

# In Search of Naked Things Through a Hungry Nose: Virginia Woolf's "The Duchess and the Jeweller"

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## I. Introduction

Virginia Woolf's "The Duchess and the Jeweller," first published in 1938 by Harper's Bazaar, portrays two characters: Oliver Bacon, the story's social-climbing protagonist, once a poor boy in the streets of London who has become the richest jeweler in England, and the Duchess of Lambourne, an English aristocrat who has lost a great deal of money to gambling and coaxes Oliver to purchase fake pearls for a high price. Although Oliver doubts the pearls' authenticity, he decides to buy them. Knowing that Oliver wants to be in the aristocratic circles occupied by the old English upper classes, the Duchess invites Oliver to spend "a long weekend" in her country house (253)<sup>1</sup> where he will meet her daughter Diana and the Prime

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1) Virginia Woolf, "The Duchess and the Jeweller" in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt). Further references to this short fiction are

Minister. Oliver accepts the Duchess's invitation as an opportunity to gain access to the highest echelon of English society, and writes a cheque for twenty thousand pounds. Appearing as caricatures of moral corruption, these characters might epitomize types of snobs in the British cultural context: a decadent aristocrat and a utilitarian businessman.

Not many scholars have discussed "The Duchess and the Jeweller" since it was published in 1938, and studies on Woolf's works little touch on "The Duchess and the Jeweller." Heather Levy's *The Servants of Desire in Virginia Woolf's Shorter Fiction* (2010) omits the 1938 story, though it covers a range of Woolf's short stories. One reason the 1938 story has been absent from critical focus is because the text does not partake in the experimental narrative devices Woolf's fictions commonly present. Devoid of the innovative writing styles Woolf has arduously employed, the 1938 short fiction might simply appear as a moralistic tale purported to satirize corrupted individuals. Taking that stance, Dean Baldwin sees the characters within the story as no more than "flat characters" aimed more at ridicule than understanding, and assesses that Woolf follows the conventions of "slick magazine fiction" (62). Dominic Head considers the short fiction a "conventional plot-bound story" (80) and Jean Guiget evaluates it as "a mere satirical portrait" (341).

The lack of critical attention to the story also comes from its references to Jewishness and its evocation of a "blatant Anti-Semitic attitude" (Rodríguez 116). Finding "offensive" racial connotations such as "Jewish" noses in "The Duchess and the Jeweller," critics in this line note Woolf's use of anti-Semitic representation. Julia Briggs takes Woolf's portrayal of the jeweler as an inappropriate representation of a Jew (182) by pointing to the American publisher's reaction to the story's synopsis. New York literary agent Jacques Chambrun had initially accepted Woolf's manuscript, titled "The Duchess and the Jew," but later asked Woolf to change the title from what the American market would consider "a terrific racial prejudice" (Lee 679). In her diary, Woolf wrote that Chambrun

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incorporated in the text, with page numbers appearing in parentheses.

worried about the synopsis “on the grounds that it was ‘a psychological study of a Jew’ and thus, due to widespread racial prejudice in America, unacceptable to his client” (107). Following the publisher’s request, Woolf changed several elements, including the title. She also changed the character’s name from “Isadore Oliver” to “Oliver Bacon,” and from “the little Jew boy” to the “little boy” (Rodríguez 117-18). Kate Krueger Henderson observes that, despite Woolf’s revisions, the story retains anti-Semitic references. Henderson argues that “Woolf’s production of an anti-Semitic portrayal of a Jew cannot be overlooked, excused, or ignored, whatever her intent” (2). Lara Trubowitz, in “Concealing Leonard’s Nose: Virginia Woolf, Modernist Antisemitism, and the Jeweller” (2008), alleges that Woolf’s representation of Oliver’s physical appearance, including the shape of his nose, is based on pervasive racial stereotypes of Jews (277).

Breaking apart from such a reception in which the story is conceived as an Anti-Semitic piece of work, some other scholars have discussed complex aspects of the author’s representation of the character. Hermione Lee sees that Woolf’s “offensive caricature” of a Jew serves to deliver the author’s social critique of “the habitual Anti-Semitism of her circle” (680). Young Joo Kim reads that the story reflects Woolf’s self-conscious challenge of the formation of British anti-Semitism. Instead of reducing the story to an anti-Semitic work, Kim argues that the text reacts to the British politics to control Jews, which deploys both “differentiation” of the racial other and “assimilation” of them as a political strategy (17).

In line with the existing studies, this paper proposes that it is a hasty conclusion to link Woolf’s representation of the character with her personal racism. On the surface, the text displays images and signs evocative of Jews, like Oliver’s nose, the word “Jew” in the “Jeweller,” and “Oliver Bacon,” the surname of which “may refer to the prohibition to eat pork in the Jewish tradition” (Rodríguez 118). However, the very portrayal of Oliver can be a central site intimating Woolf’s objections to a broad range of cultural and political forces, including anti-Semitism and Nazism; it also engages Woolf’s interest in olfactory perception and her critique of the Western idealization of optical vision, conceived as “the noblest of

the senses” (Jay 29).

