 1913, 15.
33. See Edmund Wilson, "Mr. Bell, Miss Cather and Others," *Vanity Fair*, October 1922, 26–27; and Hugh Walpole, "Realism and the English Novel: A Practitioner of the Established School Discusses the Messiahs of the New Faith," *Vanity Fair*, March 1923, 34. The Wilson essay is discussed in Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
34. See Clive Bell, "The Rise and Decline of Cubism: An Account of the Artistic Theory Behind the Experiments in Geometrical Abstract Form," *Vanity Fair*, February 1923, 53; Bell, "The Elusive Art of T. S. Eliot: An Enquiry into the Artistic Principles of the Most Disputed of Living American Poets," *Vanity Fair*, September 1923, 53, 110; Aldous Huxley, "Too Much Theory: Showing the Irreparable Harm Done to Art by Persistent Dogmatizers," *Vanity Fair*, April 1925, 55, 94; Hugh Walpole, "On Novel Reading, and the Critics," *Vanity Fair*, October 1920, 61, 110.
35. Agnes W. Smith [A.W. S.], "Recent Books," *The New Yorker*, March 8, 1930, 102–4.
36. Ernest Boyd [Alceste], "The New Books," *The New Yorker*, January 8, 1927, 82–85. Boyd, like Smith, also tried to differentiate the modernist wheat from the chaff: in one 1927 review he exulted over Glenway Wescott's echoes of Proust in the composite regional novel *The Grandmothers*, but found Conrad Aiken's reworking of Joyce's "subconscious" style dull and overly imitative. Ernest Boyd [Alceste], "Recent Books," *The New Yorker*, August 27, 1927, 61–63.
37. Max Eastman, "A Dramatic Career in Modernist Art," *Vanity Fair*, August 1916, 35, 98.
38. Moreover, this is why, despite my focus on written engagements with modernism, other artistic media like painting, sculpture, and music never disappear entirely: the aesthetic experience accorded to modernism as a genre was not confined to one media. Indeed, sometimes modernism's shock could come from the sense that an artistic object of one medium was producing experiences from another. As late as 1928, Deems Taylor complained about what could also be a selling point for modernism, accusing its music of "setting up as one of the plastic arts" and suggesting "modern poetry seems to have been written for the eye." Deems Taylor, "The Truth About 'Modern Art,'" *Vanity Fair*, March 1928, 63, 106–8.
39. James Huneker, "Some Italian Futurists with a Past," *Vanity Fair*, October 1915, 51, 116.
40. "But I Know What I Like," *The New Yorker*, November 21, 1925, 35.

41. P. G. Wodehouse, "The Literature of the Future: Or Every Man His Own Futurist," *Vanity Fair*, June 1914, 49, 96. Wodehouse went on to become *Vanity Fair*'s drama critic for much of the later teens, preceding Dorothy Parker's more famous tenure in that position.

42. For genre as "habits of reading and writing," see June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1985).

43. Diepeveen, xi.

44. M. M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1986), 63.

45. Diepeveen, 9.

46. Murphy, 62, his emphasis.

47. Gertrude Stein, "Have They Attacked Mary. He Giggled," *Vanity Fair*, June 1917, 55.

48. In this use of wit for a range of extreme responses to modernism, smart magazines exacerbate the middlebrow response to culture as explained by Jonathan Freedman, who argues that a love/hate relationship to culture defines the middlebrow reaction to literary celebrity. Jonathan Freedman, *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

49. John Riddle, "'Macaron,' as if by Edna Ferber," *Vanity Fair*, October 1930, 63, 103–4.

50. Louis Untermeyer, "Beginning Novels: In the Manner of G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Edith Wharton, and Jack London," *Vanity Fair*, March 1914, 45.

51. James Thurber, "A Visit from Saint Nicholas [In the Ernest Hemingway Manner]," *The New Yorker*, December 24, 1927, 17–18; Marion Sturges-Jones, "'Twas the Night Before Christmas as Viña Delmar Would Write It," *The New Yorker*, December 21, 1929, 63–65.

52. Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2001).

53. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz make a similar observation in slightly broader terms, referring to two types of new modernist studies (in the reverse order that I name them): "One that reconsiders the definitions, locations, and producers of 'modernism' and another that applies new approaches and methodologies to 'modernist' works" (1). Mao and Walkowitz do not make the distinction within the "new approaches and methodologies" group that I do immediately below. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *Bad Modernisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

54. See Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Jessica Burstein, "A Few Words about Dubuque: Modernism, Sentimentalism, and the Blasé," *American Literary History* 14.2 (2002): 227–54.

55. Rita Felski, "Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method," *Modernism/modernity* 10.3 (2003): 508.

56. Jennifer Wicke, "Appreciation, Depreciation: Modernism's Speculative Bubble," *Modernism/modernity* 8.3 (2001): 397.

57. Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

58. On "modernism" as a construct of New Critics and postmodernists, particularly as but one code, see Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), particularly the chapter on "Mapping the Postmodern," 179–221. See Mao and Walkowitz for modernism as academic invention of the 1960s—also, in a more skeptical take, John Harwood, *Eliot to Derrida: The Poverty of Interpretation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). For modernism as the prime beneficiary of post-structuralism, which retools it as a literary system not of order but of uncontainable complexity and incessant intertextuality, see Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 134–35.