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# Romance in *Woman's Weekly* and *Woman's Weekly* as Romance, 1918–39

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines romance and social aspiration in British domestic magazine *Woman's Weekly* during the interwar period. Between 1918 and 1939, Cinderella romance was the dominant fictional genre in *Woman's Weekly*, which featured at least one complete story and one serial instalment in each weekly issue. These romances work through the social ambitions of the magazine's target readers: lower-middle-class housewives on low incomes, who aspire towards class promotion. Assuming a social framework within which a woman's status is determined by the status of her husband, and assuming a reading experience in which the heroine functions as the reader's avatar, the social aspirations of *Woman's Weekly's* target readers emerge in the socio-economic status of the magazine's fictional romance heroes. Surveyed using the 'distant reading' process pioneered by Franco Moretti, a sample of *Woman's Weekly* Cinderella romances issued during 1918–19, 1928, and 1938–39 reveals shifts and complexities in these aspirations across the interwar period. Notably, these shifts and complexities reflect changes within Britain's class system, and the assumed position of *Woman's Weekly's* target readers within it. Whilst *Woman's Weekly's* Cinderella romance fiction fulfils its target readers' social aspirations in fantasy, the magazine's lifestyle content promises to realize them in actuality, by supplying the products and behaviours associated with aspirational lifestyles. Showing how the anticipation and fulfilment of narrative resolution that underpins Cinderella romance narratives might shape one imaginary reader's experience of reading *Woman's Weekly*, I argue that it is the romantic promise of social elevation that attracts readers to the magazine, and ensures their long-term loyalty. The extent to which the magazine can fulfil this promise for real is, however, questionable.

## KEYWORDS

*Woman's Weekly*, romance, magazine, domestic, interwar, femininity, class, lower-middle-class

Vera lives with her grandmother, a conservative woman who insists that she spend each evening reading aloud from an improving novel. When a trusted friend offers to chaperone Vera to a private ball, her grandmother agrees. Vera, a typist, is initially overwhelmed by the vast ballroom, her fellow guests' expensive frocks, and the fleet of attendant footmen, but gains confidence as she dances with her hostess' brother Stanley, a distinguished and — it is hinted — aristocratic army officer. The following day, he proposes. The year is 1919.<sup>1</sup>

Ellen, a typist living in London, meets a young man called Francis. He tells her that he travelled to the city in search of a job, but has so far been unsuccessful. Ellen decides to help him. She lends him money, and rents him a room at her boarding house. Their relationship blossoms over picnics and cheap dinners. Eventually, Francis finds a job with excellent prospects in an insurance firm. His salary, although low, is sufficient for them to marry, and his employer promises that he will quickly gain promotion. He proposes. The year is 1928.<sup>2</sup>

Dora is secretary to Oliver, the owner of a large and thriving department store. He asks her to supervise the furnishing of a show home, a task she relishes since she hopes one day to marry and furnish a home of her own. Oliver watches Dora as she selects domestic fixtures; the task shows her to great physical advantage, and he realizes that he is in love with her. The well-equipped and tastefully decorated 'home' she creates in his store convinces him that she will make an outstanding wife. He proposes. The year is 1928.<sup>3</sup>

Newly single Christy tries to purge herself of heartbreak by driving dangerously fast around the Cornish village where she lives. One afternoon she overhears the doctor, Jerry, complaining about her speeding to the librarian; in retaliation, she prods him with an oar during a sailing race. He falls overboard and sprains his wrist. Whilst Christy is apologizing, Jerry is summoned to an island where a patient has gone into labour. Since he cannot steer his boat, Christy takes him, and helps to deliver the baby. He proposes. The year is 1939.<sup>4</sup>

The stories outlined here appeared in the British domestic women's magazine *Woman's Weekly* at the beginning, middle, and end of the interwar period. Like most of the publication's interwar fiction, each is a romance: focusing on the developing love relationship between its principal characters, concluding with the satisfying certainty that they will marry, and inviting its assumedly female reader to identify with a heroine very like herself, each exhibits the genre's defining characteristics.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, each story is a Cinderella romance, a subcategory of the genre that conflates heroine and reader's marital and class aspirations by incorporating 'an individual very like the reader into the society aspired to by both [...] ushered in with a happy rustle of bridal gown and banknote'.<sup>6</sup> Echoing Cinderella's fairy-tale marriage to the Prince, the

1 'A Modern Cinderella', *Woman's Weekly* (26 April 1919), 318–20.

2 Elizabeth Jordan, 'The Stake', *Woman's Weekly* (7 July 1928), 3–8, 10, 22.

3 Nancy Cabell, 'The Dancing Doll', *Woman's Weekly* (13 October 1928), 521–27.

4 Loretta Burrough, 'The Girl Who Showed Off', *Woman's Weekly* (5 November 1938), 917–20, 952, 954–56.

5 Kristin Ramsdell, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1999), p 5.

6 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p 44.

happily-ever-after of a Cinderella romance constitutes not simply everlasting love, but class elevation activated by the everlasting love of a socially desirable man.

That *Woman's Weekly* Cinderella romances work through, in fantasy, their readers' assumed class aspirations, is the starting point for this article, which uses the genre to plot shifts in the latter between the beginning, middle, and end of the interwar decades. Its structure follows three subsections, headed for clarity. 'Contexts' provides social and critical context, introducing the magazine, establishing the gendered social environment in which it was produced, and positioning my approach within existing periodical scholarship. 'Aspirations' examines how Cinderella romance works through readers' social aspirations, in both its fiction and lifestyle features (adverts, advice columns). 'Interactions' uses romance as a framework for considering *Woman's Weekly's* interactions with its readers. Finally, I consider the publication's promise to realize these ambitions in the light of its form.