To demonstrate this argument, this paper examines how “The Duchess and the Jeweller” challenges cultural and political trends of producing ostensibly polished surfaces or visual facades in the 1930s by concentrating on three crucial literary tropes embedded in the text: jewels, the jeweler’s nose, and the Duchess’s artificial scent. First, this paper examines the story’s valorization of jewels, a major trope in Woolf’s writing serving to express an individual’s mistreatment of things, which prevents one from understanding the true qualities of things. Next, it turns to Woolf’s “offensive” caricature of the jeweler, characterized as having an animalistic nose, and discusses how the seemingly offensive portrayal can produce possibilities to see the character from new perspectives. Contradicting the view that such a portrayal evinces the author’s racism, I argue that it functions to reveal Woolf’s desire to explore the depths of things, the true nature of which might be perceived through depending on multiple bodily senses, including smell. Finally, to address the author’s portrayal of the Duchess, the obviously arrogant snob who invents an artificial façade through aromatic perfume as well as clothing, this paper emphasizes the subtle but significant differences between the Duchess and the jeweler, and tries to articulate the cultural messages drawn from their relationship.

## II. Abused Jewels in “The Duchess and the Jeweller”

Prior to the publication of “The Duchess and the Jeweller,” the image of jewels often emerged in Woolf’s writings. Woolf’s 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* is one of her exemplary texts centering on the image of jewels. It uses the image of a ruby in a moment of epiphany that Mrs. Ramsay creates her dinner party. At the cost of Mrs. Ramsay’s effort to harmonize all of the separate guests, a gem-like moment is created. In *To the Lighthouse*, the narrator says, “there is a coherence in things, a stability; something. . . is immune from change and shines out. . . in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby” (107). Mrs. Ramsay’s moment

creates an enduring form, analogous to a ruby that is solid, stable, and immune from the flux of time and physical decay. In *To the Lighthouse* an image of a jewel is given to the moment when Mrs. Ramsay's love and self-sacrifice creates perfect harmony. Because Mrs. Ramsay's gem-like moment enables the concealed pattern to emerge on the visible surface, those who partake in this special moment are given the woman's "free" gift: that is, the healing power that serves to bind all separate individuals.

Paralleled with a jewel, the moment Mrs. Ramsay invents in her dinner party appears as a perfect work of art that makes the hidden togetherness visible, manifesting the artistic gift of the creator. Fusing spiritual virtues by means of her labor, Mrs. Ramsay engenders the magic moment, identified with a crystal that is made into a permanent moment. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf presents jewels as aesthetic objects emblematic of spiritual values such as beauty, love, eternity, and purity; if their transparent color seems to mirror heaven, their hard texture appears to contain such invisible values protecting them from external influences. Woolf's autobiographical essay, "A Sketch of the Past" also includes the moment of choosing the mother's jewelry. Woolf describes: "There were none of those snatched moments that were so amusing and for some reason so soothing and yet exciting when one ran downstairs to dinner arm in arm with mother; or chose the jewels she was to wear" (*Moments of Being*, 94-95). As in *To the Lighthouse*, the jewels in "A Sketch of the Past" are associated with her mother's beauty and love.

That Woolf employed jewels as an embodiment of beauty and love may not necessarily mean that she used them as a mere symbol serving to signify something else, like beauty, love, and other spiritual values. In other works, Woolf provides the image of jewels in seeking to highlight the real qualities or natural beauty of things. By focusing on the material quality of jewels or gems, characterized as hardness and solidity, Woolf exposes how one can be fascinated by the thing itself. For example, in her short fiction, titled "Solid Objects" (1920),<sup>2)</sup> Woolf creates a

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2) This story is collected in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. References to this story are marked, with only page numbers appearing in parentheses.

character named John who recollects broken beauties out of garbage, abandoning a career in politics to search for a gem in the form of a “lump of glass,” especially among “waste land” (104): he retrieves and reanimates the objects that attract him. Although John can be seen as a morbidly obsessive person, he displays an extraordinary quality: his potential to escape consumer capitalism where things are assessed only by their exchange-value and uncover the enigma of the overlooked things. “Solid Objects” tends to highlight the true nature of things, that is, the “thingness” of things, by reflecting Woolf’s desire to liberate things out of their functions as symbolic signs or humanized artifacts (Brown 412-13). In the fiction, Woolf engages jewels or gems in portraying an individual’s sincere pursuit of “the thing itself,” which refers to the ontological conditions of the thing, independent of a human subject’s use of it.

“The Duchess and the Jeweller” exemplifies how an individual can misuse things, in this case, jewels, by taking them as mere commodities or using them for self-oriented purposes. Published in 1938, the period when the law of consumer capitalism became a dominant principle, the story illustrates that the “sellers” neither consider spiritual values that the things might possess nor appreciate the ontological qualities of the things, or the nakedness of them. For the Duchess, who asks an exorbitant price for her imitation pearls to pay off her gambling debts and to work her plan through to its end, things are not more than objects of exchange-value. The pearls, albite fake, are important to the Duchess, only insofar as they solve her financial crisis.

