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Shaping a Weekly ‘For Everyone’: Italian Rotocalchi Entre-Deux-Guerres

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Shaping a Weekly ‘For Everyone’: Italian Rotocalchi Entre-Deux-Guerres

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ABSTRACT

In the years between the two World Wars, Italian publishing houses Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano worked on the model of a specific ‘popular’ weekly. They built up a combination of periodicals constituting a complete and integrated offer, experimenting marketing strategies — such as frequency, distribution, price, and advertising message — and editorial formulae capable of attracting a large readership. This article analyzes these strategies and formulae in weeklies, so-called *rotocalchi*, such as *Il Secolo Illustrato*, *Novella*, *Lei* (by Rizzoli), *Le Grandi Firme*, *Grazia* (by Mondadori) and *Excelsior* (by Vitagliano). As the analysis shows, their publishers and editors focused on a product based on both a precise interpretation of the concept of ‘popularity’ and an interpretation of the expression ‘popular culture’ that was different from that of the past, when ‘popular’ cultural products were such because they were destined for the uneducated and less well-to-do classes. Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano abandoned this static view and the hierarchy of cultural systems and adopted a different, more modern, more flexible, and more dynamic approach. In their case, rather than being associated with a distinct sector of the audience, the popular cultural product looked towards an undifferentiated group of readers: it was ‘for everyone’. In this meaning, ‘popular’ no longer had a qualitative significance — ‘for the people’ — but a quantitative one: ‘as widespread as possible’. By the same token, they did not limit themselves to pleasing an audience that already existed, but tended to ‘build’ their own, winning over those who were not yet part of it.

KEYWORDS

Rotocalchi, Rizzoli, Mondadori, Vitagliano, Italy, Fascism, popular

The 'Trail-Blazers' of the New Popular News Magazine

Angelo Rizzoli and Arnaldo Mondadori were both born in 1889, and both started out poor — the former was an orphan whose unemployed father had committed suicide, the latter was the son of a travelling and illiterate cobbler; both were self-taught before becoming Italy's most important publishers in the 1930s. Always on the lookout for new segments of the difficult readers' market, as well as dealing with books, they managed a considerable and varied number of so-called *rotocalchi*, periodicals printed using the rotogravure technique introduced into Italy in the mid-1920s. Ottavia Vitagliano, born in 1894, became head of a 'paper empire' after inheriting from her husband the publishing house: a series of weeklies, women's magazines, sports journals, *novelle*, and variety and cinema magazines, accompanied by supplements on Hollywood stars and athletes who were about to become myths.¹ Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano were the leading publishers of *rotocalchi*; all had their headquarters in Milan, publishing and printing capital, especially of popular publishing.²

None of them invented a strategy from scratch. Those publishers who had already gained success in the field in the second half of the nineteenth century, Emilio Treves and Edoardo Sonzogno, had created a number of periodicals in addition to their many book series, that catered to a bourgeois or lower-middle-class public (for instance, *L'Illustrazione italiana* and *L'Illustrazione popolare*) and a more working-class one (for instance, *Emporio pittoresco*): women's magazines, travel journals, scientific and literary magazines, variety magazines from Italy and the rest of the world, stories, and serialized novels. Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano also had to compete with illustrated supplements from the big newspapers, such as the *Corriere della Sera*, *La Tribuna*, *Il Mattino*, which had a wide readership in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

All popular periodicals in the period between the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth century shared two key features essential to cultural products for mass circulation: a simple and crystal-clear style of writing, though never flat or negligent, and the use of images, especially illustrations, capable of attracting even less educated readers thanks to the sensational and dramatic effects provided by the pictures' authors. It will not come as any surprise that in the years of the Great War the literary genre most loved by soldiers was that of the illustrated magazine: according to military chaplain Giovanni Minozzi, who was involved in the organization of camp libraries, such magazines 'formed the most popular pastime of the less educated, who delighted in them at length, like dazzled children'.³ They most probably included two magazines

1 Enrico Decleva, *Arnaldo Mondadori* (Turin: Utet, 1993); Alberto Mazzuca, *La erre verde: Ascesa e declino dell'impero Rizzoli* (Milan: Longanesi, 1991); Carlo Carotti, 'La casa editrice Vitagliano anche Gloriosa', *Wuz*, 6.5 (September–October 2007), 16–22; and Carlo Carotti, 'Da Nino a Ottavia la Gloriosa Vitagliano 1933–1965', *Wuz*, 6.6 (November–December 2007), 20–24. On the history of books and publishing in twentieth-century Italy, see Gabriele Turi, ed., *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea* (Florence: Giunti, 1997); Nicola Tranfaglia and Albertina Vittoria, *Storia degli editori italiani: Dall'Unità alla fine degli anni Sessanta* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000).

2 Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni, eds, *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra* (Milan: Cisalpino Istituto Editoriale Universitario, 2009); Fabio Guidali, 'Developing Middlebrow Culture in Fascist Italy: The Case of Rizzoli's Illustrated Magazines', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 4.2 (2019), 106–21. On film magazines, see Raffaele De Berti, *Dallo schermo alla carta: Romanzi, fotoromanzi, rotocalchi cinematografici: il film e i suoi paratesti* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), pp. 25–53, and on the Italian cultural industry in the years between the two World Wars, see David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

3 'formarono il passatempo più allettante dei meno istruiti che ne godevano a lungo, da bimbi abbagliati'. Giovanni Minozzi, *Ricordi di guerra: Le bibliotechine agli ospedali da campo, le case del soldato alla fronte*, 2 vols (Amatrice: Tip. Orfanotrofo maschile, 1956), quoted in Loretta De Franceschi, *Libri in guerra: Editoria e letture per i soldati nel primo Novecento* (Milan: Mimesis, 2019), p. 50. All Italian quotations have been translated into English by the author.

for soldiers printed by Mondadori, who had just launched his publishing business: *La Tradotta* (from March 1918) and *La Ghirba* (from April 1918).

In the post-war years, the Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano publishing houses did not abandon this tradition — indeed they treasured it — but updated their editorial models, organizing their marketing strategies, each following their own path and each taking into account their own know-how. These were popular narratives for Vitagliano, periodicals and products regarding the cinema for Rizzoli, and books that considered both literary quality and success for Mondadori. Whilst in the case of the Vitagliano enterprise, the owner Ottavia Mellone Vitagliano, known under the pseudonym of Sonia, was personally involved in directing several publications, Rizzoli and Mondadori relayed work to editorial staff. All counted on the work of writers, journalists, and figures from the world of entertainment with plenty of inventive ideas; all were eclectic and hardworking and some of them moved from one publication to the other. Amongst them, Guido Cantini, Giuseppe Marotta, Mario Buzzichini, Luciana Peverelli, Mario Monicelli, Filippo Piazzì, and, above all, Cesare Zavattini were leading figures.