### Contexts

*Woman's Weekly* was launched in 1911 as a manual for servantless housewives, and it kept this function throughout the interwar period. Costing just 2d (3d by 1939) per issue, printed on cheap paper, and not advertising expensive cars, holidays, or domestic appliances, it targets women on low incomes, who nevertheless, their evident hunger for etiquette advice suggests, seek social advancement. Managing small budgets, anxious for promotion, *Woman's Weekly's* interwar readers belong to the lower middle classes, a demographic that was gaining stature during a period of social turbulence. Crippled by high post-war taxes and the loss of their male heirs in battle, the aristocracy were ceding influence to the middle classes; the middle classes themselves were expanding, absorbing upper-class individuals who lost status with money, and working-class individuals who, helped by free secondary education and jobs in new industries, were leveraging themselves into white-collar, salaried occupations. Ambitious, upwardly mobile, these individuals comprised the lower middle classes, and they sought to confirm their middle-class status by buying or renting homes in Britain's fast-expanding suburbia. Their wives, who could afford to be full-time homemakers, but who could not afford maids or appliances, sought to maintain middle-class domestic standards in these homes with the help of publications such as *Woman's Weekly*.<sup>7</sup> Detailing how to dress, behave, and keep house, the magazine set the middle-class lifestyle standards towards which its readers aspired.

*Woman's Weekly's* splicing of its readers' class aspirations to their marital ambitions reflects the status of many middle-class women in interwar Britain. Although women's status was changing to the extent that they were enjoying greater social freedom and political influence than previously, and although their employment horizons were expanding, few married women with husbands capable of supporting them had paid jobs, prevented from doing so by marriage bars, public opinion, and personal preference.<sup>8</sup> Although interwar *Woman's Weekly* supports a working readership, issuing employment and workplace conduct advice, it assumes that these women are predominantly single and will quit paid employment when they marry, urging jobseekers to find work that will prepare them for homemaking, and insisting that most wives cannot combine

7 Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp 54, 60–61; Alan Jackson, *The Middle Classes 1900–1950* (Melksham: Redwood Press, 1991), pp 12–13, 49; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp 44–45, 73–74.

8 Adrian Bingham, "An Era of Domesticity"? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.2 (2004), 225–33; Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890–1960* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996 [1994]), pp 124–29.

housekeeping with paid jobs. Whilst in practice, many readers' socio-economic circumstances will have been more complex than this treatment of 'Marriage — Or A Career?' suggests, throughout the interwar years *Woman's Weekly* maintains that married women should be full-time homemakers.<sup>9</sup> Janeen Baxter has discredited notions that women's status is 'derived' from their male providers, identifying 'cross-class' marriages in which wives and husbands' occupations have different statuses.<sup>10</sup> As her argument assumes that both partners have jobs, however, it is not applicable to *Woman's Weekly's* assessment of its interwar readers. Although, thanks to increasing opportunities for working-class women in traditionally middle-class clerical work, it is possible that some readers from poorer backgrounds are achieving promotion professionally, interwar *Woman's Weekly* clearly believes that status of the majority will ultimately be determined by their husbands.<sup>11</sup>

Within this gendered social framework, my premise, that *Woman's Weekly* Cinderella romance works through, in fantasy, target readers' class aspirations, has reductive implications. I use it to frame my analysis of these texts aware of and despite them. Cora Kaplan cautions against accepting uncritically a model of romance in which the narrative's world is a straightforward projection of its female reader's social world, and in which the heroine functions exclusively as her avatar, arguing that the genre lacks a fixed subject-position, and that consequently, her relationship with the heroine is 'more complex than most accounts of reading romance have allowed'.<sup>12</sup> In the light of Kaplan's argument, and especially given the absence of testimony by *Woman's Weekly's* actual interwar readers, it would be speculative to assume that the women who read its romances understood them purely as fantasy manifestations of their own social aspirations. For this reason, the 'reader' or 'target reader' to whom I refer throughout is the woman addressed by the magazine, not the woman who actually read it. Nevertheless, to the extent that upward mobility through marriage is a key element of Cinderella romance, and since the narrative and social structures underpinning the magazine's promises to elevate its readers strongly echo those played out in the genre, my approach offers a productive means of interrogating the discursive mechanisms with which the magazine addresses their aspirations for promotion. Offering fantasies of elevation through marriage to an aristocrat, an insurance clerk, a prosperous department store-owner, and a doctor, the stories outlined above suggest that these aspirations are complex, incorporating shifts and contradictions across the period.

My method of gauging *Woman's Weekly* readers' social ambitions is quantitative, an approach drawn from recent magazine scholarship that uses Franco Moretti's 'distant reading' process to survey what are vast texts, too large to be read in their entirety by one individual. Distant reading involves generating data from the latter for quantitative analysis, which reveals 'shapes, relations, structures'<sup>13</sup> — patterns that would not emerge through close reading of a small sample — a process through which

9 Following the First World War, some widows or wives of disabled veterans entered paid employment (Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* [London and New York: Routledge, 2005], p 146). In 'Marriage — Or A Career?', *Woman's Weekly's* masculine columnist The Man Who Sees explains that, if a wife cannot afford domestic help, she should not have a job (*Woman's Weekly* [11 February 1939], 234–35, 272): assuming that its readers do their housework unaided, the magazine brackets them in this category.