The text shows that the Duchess’s pearls and her tears are juxtaposed. The Duchess is shedding false tears when trying to sell the fake pearls: “Tears slid; tears fell; tears, like diamonds, collecting powder in the ruts of her cherry-blossom cheeks” (252). In exchanging her false pearls with Oliver’s money to pay off her gambling debts, she drops “ten pearls,” “rolling from the slit in the ferret’s belly – one, two, three, four – like the eggs of some heavenly bird” (252). Using false tears as well as fake pearls, the Duchess creates a game of power. In this game, she is abusing not only things but also her daughter, Diana, through offering her up as

a commodity. The jeweler and the Duchess, depicted as “friends, yet enemies,” “master, [and] mistress” (251), are misusing and abusing the things for the sake of selfish purposes.

Oliver’s desire for material success has led him to deploy dishonest means in becoming a jeweler. He had sold “stolen dogs to fashionable women in Whitechapel,” “cheap watches,” and opportunistically, replaced items for selling (248). In the past, Oliver “passed through the knots of jewelers in the hot evening who were discussing prices, gold mines, diamonds, reports from South Africa” (249), and was getting preoccupied with jewels for their exchange value. Through becoming such “a dealer in minerals” who “sees only the commercial values, but not the beauty and unique nature of the mineral” (Marx 141), Oliver utilizes things, instead of exploring “the secret life of things,” which designates their autonomous existence outside “a fetishistic overvaluation or misappropriation” of a human subject (Brown 399).

Oliver utilizes the jewels as if they were female bodies or fetish objects existing for the pleasure of looking, what the American film critic Laura Mulvey termed as scopophilia, meaning both the aesthetic pleasure and the sexual pleasure derived from looking at others. It conveys a voyeuristic fantasy which “arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (Mulvey 836). Mulvey criticizes the psychology of scopophilia by addressing the way in which a woman has functioned “as erotic object for characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (838). Oliver’s private room in the short fiction emerges as a space that allows him to take a sexual gesture, entailing a voyeuristic fantasy and a violent kind of touch.

Keeping and displaying sumptuous jewels, Oliver’s chamber is located within the jewelry shop he runs on Bond Street. The narrator pictures the spatial setting: “The cries of Bond Street came in; the purr of the distant traffic. The light from reflectors at the back of the shop struck upwards” (250). Compared to a cinema, featured as dark, closed, and seemingly remote, the private room serves to give

Oliver the pleasure of looking. The text captures the moment when Oliver “unlock[s] the grating that barred the window” and enters the room, which one might compare to a cinema in that the place serves to meet voyeuristic and erotic pleasures. After entering the room, Oliver fixes his eyes on the displayed jewels:

Each was lined with a pad of deep crimson velvet; in each lay jewels—bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, ducal coronets; loose stones in glass shells; rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds. All safe, shining, cool, yet burning, eternally, with their own compressed light.

“Tears!” said Oliver, looking at the pearls.

“Heart’s blood!” he said, looking at the rubies. “Gunpowder!” he continued, rattling the diamonds so that they flashed and blazed. “Gunpowder enough to blow up Mayfair—sky high, high, high!” He threw his head back and made a sound like a horse neighing as he said it. (250)

Exhibited in Oliver’s private chamber, each of the jewels triggers a kind of banal poem. Oliver assigns a verbal sign to each of the jewels: “Tears,” “Heart’s blood,” and “Gunpowder.” Oliver imitates poets who conceived that the jewel stands for femininity, and, if arguable, utilized the female body as “a common trope for art and artistry” (Rodríguez 124).<sup>3</sup> Related to female bodies, the jewels are treated as objects for gaze and erotic pleasure.

Oliver’s pursuit of the voyeuristic fantasy through using the jewels is a pseudo-romantic posture. For Oliver, possessing a woman has been one of his primary desires. Living in “a villa at Richmond, overlooking river, with trellises of red roses” (250), Oliver used to stick one rose in his buttonhole every morning, and pursued a quasi-romantic life style; yet, he keeps up this habit no more because the “Mademoiselle” picking the rose for him married another man (250). In this situation where he has lost the “Mademoiselle” who fulfilled his romantic desire to

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3) Laura María Lojo Rodríguez aligns Oliver’s response to the jewels with the aesthetic performance of the Romantic and the late Victorian poets. Rodríguez mentions, in particular, “Christina Rossetti, Letitia Landon, Alfred Tennyson and Percy Bysshe Shelley” (124).



some extent, Oliver takes another quasi-romantic performance, looking at and touching the jewels in the private room. The flaming sight of the jewels reaches Oliver's eyes, captivates him, and stirs him to express his perverse desire for things and female bodies. Simultaneously, Oliver touches the diamonds with his hands by "rattling [them] so that they flashed and blazed." Evoking "Diana," the woman whom he has lustroously yearned for, the diamonds serve as a female body in Oliver's hands.

"The Duchess and the Jeweller" in this way signifies how the characters mistreat things, the jewels in this case, as well as human beings. In an economy of exchange, both characters reduce the things to objects for selling. Yet, between the two individuals, the story focalizes the jeweler's use of jewels, by inducing readers to see how he treats the things. In portraying the man's use of the jewels, the text implies his entangled desires, a commercial desire for money and at the same time, a sexual and erotic desire for a woman. It also exposes to what extent Oliver comes to misuse the jewels when he approaches them by acquiescing to the law of a capitalist marketplace and pursuing the male-oriented pleasure of looking. Through showing Oliver's treatment of the jewels, which entails scopophilia and a self-oriented touch, the story allows readers to recognize a mundane abuse of things and to consider alternative ways to approaching things or the other bodies, whether artifacts or human beings.

