Abstract

*Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon* examines the evolution of cultural categories in mid-twentieth-century America through the study of the Modern Library, a cheap reprint series created in 1917. While the Modern Library has been described as a series of “highbrow” works that gradually became more commercial, my dissertation shows that it had always published a wide range of texts. I argue that the diversity of the Modern Library exemplifies the flexibility of cultural categories in the interwar period – a flexibility that was lost in the 1940s and 1950s when critics called for the separation between “high” and “low” cultural forms. I see the Modern Library as a large-scale institution of modernism that participated in the definition of the literary canon, and contributed to the popularization of writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

In Chapter 1, I situate my methodology in relation to the various approaches employed by book historians, from biographical studies to quantitative analyses. Chapter 2 focuses on the inclusion of scientific essays and H. G. Wells’s controversial novels *Ann Veronica* and *Tono-Bungay* – a selection that contributed to the image of the Modern Library as a daring series for the civilized minority. Chapter 3 contends that the series participated in the early canonization of Sherwood Anderson by marketing *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White* to a wide audience of instructors and students. Chapter 4 studies the publication of *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the Modern Library. The fact that these two books were marketed and advertised in the same way exemplifies the blurring of the boundary between “highbrow” and “popular” texts in the interwar period. Chapter 5 looks at the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Despite her opposition to the “middlebrow,” Woolf accepted to write the introduction to widen her readership in North America. Chapter 6 examines
the preface that Faulkner wrote for the Modern Library edition of *Sanctuary*. It shows that this introduction became controversial only in the late 1930s, when critics started dividing “high” culture from “lesser” works.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Lise M. Jaillant.
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List of Abbreviations

*BC*: Bennett Cerf Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York City.

*BC-EP*: Bennett Cerf Correspondence Regarding the Ezra Pound Controversy, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.


*SA*: Sherwood Anderson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.
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Introduction

When Albert Boni and Horace Liveright created the Modern Library series in New York in 1917, “classics” generally meant out-of-copyright works reprinted in cheap collections for the school market. Recent literary works were too expensive for most working-class and lower-middle-class readers. For instance, when E. P. Dutton published Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* in 1910, it was priced at $1.50. Workers in printing industries, who were on average more skilled and better paid than other workers, would have had to work five hours to earn this sum.¹

Ironically, for those workers who manufactured books, contemporary literature remained a luxury good. When *The Way of All Flesh* was reprinted in the Modern Library, seven years after its first publication in the United States, it was priced at 60 cents – putting it within the reach of skilled workers and clerks.² As an affordable series of modern classics, the Modern Library widened the market for modern literature. By “modern literature,” I mean works that dealt with the social and economic transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a reader in 1917, Oscar Wilde was a modern and so was H. G. Wells. Both writers appeared in the first list of the Modern Library, along with Butler, Hardy, Maupassant, Dostoyevsky and others. Everyman’s Library, one of the Modern Library’s major competitors, would wait until 1930 to include Wilde’s writings. In short, the Modern Library was the first uniform series to sell a broadly defined literary modernism to a large audience.

¹ Based on hourly earnings of $0.301 in 1914 in the printing and publishing industries (National Industrial Conference Board 9, 160).

² The price increased to 95 cents in 1920 and remained unchanged until 1946. This price rise was largely due to the increase in production costs that followed the printers’ strike and subsequent pay rise in late 1918-early 1919 (West, “The Divergent Paths” 505).
The Modern Library had two main competitive advantages over the London-based Everyman’s Library: it specialized in recent literary works and it was printed in the United States. If one popular Modern Library title were out-of-stock, the bookseller would not have to wait long until the next delivery. As Jay Satterfield has shown, the identity of the Modern Library was rooted in New York City (13). Before creating the series with Liveright, Boni had opened a bookstore in Greenwich Village, which became a familiar place for bohemians. Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer, who bought the Modern Library in 1925 and founded Random House two years later, were both born in New York and educated at Columbia University. The owners of the Modern Library strived to create an image of elegant modernity for their brand. Indeed, “brands can be thought of as a network of associations that carry meaning – including attributes, emotional and self-expressive benefits, personality traits, country of origin, visual symbols and logos, and charitable causes” (Loken and John 233). In the interwar period, the Modern Library brand combined an aura of New York glamour and intellectual sophistication with a very affordable price. The colophon designed by Lucian Bernhard showed a leaping torchbearer, which symbolized the modern spirit of the series. The list included French, German, Italian, Irish, Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, along with English and American writers. This cosmopolitan character became less marked over time, as the Modern Library increasingly favored American authors. In 1917, literary modernism largely remained a European import. But in the 1920s and 1930s, the Modern Library was increasingly promoting American novels and participating in the celebrity culture created by the movie industry. In other words, the Modern Library was closely intertwined with the evolution of literary taste in the United States.

Between the wars, the Modern Library reprinted texts by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner alongside detective fiction and works that we now consider “middlebrow.” All these texts were marketed as “the world’s best books” and sold in a uniform format. Readers
were encouraged to collect Modern Library books: they could buy Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories*, Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* and Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth*. The point of this dissertation is to show that the boundaries between “high” and “low” cultures were much more flexible in the 1920s and 1930s than in the 1940s and 1950s, when critics called for a strict separation between serious literature and commercial products. In postwar universities, the iron wall between the “high” and the “low” shaped the creation of modernist studies. Whereas Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound joined the canon of modern literature, “popular” texts were dismissed. My objective is to recover a forgotten moment in the history of modernism – the moment when high modernist texts were sufficiently attractive to be reprinted in a cheap series, but had not yet been dissociated from “lesser” works.

In his influential analysis of the antagonism between high culture and popular culture, Andreas Huyssen has argued that “the discourse of the Great Divide has been dominant primarily in two periods, first in the last decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th, and then again in the two decades or so following World War II” (viii). Terms such as “highbrow” and “lowbrow,” which originated in phrenology, thus appeared at the turn of the century to designate radically different human types. “Highbrow” described intellectual or aesthetic superiority, while “lowbrow” referred to someone or something that lacked taste and refinement (Levine 221-2). When the story of the Modern Library begins, such terms had not disappeared, but they had become more flexible. Instead of structuring the cultural landscape in terms of hierarchy, American critics imagined a variety of cultural sub-fields that shared similar characteristics. For example, Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* was often compared to the work of Ernest Hemingway and other “modernist” writers. As we will see in Chapter 5, a much more elitist conception of culture prevailed in England, where the term “middlebrow” appeared in the 1920s. “The B.B.C. claim to have discovered a new type, the ‘middlebrow,’” declared the
satirical magazine *Punch*, “It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like” (qtd. in “middlebrow,” def. A). “Middlebrow,” in its original sense, described someone with high intellectual or aesthetic aspirations, but who lacked the cultural capital necessary to understand high art.

This dissertation uses the term “middlebrow” to refer to a position in the literary field, between “high” and “low” cultures. As Catherine Keyser puts it, “the term middlebrow referred perhaps more clearly to mass-market venues and middle-class audiences than to formal characteristics of literary style” (9). Keyser gives the example of *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker* as middlebrow enterprises, “magazines that popularized the innovations of literary and artistic modernism even as they promoted bourgeois status and consumer pleasure” (8). Likewise, the Modern Library can be seen as a middlebrow institution that sold modern literary texts to a large audience. While Joan Shelley Rubin and Janice Radway have defined the middlebrow as an autonomous cultural sphere hostile to literary experiments, my thesis shows that middlebrow producers played an ambiguous role, trying to explain “difficult” literature to their middle-class audiences while also developing an identity of their own by engaging with the mass market and the new celebrity culture. The Modern Library, by including modernist writers on its list, positioned itself as a distinguished series that allowed readers with a limited budget to increase their cultural capital. Of course, “middlebrow” is always a problematic term, not only because of its instability, but also because of the pejorative connotation attached to it, famously exemplified by Woolf’s essay “Middlebrow” collected in *The Death of the Moth*. Yet, it is perhaps the best way to describe institutions that, in Trysh Travis’s words, “offered to mediate literary culture for modern audiences in need of guidance” (340).

After the Second World War, the role of guidance of the Modern Library became increasingly contested. Many scholars and critics saw the series as a mass-market enterprise that
failed to make any distinction between high culture and mass culture. In the work of Dwight Macdonald and others, “mass culture” was manufactured by a small elite of cultural producers and sold to the masses, in an effort to control and manipulate them. Unlike “popular culture,” created by the masses for their own consumption, mass culture circulated from top to bottom and catered to the lowest level denominator. For postwar critics, it was essential to preserve “high culture” from the contamination of these debased cultural products. The influence of New Criticism thus led to a conception of literary modernism as a difficult movement accessible only to a handful of professionally trained male critics, as opposed to a feminized mass culture. Literary modernism became associated with the experimental prose and poetry of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis (female writers such as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein were rarely mentioned). New Critics not only defined literary modernism as an object of study, they also developed a methodology that focused on the text itself rather than on the social and historical context. In a 1951 essay published in the *Kenyon Review*, Cleanth Brooks distinguished between the formalist criticism practiced by New Critics and the “more amateur, and more ‘human’ criticism,” which is flourishing “in the class room presided over by the college lecturer of infectious enthusiasm, in the gossipy Book-of-the-Month Club bulletins, and in the columns of the *Saturday Review of Literature*” (“The Formalist Critics” 77). Like other New Critics, Brooks saw criticism and its object of study, literary modernism, as radically hostile to mass culture and its institutions.

In the past twenty-five years, however, literary critics have paid more attention to the relationship between modernist texts and popular culture. Following Andreas Huyssen’s analysis of the great divide between modernism and mass culture, scholars such as Lawrence Rainey, David Chinitz, John Xiros Cooper, Kevin Dettmar and others have shown that modernist writers and institutions participated in mainstream culture. Whereas New Critics focused exclusively on
the aesthetic characteristics of the modernist text, scholars who work in New Modernist Studies have paid more attention to the social and cultural conditions that accompanied the emergence of modernism. The title of the journal *Modernism/Modernity* exemplifies this ambition to examine both the literary movement and the material context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In his influential *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), Rainey has presented the little magazine and the limited edition as key institutions that mediated the diffusion of literary modernism. The main focus of his research has been on the “development of a particular set of institutions which were essential to modernist production – the little reviews, the deluxe editions, a corpus of patron-collectors and investors, and specific groups of smaller publishers such as Alfred Knopf, Horace Liveright, and Ben Huebsch” (Menand and Rainey 4-5). Rainey’s analysis of small-scale institutions that targeted a tiny audience of connoisseurs was followed by important works on little magazines (Morrisson, Churchill and McKible, Brooker and Thacker) and on small presses such as the Hogarth Press (Southworth, Willson-Gordon). However, larger-scale institutions such as trade publishers and commercial magazines have been largely understudied. One reason for this neglect is that these commercial institutions did not specialize in what we now call “modernism.” For example, *Vanity Fair* published Gertrude Stein’s poems, alongside a wide range of textual and visual materials, including gossip and pictures of celebrities (Conrad 221). This mix of “high” and “low” cultural forms has often perplexed the few scholars of modernism who have paid attention to these institutions. Catherine Turner and Jay Satterfield have thus described Random House and the Modern Library series as publishing enterprises that brought modernist works to the mainstream, but “modernism” is taken as a self-evident category restricted to canonical writers such as Joyce, Woolf and Stein. At the time when Random House and the Modern Library published those writers, however, the canon of modernist writings had
not yet been fixed, and these publishing enterprises also brought out many works that we now see as middle-to-lowbrow. It is therefore important to recover the cultural context in which “modernism” first appeared, before the postwar establishment of a rigid hierarchy between the “high” and the “low.”

In addition to modernist and middlebrow studies, I draw on book history and print culture studies, which can be defined as the history of the creation, dissemination, and reception of printed texts. In particular, there has been a renewal of interest in uniform series of classics and their role in shaping the literary canon (Rose, Hammond, Friskney, Spiers). As John Guillory notes, the use of the term “canon” in literary studies is relatively recent. Until the 1970s, “it was still possible to discuss what we call canon formation exclusively by reference to the word ‘classic’” (Cultural Capital 344 n9). In their analyses of Everyman’s Library and the Oxford World’s Classics series, Jonathan Rose and Mary Hammond point to the commercial interests that underlined the selection of texts in uniform series. The “classic” was never a fixed category: certain texts were included because they were cheap to produce and sold in large quantities, not because they were “greater” than others. The whole economy of the publisher’s series depended on copyright laws. For example, Everyman’s Library was created at the time when the copyrights of the Great Victorians were expiring (Rose 133). This conception of the literary canon as an ever-evolving phenomenon originates in the “canon wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. While Matthew Arnold viewed the canon as “the best that has been thought and said,” Jane Tompkins and others have described literary reputation as a historical construction dependent on the social, political and commercial interests of the time (xii). As Lawrence Schwartz argues, “in every era, there are many excellent writers who never achieve widespread recognition, while there are also writers who achieve some measure of literary success in one period but find themselves set aside
in another” (3). Likewise, I see the literary canon as a historically constructed entity, shaped by institutions such university departments and trade publishers.

**Context**

To understand the position of the Modern Library in the American literary field, it is important to address the question of taste and cultural categories in the early twentieth century. What did terms such as “highbrow” and “lowlbrow” mean in the first half of the century? Was the Modern Library similar to the Book-of-the-Month Club and other “middlebrow” institutions described by Joan Shelley Rubin and Janice Radway? How could the Modern Library be marketed as both cheap and distinguished?

For the historian Lawrence Levine, the great divide between “highbrow” and “lowlbrow” appeared in America in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Earlier in the century, Americans “shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes” than their descendants were to experience later (9). Art forms such as Shakespearean drama, symphonic music, opera and the fine arts were “simultaneously popular and elite” (86). In the 1880s and 1890s, however, things started to change. Cultural forms that had previously been “shared” moved “from entertainment to erudition, from the property of ‘Everyman’ to the possession of a more elite circle” (56). Levine invites us to replace cultural categories in their historical context instead of viewing them as “immutable givens” (241). As newly-arrived immigrants “spilled over into the public spaces that characterized nineteenth-century America” (theaters, music halls, opera houses, museums, parks, fairs, and the like), the response of the elites was “to transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behavior of their own choosing” and “to convert the strangers” to emulate the elite “modes of
behavior and cultural predilections” (177). In other words, the establishment used cultural categories to enforce law and order, isolating disorderly lowbrows from law-abiding citizens.

Although Levine’s vision of a late-nineteenth-century “sacralization of culture” (83) has been extremely influential, it has also been criticized for its populism – “highbrow bad, lowbrow good,” in Jonathan Freedman’s phrase (94). Following Freedman, I argue that a middle ground between high and low art forms and attitudes to culture started to appear in the 1880s and early 1890s. As Freedman suggests, the middlebrow emerged “with the rise of new professional/managerial classes in both England and America and with the concomitant rise of a culture increasingly attuned to the ethos of consumption” (93). For the doctors, lawyers, businessmen and other members of the new elites, participation in the emergent consumer society was not enough. These professional/managerial classes “sought increasingly to legitimize themselves by invoking the authority of taste, aesthetics, and ‘culture’” (93). The turn of the century thus saw the emergence of cultural producers who specialized in explaining high art to aspiring middle-classes.

Among these new producers were publishing houses, which brought out guidebooks to self-improvement. For example, in 1898, Doubleday & McClure published How to Study Shakespeare, a handbook aimed to the growing number of reading clubs. The author of the introduction mentioned one club in Boston “made up of clergymen, teachers (including college professors), lawyers, editors, and other cultivated people” (Rolfe vi-vii). How to Study Shakespeare gave advice to those who were anxious to appear cultivated and at ease within the social environment of the reading club. Owning editions of Shakespeare was not enough; the new members of the elite needed to master the ways to speak about Shakespeare and to read the plays aloud. The introduction thus describes the transformation of a wealthy man, from philistine (he has many editions of Shakespeare in his library, which he never reads) to sophisticated art lover
(iv). With time, effort, and a guidebook, anybody could learn how to show taste and culture, and to reach social success. In Freedman’s phrase, this “recalibration of social position through the experience of culture” was absolutely central to the new middlebrow ethos (94).

Although the term “middlebrow” did not appear until the 1920s, Freedman situates “the great era of the cultural how-to kit” in the 1890s (93). In Theory of the Leisure Class (first published in 1899 and reprinted in the Modern Library in 1934), Thorstein Veblen famously suggested that, for the upper classes and those aspiring to belong to the elite, conspicuous leisure and consumption served to attain and maintain social status. Veblen insisted on the importance of “education in taste and discrimination”: “Closely related to the requirement that the gentleman must consume freely and of the right kind of goods, there is the requirement that he must know how to consume them in a seemly manner” (37, 53). In a context where lower groups could appropriate existing positional goods, knowledge became essential: knowledge of desirable products, their social and cultural value, and how to use them appropriately. As Mike Featherstone puts it, the “increasing supply of symbolic goods” posed a challenge for aspiring groups, engaged in a struggle to convey the appropriate signals through their consumption activities. Hence, the demand grew for cultural intermediaries dedicated to giving advice on the choice of marker goods and “provid[ing] the necessary interpretations on their use” (11).

Paradoxically, the rise of these middlebrow intermediaries seems to have gone largely unnoticed by contemporaries. Let’s take the example of Charles Eliot’s Five-Foot Shelf of Books, launched in 1909. Professor Eliot was at the end of a distinguished career as Harvard President when he signed a contract with Collier & Son to edit fifty volumes marketed as “Harvard Classics.” As the advertisements proclaimed, the aim of the series was to give a good liberal education to any serious reader. With its emphasis on “great books,” Eliot’s series was a forerunner to the Modern Library. One advertisement for the Harvard Classics, kept in the
Random House records at Columbia Rare Book & Manuscript Library, promised to solve “reading problems” and bring “success”: “the ability to get things done, to persuade and convince others, depends very largely upon your breadth of mind, upon your power to probe for real causes, and this breadth and power come from contact with GREAT BOOKS.”

This advertisement illustrates what Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears have called the “emerging therapeutic ethos of self-realization” (xiii). At the turn of the century, advertisements moved away from a simple description of the good, to the promise “that the product would contribute to the buyer’s physical, psychic, or social well-being” (Lears, “From Salvation” 19). Consumers were thus encouraged to buy the Harvard Classics to increase their confidence and social status. Similarly, in 1917, one of the first advertisements for Boni and Liveright’s series proclaimed: “The ‘Modern Library’ appeals to people who consider good books a necessity, not a luxury. People are judged by the books they read” (emphasis in the original). Readers were promised that “the world’s best books” would shape their taste and their personality.

These advertisements for the Harvard Classics and the Modern Library revealed the main characteristics of the new middlebrow ethos: the emphasis on education, the ideal of self-improvement, and the explicit link between culture and social success.

Yet, contemporary critics such as John Jay Chapman denounced the Harvard Classics as a lowbrow enterprise threatening highbrow ideals. In a 1909 letter published in Science, Chapman wrote: “the men who control Harvard to-day are very little else than business men, running a large department store which dispenses education to the million” (440). He opposed this sordid business to an enlightened vision of education: “For what purpose does a university exist except to be a guide to the people in true scholarship, to be a light and not a false beacon to the half-

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3 Advertisement for Dr. Eliot’s Five-Foot Shelf of Books (The Harvard Classics), n.d., box 764, RH.

educated, to be a touchstone and a safe counselor to those who honor learning and who desire to be led toward her?” (442). For Chapman, education and art belonged to the higher spheres of the mind and had to be preserved from the corrupting influence of business. However, he also recognized the emergence of new audiences for culture and art: “These hordes of well-meaning people, uneducated and yet hungry for education, are apt to believe what any clever person tells them” (442). Chapman, who had graduated from Harvard, ridiculed the naïve newcomers who believed Professor Eliot’s promise that fifteen minutes of reading a day sufficed to become a cultured man. In Chapman’s words, these people “require to be spoon-fed” and to be shown that “culture is easy” (442). This kind of arguments anticipated the anti-middlebrow rhetoric of the 1920s described by Janice Radway. But in 1909, the space between high and lowbrow had not yet been exposed as a “colonizable space” (Radway 259).

Like Chapman, other critics of the early twentieth century described the cultural landscape in terms of high and low. Unlike Chapman, however, some deplored the rigid separation between these two extremes. In 1911, George Santayana gave a talk entitled “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” at the University of California. He provocatively presented America as a divided nation, “a young country with an old mentality” (39). America has shown the dynamism of a young mind in matters such as “invention and industry and social organization” (40). But “in all the higher things of the mind—in religion, in literature, in the moral emotions—it is the hereditary spirit that still prevails” (39). Santayana’s talk is structured by antitheses: “the sky-scraper” (home to “the American Will”) is opposed to “the colonial mansion” inhabited by the “American Intellect” (40). The masculine sphere of “aggressive enterprise” is opposed to the genteel tradition dominated by “the American woman” (40). Santayana’s vision of a gendered cultural landscape was extremely influential among those intellectuals who found American culture backward and provincial. The term “genteel tradition”
gave a new way of seeing the perceived lack in artistic achievements by rooting this failure in a debased female sphere. For Santayana, the problem came from sentimental highbrow writers, not from the cultural commoner “whose mentality comprised the instincts of the native-born, rough-and-ready younger generation, the wellspring of American inventiveness” (McClay 381). In other words, Santayana appealed for a regeneration of literature, religion and philosophy by the more dynamic segments of American society.

While Santayana used the metaphors of intergenerational oppositions to describe the American society, Van Wyck Brooks did not share the optimistic view that the young would eventually regenerate the intellectual sphere. Brooks was twenty-nine years old in 1915 when his essay *America’s Coming-of-Age* was published. He described a nation rigidly divided by “twin values,” with the cult of “high ideals” on the one hand and the “acceptance of catchpenny realities” on the other: “Between university ethics and business ethics, between American culture and American humor, between Good Government and Tammany, between academic pedantry and pavement slang, there is no community, no genial middle ground” (7).

As we have seen, a “middle ground” between the high and the low had, in fact, just started to emerge when Brooks wrote his essay. In 1912, James Loeb brought out the Loeb Classical Library, a series of ancient texts and facing-page English translations. Kevin Sheets has argued that Loeb’s “effort to popularize the works of antiquity” belonged to the new middlebrow culture (150). According to Sheets, “promoters of middlebrow packaged highbrow culture in ways that made it accessible and palatable to a middling audience of educated consumers” (150). Difficult books could indeed become “palatable,” as the example of the Little Leather Library shows. In 1916, Harry Scherman, a successful advertising manager, persuaded the Whitman Candy Company to market a “Library Package, uniting a large box of candy” with a small, leather-bound Shakespearean play (Radway 127). The Little Leather Library, which had been
conceived by Charles and Albert Boni, eventually sold more than 25 million books through drugstores and mail-order sales. Albert Boni soon sold his investment and went on to create the Modern Library, while Scherman founded the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1926. For both men, the Little Leather Library offered an experience of marketing classics to the masses – an experience that strengthened their expertise of middlebrow culture.