10 'Gender and Class Analysis: The Position of Women in the Class Structure', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 24.1 (March 1988), 106–23.

11 Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918–1950*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 43, 91.

12 'The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), pp 152–53.

13 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London and New York: Verso, 2007 [2005]), p 1.

what Patrick Collier calls ‘an unmanageable plenitude’ of material might be gauged.<sup>14</sup> Thus, J. Stephen Murphy and Mark Gaipa’s quantitative analysis of review networks in *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist* reveals how these magazines contributed to the formation of literary modernism between 1911 and 1919; Elizabeth Dickens’ quantitative survey of the *Nation and Athenaeum*’s literary pages highlights the title’s links to the 1920s book trade.<sup>15</sup> To date, most quantitative magazine analysis has been performed by scholars of Victorian periodicals, who have at their disposal searchable digitized archives.<sup>16</sup> Since *Woman’s Weekly* has not (yet) been digitized, I necessarily draw on a much smaller sample, of magazines issued between November 1918 and November 1919, January and December 1928, and September 1938 and September 1939, reading the first issue of each month cover to cover, and flipping through the rest to pinpoint further features of interest. Although time-consuming, this process generated data that, analysed quantitatively, identifies shifts and contradictions within the aspirations underpinning *Woman’s Weekly* romance over three points within the twenty-year period. These reflect changes within Britain’s class system, and readers’ assumed position within it.

Besides exploring how Cinderella romance operates in the fiction and lifestyle content of interwar *Woman’s Weekly*, I examine how the genre shapes its structure and interactions with readers, over single and multiple issues. This involves negotiating two of the magazine’s defining properties: its polyvocality and its periodical temporality. Polyvocality is identified as a distinguishing characteristic of women’s magazines by Amy Aronson, who envisages the latter as ‘a noisy, complex form’ whose ‘multiple, and sometimes conflicting, images and ideas’ emerge ‘between and within’ its visual and verbal discourses.<sup>17</sup> Comprised thus of multiple, multimedia, potentially contradictory texts, women’s magazines are ideologically complex. Their complexity materializes, Margaret Beetham observes, in the versions of femininity they produce, which, encompassing a range of identities, are as ‘fractured and heterogeneous’ as the publications themselves.<sup>18</sup> Acknowledging Aronson, I approach *Woman’s Weekly* as a mixed media, polyvocal text, whose messages are potentially at odds. The process of reading this text as Cinderella romance exposes points of contradiction, which emerge, as Beetham’s analysis suggests, in the magazine’s complicated understanding of its readers’ social aspirations.

*Woman’s Weekly*’s periodical temporality requires more discussion, for it both complicates and strengthens the magazine’s links to romance. The publication’s periodicity is highlighted by Beetham’s observation that a magazine is not simply the single issue, but an entire run that ‘appears in single numbers separated by time’.<sup>19</sup> Its identity is thus established through formal repetition, including series, serialisation, and references to past and future numbers, which link each issue to the next. Within these repetitive structures, Beetham argues, magazines remain open-ended, each

14 Patrick Collier, ‘What Is Modern Periodical Studies?’, *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 6.2 (2015), 92–111 (p 107).

15 J. Stephen Murphy and Mark Gaipa, ‘You Might Also Like...: Magazine Networks and Modernist Tastemaking in the Dora Marsden Magazines’, *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 5.1, Special Issue, Visualizing Periodical Networks (2014), 27–68; Elizabeth Dickens, ‘“Permanent Books”: The Reviewing and Advertising of Books in the *Nation and Athenaeum*’, *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 2.2 (2011), 165–84.

16 For instance, *19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals* (Gale Cengage); *British Newspapers 1800–1900* (British Library); *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* (ProQuest).

17 Amy Aronson, ‘Still Reading Women’s Magazines: Reconsidering the Tradition Half a Century after *The Feminine Mystique*’, *American Journalism*, 27.2 (2010), 31–61 (p 32).

18 Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), p 1.

19 Margaret Beetham, ‘Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 22.3 (1989), 96–100 (p 96).

issue presenting new material within a familiar layout.<sup>20</sup> Since narrative closure is a defining formal characteristic of romance, *Woman's Weekly's* open-endedness potentially undermines any attempt to approach its discourses as romance narratives. By showing how shifts within these discourses reveal changes to its readers' aspirations over time, and by exploring serialisation as it relates to their subjectivity and experiences of reading the magazine, I acknowledge the title's open-endedness. Nonetheless, I argue, *Woman's Weekly* does provide narrative closure; furthermore, it is the romantic promise of satisfactory conclusiveness, a happily ever after, that attracts readers to the magazine.

Although magazines' open-endedness complicates *Woman's Weekly's* structural relationship with romance, its formal repetitiveness offers three elements that are closely associated with the genre: predictability, familiarity, and comfort. Like periodicals, romances are defined partly by their structure. Inasmuch as they focus on their protagonists' developing love relationship and conclude with the certainty of their everlasting happiness together, part of their appeal lies in their predictability and familiarity, which, engendered through repeated reading, offers some readers comfort within chaotic everyday life. Romance fans surveyed by Janice Radway describe reading the endings of novels before buying them, to ensure that they can be enjoyed with the certainty of a happy ending; romances' assurance that 'everything' will 'turn out all right' appeals to romance novelist Susan Phillips, who finds in the genre a reassuring predictability, missing from other aspects of her life.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on these readers' experiences, it seems reasonable to attribute the appeal of *Woman's Weekly's* interwar romance fiction in part to its comforting predictability, especially during the year following the First World War, and the months before the Second.