### III. Oliver Bacon's Animalistic Nose

The opening of "The Duchess and the Jeweller" introduces Oliver as a social climber who lives "at the top of a house overlooking the Green Park," where he rather self-contentedly reflects on his rise from being a boy selling stolen dogs on Sundays (249). The text offers a detailed description of the ostensibly refined façade where Oliver dwells, and the material things: "He had a flat; chairs juttet out at the right angles—chairs covered in hide. Sofas filled the bays of the windows

—sofas covered in tapestry” (248). It also alludes to Oliver’s culinary taste, saying that the “mahogany sideboard bulged discreetly with the right brandies, whiskeys and liquors” (248). “And from the middle window he looked down upon the glossy roofs of fashionable cars packed in the narrow straits of Piccadilly. A more central position could not be imagined” (248), says the narrator. A “manservant” serves Oliver “at eight in the morning” so that “he would have his breakfast brought in on a tray” (248); the servant “would unfold his crimson dressing gown” (248). At every morning, Oliver also reads invitations coming from high-class people, washes, and reads his paper “by the bright burning fire of electric coals” (248). As the richest jeweler, Oliver possesses material property by which he willfully constricts his self-identity, adapting himself to the marketplace, and relishing the fact that he is the most affluent jeweler in England.

The text shows how the act of covering nakedness emerges in Oliver’s conscious manipulation of his visual façade. Having invested his money in a project of sophistication, the self-made man seeks to gain sartorial refinement by means of dress, shoes, and other lavish items, the external signs of cultural sophistication that invent visual refinement. Oliver’s money allows for the growing refinement of his appearance: he “dressed better and better; and had, first a handsome cab; then a car; and first he went up to the dress circles, then down into the stalls” (249). Oliver’s commercial success engenders cultural, social, and aesthetic refinement: his economic capital has reshaped the fashionable façade. By appearing in an urban milieu with stylish dress and a car, Oliver stages himself and displays his own refinement to the mass of spectators.

Through Oliver’s pose of sophistication, which turns out to be unable to suppress the residue of a memory, the text exhibits his obsession with sartorial refinement. As R. S. Koppen notes, clothes can be “objects of use that display a look and a style that tie [individuals] to a particular aesthetic and historical moment” (2). For Oliver, garments become one of the most visible signs indicating his material achievement in society. Fashion, as George Simmel pinpoints, offers that “measure of conspicuousness and individual prominence” which allows one to

make oneself noticeable, to grasp the attention from others in the social world (309). Koppen restates Simmel's commentary on the role of fashion: "In a metal climate where quality (individual difference) reduces to quantity (exchange value), fashion offers a mode of individuation which is always looked upon as proper, and a mutability which operates at the 'periphery of personality' and so presents no threat to the 'stability of the ego-feeling'" (qtd. in Koppen 7).

Although Oliver strives to eliminate signs of poverty unfitting his present status as a rich man, he confronts the return of them. Oliver reflects on the material success that has brought him the appearance of refinement, but then he encounters a memory of his childhood. Destabilizing Oliver's appearance of refinement owed to the designer's dress, the memory returns to him. Remembering his past, he addresses himself, "Behold Oliver," . . . "You who began life in a filthy little alley. . ." (248). Oliver "would look down at his legs, so shapely in their perfect trousers; at his boots, at his spats" (248). His clothes "were all shapely, shining; cut from the best cloth by the best scissors in Savile Row" (248). To the ostensibly civilized man, a memory of the "dark" past occurs, as the narrator remarks, "But he dismantled himself often and became again a little boy in a dark alley" (248).

Describing the luxurious façade surrounding Oliver and the return of his past, the text evokes the cultural trend in which people conceal their naked bodies through covering them with sartorial surfaces and visual spectacles, and at once, reveals the visceral power of bodily memories, associated with olfaction. To be specific, "The Duchess and the Jeweller" suggests that the Western civilizing process has engendered the suppression of smell by attaching negative connotations to olfaction, and Woolf challenges this negation in the name of civilization. It recalls the way in which social and cultural refinement has grown with the elimination of smell, in that smells are often identified with poverty, vulgarity, and social marginalization: the civilizing process during and after the Enlightenment has in fact involved the process of eradicating smells.

The French historian Alan Corbin examines the historical moments when smells disappeared in the world of upper classes. In *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1986),

Corbin articulates, since the Enlightenment period in European culture, the privileged classes have striven to avoid smells through social programs and discipline by stressing sanitization and bodily hygiene. The bourgeoisie invented deodorizing tactics, being in favor of fresh air, cleanness, and good health, and all of these paralleled their primary drive toward civilization, intelligence, progress, refinement, and sophistication. The “bourgeois deodorization presupposed wealth, or at least comfort,” and in contrast, bad smells became the definite sign of poverty, vulgarity, barbarism and lack of intelligence (Corbin 213).