In *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992), Joan Shelley Rubin explores the development of a new space between high- and lowbrow in the American literary field of the first half of the twentieth century. Rubin’s study is divided into five topics illustrating the rise of middlebrow culture: the *New York Herald Tribune's Books* section; Scherman and the Book-of-the-Month Club; John Erskine and the “Great Books” movement; the vogue of the “outline” volume; and the spectrum of book programs on commercial radio. Focusing on the biographies of several middlebrow figures, Rubin traces their common influences and notes that Scherman, Erskine and others perpetuated the “genteel tradition” in their conception of literature, while also embracing the marketing techniques characteristic of the new consumer society. Their “genteel belief in aesthetic training” “presumed the capacity of all readers, once ‘trained,’ to grasp the elements of literary style and accorded them a basic right to have their lives enriched in so doing” (27). Henry Seidel Canby, a Book-of-the-Month Club judge and former academic, thus favored books that he believed were both readable and informative. The novels he was most pleased to have selected included Edna Ferber’s *Show Boat*, Clarence Day’s *Life with Father*, as well as Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s *The Yearling* (121). These three books were later included in the Modern Library (respectively in 1935, 1944 and 1946). Contrary to the Modern Library, however, the Book-of-the-Month Club eschewed American writers suspect of “moral anarchy” (Hemingway, Dos Passos) as well as European modernist writers: “there is no Joyce, Lawrence, Yeats, or any of the other exponents of the modern tradition” (147). Indeed, the Book-of-the-
Month Club appealed to the general reader, who favored realistic novels and shied away from formal experiments and controversial subjects. These conservative values would later influence the People’s Choice, the book club of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. mail-order catalog, which only selected family-friendly books (d’Arpa).

In contrast, the Modern Library’s imagined readers were students, intellectuals, and businessmen with more adventurous tastes. The owners of the Modern Library played a subtle game: if they published works deemed too experimental or risqué, some readers would feel shocked and alienated; if, on the other hand, they erred on the side of conservatism, they risked losing the competitive advantage that differentiated the series from Everyman’s Library and Oxford World’s Classics. The Modern Library was thus marketed as the “civilized minority’s” choice, rather than as the people’s choice (Satterfield 42).

While the Modern Library selected many modernist works, the Book-of-the-Month Club treated high modernism as a niche product unsuitable for its main audience. Following Rubin, Radway points to the Book-of-the-Month Club’s seemingly rejection of the avant-garde: “literary modernism is conspicuously absent from the list of books the judges recommended as appropriate to a large general audience” (279). However, Radway adds that many books by Faulkner, Stein, Woolf and Joyce were included in the list of recommended alternates and frequently marked as titles for people with “special tastes” (391 n35). As Radway puts it, “middlebrow culture constituted itself implicitly, and sometimes quite explicitly, in opposition to both emerging literary modernism and the avant-garde and to the growth of an institutionalized, more thoroughly professionalized group of literary specialists, some employed by highbrow magazines, others in the fast-developing university English departments” (15). Radway thus rejects the traditional claim that middlebrow culture servilely imitates the value and aesthetics of high culture. Instead, it appears as “a kind of counterpractice to the high culture tastes and
proclivities that have been most insistently legitimated and nurtured in academic English departments” (9-10). Radway suggests that this critique proved particularly effective in the 1920s and created “a new constellation of tastes, preferences, and desires” (12).

Although Radway tends to present middlebrow culture as a separate and autonomous sphere, the presence of Henry Seidel Canby and Dorothy Canfield Fisher among the judges of the Book-of-the-Month Club shows that the boundary between high- and middlebrow was easily crossable. Canby had earned a PhD in English at Yale University and worked as a university instructor from 1900 to 1916. Fisher, whose father was a college professor, received her doctoral degree from Columbia University in 1904. Both Canby and Fisher then drifted away from academia. Canby became the editor of the Literary Review, a weekly supplement of the New York Evening Post, and later co-founded the Saturday Review of Literature. Fisher started a career as a writer, and rose to fame with the publication of The Brimming Cup (1921). Whereas Canby and Fisher were certainly critical of the narrow specialization of academic scholarship, their own emphasis on education and learning made it difficult to turn their back entirely on academia. As Radway recognizes, Fisher’s position marked her as “a female literary sage” who could mediate between various cultures (179). Like Erskine, who implemented a “great books” curriculum at Columbia University after the First World War, Canby and Fisher used their academic credentials to defend an alternative view of education, generalist rather than specialized. As Gerald Graff has shown, the conflict between critics and scholars was a major characteristic of English departments between and after the war (121). In other words, there was no homogeneous highbrow学术 sphere against which the middlebrow ethos could develop.

The Modern Library, which sold modernist texts to the academic market and eagerly embraced the authority of professional literary specialists, exemplifies the overlaps between high- and middlebrow cultures. Indeed, Modern Library editors relied on the authority of academics to
increase the aura of their series. The fall 1925 catalog thus presented the Modern Library as an educational institution: “Purposeful reading is taking the place of miscellaneous dabbling in literature, and The Modern Library is being daily recommended by notable educators as a representative library of modern thought” (qtd. in Satterfield 60). Although the Modern Library legitimized itself by invoking the authority of taste and culture, it only reprinted bestsellers and generally stayed away from books that could only appeal to a few intellectuals.

In *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* (2009), Karen Leick observes that “writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were frequently mentioned by popular columnists and were very well-known public figures, even celebrities, in the 1920s and 1930s” (6). Similarly, Stein became an “American celebrity” in the 1920s because mainstream periodicals closely followed what was happening in the literary sphere, including the world of little magazines. The Modern Library editors understood that modern literature, even in its most experimental forms, could appeal to a large audience precisely because modernist writers were renowned figures often discussed in mainstream media. According to Leick, the celebrity of modernist writers even attracted the attention of book-clubs: “Virginia Woolf's *Flush* was one of the ‘dual’ selections of the Book-of-the-Month Club in October 1933” and “Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was the September 1933 selection of the Literary Guild” (6).

Leick rightly criticizes Radway’s rigid separation between modernist and middlebrow cultures, but she also tends to exaggerate the overlaps between the two cultural spheres. *Flush* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* were far less experimental than, for instance, *To the Lighthouse* and *Three Lives*. Middlebrow institutions mostly avoided works that displayed, in Rita Felski’s words, “formally self-conscious, experimental, [and] antimimetic features” (25). The “Great Books” syllabus thus “entirely ignored literary modernism,” apparently because Erskine believed “that it was premature to include such writers as Strindberg, Conrad, or Henry
James” (Rubin 166). Erskine selected seventy-five works, but only four Americans: Santayana, William James, Josiah Royce, and Henry George. Rubin also points out that “there were no women, black, or non-Western authors on the list” (165-6). In contrast, the Modern Library had an eccentric image, which differentiated it from institutions specializing in older classics on the one hand, and from book clubs on the other. While the Book-of-the-Month Club viewed consumers who enjoyed literary modernism as a niche market, the Modern Library did not relegate experimental texts to the margins of its list. On the contrary, the Modern Library was marketed as a non-conformist series of classics, and made timid attempts to publish women (Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield among others), blacks (An Anthology of American Negro Literature, with a preface by the Marxist critic V. F. Calverton was published in 1929) and non-Western texts. For instance, Some Chinese Ghosts, by the naturalized Japanese writer Lafcadio Hearn, joined the series in 1927.

The Modern Library’s cosmopolitanism and emphasis on high modernism and other “difficult” works have led Satterfield to describe the series as a highbrow product sold to a large audience: “the series offered a form of culture that combined highbrow ideals with lowbrow commercial sense” (22). According to Satterfield, “once established in ‘The Modern Library of the World’s Best Books’ a book promised both to stimulate and amuse; skillful marketing, careful selection, and close attention to packaging contrived to suggest that it was no longer ‘highbrow’ literature only for the intellectual elite, but quality literature sure to please a substantial audience” (2). Satterfield suggests that the Modern Library has kept its aura as a highbrow collection of “serious” literature, contrary to other publishing ventures dismissed by critics as middlebrow. “What kept the Modern Library from opprobrium? Why was its blend of culture and commerce not only inoffensive but hailed as a cultural triumph?,” Satterfield asks (9). His central argument is that Cerf and Klopfer avoided going down-market by carefully selecting
critically acclaimed texts and by avoiding certain book outlets (drugstores, stationery shops) associated with popular literature. Although the Modern Library was sold only in traditional outlets including bookstores, college stores, and department stores, Cerf pushed for innovative marketing techniques such as “attractive point-of-sale displays, promotional contests, and high-visibility product placement” (65). Brightly colored dust jackets replaced the former brown, typographic covers to make the volumes “more eye-catching in crowded bookstores” (81). Satterfield rightly insists on Cerf’s and Klopfer’s business acumen and on their successful transformation of the Modern Library into a brand. Like the Book-of-the-Month Club, whose early advertisements focused on the name of the club itself rather than on individual authors and titles (Radway 172), Modern Library advertisements fostered “brand-name recognition” (Satterfield 20). Customers were invited to trust that all books included in the Modern Library were classics, and therefore worth reading.

However, Satterfield pays little attention to the ways classics were manufactured in the Modern Library. He seems to take for granted that the series published quality modernist works during its first fifteen or twenty years of existence, before losing its editorial focus (142). Similarly, Gordon Neavill argues that in the 1930s, the Modern Library started to publish “lesser works” such as Buck’s The Good Earth, Ferber’s Show Boat and Fisher’s The Deepening Stream, “which gave the Modern Library a more middlebrow appeal than it had had before” (”The Modern Library Series” 538). Here, “middlebrow” is used in a derogatory sense to describe commercially oriented works of little quality.

Yet, the recent reappraisal of middlebrow writers has shown that Buck, Ferber and Fisher were successful and respected literary figures in the interwar period. Thus, the editors of Middlebrow Moderns (2003), Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith aim not only to “bridge the gap between the modern and the middlebrow of the early twentieth century” (17), but also to
recover forgotten female authors “of diverse class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, politics, career paths, and domestic situations” (4). Among these neglected middlebrow writers is Edna Ferber, who came from a Midwestern Jewish German background and obtained the Pulitzer Prize for *So Big* in 1925. Like other middlebrow writers, Ferber “successfully made transitions between literature and the burgeoning technologies of magazine publication, book clubs, advertising, radio, and film, institutions that deliberately targeted ‘middle’ audiences for maximum distribution and profit” (4). Her novel *Show Boat*, published in 1926 by Doubleday, was adapted in a Broadway musical, a movie and a weekly radio program (the Show Boat Hour) before joining the Modern Library in 1935 – just in time for the release of a second movie in 1936. Jerome Kern, the composer who had written the successful musical, contributed a foreword to the Modern Library edition. Moreover, a “note on the author of Show Boat” described Ferber’s novels as “best sellers that we may be proud of”: “*Show Boat, Cimarron* and *So Big* possess genuine literary quality; they are pictures of American life.” The editor Belle Becker apparently felt that Modern Library readers needed reassurance on the literary merit of *Show Boat* – a novel that overtly participated in the mass culture of the 1920s and 1930s. The note also presented Ferber as an incarnation of the American dream: “born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and educated in Appleton, Wisconsin,” Ferber now “lives in a fabulous Park Avenue penthouse, makes fabulous sums from her plays, short stories, and novels, and is constantly surrounded by all the most fabulously clever people in New York.” The repetition of “fabulous” conveyed the sense of a mythical world of wealth, success, taste and culture. One could be fabulous only in New York, a city associated with modernity, sophistication and creativity.

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5 Box 180, RH.
As a series that commodified this glamorous metropolitan idea, the Modern Library occupied a similar position to smart magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*. George Douglas has shown that the smart magazines’ “appeal was . . . to some assumed class of sophisticated readers” (1). As a 1924 prospectus declared, the *New Yorker* was “not edited for the old lady in Dubuque” but for “persons who have a metropolitan interest” (qtd. in Hammill 8). *Vanity Fair* also sought to appeal to sophisticated readers, by publishing a mix of commercial and avant-garde writings. In short, smart magazine editors and middlebrow writers assumed “that audiences could *enjoy* the collision of different levels of cultural pleasure” (Frost 298). The term “New York middlebrow”⁶ gives a sense of this ambiguous position between high and low cultural spheres, and could apply to the smart magazines but also to the Modern Library. It reconciles the sophisticated urban image of the Modern Library, its proclaimed modernity and its cosmopolitanism on the one hand, with the middlebrow cultural pedagogy that is so central to this collection on the other hand.

The Modern Library shared three main characteristics with the smart magazines: an emphasis on cultural pedagogy, a collision of different cultural tastes, and a participation in the emerging celebrity culture. First, the Modern Library reassured anxious readers that all books published in the series were “the world’s best books.” Readers who preferred Ferber to Joyce did not have to feel guilty, as both writers were on the Modern Library list and both were presented as equally good. For those who had little confidence in their ability to identify the best books, the Modern Library played the role of a benevolent and encouraging guide. In the twenty-first century, many academics would frown upon such a collision of different levels of cultural pleasure. When the Penguin Classic series released “quality” contemporary books, such as Helen

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⁶ See Scott and Rutkoff.
Fielding’s bestseller, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, one scholar wrote that “the company cashed in on the value of the word ‘classic’” and “in doing so, devalued it” (Barry 269). Likewise, when Nick Hornby’s *Fever Pitch* – a bestselling novel on football – was included in the same series, the publishing historian John Sutherland said that “‘modern classic’ is kind of oxymoronic” (“Today Programme”). However, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Modern Library did not lose its prestige for applying the word “classic” to recent bestsellers. In fact, the diversity of the Modern Library was seen as the trademark of a series perceived as eccentric and modern. A 1928 review in Calverton’s *Modern Quarterly* declared: “there is . . . a degree of sauciness, a thumbing of noses, in a collection of books that includes titles so diverse as a detective story by the Baroness Orczy and Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*” (Cairns 121). The reviewer saw this “recklessness” as one of the “hall marks” of the Modern Library, a series he described as “civilized” and “indispensable” (121, 123). This review, published at the time when the Modern Library had just released *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, shows that the Modern Library’s diversity was associated with sophisticated eccentricity rather than commercial opportunism.

In addition to this emphasis on diversity and cultural pedagogy, the Modern Library also shared the smart magazines’ participation in celebrity culture. Cerf, who was in charge of the marketing of the series, was himself fascinated with celebrity: he was briefly married to the Hollywood actress Sylvia Sidney and his second wife was Ginger Rogers’s cousin and a former child actress. In the early 1930s, at the time when the advertising trade press recommended “injecting motion picture drama into the photographic picture” (Larned), the Modern Library started featuring movie stars in its advertisements. In 1934, for example, an advertisement showed a photograph of Rosamond Pinchot, “famous actress and niece of Governor Pinchot of Pennsylvania.” Pinchot, who held a copy of Lion Feuchtwanger’s *Power* in her hands, was
described as “an ardent Modern Library fan.” The juxtaposition of style, beauty and intellect created a striking narrative – what Lears has called a “fable of abundance.” The Modern Library promised its readers that they could belong to the upper levels of society – even if they could spend no more than 95 cents on a book.

In the interwar period, then, the Modern Library created a successful “brand story,” which offered “a robust and strategically innovative route out of the dead zone of being seen as just a commodity” (Hill 156). The Modern Library established a setting and characters for the story: intellectuals, artists, and glamorous actresses all played a role in its “branded story country,” New York City (156). For example, a 1935 article in the Palm Beach Post reported that the actress Miriam Hopkins “bought a complete set of the 215 Modern Library books and the 22 ‘Giants’ put out by the company for the library of her new home in Sutton Place.” Hopkins was not the only one to look for “a quick way of building up snooty looking book shelves”: “Other purchasers of the full sets include George Gershwin, Harold Ross of the New Yorker, and Gilbert W. Gabriel, the critic.” In the mid-1930s, the Modern Library was associated with Sutton Place, one of the most affluent enclaves in Manhattan, and with the trendiest intellectuals and artists. At the time when many academics drew on literature to teach humanistic values, Modern Library editions offered the right mix of serious and fun texts.

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7 Advertisement for the Modern Library, Harper’s Magazine, c. 1934, box 37, BC.
Outline

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 examines the various approaches that book historians have used to analyze publishing enterprises, and positions my own methodology in relation to these studies. Drawing on Janet Friskney’s and David Damrosch’s works, I employ a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools to study the impact of the Modern Library on the literary canon. Chapter 2 focuses on the juxtaposition of novels by H. G. Wells and scientific texts in the series. The inclusion of Wells’s *Ann Veronica* and *Tono-Bungay*, alongside collections of essays on Darwinian theory and other aspects of modern science, highlights the daring positioning of the Modern Library. Unlike other publisher’s series, the Modern Library did not hesitate to tackle controversial subjects, including women’s emancipation, sexuality, reproduction and eugenics. Chapter 3 argues that the Modern Library contributed to Sherwood Anderson’s entry into the literary canon while he was still alive. It looks at the ways in which the Modern Library marketed *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White* to a large audience of teachers and students. It also examines the effect of the Modern Library editions on Anderson’s reputation after the Second World War. Chapter 4 studies the mix of high modernism and detective fiction in the Modern Library. It takes the example of *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (both added in 1928) to show that the Modern Library made no difference between “high” and “low” cultural forms. The fact that both books were produced in the same format, advertised in the same periodicals and reviewed simultaneously highlights the flexibility of cultural categories in the interwar period. Chapter 5 looks at another book included in the Modern Library in 1928, *Mrs. Dalloway* with a special introduction by Woolf (the only introduction of this kind she ever wrote). It shows that, while Woolf often denounced middlebrow culture, she was also eager to communicate with ordinary
readers. A middlebrow institution such as the Modern Library allowed her to touch a large audience of middle-class Americans, who might not have read her books in more expensive editions. Chapter 6 examines the changing reception of Faulkner’s introduction to the Modern Library edition of Sanctuary. It argues that the introduction became controversial only in the late 1930s, at the time when critics started to divide high culture from popular works.

Since the Modern Library published such a diverse list, it is a privileged site to analyze the evolution of the canon of modern literature in mid-twentieth-century America. This is why I focus on canonical writers such as Joyce, Woolf and Faulkner, writers who risk slipping out of the canon such as Sherwood Anderson, and genre writers such as Dashiell Hammett. The Modern Library also published many texts that have been nearly forgotten (including W.H. Hudson’s Green Mansions, a bestselling title that stayed for fifty years in the series). As Janet Friskney argues in the case of the New Canadian Library (NCL), “it was educators, and, in particular, university professors, who collectively refined that selection to form a discernible - albeit fluctuating – canon” (154). Like the NCL, the Modern Library was one canon-maker among others. When F. S. Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby was included in the series in 1934, it attracted little attention and was discontinued five years later. Although the Modern Library did not single-handedly create the canon of modern literature, it participated in the definition of this canon by selecting and marketing the “world’s best books” to mainstream America.
Chapter 1 - A Mixed Methodology for the Study of Publishing Enterprises

The historian Robert Darnton famously described book history as an “interdisciplinarity run riot” (67). Likewise, in her study of the Victorian imprint Kegan Paul (1998), Leslie Howsam recognized that the student of the history of the book might need “guidance on how to proceed with the sometimes bewildering combination of evidence and methodologies that field encompasses” (7). While book history is a relatively young discipline focusing on the study of publishers, printers and other literary actors, it is important to note that literary scholars (and especially Victorianists) have long been interested in the publishing business and the role of individual publishers in shaping literature. As John Sutherland argued in Victorian Novelists and Publishers (1976), there was no Victorian novel “which was not materially influenced by the publishing system, for good or ill” (6). Sutherland was referring to significant events within the book trade, such as the development of serial publication and its impact on the material form of novels. Of course, the publishing system continued to influence the production and reception of texts well after the nineteenth century.

In spite of their importance in the literary field of the mid-twentieth century, Random House and the Modern Library have attracted little scholarly interest. Jay Satterfield’s study of the Modern Library (2002) can be viewed as the most significant contribution to date. Satterfield’s approach is broadly socio-historical and based on archival work. At least one reviewer criticized the lack of literary anecdotes: “the characters run away with the story, and the author’s diligent efforts to interest us in highbrow/lowlbrow, culture for the masses, and ‘book club ballyhoo’ only make us ache for more tales of Horace Liveright wandering in Greenwich
Village or Bennett Cerf bounding through bookshops in the Middle West” (Adams 70). Since publishing history has traditionally focused on personalities and individuals, many scholars continue to assume that the history of a publishing house should be the story of its founders and editors (and of their relationships with authors).

Despite some methodological differences, the majority of scholars who specialize in publishing history agree on the importance of archival work. As Howsam puts it, “most of us know [book history] when we see it, and can identify that brand of scholarship which claims to be book-historical but is really just playing around with the fashionable terminology of ‘print culture’ or ‘print capitalism’ or whatever, without grappling with the archival and bibliographic realities” (“The Practice of Book”). Indeed, book historians are often critical of literary types who read Derrida in trendy coffee shops instead of engaging with materials in rare-book rooms. In How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment, the sociologist Michèle Lamont has shown that English and History have different standards. Unlike English, History “present[s] a relatively high degree of agreement about what constitutes quality and how to recognize it” (79-80). According to one historian interviewed by Lamont, “what is shared is agreement on what constitutes good historical craftsmanship, a sense of ‘careful archival work’” (80). This consensus might explain, in Antoinette Burton’s words, the “historians’ comparative silence about the personal, structural, and political pressures which the archive places on the histories they end up writing - as well as those they do not” (9). Similarly, Howsam notes that historians “don’t . . . tend to ask too many questions about how those documents came to rest in that archive, or about what documents are missing from that same archive, or what archives have been dismembered, or gone missing altogether” (“The Practice of Book”). However, some

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1 I am grateful to Dr. Howsam for sending me her notes.
historians have begun to question the status of the archive and the excitement that archival work produces (what Derrida calls *mal d’archive* or archive fever). Burton, for example, has argued for a more self-conscious engagement with the archive, with historians revealing their “archive stories,” defined as “narratives about how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them to write history” (6). Archivists, too, are increasingly aware that they are not mere guardians of the archive. As Tom Nesmith has noted, they “actually co-create and shape the knowledge in records” by writing over the records “in finding aids, other guides, letters to researchers, and, perhaps most of all, in the spoken guidance offered to colleagues and researchers on the existence, value, links between, and meanings of records” (27, 37). Documenting the provenance of the archive is now seen as essential, but archivists “do not always agree among themselves on what counts as necessary context” (36).