Although periodicals do not necessarily reassure their readers that events will turn out for the best, their repetitive form is, James Mussell suggests, similarly comforting. Drawing on Beetham, Mussell argues of Victorian periodicals that their repetitive structure was a device for ordering world events, and packaging them for consumption.<sup>22</sup> These publications, he argues, helped their readers to make sense of the events of the day. They were thus concerned with making 'the new' understandable, and they sought to achieve this by using conventions, such as categories and modes of address, to which readers, familiar with them through repeated reading, could relate.<sup>23</sup> Their repetitive form thus offered comfort to those who read it as a means of making sense of a world in constant flux.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the interwar years, *Woman's Weekly's* familiar structure invokes predictability, of domestic life continuing regardless of world events. Appearing weekly, romance fiction is integral to its structural repetition. Mapping out readers' aspirations for upward mobility and showing them how to achieve lifestyles and identities distinctive of middle-class status, the magazine's romance narratives position them within a changing class system. The extent to which the magazine's repetitive form allows it to fulfil its reassuring promise to activate their upward mobility is, however, questionable: an issue I address at the end of this article.

20 Beetham, 'Open and Closed', pp 97–98.

21 Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1984), p 99; Susan Phillips, 'The Romance and the Empowerment of Women', in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*, ed. by Jayne Ann Krentz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 54–56.

22 James Mussell, 'Cohering Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century: Form, Genre, and Periodical Studies', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 42.1 (2009), 93–103 (p 94).

23 Mussell, p 95.

24 Mussell, p 101.

## Aspirations

Throughout the interwar period, romance is a dominant voice within *Woman's Weekly*. Each issue of the magazine contains at least once serial episode and one complete story, by popular romance writers including Annie O. Tibbits, Ruby M. Ayres, and Ethel M. Dell: frequently headlining front covers, their names are evidently considered a strong draw by the magazine's producers, who presumably envisage readers escaping into the fantasy worlds their stories invoke.<sup>25</sup> The discourses surrounding this romance fiction indicate that it functions, indeed, as escapism. Dispersed amongst features supporting house and office work, it offers readers respite from mundane workaday demands.<sup>26</sup> The genre's provision of 'me-time' away from the real world does not preclude it from engaging with real life, however: rather, *Woman's Weekly* romance fiction helps readers make sense of their everyday experiences. Lise Shapiro Sanders argues that, besides supplying escapism, early twentieth-century magazine romances helped lower-middle and working-class readers to work through problems they encountered daily, including financial insecurity and marital expectations.<sup>27</sup> Interwar *Woman's Weekly* fiction engages with issues including the rehabilitation of First World War veterans, marriage to a widower, frustration with housework, and single motherhood. Each story invites its reader to identify with a heroine whose experiences and dilemmas may parallel her own, and it is romance's familiar, predictable structure that allows her to work through these potentially difficult or distressing issues. The guarantee of a happy ending establishes the story as a safe narrative space within which she can confront everyday problems. Recalling Mussell, the predictable, comforting narrative framework of *Woman's Weekly* romance fiction helps its readers to find order within chaotic daily life.

In helping its readers to confront everyday concerns, *Woman's Weekly* romance fiction works through what it believes to be their social aspirations within Britain's turbulent class system. As I have shown, the magazine's construction of these aspirations is founded on its readers' gender: encouraging married readers to be full-time housewives and working readers to leave paid work upon marriage, it suggests that women should fulfil their socio-economic aspirations primarily through their husbands. Paid for by the latter, their domestic lifestyles post-marriage will, therefore, be distinctive of their status. These assumptions shine through in *Woman's Weekly* Cinderella romance fiction, which tethers heroines' aspirations for class elevation to the status of socially-desirable heroes. Whether or not the magazine's actual readers identified with its fictional heroines or participated vicariously in their courtships is now impossible to tell: the reader as she is constructed by the magazine does, however, and therefore much can be extrapolated about her aspirations for upward mobility from the status of its fictional heroes. Although heroines' post-marriage lifestyles are not always discussed explicitly, heroes' socio-economic position enables us to predict what they will be like. A quantitative survey of heroes' status at the beginning, middle, and end of the interwar

25 For instance, Tibbits's *Through the Hospital Gate*, serialized in *Woman's Weekly* in 1919–20; Ayres's *Dear David*, serialized in *Woman's Weekly* 1938–39; Dell's *Sown Among Thorns*, serialized in *Woman's Weekly* in 1939. Since Dell's first novel, *The Way of an Eagle*, was published in 1911, it is striking that her fiction still being used to sell the magazine during the late 1930s. This suggests that by then, the magazine was targeting older readers in particular.

26 Lorna Stevens, Pauline Maclaran, and Miriam Catterall, 'A Space of One's Own: Women's Magazine Consumption within Family Life', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, no. 6 (2007), 236–52 (p 247).

27 Lise Shapiro Sanders, 'Making the Modern Girl: Fantasy, Consumption, and Desire in Romance Weeklies of the 1920s', in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: The Interwar Period*, ed. by Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, and Fiona Hackney (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 87–102 (pp 88, 98).



years enables the measurement of *Woman's Weekly* readers' aspirations for social elevation across the period, as they are shaped by the magazine.