The push to deodorize was worked out at the fin de siècle among the affluent and educated British people. By the late nineteenth century, privileging the doctrine of progress and influenced by developments in the medical, biological, and psychiatric sciences, the British bourgeoisie had immense anxiety over the degeneration of the human race. They regulated smell by means of ousting natural odors from the cultural arena and inventing artificial fragrances so as to suppress the natural bodily odors, which seemed to be at odds with progress and sophistication (Smith 66). While elevating the significance of the eye as the sense of truth, the so-called Enlightenment and modern Western Europe did not appreciate the real nature and value of smell (Smith 63).

The tendency of undervaluing smell in favor of visible facades is reflected in the case of Oliver in Woolf’s short fiction. While achieving the appearance of refinement as the story suggests, Oliver has eliminated the stench that might remain from his former environment, “a filthy little alley” (248), considered a term of “condemnation” for the word “filth” evokes stench, dust, pollution, infection, decay, decomposition, waste, rubbish, the rotten, malnutrition, excrements, and sickness (Cohen and Johnson xi). Oliver’s escape from the filthy smell is aligned with the Western civilizing project in which the educated and bourgeois were eager to avoid smells, afraid of “the terrible dangers of decay” and “waste” that are attached to strong, foul odors (Corbin 214). Desiring to be accepted by the privileged social circle, the social climber Oliver had to divest himself of the smell of filth, which seems critical for class formation. The more money he earns, the better he dresses;

and this visual evolvment alludes to his disconnection from smells.

Despite Oliver's extreme consciousness of surface appearances and his achievement of refinement in the cultural sense, the smell of the filthy alley returns to Oliver through his memory. The return of the memory becomes an embarrassing self-revelation of smell, which is travelling through the realm of Oliver's unconsciousness, and manifests its presence, in spite of one's efforts to stamp it out, through the programs of manipulation. The story empowers the long-neglected olfaction, revealing how the obsession with the visual façade is affiliated with the attempt to hide or eliminate smell, as if it mocked the character's struggle to eliminate the "stench" of his past. Associated with darkness and filth, the return of Oliver's "uncivilized" past bespeaks the impossibility of hiding naked bodies and smell, a bodily sense that has been suppressed while climbing to his current wealth and civilizing his façade, but remains a part of the elements constituting his identity.

While referring to the visceral force of smell, "The Duchess and the Jeweller" provides Oliver with images of animals, most of which are characterized as a distinguished nose. The story depicts that in spite of the material goods that influence his commercial success, Oliver is "not satisfied yet," just as a camel at the zoo "is dissatisfied with its lot" (249). The text identifies Oliver as a set of animals, as follows:

He was the richest jeweler in England; but his nose, which was long and flexible, like an elephant trunk, seemed to say by its curious quiver at the nostril" (but it seemed as if the whole nose quivered, not only the nostrils) that he was not satisfied yet; still smelt something under the ground a little further off. Imagine a giant hog in a pasture rich with truffles; after unearthing this truffle and that, still it smells a bigger, a blacker truffle under the ground further off. So Oliver snuffed always in the rich earth of Mayfair another truffle, a blacker, a bigger further off. (249)

As the passage indicates, Oliver is compared to an elephant and a giant hog. He

is then identified as a camel at the zoo: “He swayed slightly as he walked, as the camel at the zoo sways from side to side when it walks along the asphalt paths laden with grocers and their wives eating from paper bags and throwing little bits of silver paper crumpled up on to the path” (249). The narrator goes on to say: “[t]he camel despises the grocers; the camel is dissatisfied with its lot; the camel sees the blue lake and the fringe of palm trees in front of it” (249).

Woolf employs the zoomorphism of the character, right after describing his ostensibly refined surfaces. On the one hand, the animalization of Oliver might be designed to satirize the character driven by animalistic appetites for money, appearance, and social success. In this interpretation, “a bigger, a blacker truffle” that Oliver is searching for signifies material property. Oliver’s pursuit of a bigger truffle by his nose indicates his endless desire toward material goods and sexual objects. Imagining that “a bigger, a blacker truffle” (249) would lie in the terrain of depth, Oliver aspires to go into a “foreign” space, just as European imperialists explore the “Other” world with imperial fantasies in which the place is fantasized as a mysterious site that may reserve “bottomless” and profitable things. In this sense, Oliver’s sniffing nose becomes an indicator of his perverse desire, suggesting that he remains desirous of something more.

However, Woolf’s portrayal of Oliver’s animalistic nose could be considered not simply a mark of moral corruption but a sign of his potential, if unfledged, to be differentiated from the typical types of imperialists or culturally privileged individuals who have promoted innumerable calculations and strategies to hide the true qualities of naked bodies and things. If the conventional upper classes are simply contented with their own achievement of making ostensibly clean, sophisticated, and civilized appearances, Oliver stays self-conscious of what he has achieved, and occasionally recalls his childhood memories. For Woolf, who was skeptical about human-oriented actions to produce artificial facades purported to conceal naked bodies, Oliver, who is associated with the non-sophisticated animals, might have certain advantages of departing from the social compulsion to the willful creation of artificial appearances.