Compared to the standards of periodicals previously published by Treves and Sonzogno and to those of the dailies, these three publishers introduced many new features. Some were suggested by technological progress and others by the evolution of the cultural industry; others were dictated by their own intuition, taking into account international models of the time (such as the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, *Vu*, *Film Weekly*, *Movie Weekly*), with which they were well acquainted. In fact, the rotogravure technique made it possible to produce more attractive products at a very affordable price, one within the reach of the less well-off: generally news magazines cost fifty cents, while the average cost of a book was ten lire, twenty times more. Moreover, the quality-price ratio was particularly inviting, in view of the abundance of photographic material.

What is more, news magazines were closely related to the world of cinema, a form of entertainment that was experiencing exponential growth among spectators in Italy. The relationship was evident, both in terms of content (many periodicals were specifically devoted to the cinema, but articles on the most popular films, famous film stars and film reviews and photographs also appeared in non-specialized publications) and in the iconography, expressed in the lively, crowded, racy layout, designed so that a reader could also become a 'spectator'. As we read in the first issue of the new series of the periodical *Le Grandi Firme* (1937–39), newly purchased by Mondadori from the writer Pitigrilli (Dino Segre):

The public is not content just to read. They want photography. The stadium and the cinema have taught them to look. Amidst columns of type and pure fantasy, they want a few photos, meaning windows open on the world and onto reality.⁴

And so illustrations, capable of appealing to the reader's imagination and fantasies, were replaced by photography, considered visual evidence of reality. Static photography, inspired by pictorial models, was replaced by real life scenes or portraits of faces that seemed to 'speak' to readers — or even sequences that transported them into the heart of an event as it happened or to a place in all its detail.

A happy move was the choice of the Rizzoli, Vitagliano, and Mondadori publishing houses to publish each weekly journals, which allowed for a faster pace

4 'Oggi il pubblico non si accontenta di leggere. Vuole la fotografia. Lo stadio e il cine gli hanno insegnato a vedere. Fra le colonne di composizione tipografica e di fantasia pura, vuole qualche fotografia, ossia qualche finestra affacciata sulla vita e sulla realtà.' 'Secondo tempo', *Le Grandi Firme*, 13.308 (22 April 1937), 3, unsigned, but by the editor Pitigrilli, alias for Dino Segre.

than the fortnightly publications and supported the process of capturing the public's loyalty. From that moment onwards, the weekly event became the 'golden ratio' of the mass cultural industry, so much so that it was to be adopted in the post-war period by the radio industry, by the dawning television service, by the encyclopedias published in instalments and sold at newsstands, and by the economy series of books. It was a rhythm that marked the pace of life in an urban society undergoing modernization but still keeping to the rituals of the days of the week that everyone learned by heart in rhymes as children.

Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano managed to create a far greater weekly readership than had been seen on a daily basis and, at the same time, produced a new type of 'popular' cultural product. The revolution took place primarily on the terrain of quantity. In Italy, the illiteracy rate was extremely high and the percentage of readers was low, especially when compared to more advanced European nations.⁵ Nevertheless, the efforts of the Milanese publishers to broaden the readership of their weeklies were intense, and they were rewarded with excellent results. In 1943, at the height of the war, the official figures for the circulation of weeklies were considerable: *Novella* (owned by Rizzoli since 1927), for example, printed 410,000 copies weekly, the women's magazines printed between 100,000 and 220,000 copies, the news magazine *Tempo* 195,000.⁶ Considering that a weekly was read by more than one person and was often shared, these numbers should presumably be multiplied by at least five to arrive at a realistic readership.

In addition, the Milanese publishers were focused with determination on a product 'for everyone', based on a precise interpretation for the concept of 'popularity' and a meaning for the expression 'popular culture' that was different from that of the past. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Italy, in the restricted circle of the educated, ruling class, there was a widespread opinion that the 'people', or a large proportion of the illiterate or barely literate population, were intellectually inferior, as many also believed of women.⁷ Even those who did not share this extreme opinion saw the uneducated not as a public or a group of potential consumers of cultural products, but as something to be ashamed of, a social ill or a sign of the country's backwardness, to respond to by means of a *mission*, action aimed at spreading knowledge, animated by a paternalistic attitude. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the socialists, too, were engaged in spreading literacy among the urban population, but started out from the perspective that culture was a tool of emancipation. This more modern concept of the promotion of culture amongst the lower classes was still being supported by a pedagogical and educational function, so much so that they were often described in historiography as 'apostoli laici' [lay apostles]. Reading for them meant reading only 'good' books, those tied to a prescriptive concept that indicated what the 'lower classes' should or should not be reading.⁸

5 David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

6 Irene Piazzoni, 'I periodici italiani negli anni del regime fascista', in De Berti and Piazzoni, eds, p. 94.

7 See, for instance, Paola Lombroso, Mario Carrara, *Nella penombra della civiltà: da un'inchiesta sul pensiero del popolo* (Turin: Bocca, 1906).

8 Maria Grazia Rosada, 'Biblioteche popolari e politica culturale del PSI tra Ottocento e Novecento', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 23.2 (1977), 259–88; Stefano Pivato, *Movimento operaio e istruzione popolare nell'Italia liberale: Discussioni e ricerche* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1986); Carlo G. Lacaïta, 'Socialismo, istruzione e cultura popolare tra l'800 e il '900: i riformisti', in *Il socialismo riformista a Milano agli inizi del secolo*, ed. by Alceo Riosa (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1981), pp. 379–401; Carlo G. Lacaïta, 'Politica e istruzione popolare nel movimento socialista', in *Istruzione popolare nell'Italia liberale: Le alternative delle correnti di opposizione Atti del II convegno nazionale* (Pisa 12–13 novembre 1982), ed. by Giovanni Genovesi and Carlo G. Lacaïta (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1983), pp. 21–77.

In any case, such were the 'popular' cultural products, because they were destined for the uneducated and less well-to-do classes. The criteria that were applied included levels of literacy and socio-economic parameters. They reflected either a dichotomy in the view of culture, with a clear distinction between high-brow culture and low-brow culture, or a hierarchical view, in which 'popular' publishing was seen as the starting point for scaling the ladder towards 'l'editoria superiore' [superior publishing], as emphasized by one of its greatest supporters, Ettore Fabietti.⁹ Not by chance, products for the 'people' were generally modest and lacking from a material point of view, partly to keep costs down.