For instance, the finding aid for the Random House Records presents the collection only as a “gift of Random House, Inc., 1970, 1974, 1977-1979, 1986-1989, 1992, & 1999.” It takes some investigation to discover how the Random House fonds actually arrived at Columbia University Library. In the mid-1960s, the president of Columbia learnt that Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer were looking for an institution to bestow all their papers (Pratt 3-4). The librarian for Rare Books and Manuscripts, Kenneth A. Lohf, then started a survey of the firm’s literary papers. He later described his preliminary work using the vocabulary of exploration and discovery:

All of the firm’s records prior to 1945 were stored in a series of dark, damp, cavernous chambers in the basement and subbasement of the Villard House, the Renaissance-style buildings on Madison Avenue that housed the publishing company’s offices. Nearly two decades of literary papers were packed away in filing cabinets, transfiles, cardboard cartons and bundles, all covered with a thin layer of that New York dust so well known to all who have ever stored precious mementos in their basements.
As I identified the various files that looked most promising (they were stored in no special order), they were brought up from the sub-basement to a conference room on the first floor. There, I went through the folders item by item, discovering letters from Gertrude Stein, Sinclair Lewis, W. H. Auden, William Faulkner, John O'Hara, and many other legendary names in contemporary literature (Lohf 103-4).

In a striking example of what Carolyn Steedman has called “the romance of endurance and quest” (21), Lohf explores an unwelcoming and slightly threatening setting and discovers the letters of “legendary names.” His narration is structured by an upward movement, from darkness to light: he rescues the treasure from dampness and dust in the Random House cave, and brings it back to the surface for the benefits of researchers.

The Random House collection was officially opened for research in 1970. A small part of the collection has been catalogued and is kept on site, but the largest part (1,682 boxes) is uncatalogued and kept off-site. There is no information on the re-organization of parts of the archive (one would want to know the origin of the letters that eventually ended up in the catalogued collection, for example). The archive is so disorganized that the current curator of literature congratulated me on “navigating our RH collection with its unwieldy finding aid.” The researcher must keep in mind that the archive cannot provide a transparent window on the past and that “any reading of its contents will necessarily be a reinterpretation” rather than a reconstruction (Freshwater 738).

This chapter has two objectives. The first one is to identify the many methodologies that have been applied to the publishing business, from Alistair McCleery’s focus on the personality of Allen Lane at Penguin to Simon Eliot’s quantitative data on Victorian publishing. In the

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2 Karla Nielsen, email to author, 11 June 2012.
second part, I summarize the methodology I propose to use in the case of the Modern Library series.

Figure 1-1 attempts to classify the various approaches used to study publishers and the book trade. The horizontal axis opposes a focus on individuals and their personalities, to an emphasis on facts and figures. In other words, this axis contrasts qualitative works with more quantitative analyzes of the book trade. The vertical axis opposes studies that focus primarily on
authors, to those that examine publishing houses. For instance, Robert L. Patten’s *Charles Dickens and his Publishers* (1978) and Royal A. Gettman’s *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (1960) would occupy opposite positions along this vertical axis.

The graph shows that book history is fundamentally an interdisciplinary discipline, practiced by literary scholars (Rainey), bibliographers (McKenzie), historians (Darnton, Howsam), and sociologists (Bourdieu). Book history is itself a part of cultural history, as opposed to social history – the study of social class and class conflict. Cultural history deals with the ways in which individuals made sense of the world by creating cultural forms. It is closely related to cultural studies, as both fields rely on a broad definition of “ordinary” culture. But whereas cultural history is committed to historical research, cultural studies generally focus on contemporary mass culture. Simon During, the editor of *The Cultural Studies Reader*, thus defines his field as “academic work (teaching, research, dissemination, etc.) on contemporary culture” (25). In practice, Janice Radway, Trysh Travis and other scholars who work on contemporary culture are often identified as book historians. Perhaps book history is best understood in relation to the sociology of literature, itself a stream of cultural studies. As James English has suggested, book history and the new bibliography studies are “among the approaches where affinities with sociology are strongest” (“Everywhere and Nowhere” viii). In short, book history studies what D. F. McKenzie called the “sociology of texts,” i.e. the social contexts that enabled printed materials to be written, published, circulated and read.

Moreover, the graph identifies four main approaches to the study of the book trade. The first one is the house history, “the genre in which much of the history of publishing has been written” (Howsam, *Kegan Paul* 12). Since a house history is generally commissioned by the company that constitutes its subject, it is often characterized by uncritical attention to the personality of key individuals. In Alistair McCleery’s words, “the role of the house history is to
protect the house patrimony” (180 n9). It celebrates the longevity of the firm and the essential role of its founders, anchoring the company’s success in the past and looking towards the future. The focus is usually on the dynasty of (male) publishers, which inherit the house patrimony from their fathers before leaving it to their sons. In The History of Longmans and their Books (2008), Asa Briggs notes that “there had been no Longmans connected with the House of Longman after the death of seventh-generation Mark (1916-1972), the last of his line” (3). He later adds that Mark Longman left “behind his two daughters but no sons” (7). Briggs seems to take for granted that the firm could only have gone to a male heir, and he includes in the appendix a family tree that mainly focuses on the men in the Longman family. This patriarchal framework is shared by many house histories, such as John Attenborough’s A Living Memory: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1868-1975. Attenborough observes that the family tree of the Stoughton family shows “an unbroken line of descent from the twelfth century” (6). This quasi-aristocratic lineage is paralleled by the longevity of the family business, which (as the title shows) was created in 1868. Similarly, Humphrey Carpenter’s The Seven Lives of John Murray (2008) stresses the long history of both the Murray family and their publishing house – from the first John Murray who founded the firm in 1768 to John Murray VII who sold it to Hodder Headline in 2002. The insert of the book includes “a posed dynastic photograph taken at their home, Newstead, Wimbledon, showing three generations: John Murray III, IV and V, 1890.” Like Briggs’s history of Longmans, The Seven Lives of John Murray was written at the time when the family business had recently lost its independence and survived as part of a larger group. The preface thus explains

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3 Briggs’s study is not a house history in the strictest sense, as Pearson Longman did not publish it. However, it is largely uncritical and presents many traditional aspects of house histories such as the focus on the dynasty of publishers and the celebration of the longevity of the firm.
that the Murray family commissioned the book in 2002, as the firm and its archives were about to leave “the fabled 50 Albemarle Street” (xi).

Howsam differentiates between the house histories that “are grounded firmly in the archival records of the house in question” and those that are “based on selective memory rather than objective scholarship, and exists primarily as a promotional vehicle, to celebrate the survival and the successes of a firm, usually on the occasion of an anniversary” (Kegan Paul 12). This is an important distinction, but I would add that the use of archival records is not a guarantee of “objective scholarship.” Carpenter made extensive use of John Murray’s archives to write his book, which is presented as an “independent” study (xii). However, *The Seven Lives of John Murray* can hardly be viewed as an unbiased work. Instead, its role is to protect the house patrimony in uncertain times by emphasizing the greatness and longevity of the Murray family. The book opens with a quote from John Murray IV speaking at the coming-of-age dinner for his son, John Murray V on 9 October 1905: “I cannot express it better than by proposing the toast of ‘Albemarle Street.’ . . . Amongst ourselves we always allude to the firm as Albemarle Street, and I daresay you know what that means.” Here, the firm’s head office functions as a metonymy for the publishing house and its prestigious past. The last sentence makes clear that the loss of independence does not entail the end of the firm, as long as it keeps its renowned address and “all the intangible evidence that binds together the history of the publishing dynasty and its house” (311). *The Seven Lives of John Murray* can therefore be read as promotional device that markets the company’s illustrious past and celebrates its survival as a division of Hodder Headline (and now Hachette).

Unlike house histories disguised as independent studies, Bennett Cerf’s memoirs, *At Random*, openly draws “on selective memory rather than objective scholarship.” It was published in 1977, six years after Cerf’s death, and is based on interviews for the Columbia Oral History
project, from which his widow, Phyllis Cerf Wagner, and Random House editor Albert Erskine shaped the book. *At Random* reads as the confession of a successful publisher who has known everybody that matters, from Anita Loos to Truman Capote. At the time when Cerf recorded the interviews, he was a celebrity himself, known for his bestselling books of jokes and his participation to the television program *What’s My Line?* His account of William Faulkner’s funeral is typically self-aggrandizing: the atmosphere suddenly changes from hostile to friendly when Faulkner’s relatives recognize him as “the fellow we see on TV every Sunday night” (136).

In addition to literary anecdotes drawn from the interviews, *At Random* also contains extracts from the diaries that Cerf kept all his life. An entry dated 5 June 1925 records his family’s anxiety regarding the Modern Library deal: “They all seem to have decided that Liveright is an awful crook who is going to ‘gyp’ me if ever he can. With this estimate I violently disagree. He has always played fair with me, and I am sure, regards me as a very good friend – certainly not a business enemy” (51). The text reproduced in *At Random* is faithful to the original, kept in the Random House archives. 4 The diaries also provide unique insight into the business aspect of the transaction. As Arthur Pell (Boni & Liveright’s treasurer) demanded an extra $25,000 for the purchase price of the Modern Library, Cerf refused to listen to his family’s advice to return immediately to New York. When editing *At Random*, Phyllis Cerf Wagner and Albert Erskine selected extracts that conveyed the impression of an optimistic young man, with excellent business acumen and ability to remain calm under pressure.

*At Random* exemplifies the thin boundary between literary biography or memoirs on the one hand, and house history on the other. Indeed, *At Random* shares many similarities with Sylvia Beach’s memoirs, *Shakespeare & Company*, which portrays James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and

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4 Cerf, “My Trip Abroad [1925],” Diaries 1915-1949, box 11, BC.
others as individuals rather than legends. For instance, Beach’s description of Joyce’s marriage to Nora stresses the daily routine of the couple: “Joyce enjoyed being called a good-for-nothing by Nora; it was a relief from the respectful attitude of others. He was delighted when she poked and pushed him” (42). Likewise, Cerf recalls Nora’s offer to write a book entitled “My Twenty Years with a Genius – So-called” (92). If the tone of Cerf’s and Beach’s books is quite similar, their objectives differ significantly. When Harcourt, Brace published *Shakespeare & Company* in 1959, Beach’s famous bookstore had been closed for eighteen years. At the time when Beach was writing her memoirs, she was also ordering her papers and books. Thus, *Shakespeare & Company* “provides a key and summary guide to the collection of manuscripts, books, pictures and other souvenirs now at Princeton” (“Finding Aid”). Cerf probably participated in the Columbia Oral History project for a similar purpose – giving a road map to his own papers and records. However, the fact that these interviews were edited and published in book form for Random House’s fiftieth anniversary frames the text in a different light. Instead of the memoirs of a publisher, we are given to read a house history. The 1977 hardcover edition thus features a Random House logo stamped in gold on the cover and reproduced on the title page and endpapers. A new edition was issued in 2002 with an introduction by Bennett’s son, Christopher Cerf, to celebrate the firm’s seventy-fifth anniversary. The blurring of the distinction between memoirs and house history stems from the evolution of the publishing industry – moving away from family dynasties and towards ownership by large corporations. New house histories tend to focus on founders, such as Allen Lane at Penguin, rather than on the history of a dynasty.

Although no one ever wrote a house history of Boni & Liveright, two biographies of Horace Liveright appeared in 1970 and 1995. Both of them make extensive use of archival records, but Liveright is still presented as a mythical figure who discovered and promoted famous writers before falling into disgrace. It is certainly true that many of those who worked for
Liveright later had distinguished careers in the publishing business. Examples include not only Bennett Cerf but also Richard Simon of Simon & Schuster and Aaron Sussman, who designed the advertising campaign for the 1934 Random House edition of *Ulysses*. However, Walker Gilmer and Tom Dardis tend to write a hagiography of Liveright rather than a dispassionate analysis of his role in the book trade. According to Gilmer, “Liveright was a Gatsby-like figure who sometimes epitomized the excesses of Twenties at their most blatant” (ix). Dardis’s *Firebrand* similarly portrays Liveright as a self-destructing genius: “He transformed the staid, self-satisfied atmosphere of American publishing into an exciting, pulsing forum in which contemporary American writing could come of age. He couldn’t resist his many temptations and was proud of the fact, an attitude that has unduly influenced our feeling about him” (354). This romantic view of the publisher as the victim of an oppressive society can also be found in James G. Nelson’s *Publisher to the Decadents* (2000), which presents Leonard Smithers as an extraordinary entrepreneur who “showed his willingness on many occasions to defy the forces of patriarchal power and puritanical fanaticism” (5).

In a frequently quoted 1982 article, Robert Darnton offered a model to think critically about the role of publishers and other players of the book trade. His objective was to unify disparate specializations and methodologies under a single conceptual umbrella. As models risk “freezing human beings out of history,” Darnton’s communications circuit emphasizes the role of individuals as opposed to impersonal structures (69). Indeed, the circuit “runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader” (67). Since writers are themselves readers and meet readers’ demand in their writing, the circuit is not a one-way system but a full cycle. The model therefore provides a way to think about the whole book trade as opposed to narrow aspects examined by bibliographers, cultural historians, sociologists, economists and literary critics.
Darnton’s emphasis on the individual publisher, as part of the broader publishing business, has influenced Alistair McCleery’s appeal for a “return of the publisher to book history.” McCleery claims that book historians should look for a “third way” between the Annales school and the “uncritical attention to personality” typical of the standard house history (162). Annales historians and sociologists of literature tend to present the publisher “as an agent subordinating personal will to impersonal forces emerging from the nexus of cultural change, the marketplace, and legal liabilities” (161). McCleery argues, on the contrary, that a publisher’s individual decisions can make a significant impact on the book trade. He gives the example of the founder of Penguin, Allen Lane, whose willingness to take risks enabled the British publication of *Ulysses* and, later, of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. McCleery is well aware that house histories also emphasize the “significant role of the prominent individual as an agent of change” (179). For McCleery, “a biographically based study” of a publisher should be critical but not too critical: “it should attempt to understand the nature of his success in publishing and perhaps to qualify initial hagiography without denying that success (163).

McCleery’s insistence on placing the publisher at the center of the communications circuit has obvious methodological value. However, McCleery leaves important questions unanswered. In particular, he fails to address the reasons why a specific publisher is considered worth studying. Indeed, a novice scholar would have no difficulty finding biographical information on Lane, as well as detailed histories of Penguin. Archives are easily accessible at Bristol University, and a four-year, ARHC-funded project aims to extend our knowledge of Penguin even further. In 2010, the Penguin archive project organized a conference to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the firm, with panels including academics as well as publishing insiders. So why have Lane and Penguin attracted such a level of attention? Instead of focusing on Lane’s “greatness” (164), I would argue that his memory has been promoted by a network of
institutions, from the Penguin Collectors Society to the Allen Lane Foundation. Despite having been acquired by Pearson Longman in 1970, Penguin Books has continued to celebrate Allen Lane through publications, exhibitions, and pages on their website. This celebration of the founding figure contributes to a marketing of nostalgia and to a strong brand identity.⁵ In other words, the figure of Allen Lane is used to create continuity between the initially independent publishing house and the post-1970 multinational corporation. McCleery’s approach thus brings problems of its own. By eschewing “the dryness of the French school of historians” (162), his biographically based methodology risks falling back to the mythmaking of the house history.

Rather than examining a publisher’s relationship with authors, literary biographies often focus on a writer’s relationships with his or her publishers. This second approach is in fact very close to the first one, since it often privileges anecdotes and subjective memories over more factual evidence. In other words, biographies of writers tend to dwell on interpersonal exchanges rather than on business transactions (contracts, payment of royalties, reprinted editions and the like). As Ira Nadel observes, “often the life and not the output of the subject receives the greatest attention” (134). Biographies of Pearl Buck thus give detailed accounts of her affair with her publisher, Richard Walsh. Although the publication of the Modern Library edition of *The Good Earth* in 1934 was an important turn in Buck’s career – raising her to the status of classic writer – it is not mentioned in Nora Stirling’s and Hilary Spurling’s biographies. Likewise, Peter Conn refers to Cerf only in the context of Buck’s activities to help persecuted Jews to flee Europe (198). It is certainly true that Buck had been “discovered” by Walsh, not by Cerf. But what about Joyce, who owed the American publication of *Ulysses* to Random House? Richard Ellmann mentions Cerf only twice in his 887-page-long biography of Joyce. There are forty-four

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⁵ Likewise, in his discussion of Random House’s marketing of the paperback edition of *Ulysses*, John X. Cooper refers to the techniques of “emotion marketing” described by Scott Robinette and Claire Brand (179-80).
references to Sylvia Beach, many anecdotes on her relationship with Joyce but little information on its business side. For the scholar in search of hard facts on the publishing industry, literary biographies are perhaps not the best place to start.

Another approach to the history of the book is to focus on structures rather than individuals. Lawrence Rainey’s influential *Institutions of Modernism* (1998) thus rejects the anecdotal narratives of biographies and concentrates on the new institutional environment in which modernist texts first appeared. Rainey describes “the little review and the limited edition” as “venues situated in a profoundly ambiguous social space, simultaneously sequestered and semi-withdrawn from the larger institution of publishing even while firmly embedded within the market economy” (39). Instead of casting Joyce and Beach, for instance, as “heroic figures who have succeeded despite a benighted legal system, philistine publishers, and a hostile or indifferent public” (42), Rainey maintains that the limited edition of *Ulysses* targeted speculators on the rare book market in addition to a handful of wealthy collectors. This argument is supported by evidence from the archives. As Beach’s sales records for *Ulysses* are scattered in various collections, Rainey has “collated the materials at Princeton, Buffalo, and Austin” (191 n45). He has then listed the “eighteen shops, dealers, and agents who placed orders that totaled more than 1,000 francs” (60), finding that “taken together, these dealers alone accounted for 55,280 francs, nearly 40 percent of the 142,000 francs in gross sales that Beach took in for *Ulysses*” (61). This kind of evidence allows Rainey to challenge the traditional view of *Ulysses* being sold only to distinguished writers and other celebrities.

At first sight, Rainey’s methodology seems rather similar to that of literary biographers. He draws on a mix of archival documents and published works of reference (biographies and bibliographies of canonical modernist writers as well as collections of their letters). However, Rainey looks at these materials through an original model influenced by Jürgen Habermas’s *The
Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. He is thus able to shed new light on received narratives and to situate the decisions of modernist actors “within the context of a body of institutions, a corpus of collecting, marketing, and discursive practices that constituted a composite social space” (44). The titles of his chapters (“Consuming Investments,” “The Price of Modernism,” “Patronage and the Poetics of the Coterie”) reflect this focus on institutions rather than individuals.

Similarly, Lawrence Schwartz’s Creating Faulkner’s Reputation: The Politics of Modern Literary Criticism (1988) analyzes the institutional structures that contributed to the revival of interest in William Faulkner in the late 1940s. Drawing on extensive archival research, Schwartz argues that this revival cannot be separated from the historical context of the postwar period: “Ultimately, Faulkner’s work was championed and canonized because his often supremely individualistic themes and technically difficult prose served an ideological cause” (210). According to Schwartz, Faulkner’s work fit perfectly with the values that the United States wanted to project during the Cold War. Furthermore, Schwartz places Random House’s decision to revive Faulkner’s reputation within the changing institutional context of English academic departments, characterized by the growing influence of New Criticism and the rise in courses on modern literature.

Pierre Bourdieu’s The Field of Cultural Production, translated in English in 1993, gave a strong theoretical basis for exploring the structure of the literary field. For Bourdieu, what “makes reputations” is not a prominent publisher, writer or critic; it is not even institutions (influential review, magazine, academy, coterie or publishing house). It is “the field of production” understood as “the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated” (78). Bourdieu analyzes this performative “power to consecrate” not individually, but structurally –
thus showing his debt to Marxist theory. Crucially, Bourdieu shows that the writer is never the sole producer of the literary work. The “‘charismatic’ ideology” obscures the most important aspect in the creation of a work of art: “the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize” (76). By increasing their symbolic capital, publishers can gain the power to present their latest discovery as a masterpiece (and thus gain profit from it). For Bourdieu, then, the value of a work of art is not based on its use, but on the quality of the discourse that legitimizes it. Likewise, John X. Cooper has noted that the “immanence-value” of modernist literature resided “not in the work as such, but in the consumer’s head.” As the focus of advertisements “shifted from the product itself to the experience it is meant to induce” (183), modernism came to be associated with avant-garde coolness and audacity. A Shakespeare & Company edition of *Ulysses* was a sought-after commodity because it promised a unique experience of self-transformation. Owning such an edition, especially before it was authorized in the United States in late 1933, meant that one had sophisticated and adventurous literary tastes. Any rich businessman could thus be transformed into an enlightened connoisseur.

In *British Literary Cultures and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (1997), Peter McDonald uses Bourdieu’s model of the field as a methodological concept to study the literary culture of late-Victorian Britain (20). Instead of following John Sutherland’s steps in analyzing the interactions between authors and publishers, McDonald aims to reconstruct “the implicit structures underlying such relations” (10). This reconstruction of the literary field enables McDonald to move beyond the divide between “purely ‘internalist’ modes of reading, which focus on textuality *per se*, and ‘externalist’ modes, which threaten to dissolve the text into its non-discursive context” (172). By examining stylistic and intertextual aspects as well as other aspects external to the text such as the publishing practice and the press reviews, McDonald positions the individual writer within the broader literary field. According to McDonald, the
theory of the field can transcend the opposition between highbrow and commercial literature. Indeed, “its object is neither avant-garde nor ‘popular’ literature: it is the reciprocal antagonisms that exist between them and the hierarchically structured networks that make each possible” (173). Moreover, McDonald uses Bourdieu’s model to challenge Darnton’s communications circuit. Whereas Darnton insists on the agents’ function in the circuit (as writer, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller and reader), McDonald claims that “the agents’ positions in the culture are defined not only horizontally, in terms of their function in the circuit, but vertically, in terms of their status in the intricately structured field” (11). In short, “publishers not only issue books, they invest them with prestige” (11).

This point is particularly relevant to the late nineteenth-century British and French literary fields. In the case of twentieth-century American publishers, the notion of status can be more complex. For instance, Random House was initially established to publish limited editions, illustrated by renowned artists like Rockwell Kent. Yet, Cerf and Klopfer also marketed their cheap Modern Library series as a distinguished collection printed by Elmer Adler with end sheets designed by Kent. Random House and the Modern Library did not occupy rival positions in the literary field. Instead, both imprints targeted the same audience of professionals who aspired to display their education and taste.