*Woman's Weekly* romance heroes' status assumes, firstly, an increasing desire amongst readers to join the established middle classes, and a decreasing interest in aristocratic culture. This shift emerges in a rising preference for heroes who work for a living, and a fall in desire for titled heroes with inherited incomes. Between November 1918 and November 1919, out of the twenty-seven short story heroes whose income source is named, eight are independently wealthy, and nineteen work for a living; during 1928, two have inherited incomes and thirty-eight earn salaries; between September 1938 and September 1939, just one is heir to a title, whilst forty-three have paid jobs. Middle-class society is clearly desirable during each of the three years, but by the middle of the interwar period, it seems to have replaced aristocratic society at the pinnacle of readers' assumed aspirations. This shift mirrors changes in Britain's class system: that *Woman's Weekly* readers increasingly seem to prefer middle-class heroes to aristocrats reflects the interwar aristocracy's falling prestige, and the middle classes' ascendancy. As 1919 *Woman's Weekly* heroine Stephanie discovers when Lord Burdenholme explains to her that his family have rented out their stately home and are living in a cottage on their estate, a title no longer guarantees wealth and material luxury.<sup>28</sup> Crucially, not one of the heroes included in the sample can be classified as working-class: of those who earn their own living, all have white-collar salaried jobs, own profitable businesses, or have occupations connected to the Arts, disqualifying themselves from this category. Whatever *Woman's Weekly* readers' own social origins, this absence of working-class romance heroes suggests, they do not aspire to move in working-class circles, and view marriage as a means of promotion.

That the reader addressed by *Woman's Weekly* is specifically lower-middle-class also emerges in heroes' status. During 1928, middle-class heroes occupy two income-related categories: those who are already established in well-paid jobs and can therefore provide their wives with comfortable or even luxurious lifestyles as soon as they marry, and those who, still working their way up professionally, will provide comfort or luxury in the future, but cannot afford to do so at present. Established heroes include Stanley, partner in an advertising firm, and Alan, who has made millions through unspecified activities in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Married to them, Polly and Charlie will enjoy domestic leisure, thanks to the paid help they can afford to employ. Up-and-coming heroes include Mark, a talented but as-yet-unrecognized painter, and Jimmy, a Hollywood props boy with his sights set on directing.<sup>30</sup> Married to them, Ann and Mary Rose will keep house unaided whilst their husbands realize their potential. The coexistence of established and up-and-coming heroes in *Woman's Weekly* during 1928 complicates readers' aspirations for promotion through marriage. On the one hand they aspire to enter the established middle classes, for whom the ability to employ domestic help is an important distinction, but on the other, their objective is the potential to achieve elevation sometime in the future through their husbands' professional endeavours. It is within this contradiction that readers' lower-middle-class status emerges. Up-and-coming heroes' attractiveness is an indicator of their current lower-class status: fantasies of marrying men with the potential to become middle class seem far more likely to appeal to socially ambitious lower-class women than to women who already view themselves as middle class, for whom marriage to men who are still making their way would constitute loss of rank.

28 Mary Fortune Clegg, 'The Becoming Background', *Woman's Weekly* (19 April 1919), 299–300, iii.

29 Carol Bird, 'Redheads Preferred', *Woman's Weekly* (29 September 1928), 521–27; Penelope Russ, 'Rich Man, Poor Man!', *Woman's Weekly* (6 October 1928), 567–74, 578, 596, 599.

30 Josephine Bentham, 'The Smock of Many Colours', *Woman's Weekly* (14 January 1928), 41–44, 46; Grace Mack, 'Better Than Pickford', *Woman's Weekly* (27 October 1928), 725–29.

Up-and-coming heroes, therefore, embody ideal lower-middle-class husbands, ambitious men from lower-class backgrounds using professional opportunities to achieve social promotion. If *Woman's Weekly's* established middle-class romance heroes mark the status its readers aspire to gain, its up-and-coming heroes, place-markers for their own white-collar boyfriends and husbands, enable them to dream that this is possible.

By the end of the interwar decades, *Woman's Weekly's* heroes suggest, the magazine's up-and-coming readers are feeling more confidently middle class. During 1928, seven classify as up and coming. Between September 1938 and September 1939 however, this figure has fallen to three: Nicholas, a novelist who lodges with heroine Christie's family whilst he completes his first book, Hugh, a medical student, and Jeremy, a fledgling architect.<sup>31</sup> Embarking on careers in well-paid professions, Hugh and Jeremy especially seem likely to be able to afford comfortable middle-class lifestyles in the near future. Readers' growing social confidence is also reflected in a rise in the number of heroes with professional occupations, and a drop in the number of those who work in business. Raphael Samuel defines the professions as occupations motivated by public service, and business as jobs motivated by moneymaking, and argues that, owing to the latter's associations with trade, the former enjoyed greater prestige amongst the interwar middle classes.<sup>32</sup> By Samuel's definitions, two *Woman's Weekly* heroes belong to the professions during 1928, and thirteen work in business; between September 1938 and September 1939 however, the number of professional heroes has leapt to fourteen, and the number of businessmen has fallen to eleven. Vicariously accepting marriage proposals from seven doctors, two architects, two vets, two engineers, a lawyer, a retired colonel, and a boarding school headmaster, *Woman's Weekly* readers seem more inclined than they did ten years previously to imagine themselves in established middle-class circles.