Animals are not always treated as inferior to human subjects in Woolf's writing, especially those published in the 1930s. Woolf used to employ tropes of animals or animalization of human subjects while exploring the depths of characters, especially outsiders, in order to critique her culture and society. In *The Waves* (1931), for example, Woolf gives the image of animals to Louis, a marginalized character in that he is an immigrant coming from Australia. Conscious of the gaze of "keepers," he remarks, "I am the little ape who chatters over a nut, and you are the dowdy women with shiny bags of stale buns; I am also the caged tiger, and you are the keepers with red-hot bars" (*The Waves*, 92). Woolf's portrayal of Louis through the imagery of animals functions to reveal his psychological oppression and the society's practice of imperialism.

Written from a dog's perspective, Woolf's 1933 work, titled *Flush*, suggests a close bond between an animal and love. Named Flush, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog traces the hidden stories of her and her lover, Robert Browning. The narration exposes that their love is traced by the dog's "nose," which is highly perceptive of scents, including "strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers, nameless smells of leaf and bramble," "sour smells as they crossed the road," and "pungent smells as they entered bean-fields" (*Flush*, 16). The dog's olfaction plays as what detects the signs of their love. As a writer whose imagination was stretched to the world without self, Woolf paid attention to animals as well as material things in external worlds, and conceived that both artifacts and animals preserve their own lives and exist independently beyond human touches. Detached from human oriented perspectives, at times, Woolf's works emphasize positive values of some of the animalistic qualities. As represented in *Flush*, Woolf makes a dog display "superior" qualities intrinsic to animals, the animal's olfactory perception.

"The Duchess and the Jeweller" brings in the conjunction of an animal, smell, and love, although the male character, unlike Flush, fails to achieve something genuine because he adheres to the pleasure of looking and the law of a marketplace. Despite Oliver's failure to explore something real and naked, the story allows readers to see some different aspects of Oliver through emphasizing his nose. The

story renders Oliver the imagery of an animal, whose major organ of perception is its nose, by implying that the character may be divergent from the traditionally upper-class and imperial subjects who vainly cover their naked bodies through artificial methods. Possibly, the image of animals attached to Oliver can be seen as suggesting his potential to question the deceptiveness of civilized facades, which prevent one from understanding the real qualities of naked bodies.

Woolf's short fiction stresses the power of olfaction whereas many of the academic discourses in Western societies tend to disregard it. As Immanuel Kant noted, in the discourse of the Western Enlightenment, smell is considered the most wasteful and uncontrollable sense: if smell is diffused once, it denies being recalled. The olfactory perception, Kant thought, is of importance only for maintaining a clean environment. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) Kant asserts that the sense of smell is "the most thankless" and "the most expendable" sense because "disgusting odors always outnumber pleasant ones (especially in crowded places), and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure we get from smelling it is always fleeting and transient" (37).

While Kant did not regard smell as one of the cognitive faculties constituting an aesthetic experience, Woolf deployed smell as the primary sense facilitating to perceive the spontaneous, intuitive, and free nature of things. Through using the trope of smell, which is diffusive and "wasteful," Woolf might intend to liberate a desire for lavishness suppressed in commodity culture, and to privilege what gets beyond the law of capitalist marketplace—something unexchangeable that denies being replaced and refined. Oliver serves to reveal such a yearning for lavishness: he decides to "waste" money to have a one-day romance. Although Oliver's excessive expenditure derives from his misguided attitude toward women and love, in a sense, it becomes an "anti-utilitarian" and non-practical action, albeit problematic, and possibly signifies his potential to transcend the commercial and visually-oriented frame in order to explore the naked qualities of a "bigger truffle." As discussed so far, such a potential that Oliver might have is presented through his animalistic nose.



#### IV. The Duchess's Artificial Spectacle: The Scent of Aroma

“The Duchess and the Jeweller” depicts the Duchess as the champion covering a naked body with artificial devices to the most extreme level. In portraying the Duchess, Woolf represents a specific way of manipulating smell; if Oliver eliminates smell to enter the new social class, the Duchess applies anal scent. The story introduces the Duchess's emergence as follows: “Then she loomed up, filling the door, filling the room with the aroma, the prestige, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the Dukes and Duchesses swollen in one wave” (251). It goes on to say: “As a parasol with many flounces, as a peacock with many feathers, shuts its flounces, folds its feathers, so she subsided and shut herself as she sank down in the leather armchair” (251). She needs to use artificial methods, like her clothes and perfume, in order to hide her financial crisis. As noted in the description, the smell of perfume first marks the Duchess' entrance to Oliver's house. In resonance with Oliver's ostensible facade, aroma serves to insinuate the Duchess' arrogance and vanity absent from any nakedness.

Through the depiction of the Duchess's appearance, Woolf places the aristocrat woman against the fin-de-siècle decadent backdrop where the process of olfactory aestheticization became highly sophisticated in keeping with the upper classes' growing tastes for sensationalism, eroticism, hedonism, and narcissism. By means of artificial perfumes and aromas, the privileged classes tried to subdue natural smells in favor of artificial scents, especially in the late nineteenth century. Reflecting this trend toward perfume, as Hans J. Rindisbacher notes, perfumes permeate the aesthetic world of Dorian Gray, a narcissistic character infatuated with his own physical beauty in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890): for his self-pleasure Dorian puts “some perfume on his handkerchief”; he has a “delicately scented chamber” (qtd. in Rindisbacher, 191).