While McDonald was careful not to lose sight of the literary text itself, Simon Eliot has analyzed the macroeconomy of book publishing using a much more “externalist” methodology. Indeed, Eliot is one of the very few literary scholars to use quantitative tools. As James English puts it, “antagonism toward counting” remains a central characteristic of literary studies. English traces the roots of this hostility to the transformation of higher-educational management, which has become increasingly “committed to numerical data, imposing on us ever more stringent quantificational regimes of value and assessment—regimes which have tended predictably to
shift resources away from the humanities and toward the very disciplines that have created them (such as the business school disciplines of finance, marketing, and strategic management)” (“Everywhere and Nowhere” xiii). The general hostility to numerical data in literary studies is shared neither by English, nor by Eliot. As Eliot provocatively puts it, “when studying book history one is never very far away from money or, at least, if one is doing it properly one should never be far away from money” (“What Price Poetry” 425). His pioneering study of British publishing offers a broad overview of patterns and trends between 1800 and 1919. Eliot compiled data from various sources – including British Museum Copyright Receipt Books and trade magazines such as *Bent’s Monthly Literary Adviser* and the *Publishers’ Circular* – to confirm patterns that scholars had long suspected such as “the general increase in the number of titles per annum over the period, the evidence of growing secularisation in both books and periodicals, and the steady reduction of unit prices” (“Some Patterns” 106).

Since Eliot’s work is grounded in numbers, an obvious methodological problem is the quality of the available data. For instance, how can we tell that the classification by subject offered by the *Publishers’ Circular* and the *Bookseller* in the last decades of the nineteenth century is reliable? Eliot’s answer is to look “not so much at the numbers themselves” but “at the way those numbers varied year by year” (4). Ideally, a second source would provide other figures for comparison purposes. If the two sources show the same trend, Eliot then carefully generalizes these findings to the whole nineteenth-century book production. As he observes, “such a model, based upon smallish subsets of the real total production, subsets, moreover, which were far from

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6 In *The Economy of Prestige*, English includes graphs to illustrate, among other things, the rise of prizes in literature and cinema (324). In *The Global Future of English Studies*, he satirically presents English as “the great discipline of anecdote and conjecture,” and argues for quantitative evidence in a section titled “Let’s Do the Numbers” (9-10).
random samples, would be tentative and subject to revision” (4). However, Eliot argues that it is better to use these “working hypotheses” than to rely on unproved assumptions (4).

In a recent article, Eliot has identified three main threats to book history as a discipline. First, its origins in bibliography and textual criticism often lead to the “neurotic accumulation of detail” (“Has Book History a Future” 12). The second danger is to focus on the study of a single publisher or even a single book, thus resulting in “a sort of regional antiquarianism.” As Eliot puts it, “we have an obligation to relate our micro-studies to broader macro-studies.” The third threat comes from those with a background in literary studies and their fascination with theory. The only “real theory,” for Eliot, is “a proposed model that can be tested by data” (12). In other words, a model that is not “falsifiable” should not be used in book history (13). While I agree with Eliot’s insistence on historical procedures, I would add that book historians have long been aware of the danger of micro-studies. Robert Darnton, Jonathan Rose and others have insisted on the significance of individual actors, while also relating their findings to the larger book trade. In his investigation of the *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), Rose uses qualitative and quantitative information in an effort to link micro-studies of readers to the history of reading in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My own research on Random House and the Modern Library relates to broader topics, such as the growth of the academic market and its impact on trade publishing. Such a project requires the gathering of relevant data, i.e. costs of production, price, sales, total number of impressions and editions. But what if the numbers are missing? Let’s take the example of Edna Ferber’s *Show Boat*. A quick look at George Andes’s bibliography or at the website modernlib.com tells us that Ferber’s novel lasted only five years in the Modern Library, from 1935 to 1940. The folder on *Show Boat* in the Random House archives
contains galley proofs, but no printing order or copyright statement. Indeed, the archives do not include comprehensive sales numbers, except for specific periods (1928, 1942-3, 1951-2). However, we know that in 1939, Pocket Book released a 25-cent edition of Show Boat. It is probable that the 95-cent Modern Library edition was selling reasonably well before the publication of the paperback version – but was dropped thereafter. In other words, the choice is not between unfalsifiable statements and “real” theory based on data. Instead, it is necessary to find creative solutions when the archives do not offer quantitative evidence.

As it is common for literary critics to examine a single book and a single author, the size and diversity of the Modern Library and other uniform series of reprints raise methodological issues. The Modern Library reached 242 titles in 1936, while Everyman’s Library had already 850 titles six years earlier. Scholars like Jay Satterfield have chosen to discuss the whole series rather than specific titles. Since individual titles were advertised as part of the larger series, it made sense for Satterfield to move the discussion away from specific books. However, this focus tends to construct a false homogeneity. Instead of a diverse series which included highbrow and middlebrow novels, fiction and non-fiction, the Modern Library is presented as a collection of difficult texts sold to a large audience (1-2).

In his chapter on Everyman’s Library, by contrast, Jonathan Rose analyzes the complete bibliography of the series to debunk the myth of Everyman editors “neglecting authors who were female, non-Western, subversive, avant-garde, or otherwise ‘marginalized’” (133). Rose observes that Everyman’s Library included “all the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Christina Rossetti” as well as Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and

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7 Box 180, RH.
8 See Neavill, “Publishing in Wartime” 589.
9 Rose used The Reader’s Guide to Everyman’s Library, “a complete bibliography of the series” (482 n73).
“the autobiography of Elizabeth Blackwell, the trailblazing female physician” (135). Everyman’s Library was not, therefore, the uniformly conservative series described by some literary critics. In fact, the widely-accepted definition of the publisher’s series as a “named, sometimes numbered, group of books with a common theme, usually with uniform binding and often uniformly priced, appearing under a general title” can be misleading (Howsam, “Sustained Literary Ventures” 5). These series were, and still are, marketed as uniform and centered on a common theme. For instance, Stein’s *Three Lives* and Buck’s *The Good Earth* appeared in the Modern Library at approximately the same time (1933-34) and were both presented as modern classics. The “common theme” of uniform series should be viewed as a construct for marketing purposes rather than an intrinsic characteristic.

In her study of the New Canadian Library, a quality paperback series of literary reprints launched in 1958, Janet Friskney examines individual titles as well as the series as a whole. Friskney’s methodology is based on archival work in the papers of Malcolm Ross and McClelland and Stewart. She also draws on four interviews, including one with Ross in 1995. Moreover, Friskney analyzes published sources, including “individual volumes that made up the NCL, and the miscellany of book reviews those titles prompted” (5). In addition to this qualitative work, she incorporates quantitative examination of sales records held in the McClelland and Stewart fonds. According to Appendix B, the heyday of the series was in the mid-1970s, when more than 360,000 NCL titles were sold annually. Friskney also includes a quantitative analysis of scholarly criticism in order to trace the evolution of the canon of Canadian literature between 1958 and 1978 (164). Her assessment of journal literature about NCL authors, based on a search of the authors’ names in the *Canadian Periodical Index* (248-9 n32), shows that many of these writers failed to attract more than two scholarly articles over a twenty-year period. Friskney’s analysis of journal literature thus offers a methodological model
that can easily be applied to the Modern Library, a series that was sold to the academic market and reviewed in scholarly journals.

While Friskney focuses on the characteristics of the New Canadian Library and scarcely discusses Malcolm Ross’s and Jack McClelland’s lives, Howsam adopts a dual methodology in her study of Kegan Paul. As she observes, “the theme of *Kegan Paul – A Victorian imprint* is the duality of imprint: the publisher’s imprint upon a list of books: and publishers’ personalities, the imprint of their taste and judgment on the culture in which they lived” (3). Howsam therefore bases her methodology on both “biography, which is proper to a study of publishers” and “bibliography, the approach pertinent to a study of books” (3). The first four chapters of the book give a biographical account for each individual associated with the imprint, including Henry S. King and Charles Kegan Paul. In order to distance her study from house histories, Howsam stresses the critical dimension of her portrayal of King and Paul. She thus makes extensive use of Paul’s *Memories*, “but always in the context of a critical reading, one that is attentive to silences and evasions” (4). The following chapters stem from Howsam’s work on the microfilm edition of the Kegan Paul archives, which consist mostly of publication books and profit-and-loss ledgers. Howsam is careful to avoid “focusing on the well-known books on the publisher’s list and ignoring the rest” (5). Her bibliographical analysis entails categorizing each title “according to the genre of the text, the gender of the author, and the type of contract involved” (5). The resulting database shows that Kegan Paul mostly published theology and poetry; 80% of authors were men; and “nearly half the contracts were commission agreements, wherein authors, not publishers, undertook the financial risk of publication” (6).

It is tempting to apply Howsam’s dual analysis, her focus on “the lives of the publishers together with the statistics that identify the kind of books they were choosing” (14), to the case of Random House and the Modern Library. Indeed, Bennett Cerf remains an understudied character.
A critical account of his long-term partnership with Donald Klopfer could shed some light on the publishing business of the mid-twentieth century. However, such biographical account would not, I believe, help us understand how the Modern Library came to be perceived as a distinguished series. Indeed, the Modern Library was not created by Cerf and Klopfer, but by Horace Liveright and Albert Boni. As we have seen, two biographies have already scrutinized Liveright’s personality. In addition, Satterfield has discussed Boni’s life in Greenwich Village (13-8). Like many successful New York publishers, Liveright and Boni (and later Cerf and Klopfer) led busy lives, filled with parties and encounters with famous writers. The Modern Library was positioned as a series for sophisticated, educated, urban readers, but its audience was also composed of aspirational readers eager to follow current literary trends. In 1929, for instance, bookshops in Albuquerque, New Mexico, reported Modern Library sales of $256.26 – an important amount for a city that had fewer than 50,000 inhabitants according to the 1930 US census. The Modern Library was not only sold in large urban centers on the East Coast, but also in small cities across the country. In other words, focusing on the personalities of Liveright and Boni, or Cerf and Klopfer, will not tell us why readers in Albuquerque bought Modern Library books.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory, my research is concerned with the structure of the field rather than with the personalities of publishers. For Bourdieu, the field is never static and each player’s success depends on his or her positioning within this changing environment. The Modern Library series was established at a time when contemporary literature was starting to attract some interest in academic circles. As the student population increased and became more socially diverse, the Modern Library was seen as an affordable way to acquire sophisticated taste.

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10 Sales from 1 Jan. 1929 to 30 June 1930, box 766, RH.
The scope of my project spans nearly forty years, from 1917 – when Boni and Liveright created the Modern Library – to the launch of the Modern Library Paperbacks in 1955. This was a key period in the establishment of the canon of modern literature. According to Gerald Graff, 1937-41 was the “turning point” for the consolidation of New Criticism in the university (152). New Critics such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate and R. P. Blackmur contributed to the institutionalization of modernist literature in academia. Drawing on Friskney’s study of the links between academia and the New Canadian Library, I show that literary scholars favored some Modern Library titles and rejected others. This emerging canon of modern literature began to take a more stable form in the 1940s and 1950s, with the exclusion of “middlebrow” and genre writers.

The methodology I follow is organized around three axes. The first one is broadly historical and empirical. The Random House records and Bennett Cerf papers have not been sufficiently explored, especially for the purpose of reconstructing the relationships between the Modern Library and academia. Although records of sales and advertising figures are incomplete and accounts of editorial decisions on individual titles are scarce, this archive is a rich resource to explore the ways in which the Modern Library was produced, marketed, and sold to the academic market and to the general public. In summers 2010 and 2011, I spent a total of twelve weeks in New York, examining marketing and advertising records including book jackets, catalogs, posters and circulars sent to college bookstores, window displays, book racks, and advertisements in various periodicals. I also looked at the correspondence between editors and authors. Finally, I searched for quantitative information such as the print runs; the royalties paid to the author and to the initial publisher; the costs of paper, composition, binding, advertising and distribution; and the total sales figures. In addition to the Random House archives and Bennett Cerf papers, I have worked in the Ben Huebsch collection at the Library of Congress and the Sherwood Anderson
records at Newberry Library. I looked at the correspondence between Anderson and his publisher regarding the Modern Library editions of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1921) and *Poor White* (1926). The Newberry also holds royalty statements, which complement the records contained in the Random House collection.

In addition to this archival work, I conducted a bibliographical examination of Modern Library titles, focusing especially on the material aspect of each book and its place in the uniform series. Modern Library books were sufficiently affordable to attract students, but they did not resemble cheap commodities. The study of texts cannot be isolated from the physical aspect of the books. For instance, we can show that the size, end-papers and bindings used for Buck’s *The Good Earth* were very similar to that used for Stein’s *Three Lives*. The uniform physical format of all Modern Library books shows that the dichotomy between “highbrow” and “middlebrow” was not so entrenched in the 1930s. Moreover, the Modern Library was not a static collection of texts. As the appendixes in Andes’s bibliography of the Modern Library show, titles were regularly added and others were dropped. It is important to have a clear sense of this evolution and of the place of each text in the whole series.

The third methodological aspect, an analysis of scholarly journals, traces the evolution of the literary canon of what has been called “modernism.” Friskney’s quantitative analysis of scholarly criticism offers a good methodological model. Likewise, David Damrosch’s chapter on the canon of world literature includes histograms and graphs based on entries for various authors in the MLA International Bibliography database. A search of Modern Library authors’ names in the MLA database shows the evolution of critical interest from 1917 to the mid-1950s. This quantitative approach needs to be completed by a qualitative analysis of book reviews in scholarly journals, in newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and in literary journals such as the *Sewanee Review* and the *Kenyon Review*. 
It is now possible to situate my approach in relation to other methodologies summarized on Figure 1-1. My dissertation focuses on structures rather than on personalities. However, it is not a macro-study of the publishing business similar to the work of Simon Eliot. According to Howsam, Eliot’s “quantitative approach is especially needed when there are no archives, or at least no correspondence” between editor/publisher and author.\(^{11}\) I was fortunate to have access to archives which contain many surviving letters as well as information on the day-to-day business of publishing. Because the Modern Library was such a diverse collection, my chapters focus on specific writers rather than on the series as a whole. The Modern Library did not have the same impact on H. G. Wells (who was already known world-wide when *Ann Veronica* joined the series) and on Sherwood Anderson (whose reputation was still tied to the Chicago literary scene when *Winesburg, Ohio* was included). My dissertation is thus halfway on the axis opposing publishing houses and writers.

I am well aware that this thesis is not a traditional project of literary studies. Although I include close readings of introductions commissioned to Modern Library writers, I favor, in McDonald’s words, “externalist” over “internalist” modes of reading. To a large extent, my project is closer to book historians’ interdisciplinary methodology than to literary scholars’ traditional focus on writers and texts. However, this dissertation contributes to the scholarly discussion on canon formation and the institutionalization of English academic departments. It also fits into the current debates on the boundaries between modernist literature and low-/middlebrow texts. At the 2010 Modernist Studies Association Conference, Adam McKible said that once the Harlem Renaissance is moved away from the “museum” and back into the market, the scholar uncovers money transactions and interpersonal networks – hence a feeling of

\(^{11}\) Email to author, 9 June 2010.
“contamination.”\textsuperscript{12} Likewise, my dissertation hopes to interrogate the canon of modern literature, to move it away from the classrooms and back into the market.

\textsuperscript{12} McKible was chairing the panel “Networks of Exchange, Experimentation, and Influence in the Harlem Renaissance,” MSA annual conference, Victoria, Canada, 13 Nov. 2010.
Chapter 2 - H. G. Wells, Science and Sex in the Modern Library, 1917-1931

At the time when anti-obscenity leagues were flourishing in America, the creators of the Modern Library marketed the series as a daring collection of modern classics. The first Modern Library list in 1917 included controversial French novels such as *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert and *Mademoiselle Fifi* by Guy de Maupassant.1 Another controversial title was H. G. Wells’s coming-of-age novel, *Ann Veronica*. When the novel first appeared in 1909, many readers were shocked by the heroine’s rebellious attitude. At the beginning of the narrative, Ann Veronica lives the sheltered life of a middle-class Victorian girl. She studies biology at a women’s college, but her father expects her to find a husband or stay at home. Ann Veronica then runs away to go to London and enroll as a student at Imperial College because of her fascination for Darwinian theory. Revolted by the lack of opportunity for women, she becomes a suffragist determined to live an independent life. Wells’s novel appeared in the Modern Library nearly at the same time as a collection of essays on Darwinian theory, *Evolution in Modern Thought*. This mix between a scientific text and a scandalous novel on a young female scientist exemplifies the original positioning of the Modern Library – a collection that promised to tackle all aspects of modernity, from the “woman question” to eugenics and reproduction.

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1 My 1918 Modern Library edition of *The Woman Question* includes a catalogue bound at the end of the book, which describes the “French Romances in the Modern Library” using the vocabulary of passion: “In no other country has the novel of romance and love come to so fragrant and colorful a flowering as in France. Love in all its troubled currents of sorrow, its pulsing courses of pleasure, its flood-tides of exaltation, has been more sympathetically understood and more lucidly revealed by the great writers of France than by the writers of almost any other country. Not only has France universalized the word ‘amour,’ she has also revealed to us through her great novels, the very body and heartbeat of love.”
Although the Modern Library mostly released reprinted novels in the interwar period, it also brought out titles such as *Contemporary Science* (1921), *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1924), *The Sex Problem in Modern Society* (1931) and Darwin’s *The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man* (1936). The Modern Library was not the only publisher’s series to include both scientific and literary texts. Cheap series of reprints generally selected out-of-copyright texts on a wide range of subjects. In 1902, the World’s Classics series – which later became the Oxford World’s Classics – reprinted Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* with a preface by the novelist Grant Allen. *On the Origin of Species* also appeared in Dr. Eliot’s Harvard Classics. In 1906, the newly-created Everyman’s Library published Darwin’s journal during the Voyage of the Beagle and T. H. Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature*. The early Everyman’s Library had twelve headings: travel, science, theology & philosophy, history, classical, books for young people, essays, oratory, poetry & drama, biography, romance, and finally – fiction (Figure 2-1). Unlike Everyman’s Library, the Modern Library did not put its books into different categories. It was marketed as a genuine uniform series. Advertisements declared that all Modern Library books were worth reading – books of fiction and of science.

Figure 2-1: Everyman's Library Headings, 1906
My central argument is that both literary and scientific works contributed to the original positioning of the Modern Library – as a daring collection of modern thought. The Modern Library appealed to a certain class of readers, who wanted to read sexy novels and audacious scientific works. These imagined readers wanted to make their own choices, independently of the authority of moral leagues. The first section of this chapter examines anti-obscenity activism in the United States at the turn of the century and its impact on the positioning of the Modern Library. The second part looks at the publication of *Evolution in Modern Thought* and Wells’s *Ann Veronica* in the Modern Library in 1917-18. The last section discusses the simultaneous release of *The Sex Problem in Modern Society* and Wells’s *Tono-Bungay* in 1931.

Recent scholarship has mostly focused on Wells’s early scientific romances rather than his mid-career social novels. Novels such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *The Invisible Man* have been read alongside late nineteenth-century debates over scientific theories and methods (Sirabian; Marsden). Yet, the interconnections between Wells’s social novels – such as *Ann Veronica* and *Tono-Bungay*, both published in 1909 – and contemporary science have been largely overlooked. Moreover, no one has yet studied the publication and reception of these two novels in the United States. Modernist scholars have traditionally neglected Wells for a variety of reasons, including his “self-styled exclusion from the modernist aesthetic, his debate with Henry James, and the dismissal of his narrative technique by Virginia Woolf” (McLean 484). However, Steven McLean rightly suggests that “the gradual breakdown of the traditional dichotomy between Victorian and Modern offers scholars the opportunity to take Wells on his own terms and investigate Edwardian novels like *Tono-Bungay* and *Ann Veronica* as responses to modernity in their own right” (484). In this chapter, I consider Wells as a modern writer by focusing on the publication of *Ann Veronica* and *Tono-Bungay* alongside scientific texts in America from 1917 to
1931. This approach illuminates the links between literature and science in the Modern Library, a collection that promised to represent modernity as a whole.

**Moral Absolutism versus Modern Thought**

The creation of the Modern Library coincides with the heyday of anti-obscenity organizations. The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, founded by Anthony Comstock and his supporters in the Young Men’s Christian Association, was particularly active in the fight against “unclean stories.” In an article published in 1891, at the start of the Progressive Era, Comstock presented his organization as the defender of the people against immoral professional artists. For Comstock, “a certain class of modern writers” placed “the sensuous products of their minds before the public for fame and pay” (161). It was the duty of moral leagues to protect the youth and other vulnerable readers from the disastrous consequences of these lewd books. Comstock made no distinction between classics and contemporary literature. As he put it, “classical and standard literature is designed for literary men and for literary purposes. When of an obscene nature, such books are properly restricted in every well-regulated public library, and should be kept from general circulation and confined to literary purposes, precisely the same as standard medical works, containing anatomical plates, are restricted in their sale to physicians and medical students” (166). Comstock advocated a ban on cheap editions of the *Decameron* and other “spicy” books, since such editions targeted a large audience rather than a handful of specialists (160, 166). The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice thus worked extensively to censor both “high” and “low” cultural productions.

Similarly, women’s organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) crossed the cultural divide in their campaigns against obscene representations. As
Alison Parker notes, “the WCTU’s Department of Purity in Literature and Art entered the cultural debate at a crucial point in American history, when scholars such as Lawrence Levine see the emergence and quick solidification of distinct ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures” (226). While Levine argues that the middle-class followed the upper-class consumption of highbrow cultural products, Parker contends that the WCTU “exemplifies the resistance of segments of the middle class vis-à-vis the ‘sacralization’ of culture into ‘high art,’ for it simultaneously fought against nude sculptures, the ballet, and Theodore Dreiser’s realism, as well as boxing, motion pictures, and dime-novel ‘sensationalism’” (7). For Parker, the WCTU attempted to carve an alternative cultural space based on morality and religious beliefs rather than originality and aesthetics.

The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union defended not only censorship, but also women’s suffrage, prohibition and other “progressive” ideas. Anti-vice activism in America participated in a broader movement away from the laissez-faire that had characterized the rise of an industrial society, and towards government intervention and increased regulation. As Parker suggests, the Progressive Era’s “child labor laws, mandatory school attendance, and juvenile courts – all supported by WCTU members – marked an increase in the regulatory function of the state” (9). This emphasis on state intervention led the WCTU to appeal for a tight control of noxious products such as alcohol and immoral literature.

The activities of anti-obscenity organizations did not go unchallenged. For example, Dreiser’s first novel *Sister Carrie* (1900) became a site of confrontation between pro- and anti-censorship activists. As James L. W. West III points out, “the story of its suppression by Doubleday was a rallying point for forward-looking intellectuals and a paradigm for the suppression of artistic freedom by the forces of puritanism and Comstockery” (“The Composition and Publication”). The owners of the Modern Library identified strongly with the progressive intellectuals who endorsed Dreiser’s realism. According to a publisher’s note inserted in the 1932
Modern Library edition of *Sister Carrie*, the novel had been suggested for inclusion as early as 1918: “This book, as much as any written by an American, we felt, expressed the trend and spirit of the literature we wanted in our series” (vii).\(^2\) Dreiser’s portrayal of a fallen woman fit well with the Modern Library, a series that positioned itself as audacious and modern. The book especially appealed to the co-founder of the Modern Library, Horace Liveright, who was always eager to fight the anti-vice movement (Boyer 81-83).