Inasmuch as they gauge *Woman's Weekly* readers' assumed aspirations for class elevation through marriage, heroes of the magazine's interwar Cinderella romance fiction reflect their changing objectives within Britain's shifting class system. The decreasing number of aristocratic heroes mirrors the interwar aristocracy's fall, whilst the increasing appeal of middle-class heroes measures the middle classes' rise. Readers' lower-middle-class status emerges in the coexistence of established and up-and-coming heroes during 1928; ten years later, up-and-coming heroes' falling appeal and the rising attraction of heroes with professional occupations reflects the lower middle classes' increasing social confidence. Encouraging readers to fantasize about both leisured and servantless domestic lifestyles post-marriage, *Woman's Weekly's* 1928 Cinderella romances present contradictory aspirations, which have largely, but not completely, disappeared by 1938. What follows examines how these romances surface in the magazine's lifestyle features.

Whilst *Woman's Weekly's* Cinderella romance fiction fulfils its target readers' aspirations for class elevation in fantasy, its adverts and advice columns promise to realize them in actuality. In Cinderella terms, these features play Fairy Godmother, supplying the transformative wherewithal to achieve promotion. Adverts suggest that, by purchasing certain products, readers will signal their membership of aspirational social groups; selling behaviours associated with aspirational lifestyles and identities, advice columns function similarly.<sup>33</sup> Lifestyle features' method of engaging with *Woman's Weekly* readers also echoes that of its romance fiction, for they invite them to identify

31 Lady Troubridge, 'Nice People', *Woman's Weekly* (22 July 1939), 159–62, 192, 195–96, 199; Gwen Thomas, 'To Tea On Sunday', *Woman's Weekly* (11 March 1939), 391–94, 396, 440; Myfanwy Price, 'Let Nothing You Dismay', *Woman's Weekly* (24 December 1938), 1311–314, 1336, 1338, 1340.

32 Raphael Samuel, 'The Middle Class Between the Wars: Part One', *New Socialist* (January/February 1983), 33–36 (p 36).

33 Kim Christian Schröder and Torben Vestergaard, *The Language of Advertising* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1985), pp 5–6.

with 'heroines' who, investing commodities and behaviours with aspirational qualities, share their social objectives.<sup>34</sup> Where not pictured visually, these heroines feature implicitly, in the delineation of a commodity or behaviour that will make its user more attractive, more competent, more middle class. Inviting readers to identify with models whose social objectives mirror their own, these features thus interpolate them as heroines of 'real life' romances, whose happy ending is social promotion. *Woman's Weekly's* assumption that its readers' status will ultimately be determined by their husbands also surfaces in these lifestyle features, which associate products with marriage to socially desirable men. Toiletries, cosmetics, groceries, and sundry domestic items are promoted alongside images of courting couples, happy husbands, cheerful wives, and disembodied female hands wearing expensive-looking engagement rings, the latter implying that their purchase will result in marriage to a man of material substance. Although not all lifestyle discourses use romance as an explicit selling point, to the extent that they support readers' domestic lifestyles, most are heavily invested in its outcome: marriage to a male provider, who produces his wife's status along with his own.

Echoing the magazine's mid-interwar Cinderella romance fiction, aspirations for up-and-coming and established middle-class lifestyles coexist in *Woman's Weekly's* 1928 lifestyle features. Modelled by a woman wearing an expensive-looking dressing gown, Eastern Foam vanishing cream is associated visually with luxury;<sup>35</sup> similarly, Odo-ro-no deodorant and Icilma face powder accessorize lifestyles distinguished by expensive clothing and pastimes, including motoring, which, during the late 1920s, was still probably outside most *Woman's Weekly* readers' budgets.<sup>36</sup> Readers who buy these products aspire to established middle-class status. Alongside these adverts however, others appeal to readers as domestic workers. The written copy on an advert for Sunlight Soap associates the product with servantless housewifery;<sup>37</sup> likewise, Zog surface cleaner and Glitto kitchen cleaner help them to do their own rough chores.<sup>38</sup> Like fictional heroines who will keep house on a budget whilst their heroes fulfil their potential, *Woman's Weekly* readers who buy these products are anticipating upward mobility. Advice columns shape the same contradictory aspirations, decorative embroidery tutorials and luxury shopping hints assuming that readers have time and money to spare, whilst recipes, cleaning advice, and instructions for refashioning out-of-date clothing address them as hands-on housewives with small budgets. Throughout 1928, etiquette advice acknowledges readers' potential to achieve established middle-class status, teaching them how to behave in circles more exalted than those they currently occupy. Although their evident need of this advice indicates that they do not yet feel confidently middle class, their eagerness to learn 'correct' conduct indicates that, like the fiancées of up-and-coming fictional heroes, they anticipate promotion in the future.

Inasmuch as they present readers with similarly contradictory aspirations, *Woman's Weekly's* 1928 lifestyle discourses echo its fictional romances. By 1938 however, the romances supported by its adverts and advice columns diverge somewhat from its fiction, tempering the latter's impression that the magazine's readers have become more comfortably middle class. Whilst the significant increase in the number of romance heroes with professional occupations points to a rise in their social confidence, adverts continue their 1928 practice of addressing them as both leisured housewives and

34 See Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Boyars, 1983 [1978]), p 12.

35 *Woman's Weekly* (29 September 1928), p iii.

36 *Woman's Weekly* (15 September 1928), p 461; *Woman's Weekly* (8 September 1928), p 422. Whereas 6d domestic glossy *Good Housekeeping* advertises cars during 1928, *Woman's Weekly* does not.

37 *Woman's Weekly* (22 September 1928), back cover.