Dorian's perfume characterizes one aspect of the fin-de-siècle aestheticians, utilizing a range of artificial means in order to achieve the decadent dandy image. The aroma which helped define the place of Dorian in Wilde's fiction, is associated

with deception, stinginess, and calculations alike in “The Duchess and the Jeweller.” The story links the smell of perfume to such qualities as power, luster, and utilitarian exchange, and implies that a world devoid of natural smell is missing the genuine comprehension of things, which, for Woolf, were construed as the original and unexchangeable figure, instead of a thing of utility. Aroma and lies are coupled in shaping the character of the Duchess, who plays as the owner of the fake pearls that afford only exchange-value in her mind.

In reference to the sartorial refinement and deception, the story makes the Duchess evoke the dictators in the 1930s, such as Fascists, Hitler, and the Nazis, notorious for their extreme reliance on visual image, illusion, and spectacle. Critics have noted that Mussolini succeeded in hoodwinking the people with manipulative tactics, and influenced German Nazism by offering “a model for Hitler’s own elaboration of political style” (Falasca-Zamponi 8). Hitler became “the symbol artist par excellence,” and performed as “an actor and stage director, as well as scene-painter, costumer, and property man”: “[t]he pageantry of the great parades and mass meeting was his” (Schuman 82). Woolf recognized that the public sphere of 1930s is a site wherein dictators put politics on display, and the political leaders attempted to deceive the crowd by utilizing aesthetic elements such as clothes, visual props, and highly controlled speeches. In the 1930s, the political use of the visual-oriented “spectacle” included sartorial surfaces and other visual mediums, such as “photograph, film, theater, and cultural performances” (Spiro 24).

Concerned about the burgeoning of the political spectacles deployed to deceive the mass public, Woolf conveys her anti-Nazi perspective in her 1938 essay, *Three Guineas*. She, in particular, addresses the danger of being attracted to sartorial surfaces. Woolf asks, “What connection is there between the sartorial splendours of the educated man and the photography of ruined houses and dead bodies? (*Three Guineas*, 21); she comments, “Obviously the connection between dress and war is not far to seek; your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers” (21). According to Woolf, the masking of nakedness is associated with a disposition towards war and deception. Putting forward an analogy between an educated man’s

dress and a soldier's uniforms in *Three Guineas*, Woolf describes the interconnection of vanity, dress, and war. What Woolf assumed is that people want to dress differently to advertise their superiority over others: the dress plays "the advertisement function," carrying a message that the wearer seems most singular" (20). Woolf wrote, "the wearer is not to us a pleasing or an impressive spectacle," and instead, he looks like "a ridiculous, a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle," because such a visual distinction tends to raise twined emotions "competition and jealousy," which "have their share in encouraging a disposition towards war" (*Three Guineas*, 21). Advertising "the social, profession, or intellectual standing of the wearer," the finest dress gratifies the wearer's vanity, while heating the feeling of jealousy, a disposition towards war. The dress "covers nakedness" of the natural human body (20).

As *Three Guineas* makes clear, the masking of nakedness through visual materials belongs to Woolf's category of war dispositions: vanity and deception, two sides of the same coin, which emerge in the process of covering nakedness, and such an obsession with a visual façade triggers a disposition towards war. Published in the same year when *Three Guineas* came out, "The Duchess and the Jeweller" portrays the Duchess as epitomizing a disposition toward war. Her items, such as the perfume and clothes, are presented as something sinister for they are designed to conceal a naked self. The text depicts her as an "aesthetic" liar using the visual spectacle as a means of achieving her purpose, getting money, and implicitly aligns her with the ostensibly aesthetic dictators, who, through the means of visual spectacles, propagated political ideologies and influenced the mass public.

As Leena Kore Schröder argues, the story encourages a reader to have a sense of sympathy toward Oliver, a relatively vulnerable character influenced by the woman's persuasion, while portraying the Duchess as "the story's real criminal" (310). Although Oliver and the Duchess share the tendency of concealing their naked selfhood by utilizing visual products, they display at least one obvious difference. If the Duchess performs as a powerful influencer and a kind of authoritarian figure, deploying artificial methods to deceive the other individual,

Oliver betrays an internal yearning for “smelling” something naked, albite subtle.

In his relationship with the Duchess, Oliver becomes a rather childlike figure. For instance, Oliver mimics the woman’s language. Oliver has properly adapted himself to the profit-driven culture, but his way of speech appears at odds with his self-achievement as a successful man. Oliver’s speech often includes fragments, murmurs, and repetitions, which reflect the characteristics of children’s infantile verbalization. The narrator addresses Oliver’s habit of repeating verbal fragments: “‘So,’ said Oliver Bacon, rising and stretching his legs. ‘So. . .’”; “‘So, he half signed, half snorted, ‘so. . .’” (249, 250). When the Duchess, who wants to sell her faux pearls to pay off her gambling debts, calls Oliver “old friend,” Oliver repeats her words “old friend” “as if he licked the words” (252). Oliver’s verbalization intimates certain aspects of their relationship: mother and son, teacher and student, or leader and follower, in which hierarchial orders and tensions exist.