The controversy over *Sister Carrie* epitomizes the clash between two ideologies: “moral absolutism” versus modernity. As Andrea Friedman points out, “moral absolutism had several components: the assertion that morality (including sexual morality) was both knowable and timeless, that it was ordained by God and essential for public and private order; the belief that social authority derived from one’s position at the top of a moral hierarchy, determined by religion, age, class, race, and gender; and agreement that the moral standards established by those at the top of this hierarchy should be enforced upon the larger society through public policy” (3-4). But by the beginning of the twentieth century, moral absolutism was increasingly challenged by another ideology, which valued the autonomy of the individual over the authority of self-proclaimed moral guardians. The Modern Library was rooted in this new ideology, which promised not only a greater level of individual freedom but also increased market opportunities. Whereas the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice advocated the restriction of racy classics to a handful of specialists, the Modern Library published controversial novels in easily available editions. In *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen argued that the ostentatious display of the right goods and behaviors served as a social marker in a context characterized by increased mobility (60). In particular, reading “good” books had become an essential element of

\(^2\) The note explains that the novel did not appear in the Modern Library earlier because Dreiser thought that it would compete with the $2.50 hardcover edition.
self-construction. Despite its cheap price, the Modern Library positioned itself as a distinguished product for those who aspired to a liberal lifestyle. However, the daring positioning of the Modern Library also limited its audience. As Parker contends, pro-censorship opinions were “relatively uncontroversial” at the turn of the century (229). Those who opposed censorship belonged to a small but vocal minority.

The first advertisements for the Modern Library appeared in April 1917, the same month when the U.S. Congress declared war on Germany. The war energized the pro-censorship movement and widened the gap between moral absolutism and modern thought. As Paul Boyer notes, the vice-society movement was determined to prove the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxons over a despicable enemy. Indeed, “from hundreds of books, articles, and lectures – often delivered to ‘men only’ audiences – Americans learned that the Hun was an obscene, lustful brute who laughed as he mutilated virgins and impaled infants on his bayonet” (Boyer 54). The “impassioned crusade against domestic immorality” launched by anti-obscenity organizations was “the natural corollary of the struggle against the lustful Hun” (57). Bills against obscene literature were introduced in twelve states in 1917, making it easier to censor objectionable books.3

For many Americans, the ideology of modernity as a whole was responsible for the German barbarity. Preachers, doctors and newspaper columnists argued that the Hun’s appetite for sex and violence found its roots in a godless ideology informed by Darwinism. In 1916, a Baptist reverend proclaimed: “it is Darwin who is responsible for the ideas of evolution that have seized the supermen of Germany.” The oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, who was attending the

3 As Boyer points out, “this flurry of obscenity legislation was but one symptom of the wartime book-censorship impulse” (58). Andreas Latzko’s Men in War, an anti-war novel published by Boni & Liveright, was barred from the mails under the wartime legislation. The novel was authorized again after the war and in 1920, it was included in the Modern Library.
service, was seen to nod his head in agreement.⁴ At a meeting of American physicians in 1917, the distinguished surgeon George W. Crile described the disastrous effect of Darwin’s theory on the German mind. This address was reproduced in the New York Times under the title “German Philosophy Reverts to Brute Force.”⁵ Biologists such as Vernon L. Kellogg stressed the crudeness of this “Germanized” Darwinism.⁶ But, as George Webb notes, “such distinctions . . . were frequently lost on less sophisticated readers, who saw in ‘evolution’ the explanation of the war’s horrors” (56). The publication of Evolution in Modern Thought and Ann Veronica in the Modern Library should be read in this context of anti-Darwinism and obsession with moral purity. By refusing to yield to wartime pressures, the Modern Library owners reinforced the bold image of their series.

**Ann Veronica & Evolution in Modern Thought**

Many literary scholars have shown that Darwinian theory influenced Victorian and modernist writers (Glendening; Richter). Science influenced literature, but literature also influenced science. This was a two-way traffic, as Gillian Beer has argued (5). Yet, when literary scholars talk about intertextuality, they often fail to examine the material aspect of the books. Intertextuality is not something that appears magically: texts do not communicate independently of their physical format. In the case of the Modern Library, the uniform format highlighted the links between modern literature and science. Indeed, the edition of Ann Veronica looked very

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⁶ Kellogg describes the German version of Darwinism as “Neo-Darwinism, the Allmacht of natural selection applied rigorously to human life and society and Kultur” (22).
similar to *Evolution in Modern Thought*. As Andrew Nash points out, “an essential part of the rationale of series publishing is uniformity in physical appearance” (189). Janet Friskney also suggests that the “use of common title and cover design is not simply cost-effective; it creates brand-name recognition, and at its most successful encourages consumers to collect multiple volumes” (6). Like other uniform series of reprints, the Modern Library used the same typography, endpapers and flexible binding for all its publications. Advertisements for the Modern Library presented the binding as “limp croft leather,” so that the series appeared distinguished. In fact, the binding was made of imitation leather – which is hardly surprising considering the cheap price of Modern Library books. The Boni & Liveright logo appeared on the front of the book, and the title was stamped in gold on the spine (Figure 2-2).

![Figure 2-2: Modern Library Binding, 1917-1918](image)

In addition, the dust jackets looked very similar: a short paragraph describing the book was pasted on the cover, between the title at the top and the banner “Modern Library” at the
bottom. *Evolution in Modern Thought* was presented as an up-to-date anthology of essays written by the “greatest and most brilliant authorities”: “The book is an authentic statement of what has been accomplished in science and in thought since the enunciation of the Darwinian theory. It is a trustworthy, invaluable guide to everyone desiring to obtain a truthful picture of the present world of ideas.” Indeed, Modern Library readers were imagined as cultivated amateurs, who wanted to keep abreast of contemporary scientific developments. At a time of increasing professionalization, the Modern Library opened the door for less specialized forms of knowledge. *Evolution in Modern Thought* was what we now call an *interdisciplinary* collection of essays. There are chapters on “Charles Darwin as an Anthropologist,” “Darwinism and History,” “Darwinism and Sociology.” The title and the dust jacket refer to “modern thought” and “the present world of ideas.” Like the Harvard Classics, the Modern Library offered a liberal education that crossed the boundaries between academic disciplines.

The dust jacket of *Ann Veronica* also targeted sophisticated readers with modern ideas: “This is one of the books that Wells wrote when he was still an unqualified radical, pure and simple, and it is instinct with the freshness and enthusiasm of a man who believes in a cause without any limiting sophistications. Ann Veronica is one of the most vividly drawn female characters, a New Woman, a thorough feminist, espousing the cause of women’s emancipation and fighting for the equal rights of the sexes.” The aggressive vocabulary illuminates the radical image of the Modern Library. Unlike Everyman’s Library and other cheap series of classics, the Modern Library did not hesitate to tackle controversial subjects such as the woman question.

When *Ann Veronica* first appeared in London in 1909, Wells was vilified for publicly exposing his affair with the young Amber Reeves, who was seen as a real life model for the novel’s heroine (Allett 63). Macmillan, anticipating a scandal, had refused to publish the novel and it eventually came out under the new Unwin imprint. Reviews were overwhelmingly
negative. “There is throughout a vicious insistence upon the material aspect of life, more especially upon the physical aspect of sex. . . in this book the insistence on things physical is beyond all proportion,” declared the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art.*  

Dr. William Barry, reviewing the novel for the *Bookman,* described it as “immoral”: “I think ‘Ann Veronica’ imperfect as a work of art, though picturesque and exciting, persuasive against the great human law which bridles passion, and therefore dangerous to every woman into whose hands it is likely to fall. And I wish Mr. Wells had not written it.”  

The most virulent attack came from the influential editor of the *Spectator,* John St Loe Strachey, who described the work as “poisonous” and “pernicious.” As Jeanne MacKenzie points out, Strachey “was an active member of the National Social Purity Crusade, then at the peak of its activity, and his attack on *Ann Veronica* was part of a campaign for formal censorship to be exercised by circulating libraries, anticipating the later campaigns against Lawrence and Joyce” (iv). In December 1909, the Circulating Libraries Association wrote to the *Spectator* to publicize its decision to carry out pre-release censorship: “we will not place in circulation any book which by reason of the personally scandalous, libellous, immoral, or otherwise disagreeable nature of its contents is, in our opinion, likely to prove offensive to any considerable section of our subscribers.”  

In the same issue, one librarian complained about Wells’s novel and “all this literary filth passing into the hands and minds of the public, and thereby polluting the moral atmosphere of our home life.”  

Attacked by reviewers, boycotted by librarians and avoided by his friends, Wells even had

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to resign from the Savile Club (Drabble xiv). Despite – or because of – the scandal, his novel became a bestseller.\(^{12}\)

The critical reception of *Ann Veronica* in the United States was generally more favorable. Unlike the British edition, the American edition of Wells’s novel was published by a well-established firm, Harper & Brothers, which brought an aura of respectability to the text.\(^{13}\) The *New York Times* described the story as “surprisingly clever” and “amazingly daring.”\(^{14}\) The *North American Review* praised the realism of the novel: “The book has a good deal of scathing social satire and keen observation. Mr. Wells is no stylist; it is not literature or beauty he is after, but a plain picture of life, and in giving this he is entirely successful.”\(^{15}\) Even the *Deseret Evening News* – based in deeply religious Utah – found *Ann Veronica* worth reading: “It is the beauty of this author’s English, no less than his story, which may be expected to give popularity to *Ann Veronica*. Mr. Wells is one of the few contemporary fiction-writers who possess a style.”\(^{16}\) In spite of these good reviews, *Ann Veronica* remained controversial. In 1910, the Detroit Public Library decided to exclude it from its shelves, along with unexpurgated editions of *Arabian Nights* and French novels by George Sand, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant.\(^{17}\)

\(^{12}\) In 1910, Wells wrote to Frederick Macmillan: “Our poor rejected ‘*Ann Veronica*’ is selling very fast both here and in New York.” Wells to Macmillan, 2 Oct. 1910 (Smith II: 289). *Ann Veronica* was still selling well in 1911, when Unwin released a seventh printing.

\(^{13}\) Harper & Brothers tried to downplay the radicalism of *Ann Veronica*. One advertisement thus declared: “That Mr. Wells believes enthusiastically in the utmost liberty of thought and action for women is evident on every page; but he also believes than women not only cannot be men, but do not want to be men - that they must be true to their sex, and that the inward cry of that sex is for marriage and maternity.” The Sun [New York City] 26 Oct. 1909: 7.


While some American readers found Wells’s novel too daring, it undoubtedly appealed to the new class of professional women. Margaret Rossiter has shown that, as graduate schools started to accept women students in the 1890s, there was a sharp rise in the number of doctorates awarded to women (35). In 1906, the National American Woman Suffrage Association annual meeting in Baltimore marked a turning point: “for the first time the college women of America, including therefore most women scientists, were called upon to play a strong role in supporting the suffrage movement” (103). NAWSA membership stood at 12,000 in 1906, and reached 117,000 four years later (Gould 50). Only a minority of these members endorsed feminism. As Rossiter puts it, “suffrage leaders, more conservative and politically realistic than the feminists, generally spurned the idea that women were the equal of men and instead relied heavily on those very sexual stereotypes that the feminists were trying to refute, such as the belief that women, being purer than men, would clean up corrupt politics, or that government (national as well as local) was just an expanded version of housework and was thus well suited for women’s ‘special skills’” (101). The feminist fringe of the women movement included many women scientists who realized that access to education had not allowed them to gain access to meaningful employment and professional recognition. The Modern Library targeted this radical fringe rather than the mass of suffragists who also supported temperance and moral purity.

When *Ann Veronica* was reprinted in the Modern Library, it had lost none of its scandalous reputation. The description of the heroine embracing the suffrage cause and going to jail must have struck a particular cord in wartime America. Indeed, 1917 was a pivotal year for American suffragists. While the National American Woman Suffrage Association preferred to concentrate on the war effort, the National Woman’s Party (NWP) organized pickets in front of the White House to pressure the president and Congress to pass the Federal suffrage amendment. NWP suffragists carried provocative banners, including one praising the political freedom of
Russian women following the Soviet revolution. Unruly crowds repeatedly assaulted the women carrying the Russian banner, and the police reacted by arresting the women themselves. The number of suffragists who joined the picket line outside the White House during 1917 is estimated at over a thousand, among which 218 were arrested and 97 were sent to jail for “obstructing traffic” (Cooney 363). The suffragists’ denunciations of their miserable prison conditions find an echo in Wells’s novel. While the heroine “had imagined that prisons were white-tiled places, reeking of lime-wash and immaculately sanitary,” she discovers that “they appeared to be at the hygienic level of tramps’ lodging-houses” (254). This traumatic experience forces Ann Veronica to realize that “this isn’t a world for an innocent girl to walk about in. It’s a world of dirt and skin diseases and parasites. It’s a world in which the law can be a stupid pig and the police-stations dirty dens” (265). Although Ann Veronica eventually turns against the suffrage movement, the novel unambiguously criticizes social and gender inequalities.

The uniformity of the Modern library was conveyed by the format and content of the books, but also by advertisements. Adverting campaigns for the Modern Library generally focused on the brand itself, rather than on individual titles. The objective was to convince consumers that they could pick up any book in the Modern Library without being disappointed. In 1918, the Modern Library began to use the word “stagnuck” in its advertisements: “Don’t be a Stagnuck. Read every book in The Modern Library.” Of course, people started asking about the meaning of “stagnuck” – and that was precisely the objective of the advertising campaign, to create interest in the brand “Modern Library”. Boni & Liveright then gave five different definitions of a “stagnuck,” including: a stagnuck is a person who thinks that Gorky is a brand of

18 Anne Martin, one of the women who picketed the White House, was later compared to Wells’s heroine. "Anne Martin, First Woman Candidate for U.S. Senate, Has Fighting Record." New York Tribune 5 Mar. 1918: 6.
caviar and Balzac, the name of a mining stock. The publishers also asked the public to send their own suggestions and in December 1918, they reported to have received about six hundred definitions. Their favorite was: a stagnuck is a person who thinks that George Eliot is the father of ex-president Eliot of Harvard, the creator of the Harvard Classics (Smith, *New Words* 180). The stagnuck advertising campaign shows that the series appealed to those who wanted to appear distinguished and sophisticated. A stagnuck or an old lady in Dubuque would not read a novel like *Ann Veronica* or an anthology of Darwin theory. In other words, the Modern Library promised to publish only the most relevant “modern” works for demanding readers.

The same kind of snob appeal can be found in another Modern Library advertisement published in the *New York Tribune* (Figure 2-3). The ad is composed of three parts, with imperative verbs as titles: SHOW; FALL BACK; BEWARE! The title “fall back” reinforces the visual display – which also gives the impression of “falling back.” The modernity of the visual aspect is paralleled by the provocative textual content: “Fall Back upon the MODERN LIBRARY for your Xmas problem - and all your worried shopping is over! . . . good red meat for strong minds - real reading in treasured, likable, limpbound form” (my emphasis). The third part of the ad declares: “BEWARE! Your friends have brains. Don’t give them the baby-food of ordinary gift-books. Show your modernity by presenting them with some of The MODERN LIBRARY volumes – the classics of our day.” Here, the Modern Library is described as a collection for adults who do not need any authority to tell them what to read. Of course, this kind of modern discourse was opposed to the moral absolutism of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and other anti-obscenity leagues. It is significant that the Modern Library advertisement uses a term such as “baby-food” which suggests the infantilization of readers by female censors. As Friedman puts it, the moderns “formulated democratic moral authority, at least in part, in
order to blunt the power of public policy initiatives advanced by the white middle-class women
who represented the forces of female moral authority in the cultural arena” (6).
The Modern Library was not only advertised, but also reviewed as a daring uniform series of reprints. In an article in *The New York Times*, the critic Herbert Gorman wrote that “the method of selecting these books is broad, to say the least. Not all of them, by any means, are classics or even approach that term, but all of them are extremely good works of their kind and worthy of the wide audience that is made possible for them by their inclusion in this series.”\(^{21}\)

According to Gorman, Modern Library books were not boring classics, but “exotics of literature.” Even “tired business men” could read them and have fun. The article illustration (Figure 2-4) shows classics on the left – sad-looking women wearing heavy dresses – whereas Modern Library exotics are pictured on the right as beautiful young women dancing and showing their legs. The early success of the Modern Library is largely due to its coherent image as a daring collection of modern thought, an image that was conveyed through advertisements and reviews.

![Exotics, Not Classics, for Tired Business Men](image)

*Figure 2-4: “Exotics, Not Classics, for Tired Business Men”*

The uniformity of the Modern Library shaped the series into a site of intertextuality, where texts responded to each other. On the one hand, *Evolution in Modern Thought* can be read as a literary text and on the other, *Ann Veronica* is largely about science and evolution. The heroine of Wells’s novel chooses to follow her instincts rather than social norms. Her training as a biologist transforms her from an innocent girl into “a hard young woman” who knows everything about the facts of life (317). Ann Veronica’s moral and physical strength is highlighted during a disturbing scene where she narrowly escapes being raped by fighting her attacker and defeating him. As a woman scientist, Ann Veronica gets used to viewing life “as pairing and breeding and selection, and again pairing and breeding” (183). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that she should fall in love with a man who works in the same lab as her. Although this man is a married professor, there is a sense that sexual attraction is part of natural selection, and should not be opposed for any social reasons. Ann Veronica and her lover pursue their relationship despite social pressures, and at the end of the novel, she is pregnant with her first child. In this novel, feminism is closely linked to biological and eugenic considerations, such as the need to find a suitable mate and give birth to healthy children.22

As a eugenicist, Wells was particularly interested in Mendelian genetics, which had been rediscovered in the 1900s. In his study of the inheritance of certain characteristics in plants, the Austrian scientist Gregor Mendel had demonstrated that the genetic material of both parents was not only transmitted to their offspring, but also to the next generations. The physical attributes of each partner therefore mattered enormously. In *Evolution in Modern Thought*, Mendel’s findings

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22 Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, coined the term “eugenics” from a Greek root meaning “well-born.” For Galton, “eugenics” was “the science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had” (25).
are described as central to the new science of genetics (Haeckel et al. 97-8). In short, Wells’s novel and *Evolution in Modern Thought* are both concerned with the major breakthroughs in biology, which had an immediate effect on humans’ perception.

The Darwinian concept of sexual selection is central to *Ann Veronica* but also to *Evolution in Modern Thought*. In the second chapter “The Selection Theory,” Professor August Weismann of the University of Freiburg suggests that “even though we certainly cannot assume that the females exercise a conscious choice of the ‘handsomest’ mate, and deliberate like the judges in a court of justice over the perfections of their wooers, we have no reason to doubt that distinctive forms (decorative feathers), and colours have a particularly exciting effect upon the female” (Haeckel et al. 62). In other words, secondary sexual characteristics play a large role in attracting females to males. Weismann uses the metaphor of the tribunal or the beauty contest to explain sexual selection. Scientists thus employed the same language and literary tools as novelists. In Wells’s novel, it is obvious that Ann Veronica is attracted to her professor largely because of his sensuality. As Jane Eldridge Miller contends, “Wells sets up a dichotomy between the unnatural, life-denying sex-antagonism of the suffragettes and the natural, life-affirming sexual desire that Ann Veronica has begun to feel for her professor, Capes” (168). When the heroine declares her love to Capes, he tells her that he has “a streak of ardent animal in [his] composition” (317). Capes then explains to Ann Veronica that his first marriage broke down because his wife did not satisfy him sexually (318). Far from being repulsed by this confession, Ann Veronica remains determined to break off her engagement with Manning, a respectable and loving young man with good career prospects, to elope with Capes. This narrative finds an echo in the theory of sexual selection, which is based on the female’s exercise of choice and her preference for, in Darwin’s terms, “not only the more attractive but at the same time the more vigorous and vicious males” (qtd. in Haeckel et al. 167).
It was precisely the description of female sexual desire in Wells’s novel that scandalized so many readers. In his autobiography, Wells declared that Ann Veronica’s “frankness of desire and sexual enterprise” was “hitherto unknown in English popular fiction” (394-5). According to Wells:

The particular offence was that Ann Veronica was a virgin who fell in love and showed it, instead of waiting as all popular heroines had hitherto done, for someone to make love to her. It was held to be an unspeakable offence that an adolescent female should be sex-conscious before the thing was forced upon her attention. But Ann Veronica wanted a particular man who excited her and she pursued him and got him. With gusto (395).

For Wells, the model of the New Woman was attractive as long as it meant sexual freedom and availability to men. “Whatever qualities he might admire in women such as Ann Veronica and her counterparts, such women existed for him primarily as potential sexual partners,” as Maroula Joannou puts it (201). Although Wells did not oppose women’s suffrage, he rejected the social purity program of the Women’s Social and Political Union, the militant wing of the suffrage movement. Wells’s autobiography thus ridiculed the “good pure women” who fought for suffrage but refused to consider the issue of sexual fulfillment (407).

Wells saw women primarily in biological terms, as sexual partners and mothers. As MacKenzie suggests, he spoiled his advocacy of women’s rights by making the conclusion of the novel “a fulfilment of his own fantasies [about Amber Reeves], not of Ann Veronica’s desire for liberation” (iii). The heroine rejects her former support for the suffrage movement and returns to the same kind of domestic sphere she had left at the beginning of the novel. In Joannou’s terms, “Wells’s novel never strays far from the biological imperative of race-motherhood by which
eugenicists defined the modern woman in an evolving society” (199). Replying to Strachey’s criticism in *The Spectator*, Wells thus claimed that women would produce more children if they were free to choose their own mates.\(^{23}\) Although Wells rejected the traditional family structure, he still placed motherhood at the center of a woman’s life.\(^{24}\)

Wells’s ambivalence towards New Women was paralleled by the hesitant feminism of the Modern Library. On the one hand, Boni and Liveright clearly positioned their series at the forefront of the women’s rights movement. Discriminations against women belonged to the Victorian era, a period vilified by the moderns. In late 1918, one year after the publication of *Ann Veronica*, the Modern Library added *The Woman Question*, an anthology of essays by canonical writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and contemporaries (H. G. Wells, Rebecca West, Havelock Ellis). The publication of this anthology came at a time of uncertainty for suffragists: the House of Representatives had passed the suffrage amendment in January 1918, but for months, the Senate refused to act. By publishing *The Woman Question*, the Modern Library management unambiguously took position in favor of the suffrage movement. Yet, they also embraced a modern discourse that associated gentility, moralism and censorship with femininity. Indeed, the moderns saw the tie between art and morals endorsed by anti-obscenity leagues as a specifically female form of control. In an effort to distance their series from the infantilizing genteel tradition, the Modern Library owners marginalized women writers. In 1917, 34 titles appeared in the Modern Library, all of them written by men. In 1918, there was only one novel written by a

\(^{23}\) H. G. Wells, "An Open Question," *The Spectator* 4 Dec. 1909: 945. Wells defended not only positive, but also negative eugenics. At a meeting of the Sociological Society in 1905, he declared: “It is in the sterilisation of failures, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies” (Sociological Society 60).