38 *Woman's Weekly* (29 September 1928), p 558; *Woman's Weekly* (17 March 1928), p 461.

hands-on homemakers, Cutex Clover nail varnish and Vinolia soap identifying them with expensively-dressed women at exclusive sporting events, and Mayfair Margarine and Abrazio aluminium cleaner assuming that their husbands' incomes do not stretch to maids.<sup>39</sup> Advice columns parallel these contradictions, encouraging readers to view a town coat, sports coat, dinner dress, and 'attractive evening ensemble' as wardrobe essentials, whilst continuing to help them keep house without servants or appliances.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, *Woman's Weekly's* late-1930s lifestyle features do indicate that its readers' social outlook may have risen. In a sample taking the third magazine issued per month during the first four months of 1928, twenty-one adverts link their products to leisured lifestyles, and seventy-three to hands-one housework; in an equivalent sample from the year beginning in September 1938, sixty adverts associate their products with leisure, and 104 with labour. Allowing for the increase in the number of adverts, the relative proportion of labour to leisure has dropped from around 3.5 to 1 to around 1.7 to 1. Apparently deemed by advertisers better able to identify with leisured housewives at the end of the interwar decades than they were during the middle, *Woman's Weekly* readers are assumed, if not as comfortably middle class as the magazine's fiction suggests, more confident in their position than they were.

### Interactions

Structurally, fictional and 'real-life' Cinderella romances in interwar *Woman's Weekly* are underpinned by the anticipation and fulfilment of resolution. The magazine's fiction meets readers' expectation of a happy ending with marriage proposals from socially desirable heroes, which fulfil heroines' aspirations for upward mobility, immediately, or in a certain future. Lifestyle features address readers as 'real life' heroines of similar narratives, by creating anticipation for upward mobility through the purchase of products associated with aspirational marriage. The following explores how anticipation and fulfilment might shape the process of reading *Woman's Weekly*, and govern its interactions with its readers.

A *Woman's Weekly* reader's romantic sense of anticipation may begin before she has opened, or even obtained, an issue of the magazine. In a 2007 study of how women consume magazines, Lorna Stevens et al record that, for 'several' informants, anticipating the moment when they can sit down to read is itself pleasurable. Describing how they look forward to getting their magazine, and then wait for the perfect moment in which to settle down and read it, they maximize this sense of anticipation, integral to their reading ritual.<sup>41</sup> Magazine scholar Janice Winship recalls how her own mother would resist opening her copy of *Woman's Weekly* until she had finished the weekly laundry — accordingly, we can imagine the magazine's interwar reader looking forward to reading the magazine at the end of a busy day, and infer that the act of reading itself constitutes escapism.<sup>42</sup> Contents aside, merely the act of sitting down to read the magazine might be anticipated as a satisfactory conclusion to a day's work.

The reader's sense of anticipation is fuelled by *Woman's Weekly's* front cover, which anticipates its contents.<sup>43</sup> This cover distinguishes the magazine from its rivals on the newsstand by characterizing its target readership and unique editorial identity; establishing Cinderella romance as the publication's chief selling point, the cover of the

39 *Woman's Weekly* (17 September 1938), pp 545, 564, 546; *Woman's Weekly* (19 November 1938), p 1088.

40 'Whispers', *Woman's Weekly* (1 October 1938), p 623.

41 Stevens, Maclaran, and Catterall, pp 243–44.

42 Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London: Pandora, 1987), p 1.

43 Gudrun Held, 'Magazine Covers – A Multimodal Pretext-Genre', *Folia Linguistica*, 39.1–2 (2005), 173–96 (pp 176–77).

issue dated 10 September 1938 identifies both with the popular genre.<sup>44</sup> 'ETHEL M. DELL'S ROMANTIC SERIAL – Inside!' declares its headline in attention-grabbing capitals. The serial's title is immaterial, its popular writer and genre deemed sufficient bait to readers who, fans of both, will purchase it. Even if the reader has never heard of Dell, her name's visual prominence implies that her serial is worth reading.<sup>45</sup> The majority of this front cover is occupied by a photograph anticipating this week's knitting project. 'Your AUTUMN SUIT for less than a Pound!' gasps its caption, a promise that, along with the issue's 3d price tag, appeals to readers with limited budgets. The context in which the suit is photographed, however, appeals to readers with social ambitions. Its confident-looking model has accessorized her outfit with smart hat, shoes, and gloves, and is posing on what looks like an expensive modern apartment or hotel balcony: displayed thus, the knitted suit associates itself and *Woman's Weekly* with class elevation. Looking forward to reading Dell's serial, the reader looks forward to vicariously experiencing the courtship of a socially desirable hero. Knitting this suit, she anticipates looking and feeling like the heroine once they are married. The pleasure she experiences in looking forward to reading her magazine is enhanced by her sense that, when she knits this suit, she will acquire an accessory to the lifestyle she aspires to lead.

Having purchased and sat down to read this issue of *Woman's Weekly*, the reader may be guided through its fragmentary texts by her romantic desire to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Like every interwar issue of the magazine, it lacks a contents table, so she must flip its pages to find the serial episode and knitting pattern. The episode is located roughly a third of the way through, and the pattern a couple of pages later – as she flips towards them, the bold subheading of Jean Herbert's complete story 'Wedding Procession' grabs her attention, with an appeal to identify with its 'everywoman' heroine. 'Thelma, Surely, Is Like Every Girl On Her Wedding Eve, Doubtful, Bewildered'.<sup>46</sup> The illustration below, of a young couple in a Rolls Royce car, is captioned, 'Desmond seemed to reflect deeply, then: "To-morrow would be too late to put off the wedding," he said, "but to-day we still can."' Curious, the reader suspends her search to read the opening of this romance, discovering, as she reaches the end of the page, that Desmond's intriguing reflection takes place later in the plot. Stuart Sillars has suggested that illustrations pre-empting action heighten periodical readers' desire to read on:<sup>47</sup> hooked, the reader abandons her search for the serial and pattern, and settles down to discover what happens next, comfortable in her certainty that Thelma's happiness will be secured by a suitable hero. Her desire to reach this satisfactory conclusion, printed towards the end of the magazine, causes her to flip beyond the serial episode and knitting pattern, through an advice column by The Man Who Sees, a dressmaking feature, a jam recipe, an episode of a different serial, and sundry advertisements, whose bold typography captures her attention as she turns the pages.<sup>48</sup> Her desire to reach the end of the story thus ensures her exposure to the rest of the magazine's contents.