When launching their news magazines, the Milanese publishers of the 1930s abandoned this static view and hierarchy of cultural systems in order to adopt a different, more modern, more flexible, and more dynamic perspective. In their case, rather than being associated with a distinct sector of the public, their popular cultural products reflected an undifferentiated group of readers, one that imagined and defined a territory where readers who differed in terms of cultural, social, and economic level might converge — in terms of interest, curiosity, entertainment, passions, and some useful content. They were, therefore, constantly on the lookout for that 'centre', or area of compromise, which, in a single product, could activate elements capable of uniting, rather than distinguishing, readers, separate from cultural levels and income. To sum up, when Rizzoli, Mondadori, and Vitagliano thought of the 'people', they thought of 'everyone', conceiving the general public and attributing a progressive concept to 'the public'; this was unexplored territory, to be sounded out and adopted, piece by piece. Publishers of periodicals in the 1930s did not limit themselves to pleasing an audience that already existed, but tended to 'build' their own, winning over those who were not yet part of a reading public. 'Popular' no longer had a qualitative significance — 'for the people' — but a quantitative one: 'as widespread as possible'.

This is why they did not wish to educate or 'tame' or provide good examples in their periodicals, or even offer tickets for an exotic or imaginary journey. Their intention was, rather, to propose a source 'of enjoyment and distraction', 'indispensable for the contemporary person', thus establishing a place in the fabric of the culture industry at the time, one still emergent in Italy, yet eminent enough to preside over the sectors that would take the lead as it grew stronger.¹⁰ Moreover, as well as being the stimulus for the circulation of other publications by their companies, these journals fuelled other purchases or fed the *desire* for consumer goods even in those who could not afford them, not only through the text, images, or advertising: 'Se avessi un milione, cosa ne faresti?' [If you had a million, what would you do?] was, significantly, a competition launched by Rizzoli's women's magazine *Lei* in 1933. This is why they exhibited an optimistic and modern view of life: the vehicles of all this were the covers showing free, exultant, proud women or the faces of film stars or events and people to keep up with.

The News Magazine 'System', from Conception to Distribution

To capture transversal segments of the public, the publishers came up with a differentiated and integrated marketing strategy: not just one periodical but an organic combination of magazines. Every journal was designed for an ideal addressee who, in the constant search for different and segmented audiences, did not correspond to a

9 Fondazione Arnoldo and Alberto Mondadori, Archivio Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, fasc. Ettore Fabietti, Letter by Fabietti to Arnoldo Mondadori, 8 December 1938.

10 'di godimento e di svago', 'indispensabili per una persona moderna'. Advertisement in *Lei*, 2.1 (2 January 1934), 17.

precise socio-cultural target but rather to a family, individual, generational, or gender group for whom a flexible product could be offered, one that would still be capable of being universally appreciated. This is why historians should not limit themselves to viewing popular weeklies as a monolithic entity but rather within the context of the whole package offered by each publishing company in a game of mirrors; the most elite journal ennobled the most humdrum and the most humdrum made its readers familiar with the elite journal, or at least suggested an attractive approximation to it. Advertising depended on their abundant package, always presented as a whole. Rizzoli's 'magazines for everyone' — *Novella*, *Il Secolo Illustrato*, *Lei*, *Il Calcio Illustrato*, *Cine Illustrazione*, and so forth — appeared like a TV channel *ante litteram* with its programming structure: 'In the peace and quiet of your own home, without having to visit theaters, cinemas or worldly, sports or artistic gatherings etc., you can follow world events in all fields of human activity.'¹¹

Current events, entertainment, worldly events, sport, art, fashion, literature: everything you needed to be *à la page* was at hand for only a few cents, satisfying everyone's taste. In 1934, Ottavia Mellone Vitagliano, in turn, promoted three journals — *Eva*, *Zenit*, and *Excelsior* — promising that her readers would find 'Literature — Art — Fashion — Science — Variety' marked by 'intelligent good taste', delight, agility, and modernity. Regarding the women's magazine *Eva*, the advice was: 'Every Italian woman should read it'.¹²

In the same way, the news magazines were internally complex products, articulated and non-homogeneous, alternating texts in different registers. In this case, too, the loftier content ennobled and legitimized the humble, and the humble 'tamed' the lofty. The same technique was used by the publishers for their book collections: to quote an example, *Medusa*, the famous series of contemporary translated fiction by Mondadori, brought together great writers and great craftsmen of the novel, masterpieces and books of average quality, doing away with 'the class discrimination between elite novels and popular novels, craft and art'.¹³ And with regard to literature, the stories and serialized novels that abounded in the news magazines deserve mention. Although a systematic study of this material is still lacking, the impression is one of peaceful cohabitation between mediocre texts, popular texts with their own literary dignity, and texts by prestigious, successful authors (though never experimental or avant-garde), all lacking any editorial presentation, so that they all ended up on equal footing. A similar impression was gained from a well-balanced combination of Italian authors and translated works by foreign authors, so that the reader was led to overlook the difference, captured more by the stories' narration than by the names of their authors.¹⁴

The search for transversal interest led to every news magazine exploiting the elements capable of bringing people together through their prevailing themes or content: the sentimental stories in *Novella* (Rizzoli), *Zenit* (Vitagliano), and *Le Grandi Firme*

11 'Nella tranquillità della vostra casa, anche senza frequentare i teatri, i cinematografi, le riunioni mondane, sportive, artistiche, ecc., potrete seguire gli avvenimenti che si svolgono nel mondo, in tutti i campi dell'attività umana.' Advertisement in *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.1 (2 January 1932), 15.

12 'Lo deve leggere ogni donna italiana.' Advertisement on the back cover of the supplement devoted to the actress Mae West, *Excelsior*, 9.45 (February 1934).

13 'le discriminazioni di classe tra romanzo d'élite e romanzo di consumo, tra artigianato e arte'. Oreste Del Buono, 'La letteratura popolare: i "Libri verdi", i "Libri azzurri", i "Romanzi della Palma", i "Libri gialli"', in *Editoria e cultura a Milano tra le due guerre (1920–1940): Atti del convegno* (Milan: Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 1983), p. 97.

14 On translations in popular magazines, see Fabio Guidali, 'Tradurre in "roto": Periodici popolari e letteratura straniera (1933–1936)', in *Stranieri all'ombra del duce. Le traduzioni durante il fascismo*, ed. by Anna Ferrando (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2019), pp. 87–103, and Fabio Guidali and Irene Piazzoni, 'Modern American Literature in Italian Magazines during the 1930s', *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 11.1 (2020), 54–72.