\(^{24}\) John Allett notes that “at the time of writing *Ann Veronica*, Wells had been for several years actively campaigning within the Fabian Society to establish a policy on maternity and child-care benefits” (69).
woman (*The Belfry* by May Sinclair) among the 30 new titles. *Evolution in Modern Thought* contains no essay by a female scientist, at the time when the number of women working in science had reached a highpoint in America.\(^{25}\) In 1919, the Modern Library released 15 titles, all by male authors with the exception of Gertrude Atherton’s *Rezanov*.\(^{26}\) By privileging a male-authored perspective, the early Modern Library often reduced women to the roles of sexy French temptresses or castrating matrons.

While *The Belfry* and *Rezanov* were both dropped off the Modern Library in 1926, *Ann Veronica* remained in print through the 1920s and early 1930s. In January 1926, Bennett Cerf wrote to Wells that his novel “continues to be one of the big sellers in our Library.”\(^{27}\) Between 1926 and 1933, the Modern Library printed 11,000 copies of Wells’s novel.\(^{28}\) It sold to a wide range of readers, including university students and their instructors.\(^{29}\) *Ann Veronica* and

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\(^{25}\) Rossiter’s study of the first three editions of *American Men (sic) of Science* reveals a rising number of women scientists: from 149 in 1906, to 450 in 1921 (25). Drawing on Rossiter’s book, Londa Schiebinger notes that “by the 1920s their numbers were at a historic high in the United States, with women earning 14 percent of doctorates in the physical and biological sciences. . . . Women did not regain their 1920s levels of participation in academic science until the 1970s” (30).

\(^{26}\) The hostility to female authors is explicit in this *New Age* review of new Modern Library titles: “We do not quite understand why Gertrude Atherton’s ‘Rézanor’ (sic) should be reproduced in this library, which is a selection of modern classics. Mrs. Atherton is a completely undistinguished writer, with neither the significance nor the style of such people as Shaw, Wells, Maeterlinck, Dostoievsky, Meredith, Nietzsche, and the rest who are published in this library.” The reviewer then notes the poor quality of the translation of Schnitzler's plays: “These were translated by a woman, a fatal mistake, for women never can render the amoral man's point of view sympathetically. Their whole tradition is against any but the most practical and serious treatment of sex relations, and a phantast and a wit like Schnitzler becomes leaden-footed and tiresome in this translation of his everlasting intrigues.” Rev. of *Rezanov*, by Gertrude Atherton; *Anatol and Other Plays*, by Arthur Schnitzler. *New Age* 4 Sept. 1919: 315.

\(^{27}\) Cerf to Wells, 13 Jan. 1926, box 112, RH.

\(^{28}\) Printing schedule [1926-1931] and Donald Klopfer to Harper & Brothers, 27 June 1933, box 123, RH.

\(^{29}\) In 1928, Granville Hicks, who was teaching an upper-level course in modern literature at Smith College, assigned his class the Modern Library editions of *Ann Veronica*, James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg,
Evolution in Modern Thought could be read side by side in the Modern Library until 1929.\textsuperscript{30} The enduring success of both titles testifies to the American interest in evolution, feminism, sex and other modern topics in the interwar period.

1931: The Sex Problem and Tono-Bungay

In December 1931, the Modern Library released another novel by Wells, Tono-Bungay, alongside an anthology, The Sex Problem in Modern Society. The two books had consecutive numbers – 197 for Tono-Bungay and 198 for The Sex Problem – and thus appeared together on advertisements (Figure 2-5). Again, the uniform format of the Modern Library created links between texts that we now see as very different.

\textit{Ohio}, and D. H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers. Hicks to Modern Library, 25 Jan. 1928, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.

\textsuperscript{30} Evolution in Modern Thought and Ann Veronica were dropped from the Modern Library in 1929 and 1934 respectively.
Tono-Bungay was the third novel by Wells to join the Modern Library, after *Ann Veronica* and *The War in the Air.* As Wells was then one of the most popular writers, original publishers were reluctant to negotiate the reprint rights of his novels with the Modern Library. Indeed, the cheap price of the Modern Library meant that royalties paid to original publishers were quite low (6 cents per printed copy of *Ann Veronica* went to Harper & Brothers). *Tono-Bungay* joined the Modern Library list only after Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer bought the

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31 *The War in the Air* stayed in the Modern Library from 1917 to 1924.

32 Printing schedule, box 123, RH.
Sun Dial Library and transferred the “better titles” to their own list. Wells’s novel was already a classic when it was added to the Modern Library. In 1929, William Hayes Fogg Lamont, a professor in the English department at Rutgers University, had included *Tono-Bungay* in its list of Fifty Great Modern Novels, alongside Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* and texts that we now consider middlebrow such as Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s *The Brimming Cup* (marked with an asterisk for “greatest”). As *Tono-Bungay* regularly appeared on the syllabi of modern literature courses, the Modern Library edition was especially popular among university students and their instructors.

In 1930, textbook publisher F. S. Crofts, which was handling Modern Library sales in the college market, listed *Tono-Bungay* among the former Sun Dial titles that would “sell best” in English Departments. When Crofts failed to achieve significant results, Cerf took over college marketing. In 1932, he asked a consultant to prepare a series of form letters to university bookstores and departments. The Random House archives contain the drafts prepared by the consultant and the final versions edited by Cerf. These letters insist on the fact that, unlike Everyman’s Library, the Modern Library was “manufactured entirely in the United States,” allowing for immediate delivery “on all orders of reasonable size.” The diversity and modernity of the Modern Library were also presented as selling points: “Volumes in the Modern Library

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33 The contract with Doubleday Doran for the sale of the Sun Dial Library was signed in early 1930. Sun Dial titles that were transferred to the Modern Library list include Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party*; Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and *Victory*; Dos Passos’s *Three Soldiers* and Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay*. See box 764, RH.

34 William Hayes Fogg Lamont to Doris Schneider, 2 May 1929, box 766, RH.

35 In 1931, for instance, a professor in the English Department at Northwestern University asked the Modern Library for desk copies of *Tono-Bungay*, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Mansfield’s *The Garden Party* for his course in contemporary literature. James L. Crowder to Bennett Cerf, 20 May 1931, box 138, RH.

36 Allen S. Wilbur to Bennett Cerf, 18 April 1930, box 764, RH.

37 “Publicity” folder, box 117, RH.
appeal to modern students as the range of titles included in the series is so diversified, that the student may supplement the books he is required to read with books uniform in makeup, yet perhaps more characteristic of his individual taste in reading.” In the letter to Contemporary Literature departments, Cerf offered suggestions of Modern Library titles suitable for classroom use, including Arnold Bennett’s *Old Wives’ Tale* and Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (both added to the Modern Library in 1931). Cerf also insisted on the modernity of the Modern Library when writing to the heads of English departments. While the consultant had recommended canonical works such as *Eight Famous Elizabethan Plays* in the first draft of the letter, Cerf added modern novels such as Conrad’s *Victory* and Wells’s *Tono-Bungay*. At a time when few literary scholars specialized in the twentieth century, *Tono-Bungay* was already anchored in the canon of modern literature.

Between 1909 and 1931, between the first edition of *Tono-Bungay* and its reprint in the Modern Library, Wells’s ideas on sexual freedom and marriage moved from the radical margins to the mainstream. When it was first published in the United States,38 *Tono-Bungay* was not perceived as a controversial book. However, the scandal of *Ann Veronica* (published a few months after *Tono-Bungay*) gave Wells a reputation as a dirty writer which applied retrospectively to all his works. An article in the *Boston Evening Transcript* thus declared that Wells “seems to be obsessed with the sex problem.”39 In fact, as David Lodge has pointed out, the discussion on sex and marriage is a small aspect of this ambitious novel on the Condition of England at the turn of the century (219). The narrator of *Tono-Bungay*, George Ponderevo, tells the story of his uncle Edward, a businessman who has made a fortune selling quack medicine.

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38 *Tono-Bungay* was published in early 1909 by Macmillan in England and Duffield & Co. in the United States.

George, who has trained as a scientist, overcomes his moral scruples and accepts to work for his uncle in order to make a sufficient living to marry the woman he loves. Reflecting on the failure of his marriage from a later standpoint, the narrator blames the lack of sexual education available to young people in Victorian England: “Nobody was ever frank and decent with me in this relation; nobody, no book, ever came and said to me thus and thus is the world made and so and so is necessary. . . . and all I knew of law or convention in the matter had the form of threatenings and prohibitions” (200).40 Wells made a similar remark in his autobiography: “I thought it preposterous that any young people should be distressed by unexplained desires, thwarted by arbitrary prohibitions and blunder into sexual experiences, blindfold” (399).

In *Tono-Bungay*, George’s passionate nature is opposed to the frigidity of his wife Marion. The narrator sees her as a victim of a repressive society: “Her training had been one not simply of silences, but suppressions.” Marion suffers from “an absolute perversion of instinct,” that leads her to view sex and childbearing as “horrid” (201). Following his affair with an employee, George leaves his wife and engages in a string of unsatisfactory relationships with women. In Lodge’s words, “George’s failure to achieve a satisfactory and mature sexual relationship becomes a symptom of the universal disorder” (219).

Indeed, George’s inability to combine sex and love is closely linked to a broader social malaise. The interconnection between individual and society is particularly clear at the end of the novel, when George regrets the “sterility” of Marion: “What hope is there for a people whose women become fruitless?” (482). For the narrator, his story and the story of England as a whole are dominated by decay and futility: “I have called it *Tono-Bungay*, but I had better have called it *Waste*” (482). English society is dysfunctional because it encourages desire for goods (“a wasting

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40 Page numbers refer to the Macmillan 1909 edition of *Tono-Bungay*.
aimless fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking,” [483]), while at the same time rejecting sexual desire as dirty and sinful.

Throughout the novel, the attempt to control sexual desire is presented as both unhealthy and hypocritical. Ewart, a young sculptor, thus denounces the lack of artistic freedom in England. Claiming that Mrs. Grundy is in fact a man, Ewart tells his friend George that:

Grundy sins. Oh yes, he’s a hypocrite. . . . It’s Grundy and his dark corners that make vice, vice! We artists - we have no vices. And then he’s frantic with repentance. And wants to be cruel to fallen women and decent harmless sculptors of the simple nude - like me - and so back to his panic again (214).

Mrs. Grundy’s change of gender reveals the true face of censorship, as a male perversion rather than a female genuine attempt to improve morality. For Ewart, the artist should be free to represent the body in a candid and truthful way, without interference from censors.

Ewart then explains his vision for a utopian “City of Women,” where women would associate with men only when they felt the need for discussion and sex. As men would have to “abide by the women’s decisions,” this ideal is presented as gentle and respectful (217). It is difficult not to see Ewart as a mouthpiece for Wells. In his response to the Spectator’s attack on Ann Veronica, Wells wrote that “it is intolerable for a woman to have sexual relations with a man with whom she is not in love, and natural and desirable and admirable for her to want them, and still more so to want children by a man of her own selection.” The “City of Women” utopia combined sexual desire (presented as a natural and healthy force) to female autonomy. Although

41 The Oxford English Dictionary describes Mrs. Grundy as “an imaginary personage who is proverbially referred to as a personification of the tyranny of social opinion in matters of conventional propriety” (“Grundy,” def. 3).

42 Wells, “Open Question.”
this narrative went largely unnoticed when *Tono-Bungay* was released,\(^{43}\) the publication of *Ann Veronica* led conservative reviewers to denounce Wells’s “negation of marriage, continence, self-sacrifice, and self-control in the relations of sex.”\(^{44}\)

The simultaneous publication of *Tono-Bungay* and *The Sex Problem in Modern Society* in the Modern Library illuminates the radical change of mentalities that occurred between 1909 and 1931, both in England and in America. As the dust jacket of *The Sex Problem* states, “the revolutionary change of attitude toward sex within the last two decades has given great impetus to scientific investigation into a subject which had been taboo for centuries.” The claim of scientific investigation was a way to present the Modern Library anthology as a respectable book. In fact, the list of contributors was very eclectic. It included sexologists and psychoanalysts such as Havelock Ellis and Alfred Adler, alongside anthropologists (Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, Robert H. Lowie), left-wing intellectuals and birth-control activists. Unlike *Evolution in Modern Thought, The Sex Problem* privileged essays by social scientists and general intellectuals rather than natural scientists. These contributors were united by their progressive views on the “sex problem.” The dust jacket thus declared that *The Sex Problem* “brings together the most modern and enlightened views of men whose knowledge and authority are internationally recognized” (my emphasis). Once again, the Modern Library was faithful to its “brand story,” the story of a daring collection for sophisticated readers.

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\(^{43}\) *The Spectator* was one of the few periodicals to condemn the immorality of *Tono-Bungay* right after its publication: “In this strange go-as-you-please narrative, which, spite of its irregular and discursive method, is the most serious attempt at a novel which he has hitherto undertaken, Mr. Wells has given us a strong, sincere, but in the main repellent work.” The reviewer especially criticized Wells’s “dreary or lurid harping on the sex problem.” *The Spectator* 27 Feb. 1909: 346.

Drawing on ideas that Wells and others had introduced at the turn of the century, most of the essays compiled in *The Sex Problem* argued in favor of companionate marriage, easy divorce, birth control and sex education. This new attitude towards sex was a major feature of interwar America. As John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman point out, “sexual liberalism” was characterized by “the new positive value attributed to the erotic, the growing autonomy of the youth, the association of sex with commercialized leisure and self-expression, the pursuit of love, the visibility of the erotic in popular culture, the social interaction of men and women in public, [and] the legitimation of female interest in the sexual” (233). Sex was increasingly visible in the public sphere, a move that many scholars have attributed to the profound economic changes that shaped American values in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. As T. J. Jackson Lears has shown in his study of advertising, “movies and advertisements alike engaged in a therapeutic renovation of sensuality – cleansing sex of Victorian associations with poverty, disease, and dirt; locating eroticism in settings characterized by affluence, respectability, and, above all, health” (“From Salvation” 28).

*Tono-Bungay* is precisely about this new therapeutic mindset, since Edward Ponderevo markets his quack medicine as a solution to poor health and lack of sexual vitality. In Lodge’s words, the product Tono-Bungay falsely claims to “cure all the ills of modern society,” thus participating in the “strain of disease and decay imagery” that runs through the whole novel (219). In short, *Tono-Bungay* depicts a failed belief in self-realization, which promises happiness through consumption but continues to associate sex with shame and dirt.
The therapeutic ethos also informs “The Play-Function of Sex,” an essay by Havelock Ellis reproduced in *The Sex Problem*.45 As a physician, Ellis described traditional attitudes towards sex using a vocabulary of disease and decay strikingly reminiscent of *Tono-Bungay*:

We may prepare the way for [a sexual revolution] by undermining and destroying those degrading traditional conceptions which have persisted so long that they are instilled into us almost from birth, to work like a *virus* in the heart, and to become almost a *disease* of the soul. To make way for the true and beautiful revelation, we can at least seek to cast out those ancient growths, which may once have been true and beautiful, but now are false and *poisonous*. By casting out from us the conception of love as *vile and unclean* we shall *purify* the chambers of our hearts for the reception of love as something unspeakably holy (108, my emphasis).

Ellis’s depiction of sexual activity as a way to “renew life” (108) has the same political overtone as the “City of Women” utopia in *Tono-Bungay*. Like Wells, Ellis viewed sex as “the function by which all the finer activities of the organism, physical and psychic, may be developed and satisfied” (109). This conception of sensuality as natural, healthy and intertwined with commercialized leisure gradually became acceptable in America and elsewhere.

Indeed, the “pro-sex” ideas of Wells and Ellis were no longer radical in the early 1930s, a period that saw the sharp decline of anti-obscenity organizations. Comstock’s argument for restricting “obscene” classics to a handful of scholars and literary professionals seemed outmoded in the interwar period. In 1930, the owners of the Modern Library decided to add the *Decameron*, a book that had long been banned in the United States. They asked Morris Ernst, a New York attorney who specialized in anti-censorship cases, to write the introduction. In

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45 Ellis’s essay was first published in *Little Essays of Love and Virtue* (1922).
December, Ernst declared: “I don’t think there is much danger of attack anyway unless the edition that the Modern Library intends to publish has some shocking illustrations.”46 Ernst undoubtedly knew that two luxurious editions of the *Decameron* had appeared earlier in 1930, and been reviewed in mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times*.47 Although Modern Library books were much cheaper (and therefore more at risk of attacks by censors anxious of the impact of “obscenity” on a wide audience), Ernst was confident that John S. Sumner, Comstock’s successor as the head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, would not press charges. Ernst even predicted that if his name appeared in the Modern Library edition, “it might deter to a slight degree our friend Mr. Sumner.” The fact that Ernst had won every single case against the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice shows that the moral absolutism defended by anti-obscenity organizations no longer enjoyed widespread support. In March 1931, one month after the Modern Library edition of the *Decameron* was released, the import ban on this book and other classics was officially lifted.48 Having already reprinted four of the now-authorized five classics, the owners of the Modern Library thought they “might just as well put in a selection from the *Arabian Nights* and make it a complete fivesome.”49 Two years and a half before Cerf and Ernst won the trial of *Ulysses*, the Modern Library was already celebrating its victories against censorship.

Following the publication of the *Decameron*, Ernst’s name appeared again in *The Sex Problem in Modern Society*. His essay on “sex control” (co-authored with William Seagle)

46 Morris Ernst to Edwin Falk, 27 Dec. 1930, box 142, RH.
49 Donald Klopfer to Edwin Falk, 18 Mar. 1931, box 122, RH.
argued that the development of anti-obscenity legislation was the result of the secularization of society. In particular, Ernst and Seagle insisted on the nineteenth-century fear that Darwinian theory “would shake the ethical foundations of society” (395). The “age of sex control,” as Ernst and Seagle put it, was also a way to control political radicalism: “no sooner had H. G. Wells published *Ann Veronica*, which sounded the keynote of English feminism, than the hue and cry was raised” (399). As moral absolutism was increasingly contested, the liberalism of the Modern Library – epitomized by the publication of *Ann Veronica* and *Evolution in Modern Thought* fourteen years before – seemed particularly prescient.

In December 1931, the critic Harry Hansen suggested that sex was no longer taboo because it was now in the Modern Library. Sex had ceased to be an “esoteric subject” available only to specialists and doctors. It was now available to all those who could afford to buy Modern Library books, but not expensive first editions. Indeed, the Modern Library was the first publisher’s series to tackle the so-called “sex problem” by publishing both literature and science. This sexy image contributed to the series’ success: French novels such as *Madame Bovary* and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* were bestsellers in the early Modern Library. Other uniform series were much more conservative. Everyman’s Library waited until 1928 to include *Madame Bovary* in its catalogue, despite the fact that Flaubert’s novel had long been in the public domain (Rose 134). Everyman’s Library was positioned as a family-friendly series, whereas the Modern Library appealed to more adventurous readers. In an essay reprinted in *The Sex Problem*, V. F. Calverton wrote: “the new literature is synonymous with the new morality” (361). It is a good

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50 Ernst’s and Seagle’s essay was extracted from *To the Pure* (1928).
52 Cerf to Robert Linscott, 25 Sept. 1936, box 124, RH.
summary of what the Modern Library attempted to do – to publish literary and scientific texts that would exemplify this new morality. In other words, the Modern Library was for modern readers, not for “stagnucks.”

However, it is important to avoid the Whiggish view of increased tolerance and disappearance of repression when tracing the history of the Modern Library. The series’s fight against censorship was paralleled by its distrust for “public women” active in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and other organizations. By extension, all women were suspect of defending piety and purity in print, thus infantilizing adult readers. As we have seen, women were clearly marginalized in the early Modern Library. Even in 1931, the series reprinted only two texts by women writers (Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather and The Garden Party by Katherine Mansfield) out of twenty-one new regular titles.53 For the Modern Library, the “world’s best books” were more likely to have been written by men. Like H. G. Wells, the owners of the Modern Library showed ambivalence towards feminism but great enthusiasm for other aspects of modernity – such as the interconnection between sex and science.

53 In 1931, the Modern Library also released three new “Giants,” all of them written by men.
Chapter 3 – “The Modern Library is something magnificent”: Sherwood Anderson and the Canon of American Literature

Whereas H. G. Wells was already an internationally known author when the Modern Library was created, the series also helped younger writers to get established. Without new blood, the Modern Library risked turning into a traditional uniform series of reprints – safe, but unexciting. For Horace Liveright, literary modernism did not have to come from Europe. As the publisher of Theodore Dreiser, Liveright was particularly interested in the Chicago literary renaissance. Capitalizing on the recently acquired fame of Sherwood Anderson and others, the Modern Library transformed this short-term fame into long-term cultural capital.

The Modern Library was the first publisher’s series to market *Winesburg, Ohio* as a classic. In the summer of 1918, the forty-two-year-old Sherwood Anderson was still in relative newcomer in the literary field: John Lane had published his first three books (*Windy McPherson's Son, Marching Men, Mid-American Chants*) but would not accept his latest collection of short stories. In fall 1921, the same collection had become a “classic” in the Modern Library. In his introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Winesburg*, Ernest Boyd wrote: “Just as the growth and development of America are rapid, so literary history moves quickly in this country, and in the space of five years the writer who was an innovator, an isolated figure, is now counted as one of a school of what is called the new American fiction.” For Boyd, the fact that *Winesburg* “receives the consecration of being included in a library of the world’s modern classics” exemplified the greatness of American literature - a literature that was open to new trends and controversial experimentations (ix-x). What Boyd did not say, however, was that *Winesburg, Ohio* had sold poorly when it was first published under the Huebsch imprint. Always a gambler,
Liveright hoped that the book would reach a larger audience in a cheap format. And he was right: *Winesburg, Ohio* continued to sell in the Modern Library for half a century.

In his biography of Anderson, Walter Rideout points out the contrast between the low sales of the Huebsch edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* and its later reputation as an “American classic” (I: 321). However, he fails to explain this paradox. How could Anderson become a canonical writer when so few people read the original edition of *Winesburg*? In this chapter, I argue that the Modern Library contributed to Sherwood Anderson’s entrance into the literary canon while he was still alive. Anderson scholars have generally favored approaches inspired by New Criticism, psychoanalysis and biographical readings. For example, Rideout mentions Anderson’s successive publishers in passing, but fails to shed light on his position in the literary field of the interwar period. Moreover, Robert Dunne has examined the place of Anderson in anthologies, from the 1920s to the present day. Yet, anthologies are not the only gauge of an author’s place in the canon. As Janet Friskney’s study of the New Canadian Library has shown, cheap series of reprints are an important factor when it comes to selecting specific texts for classroom use.