Portraying Oliver as vulnerable to the power of the Duchess, Woolf might want to suggest the precarious situation of the people in the 1930s, who were exposed to the menace of the Nazi party and political spectacles relying on the visual image, and became vulnerable to being influenced from the ostensibly aesthetic façade of the spectacles. As Mia Spiro puts in, “the danger of the Nazi spectacle was that it was enticing because of the pleasure [of looking] that spectacle produced: it satisfied a desire to be seen and observed by fellow citizens and by Hitler and the state” (27). Woolf remained anxious about the political influence of the visually fascinating spectacle on the mind of spectators. In “The Duchess and the Jeweller,” the author seems to show her concern about the situation: the harmful effects of political and visual spectacles on the minds of spectators. Displaying the danger of being influenced from the authoritarian figure, signifying political dictators, Woolf calls for considering how to resist the force of deceptive spectacles, exhibited by the Nazis and Fascists.

## V. Coda

Due to Woolf's "offensive" caricature of the presumably Jewish character, "The Duchess and the Jeweller" has been neglected among academic readers, and is often accused of providing a racist portrait of a Jew. Provided that Woolf published *Three Guineas*, where she openly attacks Fascism, Nazism, and British imperialism, Woolf's composition of the 1938 short story might be surprising to a number of readers. However, regardless of his repulsive characteristics, Woolf's representation of Oliver Bacon is to proliferate multiple interpretations, encouraging readers to see beyond the surface of the text and the surface of the character. The familiar identification of the author's representation of the character with her personal anti-Semitism can prohibit readers from making sense of the various political, aesthetic, and cultural discourses created from the short fiction.

Undeniably, Woolf's portrayal of Oliver evokes cultural stereotypes of Jews circulated throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As discussed so far, however, it can produce certain effects of understanding or sympathizing with the character. The apparently "offensive" caricature of Oliver's animalistic nose might be understood as what Woolf self-consciously designed to challenge the visually-oriented culture, which turns out to reinforce the psychology of scopophilia and a broad spectrum of artificialization of naked bodies. For Woolf, the visually-oriented approach to things and human beings was highly problematic because it hinders individuals from recognizing the true qualities of things, thereby inhibiting the creation of a mutual relationship between things and humans. Critiquing the Western discourse where the primacy of vision is taken for granted, the story takes smell as the most spontaneous and authentic sense, and renders olfaction a striking prerogative, transposing the major organ of perception from eye to nose. To Woolf, wishing to "smell" something naked and non-artificial, social strategies of concealing nakedness looked sinister and politically problematic.

Woolf's writing shows that champions of the concealment of nakedness are sinister politicians and national ideologies, including British imperialism, Fascism,

and Nazism. In the late 1930s, the rising power of the Nazi Party, deploying political spectacles heavily relying on visual images, became of particular concern to Woolf. This anxiety is embedded in Woolf's portrayal of Oliver, who, like the mass public, is exposed to the deceptive of power of the authoritarian figure. Can Oliver sense what is beneath the ostensibly aesthetic façade concealing the woman's naked self? Can he resist or stay indifferent to her "sweet" suggestion? These questions are what the story in fact calls for. While encouraging readers to imagine the secret lives of things and the true nature of naked bodies, the short fiction requires thinking about an individual's role and responsibility when confronting the menacing power of politically sinister spectacles.

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**Abstract**

In Search of Naked Things Through a Hungry Nose:  
Virginia Woolf's "The Duchess and the Jeweller"

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Virginia Woolf's short fiction "The Duchess and the Jeweller," published in 1938, has been absent from critical focus partly because the text does not partake in the experimental narrative devices Woolf's fictions commonly present. The lack of critical attention to the story also comes from its references to Jewishness and its deployment of pervasive racial stereotypes of Jews. This article challenges the critical receptions in which the story is conceived as either a non-experimental and moralistic tale or an Anti-Semitic piece of work. It seeks to demonstrate that the story offers anti-utilitarian imaginations of things, explores a new paradigm of aesthetics, getting beyond the Western overemphasis on optical vision, and thereby, generates multiple thoughts opposing political ideologies propagated in the 1930s. Although the text appears to display signs and images evocative of Jews, such representations serve to reveal Woolf's self-conscious resistance to political powers, including Fascism, anti-Semitism, and Nazism. Noting that the story engages the trope of smell in order to criticize a wide range of cultural ideologies, from the Western idealization of optical vision to Nazism's use of visual spectacles, this paper articulates the roles of smell and olfaction presented in "The Duchess and the Jeweller," and argues that the sense of smell in Woolf's text is closely associated with the true qualities of things or something naked, the recognition of which is essential for Woolf to reject the lies of political ideologies.

■ **Key words** : Virginia Woolf, “The Duchess and the Jeweller,” the thing itself, nakedness, smell, olfaction, visual façade

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