(Mondadori), the films and film stars in *Novella*, *Cinema Illustrazione* (Rizzoli), and *Stelle* (Vitagliano), current events and news stories in *Il Secolo Illustrato* (Rizzoli) and *Excelsior* (Vitagliano), sport in *Il calcio illustrato* (Rizzoli) and *Azzurri* (Vitagliano), current events and culture in *Tempo* (Mondadori) and *Omnibus* (Rizzoli), fashion, beauty, and female life in *Lei* (Rizzoli), *Eva* (Vitagliano), and *Grazia* (Mondadori). These were the prevailing — but not the only — content: news magazines had to avoid monotony and always seem interesting and attractive, so the content was always mixed. This rule held even when considering a public differentiated on the basis of gender. While it was true that some magazines targeted women and others targeted men, they sometimes intentionally left the doors open to readers of both genders. The most striking example is that of *Le Grandi Firme*, with images of well-endowed, alluring women on its cover to attract male readers, yet containing a lot of content suited to a female public, such as love stories: thus, a magazine for everyone. Another interesting feature was seen on the letter pages of women's or cinema magazines, where letters from men were included and treated exactly the same as the others.

Of course the selection and distribution of content was the fruit of reflection, reconsideration, and an exchange of ideas, sometimes with clashes between publishers and editors. Indeed, the success of a product was due to its ability to reach a delicate internal balance, to come up with the right lettering and place a column in the right position. Cesare Zavattini, editor of *Il Secolo Illustrato* at the time, received the following advice from his friend, the writer Giovannino Guareschi, in 1935:

The 'Secolo' is not popular: my opinion is that if you want to make it highly popular, you should try and place it in the (fine) framework of 'Cinema Illustrazione'. Lots of things, lots of great photos, brief and very varied texts with no literary pretensions. Serial novels, little columns perhaps [...]. You're more aware than I am that sometimes it's enough to change the colour of the cover to sell a magazine.¹⁵

As well as suggesting a change of colour, other advice from Guareschi was to avoid articles spanning two pages make the layout 'the clearest and most obvious' possible, create a readers letter page 'of the type: "Just tell me and tell me everything"', like that in *Cinema Illustrazione*, and give another column a fixed place.¹⁶

A 'viva e originale' ['lively and original'] page design was another crucial aspect. The harmony and allure of the news magazine's 'face' was guaranteed by the elegance and clarity of the layout and the taste governing the choice of photographic material — a characteristic shared without exception by these magazines, featuring graphics and iconography that were both elegant and easily deciphered, suited to all palates, from the most demanding to the simplest. The layout was also a necessary lever for 'gripping' readers and encouraging them to stop and read an article: "The good layout artist must think that, before being read, each page is "seen"; often the "cut" of a photograph is

15 'Il "Secolo" non è popolare: il mio parere è che se tu vuoi renderlo popolarissimo devi cercar di dargli l'inquadratura (bellissima) di "Cinema Illustrazione". Molte cose, molte belle fotografie, scritti brevi di assoluta varietà e senza intenti letterari. Romanzo d'appendice, rubricchette forse [...]. Tu sai meglio di me che, a volte, è bastato cambiare il colore d'una copertina perché un giornale vada.' Quoted in Guido Conti, 'Cesare Zavattini direttore editoriale', in De Berti and Piazzoni, eds, p. 428.

16 'in modo più chiaro e pedestre', 'sul tipo: "Lo dica a me e mi dica tutto"'. Quoted in Conti, 'Cesare Zavattini direttore editoriale', p. 428.

enough to capture the reader's attention and conjure up sympathy, as it were, for the subject.¹⁷

Distribution of the weeklies was also essential. In 1930s Italy bookshops were considered sacred places, visited by a few initiates; humbler and more economic books were not sold in bookshops but on bookstalls run by traveling businesses. The weekly had its realm in the newsstand, a 'democratic' system of distribution, accessible to anyone regardless of social class. The periodicals' success inspired the idea of also selling books in the newsstands, to draw a public that would never enter a bookshop, closer to a modern, attractive product such as that offered by the Mondadori collection, *I romanzi della Palma*. The newsstands also sold the novels that had appeared in episodes in the magazines, such as the famous *I romanzi di Novella* by Rizzoli.

The importance of sales in the newsstands is indirectly proven by the strategy adopted for the covers of the weeklies: the editors gave the covers careful attention, as they had to both attract the attention of the buyer and be immediately recognizable, with an eye on both the public to be won over and regular readers, as well as try to distinguish the title from those of its competitors, of course. Each Rizzoli periodical was a different colour: *Novella* was printed in purple, *Lei* in sepia, *Il Secolo Illustrato* in brown, and *Cine Illustrato* in blue with a multi-colored cover. The format served the same purpose and was generally tabloid: large enough to fit covers and images with a clear visual impact. What is surprising is that the internal structure of the individual magazines was so strict and, once fixed, was adhered to in every issue and for many years: the same number of pages, the same positioning of the contents, the same columns. This was an indication not only of the success of the particular formula but also of the need not to disorientate the loyal reader.

All this helps us to understand perfectly what Cesare Zavattini recalls with regard to his work at Rizzoli: 'To serve the public was our motto, no one, however famous or needy, could move my sentiments — suitable or unsuitable were our adjectives: the newsstand our realm.'¹⁸

Love, Sin 'Hinted At', and Looking at the Lives of Others

In 1920s Italy there were already magazines dedicated exclusively to love stories, most of which had come into being at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most important of these were *Il Trionfo d'amore* and *Il Capriccio*, which also contained stories suggested by readers. The former, moreover, was directed by the mother of Luciana Peverelli, an up-and-coming romance writer, who learned the ropes of journalism whilst working on this publication. The weekly magazine of short stories *Novella* — among the best-selling periodicals of the 1930s — represented an evolution and adaptation of the formula. It offered the same content, taking advantage of the essential rotogravure technique, which made it possible to print many photos and the imaginary world fueled by the cinema, especially Hollywood. Originally, *Novella* was a periodical offering new,

17 'Il bravo impaginatore deve pensare che ogni pagina, prima di essere letta viene "veduta"; spesso il "taglio" di una fotografia è sufficiente a trattenere l'attenzione del lettore e ad affezionarlo, diciamo così, all'argomento.' Luigi G. Garrone, 'Un giornale in roto (La settimana del mondo su un metro quadro di carta)', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.31 (20 July 1932), 10.