Drawing on archival research at the Newberry Library and the Library of Congress, “Sherwood Anderson, the Modern Library Series and the Canon of American Literature” is organized in three sections. First, it shows that the success of *Winesburg, Ohio* in the Modern Library increased Anderson’s cultural prestige and triggered his change of publishers. In 1925, Anderson decided to leave Ben Huebsch and join the publishing firm of Horace Liveright. Even in the 1930s, when Anderson’s career was waning, Modern Library editions continued to be a source of regular income for him. “I’m a Fool” was included in *Great Modern Short Stories* in 1930, the Modern Library edition of *Poor White* remained in print until 1939 and *Winesburg, Ohio* was not discontinued until the close of the series in the 1970s. The second part sheds light on the institutions that allowed Anderson to enter the canon of modern literature. In particular, it
shows that the Modern Library’s wide diffusion among students and academics contributed to establish Anderson as a major canonical writer. The third section focuses on Anderson’s place in the literary canon after his death in 1941. To a certain extent, the neglect of Anderson’s later texts can be traced to the fact that they were initially not reprinted in cheap series such as the Modern Library.

From Struggling Writer to Literary Sensation

Following John Lane’s refusal to publish his collection of short stories, Anderson was advised by a number of his friends, presumably Van Wyck Brooks among them, to contact Ben Huebsch, who had a small publishing firm in New York (Rideout I: 299). Huebsch, whose list included James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, did not shy away from modernist experimentations. He accepted to publish the rather atypical stories that Anderson offered him, and suggested the title *Winesburg, Ohio*. Although Huebsch was good at spotting new talents, he was never comfortable selling their works to the market (Turner 45-80; West, *American Authors* 27). His publishing firm was deeply anchored in what Pierre Bourdieu has called “the subfield of restricted production” (as opposed to “large-scale production” represented by established companies such as Macmillan) (53). Huebsch’s reluctance to promote books was particularly bewildering for Anderson, who worked as an advertising man. In November 1919, shortly after the publication of his book, Anderson wrote to Huebsch: “Is it a good plan to advertise telling people to get Winesburg at the public library. The damn cusses do that anyway.”¹ Anderson never forgot that his own publisher had bought advertising space to tell people to borrow *Winesburg* instead of buying it (the anecdote can again be found in his *Memoirs*). Despite

¹ Anderson to Huebsch, 14 Nov. 1919, box 1, BWH.
Huebsch’s lack of business acumen, Anderson remained faithful to his publisher and even recommended him to his friends. Writing to the psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow, Anderson described the freedom from market pressures that authors enjoyed with Huebsch: he “doesn’t know what a good book is or how to sell books but he is a fine fellow and at any rate you wouldn’t have to, with him, go through the wearisome business of having some smart publisher tell you what to do to make your book sell.”


In the *Chicago Tribune*, Burton Rascoe compared Anderson to the best Russian writers. Despite these generally positive reviews, Anderson later told a would-be writer that “the Winesburg stories, when first published, were bitterly condemned”:

They were thrown out of libraries. In one New England town, where three copies of the book had been bought, they were publicly burned, in the public square of the town. I remember a letter I once received from a woman. She had been seated beside me at the table of a friend. ‘Having sat beside you and having read your stories I feel that I shall never be clean again,’ she wrote. I got many such letters.

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2 Anderson to Burrow, 12 Oct. 1921, box 2, SA.
3 Box 113 and 114, SA.
5 Burton Rascoe, "Winesburg, Ohio," *Chicago Tribune* n.d. (c. 1919). Box 113, SA.
6 Anderson to George Freitag, 27 Aug. 1938, box 6, SA.
Although Anderson exaggerated the public outcry, it is certainly true that *Winesburg* shocked many readers. Rascoe thus described Anderson’s book as particularly daring: “these stories are practically all concerned chiefly with the sex life of the inhabitants of the Ohio village.” Unlike the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Sun* did not find any artistic value to this frank description of sexual desire: “Mr. Anderson has reduced his material from human clay to plain dirt.”

Anderson’s rise from struggling writer to controversial celebrity did not escape the attention of Horace Liveright, who was always on the lookout for the next big thing. In spring 1921, Liveright offered to reprint *Winesburg* in his Modern Library series, with 8 cents royalties paid per copy. The first printing would consist of 3,000 copies, more than the Huebsch edition had sold during the first year after publication.

Ben Huebsch showed little enthusiasm for Liveright’s proposal. As he explained to Anderson, a reprint risked cutting the sales of the $1.50 edition. However, Huebsch also recognized that a deal with the Modern Library could be financially beneficial to his author: “there is the new market that would be opened up to you in spite of the fact that the Modern Library edition would be in direct competition with mine.”

Anderson waited two weeks before sending a cable to accept Liveright’s offer. As usual, he tried to balance his own interests with that of his publisher. After consulting Lewis Galantière and others, he came to the conclusion that a reprint would not necessarily hurt the original edition. The decision was not an easy one for Anderson, and the Modern Library reprint remained a thorny issue in his relationship with his publisher.

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7 "A Gutter would be Spoon River." *New York Sun* n.d. (c. 1919). Box 113, SA.
8 Huebsch to Anderson, 26 May 1921, box 21, SA; Royalty statement, 1 May 1921, box 100, SA.
9 Huebsch to Anderson, 26 May 1921, box 21, SA.
10 Anderson to Huebsch, 11 June 1921, box 7, SA.
Many years later, Sherwood Anderson continued to attribute his first commercial success to the Modern Library. Three months before his death, he wrote to Huebsch: “As I remember [Winesburg, Ohio] was two years selling the first 5,000. It did not begin to have a wide circulation until it got into the Modern Library.”\footnote{Anderson to Huebsch, 30 Nov. 1940, box 8, SA.} Extant royalty statements preserved in the Sherwood Anderson archives confirm that the Huebsch edition sold poorly: only 400 copies in the six months ending April 1920, for example.\footnote{Royalty Statement, 1 May 1920, box 21, SA.} The original edition of Winesburg sold 3,068 copies in the first two years following its publication.\footnote{Royalty Statement, 1 May 1921, box 100, SA.} Anderson often complained that his books were difficult to find: Winesburg had characteristically gone out of print before Christmas 1919.\footnote{Anderson to Huebsch, 30 Nov. 1920, box 7, SA.} In short, Anderson was in the same position as modernist writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. Although they were often discussed in the daily press (Leick, \textit{Gertrude Stein} 6), their texts were published by small-scale publishing enterprises (little magazines, small presses), which limited their penetration of the mainstream market. Many readers who read about Anderson had never read anything by Anderson. When Winesburg, Ohio was reprinted in the Modern Library in 1921, it was sold for 95 cents (one third less than the Huebsch edition) and it was available in most bookstores. One advertisement declared: “Any book buyer who overlooks this excellent series of attractively bound and printed, and interestingly chosen selection of one-hundred best books of modern times, should apply for a mental guardian.”\footnote{Advertisement for Boni & Liveright. \textit{Evening Public Ledger} 21 Nov. 1922.} With its cheap price, good distribution and effective advertising strategy, the Modern Library allowed Anderson’s book to reach a large audience. Records show that at least
63,000 copies of the Modern Library edition of *Winesburg* were printed in the first twenty-five years following its publication.\(^{16}\)

The cheapness of the series made it particularly popular among students and young people. One reader wrote to Anderson about his discovery of *Winesburg, Ohio* in the Modern Library:

> Mr. Bloomberg, a bookseller of this city [Detroit] was the first to interest me in your books by selling me a Modern Library edition of Winesburg, O. . . . Since then I have bought and read Horses and Men, A Story Teller’s Story, Mid-American Chants, Triumph of the Egg and Marching Men. At the present I am searching for Many Marriages, Poor White and Windy McPherson’s Son. I shall not be satisfied until I have them all and read them many times. Winesburg has been passed on to many of my friends and although it is but a few months old it has that worn and tattered look we love to see in excellent books.\(^{17}\)

There are two interesting things in this letter. First, it highlights the difficulty of finding Huebsch editions, compared to the easy availability of the Modern Library. Second, it reveals that the series introduced readers (and particularly young readers) to a new cultural product, modern literature. Once these readers had been educated to consume the new literature, they would not only buy more of these products, but also evangelize their friends. Hence the “worn and tattered look” of the Modern Library edition that has been passed from one reader to another.

The success of *Winesburg, Ohio* in the Modern Library edition was the source of increasing tensions between Anderson and his publisher. It proved that *Winesburg*’s low sales in

\(^{16}\) Box 100, SA and box 64, RH. To avoid excessive stock, the Modern Library generally printed only 1,000 or 2,000 copies at a time. Although some printing orders might be missing from the archive, printing figures give a good estimation of actual sales figures.

\(^{17}\) Laverne Colwell to Anderson, 8 Feb. 1925, box 17, SA.
the original edition were due not to the text itself, but to Huebsch’s faulty organization. Although Huebsch had done little to actually sell the book, he took half of the royalty income of the Modern Library edition. Thus, Anderson received only 4 cents for each reprinted copy. The royalty check of $120 for a first printing of 3,000 copies came at the beginning of November 1921, shortly after Anderson was awarded the $2,000 Dial Award. As Walter Rideout point out, “the Dial Award and its attendant publicity and, most recently, the recognition in *The Literary Digest* were making him nationally known; he was beginning to be regarded, not as a leading Chicago writer but as a leading American one” (I: 468). Anderson had now reasonable ground to hope that he could soon leave his day job in advertising, and become a full-time writer. It is in this context that Anderson wrote to his publisher, demanding a larger part of the Modern Library royalties. Anderson was all the more upset that Huebsch had not solicited the Modern Library’s offer (it was Liveright who contacted him first). It seemed unfair to “share not only in this initial payment, but in all payments from them as long as they publish the book.” Huebsch rightly claimed that it was common practice for the original publisher to take half of the reprint rights, but he offered to renegotiate the contract. Although Anderson did not insist, the issue of the Modern Library royalties continued to crop up in his correspondence for the next two decades.

The Modern Library not only enabled Anderson to reach a wider audience, it also reinforced his position in the emergent canon of American literature. In August 1923, Anderson was asked to write the introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Free*, a collection of short stories by Theodore Dreiser. Although Anderson was paid only $50, he must have felt honored to introduce the first title by Dreiser in the series. Back in 1915, Dreiser had suggested Anderson

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18 Huebsch to Anderson, 7 Nov. 1921, box 21, SA.
19 Anderson to Huebsch, 18 Nov. 1921, box 7, SA.
20 Huebsch to Anderson, 23 Nov. 1921, box 21, SA.
21 Boni & Liveright to Anderson, 15 Aug 1923, box 16, SA.
send his work to John Lane. Eight years later, Anderson was sufficiently well known to give an authoritative judgment on Dreiser’s short stories. In his introduction, Anderson praised the courage of his mentor, who fought against the genteel tradition to write realistic fiction: “he has been a heroic figure in my own eyes” (vi). For Anderson, Dreiser was winning his fight against “puritanism”: “We are rapidly approaching the old French standard wherein the only immorality for the artist is in bad art and I think that Theodore Dreiser, the man, has done more than any living American to bring this about” (vii). This introduction fit well with a series so closely associated with the fight against censorship, as we have seen in Chapter 2. With the Modern Library, Anderson had found a publishing enterprise that put him in dialogue with distinguished American writers opposed to puritanism and the genteel tradition.

Although Anderson was now an established author, he was still unable to make a living out of his writing. In spring 1924, he was shocked to receive a royalty statement of only $504.65. He sent a telegram to Huebsch, telling him that he had no choice but to change publishers: “ITS THAT OR STARVATION FOR KIDS AND ME.” Huebsch replied that other publishers would not leave him as artistic freedom as he had so far enjoyed. Anderson once again decided to give Huebsch another chance, but he remained dissatisfied. After all, the success of the Modern Library edition showed that he did not have to choose between artistic autonomy and commercial success. In November 1924, Liveright renewed his offer to publish Anderson’s new book: “I have in a short time built up the best book-publishing organization in the country.” In his reply, Anderson conceded that Liveright was right to stress the importance of

22 Anderson to Dreiser, 10 May 1915, box 3, SA.
23 Royalty Statement, 30 April 1924, box 100, SA.
24 Anderson to Huebsch, 18 June 1924, box 1, BWH.
25 Huebsch to Anderson, 21 June 1924, box 21, SA.
26 Liveright to Anderson, 18 Nov. 1924, box 23, SA.
distribution: “The number of people who will go out of their way to get books when they must be ordered from a distance or who will wait until a dealer gets them in is small and always will be.”27 However, Anderson was not yet ready to leave Huebsch, who had trusted him when no one else would publish Winesburg. A few months later, Anderson changed his mind again and signed a contract with Liveright.

There are several reasons why Anderson finally left Huebsch for Liveright. First, and most importantly, Liveright offered to pay him $100 per week for five years as advance on royalties.28 This would enable Anderson to write full time instead of being “constantly harassed by the effort to make a bare living,” as he explained to Alfred Stieglitz.29 Second, Liveright accepted to take nothing out of foreign rights. In contrast, Huebsch initially took 50%, a rate that was reduced to 25% when Anderson complained.30 Finally, Liveright agreed to pay Anderson a royalty of 10 cents a copy for all of his books published in the Modern Library. In effect, this meant that Liveright did not take a share of reprint rights in the series. This clause was deeply satisfactory for Anderson, who had long complained that Huebsch took 50% of all reprint rights. In short, the Modern Library was an important factor in Anderson’s decision to change publishers.

According to the contract, Liveright would immediately seek to purchase the reprint rights for Poor White for the Modern Library. In the next months, however, Liveright sold the Modern Library to Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer. Although Poor White did join the series, Anderson never received the 10 cents per copy he had been promised. Huebsch continued to hold the rights for Winesburg, Ohio and Poor White, and to take half of the 8 cents per copy paid by

27 Anderson to Liveright, Nov. 1924, box 9, SA.
28 Contract between Anderson and Boni & Liveright, 10 April 1925, box 99, SA.
29 Anderson to Stieglitz, 22 April 1925, box 13, SA.
30 Anderson to Stieglitz, 6 May 1925, box 13, SA.
the Modern Library. When Poor White was released in the series in early 1926, it received an 
enthusiastic review in the Manitoba Free Press: “With the reissue of his ‘Poor White’ in the 
excellent Modern Library, the opportunity offers to touch on the significance of Anderson to 
America and, more particularly, the significance of America to Anderson, for certainly in no 
other country could ‘Poor White’ have been written.”31 The Modern Library was easily available 
in Manitoba and other Canadian provinces, and introduced readers to recently established 
American writers such as Anderson. The emphasis on the Americanness of Poor White can also 
be found in the new introduction that the Modern Library commissioned to the author. “The 
Modern Library is something magnificent,” wrote Anderson, “Long rows of names - illustrious 
names. My book, ‘Poor White,’ feels a little like a countryman going to live in a great modern 
sophisticated city” (vi). These illustrious names were mostly from Europe. In spring 1925, there 
were more French than American authors in the Modern Library (18% and 13% of the total of 
countryman highlights an important turning point: the moment when a still marginalized 
American literature had started its invasion of the literary canon.

A 1926 advertisement for the Modern Library thus featured five “great modern authors,” 
four of which were American: Sherwood Anderson, Walt Whitman, James Branch Cabell and 
Eugene O’Neill (Figure 3-1). The visual representation of these authors was completed by a text 
emphasizing literary celebrity: “The Modern Library, over a period of seven years, has gathered 
together the finest works of the greatest modern authors Sherwood Anderson, Kipling, Anatole 
France, Dreiser, Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Cabell, and scores of others, equally famous, are 
represented” (my emphasis). According to this narrative, Anderson was a literary star who had

agreed to write a “special introduction” for the Modern Library edition of Poor White – thus reinforcing the aura of the series. The distinguished physical format of the Modern Library, combined with its cheapness, made it particularly attractive: “Never, in the history of publishing, has there been such an opportunity to secure works which have made their place in literature, in so beautiful a format, at so low a price.” As the title proclaimed, the Modern Library targeted “intelligent readers” – all those who wanted to keep abreast of contemporary, and particularly American literature. The new owners of the Modern Library continued to develop their American list throughout the 1920s. By spring 1930, the share of American literature had risen to one fifth of all Modern Library titles (Neavill, “The Modern Library Series” 529).

In a letter to the editor Robert Linscott, Bennett Cerf explained that Sherwood Anderson was particularly popular in the series in the late 1920s. Along with Cabell, Anderson was then part of what Cerf called “the Mencken-Dreiser-Hemingway era.” With the Depression, however, “Mencken and his chorus were swept into the discard” and “the bestsellers became books by William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell and the like.” Cerf’s analysis of “the changing tastes of the reading public” is confirmed by printing figures. In the case of Poor White, the first printing of 8,000 copies was followed by a second printing of 4,000 copies in fall 1927. Sales started to decrease in the 1930s. From 1933 to 1939, the Modern Library reprinted only 3,000 copies of Poor White. The book was finally discontinued in 1939. Although Poor White never achieved the success of Winesburg, it stayed thirteen years in the Modern Library and at least 18,000 copies were printed (three times more than the total sales of the original Huebsch edition).33

32 Cerf to Linscott, 25 Sept. 1936, box 124, RH.
33 Box 100, SA and box 131, RH.
WHAT THE MODERN LIBRARY HAS DONE
~and IS Doing for Intelligent Readers

The Modern Library, over a period of seven years, has gathered together the finest works of the greatest modern authors: Sherwood Anderson, Kipling, Annette France, Dostoevsky, Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Chekhov, and scores of others, equally famous, are represented.

One hundred and twenty-six titles are now in the Library. A new one is added each month. A glance at the list of authors and titles tells all that any intelligent book-lover needs to be told about the quality of reading in the Modern Library.

The price of each volume is only fifty cents. Even if these books were printed on the cheapest paper, and bound in inexpensive cardboard, the value would be great. But each Modern Library volume is printed on high-grade antiquarian book paper, hand-bound in limp cloth. Each volume is complete, yet printed in large, clear, new type. Never, in the history of publishing, has there been such an opportunity to secure works which have made their place in literature, in so beautiful a format, at so low a price.

Below is the list of titles. Have you will find books you have always wanted to read. Check these and get them at your bookstore while the stock in your mind. Every bookkeeper of standing in the United States and Canada carries the Modern Library, but we wish you to enjoy and obtain your choice locally.

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THE MODERN LIBRARY, INC.

I will pay the postage on delivery of the Modern Library, volumes 1 & 2 only, when enclosed Bill is ordered, and I shall save 50 cents. I hereby order the Modern Library, volumes 1 & 2, and enclose Bill of $1.00.

Address

Figure 3-1: Advertisement for the Modern Library, New York Herald Tribune Books 7 Nov. 1926
In an effort to reinvigorate interest in *Winesburg, Ohio*, the Modern Library owners commissioned a new dust jacket to the celebrated graphic designer Edward McKnight Kauffer. Like his friend T. S. Eliot, Kauffer was an American expatriate in England, where his posters for London Underground made him famous between the wars. This commercial association did not tarnish Kauffer’s avant-garde credentials. As Edward Bishop puts out, Kauffer “had been associated with the Omega Workshop and the Vorticists (and so was ideologically sound).” This ability to cross the boundary between art and commerce appealed to many, including Leonard Woolf who commissioned him a logo for the Hogarth Press (138). The dust jacket that Kauffer designed for Anderson’s book, with its combination of bold typography and color, showed the influence of Vorticism and Cubism. It first appeared on Modern Library editions in 1936, replacing an earlier design with the long-legged torchbearer emblematic of the series (Figure 3-2). The modernity of the jacket was paralleled by the blurb, which presented *Winesburg, Ohio* as a “masterpiece” that “became the forerunner of a new and vital school of contemporary writing.” The visual and textual aspects of the Modern Library dust jacket thus reinforced the positioning of Anderson as a path-breaking modern writer that had already earned a place among the classics.

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In addition to *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White*, the Modern Library reprinted Anderson’s “I’m a Fool” in *Great Modern Short Stories* (1930). The story had first appeared in the *Dial* before Edward O’Brien included it in *The Best Short Stories of 1922*. In the next eight years, “I’m a Fool” appeared in many anthologies (including Konrad Bercovici’s *Best Short Stories of the World*, Grant Overton’s *The World’s One Hundred Best Short Stories* and Leonard S. Brown’s *Modern American and British Short Stories*). The Modern Library anthology, edited by Overton, included a total of eleven stories by James Joyce, Willa Cather, Joseph Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Galsworthy, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, W. Somerset Maugham and Glenway Wescott. In 1942, Bennett Cerf revised the edition and replaced Joyce, Fitzgerald and Wescott with Faulkner, Lardner and Steinbeck. The new edition also included an additional story by Pearl Buck. The revisions partly reflected the evolution of reading tastes. Fitzgerald was no longer popular (the 1934 Modern Library edition of *The Great Gatsby* had to be remaindered five years later, having sold fewer copies than its first printing of
Faulkner, Steinbeck and Buck had gained their reputations during the Depression. Despite Anderson’s decreasing popularity in the 1930s, Cerf decided to keep “I’m a Fool” in the new edition (presumably because it was so well-known and often reprinted in other anthologies). In total, it was available for forty years in the Modern Library.

**From Literary Sensation to Canonical Writer**

After the Second World War, some writers associated with the Chicago Renaissance, such as Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg, fell almost as dramatically as Anderson rose. Scholars of Anderson have suggested that this revival was, to a certain extent, inevitable. For example, in his 1976 bibliography of Anderson, Douglas Rogers declared: “I am inclined to believe that the current pinnacle of interest in Anderson derives from the intrinsic satisfaction that two generations have received from reading his fiction” (10). In fact, Anderson was past his prime in the 1930s, and few would have anticipated the revival of the 1940s and 1950s. So how did he consolidate his place in the canon of American literature? This section focuses on two main factors. First, Anderson’s lecture tours, from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s, put him in contact with professors and students. Anderson also participated in the new creative writing programs in the 1930s. These activities meant that even during the Depression, when his sales were dropping, Anderson remained in contact with the gatekeepers of the literary canon. Second, and most importantly, teachers could easily find Anderson’s texts in reprints (anthologies and publisher’s series). *Winesburg, Ohio* continued to sell in the Modern Library throughout the 1930s, at the time when most of Anderson’s books were out of print.