Having steered her through a single issue of *Woman's Weekly*, the reader's desire for a satisfactory conclusion hooks her into regular readership. Again, romance is her incentive. Besides Dell's serial, she is now invested in 'The Squire Of Wynfield' by Ruth Fleming; 'The Flameless Candle' by Fay Chandos, beginning the week after Fleming's

44 Winship, p 9.

45 'Mere appearance in a magazine can serve as a way for an author to gain attention or even to be consecrated as the kind of writer deserving attention' (Murphy and Gaipa, p 51).

46 *Woman's Weekly* (10 September 1938), p 467.

47 Stuart Sillars, *Visualisation in Popular Fiction, 1860–1960: Graphic Narratives, Fictional Images* (London: Routledge, 1995), p 86.

48 Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p 63.

serial concludes and whilst Dell's is still ongoing, guarantees her loyalty for the next few months. By the time she has finished Chandos' serial, she will be hooked into another. This contrapuntal introduction and resolution of serialized fiction is a distinguishing structural feature of interwar *Woman's Weekly*, and is doubtless a marketing ploy. As Murphy remarks of *fin de siècle* publications, '[m]agazines and serials enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship', with serials encouraging readers to keep buying and novelists benefitting from their work's exposure.<sup>49</sup> *Woman's Weekly's* lifestyle features borrow romance serials' technique of hooking readers through delayed gratification, advice columnists inviting queries that might be answered in future issues, and knitting patterns looking forward to next week's project. Headlines anticipating future material above opening feature '*Woman's Weekly* Whispers' invite readers to look forward to future issues of the magazine before they have even started the copy they are holding.

*Woman's Weekly* consists, then, of complete and serialized romance narratives, which satisfy its readers with narrative resolution whilst hooking them into regular readership with the promise of resolution in the future. Distinctions between narratives offering immediate resolution and those that are serialized are not always clear, however. Less than a month after the reader has learnt to style her hair in one fashion, she must learn to restyle it; upon completing one knitting project, she is urged to begin the next. To an extent, this serialisation of her quest for personal attributes distinctive of middle-class status occurs because fashions are constantly changing, and the trend-setting magazine must remain relevant. Ilya Parkins argues that fashion's continual revisioning of itself situates its typically female consumer in a modern present defined by change: in this respect, *Woman's Weekly's* serialization of its readers' identities is feminist, challenging notions of femininity as 'timeless' and therefore 'anterior' to modernity, typically gendered masculine.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the magazine's continual deferral of resolution has the potential to undermine any sense of reassurance readers might gain from its instructions for achieving middle-class lifestyles and identities. Angela McRobbie discerns a similar deferral of resolution in 1960s teenage girls' magazine *Jackie*, which, in identifying and supplying solutions to problems that its readers may be experiencing, addresses the same issues repeatedly. In doing so, McRobbie argues, the publication perpetuates impossible standards, for since its vision of its reader's 'ideal' self is undergoing constant revision, its 'course of self-improvement' can never be completed. Effectively, her argument suggests, *Jackie's* serialized form surfaces in the selfhood that it constructs for its reader, who nevertheless keeps buying the magazine.<sup>51</sup> In the light of McRobbie's arguments, *Woman's Weekly*, by serializing its socially ambitious reader's quest for upward mobility, traps her into an endless cycle of social anxiety, in which the attributes distinctive of the middle-class status towards which she aspires are continually being revised, and in order to keep up, she must keep purchasing the magazine.

McRobbie shines fresh light on my earlier suggestion, made with reference to Mussell, that *Woman's Weekly*, with its predictable structure, offers its ambitious lower-middle-class readers reassurance that their social aspirations are attainable. Although doubtless comforting during periods of stress, inasmuch as they supply readers with the wherewithal to achieve social promotion, the magazine's repetitious lifestyle features ensure that their social objectives remain out of reach. By equipping readers with the wherewithal to fulfil their assumed aspirations, the magazine offers reassurance that

49 J. Stephen Murphy, 'The Serial Reading Project', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 1.2 (2010), 182–92 (p 184).

50 Ilya Parkins, 'Fashion as Methodology: Rewriting the Time of Women's Modernity', *Time and Society*, 19.1 (2010), 98–119.

51 Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp 83, 90, 121–23.

their desired status is achievable. By repeatedly reworking the distinctions of that status however, it creates anxiety that their social goals may be unattainable. Of the two aspirations for upward mobility offered by the magazine's Cinderella romance fiction, therefore, immediate entry into the established middle classes remains a fantasy. Kept in a constant state of becoming by *Woman's Weekly's* serialized lifestyle discourses, the best its readers can hope for is the possibility of promotion sometime in the future. Unlike the magazine's fictional heroines, elevation is forever beyond their reach.

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