18 'Servire il pubblico era il nostro motto, nessuno per illustre e bisognoso che fosse poteva commuovermi — adatto o inadatto i nostri aggettivi: l'edicola il nostro regno.' Cesare Zavattini, 'Diviso in due', in *Cesare Zavattini, Le voglie letterarie*, reprinted in Cesare Zavattini, *Opere (1931–1986)* (Milan: Bompiani, 1991), p. 994, quoted by Manuela Carpi, *Cesare Zavattini direttore editoriale* (Reggio Emilia: Biblioteca Panizzi-Archivio Cesare Zavattini-Aliberti Editore, 2002), p. 20. Regarding Zavattini's work in periodicals at the time, see also Guido Conti, *Cesare Zavattini a Milano (1929–1939): Letteratura, rotocalchi, radio, fotografia, editoria, fumetti, cinema, pittura* (Voghera: Libreria Ticinum, 2019).

quality literature, but sales were poor in this guise. Its transformation into a successful magazine was the work of Rizzoli, who bought it from Mondadori in 1927, and editor Guido Cantini, who came from the world of show business (he was a playwright and screenwriter). Indeed, the project for the new editorial line was Cantini's, and it envisaged news and a great many photos of scenes from films and of film stars, whose polished and ideal faces were displayed on all the covers, accompanied by stories and serials presenting characters and atmospheres in harmony with the world evoked by the images. The dual cinema-literature format referred back to a common sphere of sentiment and passion, voyeuristic and worldly, modern and alluring, in which certain ingredients were skillfully combined, some of which readers could identify with, while others projected them into a dreamscape.

Novella gave space to narratives by writers, both male and female, who churned out stories that revolved without exception around the theme of love. While order and morality generally triumphed in the end, the plots were full of complications, scheming, downfall, and recovery, sometimes with secret love affairs and brief meetings. In addition, as the advertising stressed, they took place 'in the frantic context of modern life'.¹⁹ All the women's magazines at the time offered a large quantity of reading material of this sort, by both Italian and foreign authors. Sometimes the narrated stories were quite audacious, considering that Italy at the time was still 'backward' in terms of sexual mores and couple relationships, still Catholic and bigoted, and the press had to answer to fascist propaganda on the terrain of private morals, too. The 'sin' was never revealed, of course, but suggested and left to readers' imaginations.²⁰

There was no lack of allusion to the erotic sphere; stories were never vulgar, but instead were elegant or ironic or merely whispered. These allusions played mainly on visual elements: there were many photographs showing passionate kisses, long, bare legs, sinuous bare shoulders, languid poses, and suggestive illustrations. The best-known, so much so that they have become a phenomenon in the field, are the famous covers by Gino Boccasile for *Le Grandi Firme*, which were defined as 'una pietra filosofale dell'erotismo' ['a philosophers' stone of eroticism'].²¹ Allusions to the erotic sphere were also found in the short stories, where they occasionally came to the surface in words. Hard as it is for a translation to fully render the semantic charge of Italian expressions, we offer a few examples. The September 1933 supplement of *Excelsior* by Vitagliano, dedicated to Mae West, was titled 'Sex-appeal ad alta frequenza' ['High-frequency sex appeal']; the article 'Come leggono le donne' ['How women read'] in the September 1933 *Excelsior* included a photo of a 'lettrice di giornali illustrati' ['female reader of illustrated journals'] shown in a provocative pose, wearing a scanty satin robe with an issue of *Eva* — another of Vitagliano's journals — in full sight, with the caption 'Tipo di donna che ha storie per la testa' ['The type of woman who has stories on her mind'] (Fig. 1). The caption of one of the photographs accompanying the article on champagne in *Il Secolo Illustrato* reads: '... Le signore se ne servono per cancellare dalle labbra i baci fuori serie... Ma la serie ricomincia subito dopo' [... The ladies use it to wipe the unexpected kisses from their lips... But the expected sequence starts over

19 'nella frenetica cornice della vita moderna'. Advertisement for *La corsa al piacere* by Bruno Corra, in *Lei*, 1.3 (1 August 1933), 12.

20 Enrica Cantani, 'La stampa femminile tra le due guerre', in *Editoria e cultura a Milano tra le due guerre (1920-1940)*, pp. 104-05.

21 Antonio Fatti, 'L'inventore delle gambe', in Gino Boccasile, *La Signorina Grandi Firme* (Milan: Longanesi, 1981), p. ix.



Fig. 1 'Come leggono le donne', *Excelsior*, 8.37 (13 September 1933), no page.

soon afterwards afterwards], as both kisses and champagne were clearly associated with sensuality, without entailing directly turbid eroticism.²²

Arousing voyeuristic curiosity was fundamental for the transversal success of the magazines. As well as being a window on 'life', they presented themselves as a window on the 'lives' of others, on the lives of the unreal characters in the stories and on those of real people, generally famous ones. With regard to real people, an indication of this trend came from the photographs selected, but even more so from the captions, which provided details or clues to reading the character of the people chosen, making them both distant and close, mythical and familiar. There was no lack of special editions devoted to 'Hollywood scandals' or the 'lettere intime' ['private letters'] of the eccentric and provocative actress, 'folle' ['mad'] Clara Bow. There were articles and photos of the sentimental lives of famous couples, and incursions into the private lives of journalists and those who worked for the newspapers. Regarding institutional figures, too, the moment when the public and the private coincided, such as births, marriages, and worldly occasions, were happily contemplated.²³

'A Good Magazine Is a Faithful Friend'²⁴

Novella's readers' letters column, edited by Mura (the pen name of Maria Assunta Giulia Volpi Nannipieri) met with great success. When Mura died suddenly in a plane crash in March 1940, she was remembered in the press not only for her novels, but also for her correspondence with readers, which she worked on untiringly, replying to letters on unrequited and requited love, the difficulties of life, and physical faults to be corrected.²⁵ Her audience was all-embracing, as she herself stated: 'Young and old people

22 *Mae West: Sex-appeal ad alta frequenza*, supplement to *Excelsior*, 9.45 (February 1934); 'Come leggono le donne', *Excelsior*, 8.37 (13 September 1933), no page; 'Una coppa di champagne', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.1 (2 January 1932), 3.

23 *Scandali a Hollywood*, supplement to *Excelsior*, 9.50 (February 1934); *Difendiamo Clara Bow*, supplement to *Excelsior*, 9.45 (January 1934).

24 'Una buona rivista è un'amica fedele'. Advertisement in *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 18.1 (1 January 1929), 14.

25 Enzo Arnaldi, 'La donna che parlava al cuore delle donne', *Stampa Sera*, 74.67 (18 March 1940), 3.

write to me from all walks of life, including the Church.²⁶ This type of column became common in magazines at the time and was certainly one of their strong points. Not by chance, Ottavia Mellone Vitagliano, for an article on how to run a magazine, chose a photograph that portrayed her behind her desk, attentively answering the 'valanga' ['flood'] of letters she received every day.²⁷

The special feature of these columns was not the publication of the letters received but the replies themselves, preceded by the names or pseudonyms of the writers, who could thus recognize themselves. As well as showing off the skill of the columnist — who specialized in replies that were as concise as they were intense, as clear as they were slick — this feature made it possible to establish a solid relationship between the magazine and the individual reader, who thus felt 'unique', an effect that was also felt by those who did not write letters. The magazine was someone to confide in, a point of reference, a 'friend' to turn to, even for those who did not dare ask anyone else. The subtitle of *Grazia*, the women's magazine launched by Mondadori in 1938, was *Un'amica al vostro fianco* [*A Friend at Your Side*].

The letter page was not just a tool for establishing friendships with readers, but also acted as a 'service'. The *usefulness* of periodicals was in fact another pillar of their broad success and, therefore, a wager for their editors to bet on. *Lei* included articles on physical fitness exercises, with plenty of explanations and photographs, drawings of do-it-yourself furniture, paper patterns for home dressmaking, recipes, detailed tables showing the nutritional elements in different foods, practical advice of all sorts, explanations of board games, columns on graphology and astrology, and replies to readers' questions on health and beauty. *Excelsior* also included a 'Rubrica del medico' ['Doctor's Column'], while *Il Secolo Illustrato* offered free and private medical consultations, presenting them as follows:

In order to please our readers and provide a useful service, we have established a Medical Consultancy Office, directed by a worthy professional with a profound knowledge of medical science. Readers in need of this service may thus confidently write to our 'Medical Consultant', outlining their case as clearly and conscientiously as possible.²⁸

Vitagliano's *Stelle* allowed young women who desired to attempt a career in films to submit their photographs by means of competitions, a precursor of the beauty-contest mania that was to find fortune after the Second World War.²⁹

Grazia, too, offered a number of useful columns. Indeed, it might be said that the whole of *Grazia* appeared as 'useful', starting from the table of contents. In fact the titles of the magazine's various sections were designed to show the valuable role it played in meeting certain needs: 'How to be Happy', 'How to Dress Well', 'How to Have a Happy Home', 'How to be Beautiful', 'How to Have Happy Children', 'How to Keep Healthy', 'How to be Joyful' — all universal objectives, as can be seen. And the editorial at the beginning emphasized this, telling readers:

26 'Mi scrivono giovani e vecchi e appartenenti a tutte le categorie sociali, compresa la ecclesiastica.' 'Lettere a Mura', *Novella*, 15.4 (22 January 1933), 10.

27 'Come si fa Excelsior', *Excelsior*, 8.16 (19 April 1933), 20–21.

28 'Nell'intento di fare cosa gradita e soprattutto utile ai nostri lettori, abbiamo istituito un Ufficio di Consulenza medica diretto da un valoroso Professionista, profondo cultore di scienza medica. I lettori e le lettrici che ne avranno bisogno potranno quindi rivolgersi fiduciosamente al nostro "Consulente Medico" esponendogli il proprio caso con la massima chiarezza e serietà.' Advertisement in *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.1 (2 January 1932), 10.

29 Angela Bianca Saponari, 'È nata una stella: La funzione di scouting delle riviste anni Trenta: il caso Stelle', *Arabeschi*, 10 (July–December 2017), 396–400 [accessed 20 December 2019].

You know quite well that you can be happy: because you hope to be, you struggle to be, you are convinced that you will be. So how to be happy? [...] To help you believe in life, to help you live with enthusiasm, dedication, sincerity; to help quiet your spiritual unrest and solve your big and small material problems, too, from the family budget to the unfashionable dress; to help you believe in life. This is the purpose of our magazine.³⁰

The columns were filled with advice: how to prepare a meal for four costing only thirty cents; how to choose the right curtains for a room; how to deal with children's tantrums. Many articles foreshadowed today's tutorials: photographs and illustrations showed in meticulous detail how to transform a skirt into eight different outfits or illustrated exercises for maintaining good posture. *Grazia* also included a doctor's and a graphologist's answers to readers' questions.³¹ Again referring to the services offered by the magazine, the column 'Vivere in due' ['Living as a Couple'] was of great interest. For the first time there was 'a close discussion on the couple with all its economic and moral problems, which are, in fact, everyone's problems', as Oreste del Buono emphasized.³² Enrica Cantani, in turn, writing about the approach taken by the author of the column Wanda Bontà, observed: 'The tone is mild and, naturally, does not upset the established order but the woman is authentic, and it's the woman we meet at the grocer's or on the landing, an average sort of woman, not a gorgeous *femme fatale*, not Madame Bovary but not a fanatic in combat gear, either.'³³

Interest, Entertain, and Mediate

Il Secolo Illustrato, the Italian prototype of the modern news magazine, was modelled on its international peers, such as the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*. It was marketed as a weekly 'for everyone', first of all because even someone who could not read could take pleasure in browsing through it and looking at the many photographs, which were the boast of every issue, some large, such as those on the cover and the last page, others smaller.³⁴ The educated reader could look at the same photos with the same interest, choosing whether or not to read the captions. In addition, the news and themes were suitable for readers with different cultural interests: curiosity, worldly life and gossip, and crime reporting were — and still are — the grounds, *par excellence*, on which we all meet, all the more so if they are treated with a balanced approach, as was the case here.

30 'Voi sapete benissimo che si può essere felici: perché sperate di esserlo, perché lottate per esserlo, perché siete convinte che lo sarete. E allora come si può essere felici? [...] Aiutarvi a credere nella vita, aiutarvi a vivere con slancio, con dedizione, con sincerità: aiutarvi a rasserenare le vostre inquietudini spirituali, e a risolvere anche i vostri piccoli e grandi problemi materiali, da quello del bilancio a quello dell'abito fuori moda; aiutarvi a credere nella vita. Ecco il programma del nostro giornale.' 'Per voi', *Grazia*, 13.1 (10 November 1938), 3.

31 Patrizia Landi, 'I primi passi di "Grazia" tra innovazione e informazione', in De Berti and Piazzoni, eds, pp. 235–304.

32 'un discorso serrato sulla coppia con tutti i problemi economici e morali della medesima che sono appunto i problemi di tutti'. Oreste del Buono, *Amici, amici degli amici, maestri* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1994), p. 204.

33 'Il tono è sommo e, naturalmente, non turba l'ordine costituito ma la donna è vera, è la donna che incontriamo dal salumaio e sul pianerottolo, è la donna media, non una fatale bellissima, non la Bovary, ma nemmeno la fanatica in sahariana.' Enrica Cantani, 'La stampa femminile tra le due guerre', p. 106. On women's magazines at the time, see Silvia Salvatici, 'Il rotocalco femminile: una presenza nuova negli anni del fascismo', in *Donne e giornalismo: Percorsi e presenze di una storia di genere*, ed. by Silvia Franchini and Simonetta Soldani (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2004), pp. 110–26.

34 Raffaele De Berti, 'La settimana del mondo su un metro quadrato di carta: la fotografia in "Il Secolo Illustrato" tra la fine degli anni Venti e gli anni Trenta', in *La fotografia come fonte di storia*, ed. by Gian Piero Brunetta and Carlo Alberto Zotti Minici (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2014), pp. 129–54.

The journal looked equally towards a male and female readership. This was indicated not just by the presence of a few articles on sport or fashion, but by the overwhelming prevalence of reports and narratives that were of interest regardless of the gender of the reader; the advertising confirmed this universal target.

Il Secolo Illustrato was a chronicler of current events, attentive to news reporting and the events of the past week. These were primarily condensed into pages of various photos, alternating good and bad news, tragedies and ceremonies, painful events and festivities, new and unknown faces. Often, photos of news reports with their captions appeared in the middle of an unrelated story. In the case of longer reports, photos were often used to make them more spectacular: for example, photos taken at the border of Belgium and Germany — images of arrests, chases, escapes, checkpoints — accompanied an article on smuggling.³⁵ In the case of particularly dramatic events, the cover itself was like an authentic photographic report, such as in the case of the Shanghai incident presented in the February 1932 issue.³⁶ (Fig. 2) To sum up, 'inform' was synonymous with 'entertain'. As the journalist Luigi Garrone pointed out: 'The daily newspaper must inform the public; the illustrated weekly must interest and be enjoyable, documenting and commenting on current events with photographs.'³⁷ As for the photographs,

200, 300, perhaps more, are received every day; every twenty-four hours our desks are covered with the most widely varying views and panoramas and the world passes before our eyes; images that come from all regions; portraits of political figures, car crashes, girls, athletes, the protagonists of crime stories, landscapes, congresses: everything that has interested the news reports.³⁸

In this 'chaos of issues, this constant interweaving and overlapping of themes', the editor must choose a direction and select 'wisely what will interest the majority of the public', a task implying less responsibility than the editor of a daily, but no less delicate, because it is a matter of offering a thorough overview of the week in only a few pages, endeavoring to 'balance the importance of the event with — let us say — its "illustratable" nature' — in other words with the photographic material available.³⁹

Between one news report and the next, the magazine sometimes touched on interesting issues generally neglected by the dailies. To limit ourselves to a few examples that emerge as we browse through the material from 1932, there are articles on the so-called 'people's kitchens', or canteens for the poor, in Milan, on the dormitories for the poor, on work in an agency for press clippings, on women presenters on the radio, on the headquarters of a large telephone network, on the construction of a weekly

35 Il gabelliere, 'Niente di dazio?', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.1 (2 January 1932), 8–9.

36 'I primi documenti fotografici delle tragiche ore di Sciangai', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.10 (5 March 1932), cover.

37 'Il quotidiano deve "informare" il pubblico; il settimanale illustrato lo deve interessare e divertire, documentando e commentando l'attualità con l'immagine fotografica.' Luigi G. Garrone, 'Un giornale in roto (La settimana del mondo su un metro quadro di carta)', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.31 (20 July 1932), 8.

38 'se ne ricevono 200, 300, forse di più, ogni giorno; ad ogni ventiquattro ore, i tavoli si riempiono di visioni e panorami variatissimi, è il mondo che ci passa dinanzi agli occhi; immagini che ci vengono da ogni regione; ritratti di personalità politiche, disastri automobilistici, girls, atleti, protagonisti di cronaca nera, paesaggi, congressi: tutto quanto ha interessato la cronaca.' Garrone, 'Un giornale in roto', pp. 8–9.

39 'caos di argomenti, in questo intrecciarsi e accavallarsi continuo di temi', 'sagacemente quello che può interessare la maggioranza del pubblico', 'equilibrare l'importanza dell'avvenimento con il suo carattere, diciamo così, d'illustrabilità'. Garrone, 'Un giornale in roto', pp. 9–10.



Fig. 2 'I primi documenti fotografici delle tragiche ore di Sciangai', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.10 (5 March 1932), cover.

magazine, on trips to Lourdes. There is also a *tranche de vie* of a summer on the banks of the river Po and a report from the Paris ghetto.⁴⁰

For those familiar with the history of the Italian press under the fascist regime, it is not difficult to imagine why so many people would be attracted to the crime reports, since these were few and far between in the Italian press, being subject to the instructions of the censor. They had mostly — but not exclusively — to do with cases from abroad but this did not detract from their power to fascinate. The articles on the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's son provide a pertinent example. *Il Secolo Illustrato* narrated the tragic event from its beginning right up to its epilogue, starting from its

40 Luigi A. Garrone, untitled, *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.6 (6 February 1932), 11–12; Luigi A. Garrone, 'Il Grand Hôtel dei poveri', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.11 (12 March 1932), 9–10; Luigi G. Garrone, 'L'amministrazione della gloria', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.21 (21 May 1932), 8; Alb. Cas., 'Tu conosci la sua voce (Si tratta della "speaker")', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.22 (28 May 1932), 14–15; Alb. Cas., 'Dove ci incontriamo spesso senza vederci mai...', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.23 (4 June 1932), 8; Garrone, 'Un giornale in roto', 8–10; Alfredo Jeri, 'Il treno bianco', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.32 (6 August 1932), 9–10; Alfredo Jeri, 'Il treno bianco', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.32 (6 August 1932), 9–10; L. Fietta, 'Il mare d'acqua dolce (La "stagione" sul Po)', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.31 (30 July 1932), 11; Lino Másala, 'Il ghetto di Parigi', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.34 (20 August 1932), 8–9.

cover on 12 March 1932, which 'introduced' both parents and child.⁴¹ Detailed articles followed on the Lindbergh family and the world of American crime, with updates on the enquiries, photographs reconstructing the kidnapping, and even a map of the villas in Beverly Hills where 'le "stelle" di Hollywood, impaurite, sbarrano le porte' ['the terrified Hollywood stars bolt their doors'] after the event.⁴² Crime stories, as well as the direst of news stories, were nonetheless carefully meted out, not only for fear of the censor, but rather, I believe, because of the need to keep the tone of the magazine optimistic and full of *joie de vivre*, which, as previously mentioned, remained a constant feature in the popular news magazines of the time.

In an enthusiastic, light-hearted, and sometimes ironic tone, the magazine documented new developments, whether they be the granting of permission for lovers to kiss in public, neon advertising billboards, the miracles of cosmetic surgery, or classes on baby care for 'giovani papà' ['young fathers'] set up in a London hospital.⁴³ The cultural horizons opened up by the magazine were also modern. One example is the cover with the portrait of a half-naked Exquisite Barbette — real name Vander Clyde — a queer circus performer and trapeze artist who had captured the attention of the Parisian intelligentsia of the time. The photograph is as stirring as the caption is reassuring. Barbette is defined as 'l'uomo delle metamorfosi' ['the man of metamorphoses'], one of the 'most famous acrobats in the world and one of the most amazing quick-change artists (judge from this photograph taken in his dressing-room as he applies his woman's make-up)', and his performance is called 'curious and moving'. It is stated that he has attracted 'the attention of critics and famous writers'.⁴⁴ (Fig. 3) To give another example, an article accompanied by a wealth of photos showing a girl in lax poses and attitudes offered a list of rules of behaviour 'encouraging the flapper, or girl who took her "American" upbringing to excess, to return to a more harmonious lifestyle'.⁴⁵

Indeed, a periodical for an undifferentiated public obliged its makers to contemplate a variety of sensibilities and differences regarding moral habits, worldviews, and traditions, obviously within the limits of fascist censorship. I believe this is the main reason — commercial necessity — for the contradictions between openness and closure, audacity and signals of a 'return to order' that have rightly been identified. Thus, in the same issue and sometimes on the same page, the reader might find, on the one hand, short stories in which love, and not marriage, was 'entirely dominant' or where the leading female characters aspired to divorce, articles on women pilots, sports champions, portraits of beautiful, free, and uninhibited stars, as well as images from the fantastic planet of the cinema, where anything was possible, and, on the other hand, letters in which writers encouraged a respect for tradition or warned that all those 'fine

41 'Il bimbo per il quale palpita tutto un Paese', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.11 (12 March 1932), cover.

42 'Queste sono le famose colline di Beverly: qui le "stelle" di Hollywood, impaurite, sbarrano le porte, dopo il ratto di baby Lindbergh', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.12 (19 March 1932), 5.

43 Luigi A. Garrone, 'Un bacio non dà scandalo', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.2 (9 January 1932), 4; P. Sestili, 'Réclame in volts', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.2 (9 January 1932), 13; Dr. F. Marta, 'Un naso in restauro', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.4 (23 January 1932), 11; 'La scuola dei papà', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.16 (16 April 1932), back cover.

44 'più celebri acrobati del mondo e uno dei più sorprendenti trasformisti (si giudichi infatti da questa fotografia che ce lo presenta mentre, nel suo camerino, si trucca da donna)', 'curioso ed emozionante', 'l'attenzione di critici e di scrittori illustri'. "L'uomo delle metamorfosi non è morto", *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.5 (30 January 1932), cover.

45 'richiamare ad una più armoniosa linea di vita la flapper, la ragazza che esagera l'"americanismo" della sua educazione'. Luigi G. Garrone, 'Signorine, non esageriamo!', *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.15 (9 April 1932), 5.



Fig. 3 “L'uomo delle metamorfosi” non è morto’, *Il Secolo Illustrato*, 21.5 (30 January 1932), cover.

stories are invented and often reality is very different to what art manages to convey as being so wonderful’.⁴⁶

Conclusions

For the Milanese editors in the years between the two World Wars, working on the model of a periodical ‘for everyone’ meant building up a combination of periodicals into a complete and integrated product, designing and experimenting with marketing strategies — such as frequency, distribution, price, and advertising message — and instituting editorial formulae capable of obtaining a readership that was as transversal as possible. They made abundant use of photography and its ability to provide, or whet the appetite for, a look at both the glamorous and the real life, to enliven the pages and allow a pause in reading. They mixed material on the cinema with narratives in order

46 ‘belle vicende sono inventate e che, spesso, la realtà è molto diversa da quella che l’arte fa apparire tanto bella’. ‘Lettere a Mura’, *Novella*, 15.2 (8 January 1933), 15. On this aspect, see also Elena Mosconi, ‘Irene, Luciana, Mura e le altre: La cronaca mondana e di costume’, in De Bertì and Piazzoni, eds, pp. 461–67.

to make room for the desire to escape to both close and distant worlds; and they mixed narrative material of various levels and various origins, with the result of toning down extremes and smoothing away differences. With one eye on their female readers and the other on their male counterparts, they made use of themes, atmospheres, expedients, and registers that could reconcile a large portion of contemporary social classes and cultural categories: love, sin (suggested but never exhibited), elegant voyeurism, optimism, familiarity with the reader, usefulness of their columns, the variety of subjects. Lastly, in an effort to respect a broad spectrum of tastes, their periodicals acted as a decompression chamber for extending connections between tradition and modernity, among different national cultures, and between high-brow and low-brow cultures. Extraneous elements could be assimilated because they had been exorcized, tamed, or compensated by other, more familiar ones.

The feat they accomplished was rewarded. The proof of this is that, from 1937 onward, fascist censorship began to clamp down fiercely on news magazines. However, if a journal was obliged to close down, as happened, for instance, to Rizzoli's *Omnibus* in 1939, its editor immediately replaced it with a similar one (in this case, *Oggi*), to avoid losing the readers that had been won over. And so the magazines resisted, despite being mortified by political pressure and increasingly suffocating conformity, right up until the start of the war, when, one by one, they were forced to close down. But the heritage of experience remained and so did the reading public, so much so that the immediate post-war period saw a flourishing of magazines. Other publishers, such as Mazzocchi, Sandro Parravicini, and Rusconi, joined Mondadori, Rizzoli, and Vitagliano, and the selections multiplied. A golden age for periodicals began after the war which was to last until the 1970s, when the spread of television and the proliferation of private TV channels reduced their fortunes. The increase in readership, which also considered newly literate sectors of the public, and the return of democracy led to a clearer position for the weeklies, each of which took its place with segments of readers distinguished by political position and socio-cultural interests. This was a trend that had already started to appear at the end of the 1930s, when Rizzoli launched the first *Omnibus* directed by Leo Longanesi and then *Oggi*, managed by Arrigo Benedetti and Mario Pannunzio and targeted at more educated readers, a further addition to its already rich selection of periodicals, conceived to cover certain interests and a cultural demand for information that had not been contemplated until then. This, too, proved to be a winning move.

And so, in the post-war period, the roll-out of models for magazines and the differentiation among readerships took place thanks to an enormous reserve of materials, experiments, and formulae made available during the years between the two World Wars by the Milanese publishers.

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