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35 Box 80 and 130, RH.
In 1924, Sherwood Anderson was determined to quit his job in advertising, and started to think of lecturing as a way to supplement his meager royalty income. He eventually signed a contract with W. Colston Leigh at the Leigh Lecture Bureau for a series of talks in fall 1925. In the meanwhile, however, Anderson had left Huebsch for Liveright and secured weekly advances of $100. Although he no longer needed to lecture, he had to honor his contract with Leigh. Anderson often claimed he hated lecturing, but his talks in universities helped increase his literary standing during a key period in the history of American literary studies. As Kermit Vanderbilt and others have shown, the early 1920s saw a rise of academic interest in American literature. In 1921, an American literature group met for the first time at the Modern Language Association convention, and two years later, the *Publications of the Modern Language Association* bibliography added a section devoted exclusively to American literature (Csicsila 8).

The brochure announcing Anderson’s talks insisted on his privileged position in American literary modernism:

> Out of America’s gropings for a new impulse in art and a true direction in life, this author has come forward to a place of leadership on the difficult road. He has matured in the heart of the American scene, as a dweller in small towns and in ‘booming’ cities, and he talks of it as one who has been at once an actor and an observer. Sensitive to its inarticulate dreams and desires, he has many shrewd things to say on the function of art and imagination in modern life, and on the problems which face the new workers in all the arts. He speaks not as a vague prophet, but as a sympathizer and interpreter talking the language of today (my emphasis).³⁶

Here, literary modernism is explicitly linked to the conditions of modern life, and Anderson is presented as a key practitioner of the new literature. At the time when an increasing number of

³⁶ Brochure (1925), box 104, SA.
professors became interested in contemporary writing, it is hardly surprising that Anderson’s lectures appealed to academia.

When he was invited on campuses, Anderson often spoke on “modern American writing” (titled “modern tendencies in writing” in the brochure). It was this lecture that he gave on 13 October 1925, to a packed audience of students and faculty members at the University of Georgia (UGA), Athens. The success of the lecture was the result of Anderson’s and his agent’s efforts to attract academics from UGA and other local universities. The month before, Anderson had instructed Leigh to write to the head of the Department of English at Emory University, so that he could inform his colleagues of the lecture. Anderson also told his agent to give Boni & Liveright advance notice of his dates.37 Although the Modern Library no longer belonged to B & L, it is probable that Anderson’s visit to universities stimulated the sales of Winesburg, Ohio in the cheap edition. The lecture at the University of Georgia certainly triggered interest in his writings. John Donald Wade, a thirty-three year old professor in the English department at UGA, inquired about The Modern Writer – a privately-printed edition of a lecture that Anderson had given at Berkeley the previous spring. Anderson then wrote to the press, asking them to send announcements to Wade who was “very anxious to have something of the kind to use in his classes.”38 It is this sort of networking that allowed Anderson to appear on syllabi in the mid-1920s, at the time when American literature was being institutionalized. As John Guillory puts it, “canonical status is meaningless outside the context of the school syllabus” (“Canon” 53 n5). Interestingly, Wade went on to direct the newly formed graduate program in American literature at Vanderbilt University, became associated with the Agrarian movement, and later founded the

37 Anderson to Leigh, 15 Sept. 1925, box 8, SA.
38 Anderson to Theodore M. Lilienthal, 23 Oct. 1925, box 8, SA.
prestigious *Georgia Review* (Morton). Anderson undoubtedly benefited from encounters with pioneers of American literary studies such as Wade.

In 1925, the same year Anderson started his lecture tour, H. L. Mencken published an article titled: “Why Sherwood Anderson Puzzles All the Academic Critics.”\(^{39}\) For Mencken, academic critics “alternatively flirt with him and flee from him; it seems impossible for them to decide definitely either to embrace him, as they have embraced Sinclair Lewis and Hergesheimer, or to condemn him finally to their campus hell, as they have condemned Cabell and Dreiser.” Since professors believe that “criticism is an exact science, like thermodynamics or urinalysis,” they are uneasy with texts that describe feelings and passing impressions instead of offering conclusions. In an implicit attempt to offer a roadmap to puzzled academics, Mencken then recast Anderson as a misunderstood “serious” writer with a “difficult” method. In his conclusion, Mencken hailed Anderson’s *A Story Teller’s Story* as a book that “repays study.” This vocabulary must have appealed to literary scholars, who had always seen themselves as professionals with a legitimate object of study. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*, Thomas Strychacz notes that “academic studies of literature have from their inception valued the difficult, esoteric, and complex over the popular” (42). In other words, difficulty was intertwined with the professional ethos of literary scholars. If Anderson’s texts were indeed difficult, as Mencken claimed, then it was worthwhile analyzing them and teaching them in university courses. Despite his distrust of academia, Mencken helped make Anderson attractive for the new generation of American literary scholars. As early as 1927, an article in the *English Journal*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, declared: “*Winesburg, Ohio* has become a national classic, and has exerted the largest influence upon other writers of the short story” (Fagin 272).

In the 1930s, Anderson continued to regularly lecture at universities. In December 1938, Olivet College invited him to replace Ford Madox Ford as Writer-in-Residence. The idea of writing as an academic discipline was then a new thing (the Iowa Writers’ Workshop had been founded just two years before). Anderson enjoyed working with the students and faculty members so much that he accepted to come back during the summer for the Olivet Writers’ Conference. For a time, Anderson even thought of obtaining a teaching job at a university. Anderson might not have encountered influential canon makers such as John Donald Wade and H. L. Mencken at Olivet, but the people he met helped preserve his memory after his death. For example, Glenn Gosling of the English Department at Olivet later talked to Rideout about his friendship with Anderson. In short, Anderson’s lecturing and other academic activities in the interwar period helped him secure the support of the academy, a key canonical gatekeeper.

The fact that Anderson’s stories were so often reprinted in anthologies also contributed to his early entry into the canon of modern American literature. As Sharon O’Brien notes in her study of Willa Cather, “we simply do not read writers whose work has not been published, evaluated, preserved, and transmitted by social, economic, and literary institutions of some sort” (255). While Cather categorically refused to allow her work to be reprinted, Anderson was eager to see his stories appear in anthologies, not only for financial reasons, but also, more importantly, because he grasped the idea that reprints could transform his texts into classics. At the end of his life, he wrote: “Some of my own stories . . . that have now become almost American classics, that are put before students in our schools and colleges as examples of good story telling, were, when first written, when submitted to editors and when seen by some of the so-called American critics,

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40 Joseph Brewer to Anderson, 7 Dec. 1938, box 16, SA.
41 See Rideout II: 342.
declared not stories at all” (my emphasis). Anderson was well aware of the links between reprints, academia and canonization: if a text were not easily available in cheap form, teachers would be reluctant to choose it for class use. Since Anderson’s stories were so often reprinted in the 1920s and 1930s, Robert Dunne has argued that “Anderson gained entrance into the canon when he was still alive”:

As early as 1926, Doubleday's American literature anthology included several Winesburg tales: ‘A Man of Ideas,’ ‘Queer,’ and ‘Drink.’ Even when Anderson’s reputation was on the wane in the 1930s, another anthology, The American Mind (1937), lavished him with two sets of entries, including ‘An Apology forCrudity’ in a section on literary criticism and ‘I’m a Fool’ under the section ‘Recent Trends in Fiction.’ Two years later, the austere Oxford Anthology of American Literature included one story, ‘Death in the Woods.’ At the time of his death in 1941, the first anthology of American literature published by D. C. Heath also included ‘I'm a Fool” (xii).

Dunne’s list is not meant to be exhaustive, and the Sherwood Anderson archive contains many requests for reprints in textbooks and anthologies sold to the academic market. As we have seen, “I’m a Fool” appeared in Great Modern Short Stories, an anthology that was sold on campuses (like all Modern Library books). Moreover, Carl Van Doren selected Anderson’s “I Want to Know Why” for his anthology of Modern American Prose (1934). “Although there will be a trade edition for general readers, Modern American Prose is intended primarily for the use of school and college students,” wrote Van Doren. With their Midwestern background and modern narrative style, Anderson’s stories responded to the growing demand for American literature.

42 Anderson to Freitag, 27 Aug. 1938, box 6, SA.
43 Van Doren to Anderson, 6 Mar. 1934, box 30, SA.
Sherwood Anderson was eager to circulate his products among education customers, and encouraged them by offering discounts. In his reply to one request for reprint, he wrote: “the compensation has run from $50.00 to $250.00, however as this is a text book I think a compensation of $25.00 would be sufficient.”\textsuperscript{44} Anderson was sending out the message that he valued the academic community, and that he took their financial constraints into account. As Kevin Dettmar has argued in another context, some writers (or their agents or estates) view “literary reputation as something like a stock market, driven by investor confidence” and therefore decide “that the best long-term investment strategy is to balance short- and medium-term profitability with protection of the brand, by making one’s work, or the work for which one is responsible, available.” These writers are “investing for the long-term by letting [their] work be reprinted comparatively cheaply, knowing that securing a place in the canon will pay long-term dividends in both prestige and income” (“Writers Who Price Themselves”).

Although Anderson was willing to let his work be reprinted for a cheap price, he also tried to divert the attention away from his early stories towards his later works. When the mass-market magazine \textit{Red Book} asked to reprint “I Want to Know Why,” Anderson told his agent he was “a little sorry that [the editor] picked this particular story.”\textsuperscript{45} Since the story had first appeared in \textit{The Triumph of the Egg} (1921), Viking – Huebsch’s new company – was entitled to 50\% of the reprint rights. After Anderson wrote to his former publisher, Viking agreed to decrease its share to 25\%.\textsuperscript{46} Despite Anderson’s efforts, his later work continued to attract less attention that the stories that had first been published by Huebsch (especially the Winesburg

\textsuperscript{44} Anderson to Henry Goodman, 13 Sept. 1928, box 7, SA.
\textsuperscript{45} Anderson to Jacques Chambrun, 14 June 1937, box 2, SA.
\textsuperscript{46} Anderson to Chambrun, 22 June 1937, box 2, SA.
tales). This is in part due to the fact that Viking did not charge high prices for reprints.\footnote{See Marshall Best’s reply to Anderson’s complaint that Viking had not obtained the highest possible prices for reprints. Best to Anderson, 26 Sept. 1939, box 13, SA.} The author was the only one who had something to lose when editors of anthologies or magazines chose to reprint his earlier, rather than his later stories.

In addition to trying to control \textit{what} was reprinted, Anderson was particularly interested to know \textit{where} it was reprinted. He once complained that Viking did not send him copies of the anthologies in which his stories appeared.\footnote{Anderson to Viking, 9 Aug. 1939, box 8, SA.} This request was rather unusual: “none of our other authors have apparently wanted it,” replied the publisher.\footnote{Best to Anderson, 26 Sept. 1939, box 13, SA.} Unlike many established authors, Anderson grasped the idea that anthologies, but also series of classics, had an important impact on the literary canon.

In order to understand how the Modern Library helped Anderson become a canonical writer, it is important to trace the series’s strategy to conquer the academic market. Cerf’s marketing strategy involved convincing college bookstores to stock the Modern Library. In 1936, editorial copy was secured in the \textit{College Store}, the National Association of College Stores’ trade magazine, as free publicity in connection with an ad that the Modern Library was running in the magazine (Satterfield 192 n25). The magazine invited booksellers to prepare gift boxes with several Modern Library titles grouped around a common theme, such as modern literature: “There are books by Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Aldous Huxley, Marcel Proust, for students who feel that they must read the very latest authors or tag themselves as behind the times” (“A Modern Interview”). Although courses in modern literature were still rare in the 1930s, it was part of the Modern Library's marketing strategy to stress both its seriousness and its timeliness. Students of English literature might have
used a 1929 Modern Library edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and then browsed the shelves of their college bookstore to find more modern novels in the same series.

As Jay Satterfield points out, Cerf and Klopfer recognized that if young people started reading Modern Library books during their college years, they might well continue doing so in their later years (69). Random House distribution manager Lewis Miller thus wrote to a salesman:

> Try to make your dealers realize the value of getting a customer started buying Modern Library books. With such a new customer the dealer has over 200 chances to make additional sales, all from the first effort. The Chase & Sanborn people will spend up to $10.00 to get a housewife to buy one pound sack of their coffee, retail price about 30¢. The Campbell's Soup people will spend about $4.00 to sell a can of soup. And these people know their business full well.50

The comparison between the Modern Library and Campbell’s soup is illuminating. Douglas Collins notes that, when Campbell produced its first soup in 1897, the public image of soup, “in the words of one commentator, was of ‘remnants boiled down to a greasy liquid neither pleasing to the eye nor palatable’” (167). Vigorous advertising campaigns educated customers to view canned soup as a healthy, tasteful and comforting product. “Soup can produce emotion,” declared the advertising copywriter Edith Lewis in 1923. Similarly, Modern Library advertisements sought to associate the classics with modernity, leisure, travel, wealth and pleasure.51 Customers had to be persuaded that modern literature was good for them, that it was readable, entertaining and tasteful. Once they had been hooked, they would come back to the bookstore and ask for

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50 Miller to Joseph Consolino, 30 Mar. 1939, box 136, RH.
more. In short, Modern Library books were consciously marketed like other commodities, using an aggressive sales strategy.

Anderson often credited the Modern Library for having transformed *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White* into “classics” (in the sense of canonical texts, taught at universities). In his 1940 letter to Huebsch, Anderson shows an awareness of *Winesburg*’s place in the American literary canon:

> You know that [*Winesburg, Ohio*] has become almost an American classic. Nowadays it is used in colleges and universities all over America. I believe that I am not being too much of an egotist when I say that I believe it has had a profound effect on all American story telling.

Anderson then went on to remind Huebsch that the book had sold poorly before being included in the Modern Library. In 1940, the Huebsch/Viking edition had been out of print for four years. When teachers selected *Winesburg, Ohio*, they used either the Modern Library or anthologies. For example, Granville Hicks chose the Modern Library edition for his course in modern literature at Smith College.

By the end of his life, Anderson was fully aware that the Modern Library was his only remaining link to literary success. When he was approached by Ned Brown, a movie agent who was looking for stories to sell to Hollywood, he instructed him to find *Winesburg, Ohio* in the Modern Library edition, which could “be picked up in almost any bookstore, at a low price.” Anderson also told Brown about *Poor White*: “The book has for years had a steady sale in the Modern Library. It is a good deal used by American historians as the best picture of this

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52 Anderson to Huebsch, 30 Nov. 1940, box 8, SA.
53 Box 100, SA.
54 Hicks to Modern Library, 25 Jan. 1928, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.
55 Anderson to Brown, 10 Dec. 1940, box 2, SA.
transition age in our American civilization.” In fact, *Poor White* had recently been dropped off the Modern Library. The case of *Poor White* shows that the Modern Library did not by itself create the canon. In the 1930s, teachers continued to select the Winesburg tales for their courses, but few chose *Poor White*. The demand for the novel sharply decreased, perhaps because in the midst of the Depression, few people wanted to read about America’s transformation from a rural to an industrial economy. Bestsellers such as Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* portrayed rural lives untouched by modern civilization. At the time when Anderson’s fiction increasingly appeared irrelevant, *Poor White* no longer appealed to a large audience.

What mattered to Anderson, however, was that the Modern Library (unlike Huebsch/Viking) had kept his books in print for years. In a letter to Brown, Anderson pointed out that his story “The Egg” was in a book now out of print: *The Triumph of the Egg*. Anderson himself had no copy and advised Brown to ask Anita Loos for her own book. Upset that many stories were now unavailable, Anderson tried to buy the rights from Viking. “There are too many people who know nothing of the stories in these two books [*Horses and Men* and *The Triumph of the Egg*],” declared Anderson, “I am most widely known for my ‘Winesberg (sic), Ohio.’” Anderson was determined to “do things with these stories that it is not to the interest of the Viking Press to do.” He was convinced that there was a demand for his stories. Seven years earlier, he had tried to get Viking to issue an omnibus volume of stories. Huebsch had rejected his suggestion, and advised him to contact reprints series such as the Modern Library, Blue Ribbon Books, or the Star Dollar Library to talk about his project. At the time of Anderson’s death in 1941, most of his books were out of print (even though many of his stories appeared in anthologies). Without

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56 Anderson to Brown, 30 Dec. 1940, box 2, SA.
57 Anderson to Brown, 10 Dec. 1940, box 2, SA.
58 Anderson to Huebsch, 30 Nov. 1940, box 8, SA.
59 Huebsch to Anderson, 10 Jan. 1934, box 30, SA.
the Modern Library, it is likely that *Winesburg, Ohio* would have known the same fate as *Horses and Men* and *The Triumph of the Egg*.

**Post-1941: Anderson’s Place in the Literary Canon**

In 1941, Lionel Trilling – then a thirty-six year old assistant professor at Columbia University – wrote an article on Sherwood Anderson in the *Kenyon Review*. Anderson had died a few months before, but Trilling had no intention to write a traditional obituary:

*Winesburg, Ohio* is not just a book, it is a personal souvenir. It is commonly owned in the Modern Library edition, very likely in its most primitive format, even before it was tricked out with its vulgar little ballet-Prometheus; and the brown oil-cloth binding, the coarse paper, the bold type crooked on the page, are dreadfully evocative. Even the introduction by Ernest Boyd is rank with the odor of the past, of the day when criticism existed in heroic practical simplicity, when it was all truth against gentility, sincerity against commercialism, and the opposite of ‘romanticism’ was not ‘classicism’ but ‘realism,’ which – it now seems odd – negated both (295).

Trilling was sixteen years old when the Modern Library first published *Winesburg, Ohio*, and he associated the series with a long-gone past. For Trilling, the Modern Library had lost its modernity. Neither the aspect of the book or its content showed any signs of sophistication. The Modern Library now seemed vulgar and outmoded – a fitting format for the Winesburg stories, which Trilling compared to “old letters we had written or received.” As Glen Love put it in his introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1997), the “physical presence” of the old Modern Library edition was “somehow enough to objectify [Trilling’s] resentment of its hurtful appeal” (vii). For Trilling, the mass-produced, cheap aspect of the
Modern Library could not possibly be associated with true classics, i.e. literary works that keep a universal appeal and are never “rank with the odor of the past.” In other words, the commercial success of *Winesburg, Ohio* – the fact that it was “commonly owned” in an inexpensive series – made it a vulgar product of mass consumption rather than a literary classic.

Despite Trilling’s criticism, *Winesburg, Ohio* did not disappear from the literary canon. On the contrary, Anderson’s reputation rose after his death. Figure 3-3 shows the increase in the printings of Modern Library editions of *Winesburg* in the early 1940s. Moreover, Figure 3-4 highlights the domination of Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis in MLA Bibliography entries, over two other figures associated with the Chicago Literary Renaissance, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters. Scholarship on Anderson and Dreiser reached a high point in the 1970s: there were ten times more articles, books, theses and reviews on Anderson in the 1970s than in the 1940s. In part, this was due to the general increase in literary scholarship following the postwar expansion of the university system. But even if we account for this overall increase, there were still four and six times more scholarly works on Anderson than on Sandburg and Masters respectively in the 1970s.

So how did Anderson, a writer that belonged to another age according to Trilling, come to occupy such a dominant place in the literary canon? There are at least four reasons. First, the fact that *Winesburg, Ohio* had sold for such a long time in the Modern Library edition attracted the attention of other reprint publishers in the 1940s. The American branch of Penguin thus issued a paperback edition in 1946, with a first printing of 150,000.60 On the back cover of the Penguin edition, Anderson was compared to D. H. Lawrence, since both had attacked “industrial

60 Marjorie Griesser (Viking) to Eleanor Anderson, 17 June 1947, box 100, SA.
civilization and its crippling of sexual and other emotions.” The introduction also stressed Anderson’s “enormous influence” on American writers, including Hemingway.

Second, the fact that *Winesburg, Ohio* was easily available in cheap editions published by the Modern Library, Penguin/Signet, and Viking (from 1958) made it attractive for classroom adoption. As Joseph Csicsila has noted, the relationship between anthologies and criticism works in two ways: “critical responses to individual American writers have influenced their presentation in anthologies of American literature” and “textbooks themselves have sometimes shaped critical attitudes toward particular authors” (22). The same is true of publisher’s series: because *Winesburg* had long been considered canonical, it appealed to reprint series; and in turn, the availability of the book in cheap editions made it easy to teach and study.

The third reason is tied to the evolution of American literary studies. At the time when scholars of American literature were gaining prominence in university departments, they were keen to establish a Great Tradition of American fiction. And Anderson, by nearly all accounts, belonged to this tradition. According to a narrative dominant until the 1970s, it was not possible to understand U.S. modern fiction without studying Anderson, since he had influenced so many younger writers (including, of course, Faulkner and Hemingway).

Finally, institutions such as the Newberry Library encouraged scholarship on Anderson. Eleanor Anderson presented the papers of her husband in 1947, thus enriching Newberry’s growing Midwest Manuscript collection. After two years searching for additional letters and cataloguing the collection, it was officially open to qualified scholars. In December 1948, the editor of the *Newberry Library Bulletin* declared that the Anderson Papers “contain more than 3,000 letters from him, more than 7,000 to him, and some 1,100 of his manuscripts - scores of the latter unpublished.” Six readers had already been admitted to use the collection. In a Cold War context, the editor carefully stated that although many Russians “idolized” his books in the
1920s, Anderson “had grave reservations about Communism” (L. Lewis, 67, 66). Anderson was thus recast as an individualist figure that could safely take his place in the American literary canon. The Newberry was then directed by Stanley Pargellis, who initiated fellowship, scholarly conference, and publications programs in order to attract more scholars (“Stanley Pargellis Papers”). When Eleanor Anderson expressed doubts regarding the Library’s access policy, Pargellis told her that it was in her interest to let many scholars work on the Anderson papers: “the encouragement of such exploration will contribute not merely to American scholarship but to Sherwood’s reputation.”61 Indeed, a combination of liberal access policy and fellowships contributed to the sharp increase in the number of books and articles on Anderson in the 1950s (including seminal works such as Irving Howe’s 1951 monograph and the collection of letters edited by Howard Mumford Jones).

Although Anderson’s position in the literary canon was now firmly secured, Poor White continued to lag behind Winesburg, Ohio in terms of reprints and critical responses. After it was dropped from the Modern Library in 1939, Poor White had become so rare that in 1946, when Eleanor Anderson asked the editor Saxe Commins to send her a copy, he could not find any in the Random House offices and advised her to place an advertisement in Publishers’ Weekly.62 In 1947, shortly after Penguin reprinted Winesburg, Eleanor told her agent she hoped cheap series of reprints would become interested in Poor White. For Anderson’s widow, Poor White could, in the right format, appeal to the academic market: “So many critics and teachers tell me that it would be popular, both in English courses and courses in social and economic history.” But of course, Poor White had already been marketed as a classic in the Modern Library without much success. “Perhaps [reprint publishers] would be afraid of it because it was dropped from the

61 Pargellis to Eleanor Anderson, 29 Oct. 1948, Anderson Accession Files, SA.
62 Commins to Eleanor Anderson, 16 April 1946, box 1, RH.
Modern Library,” declared Eleanor Anderson. Indeed, it is highly probable that the lack of enthusiasm for reprinting *Poor White* after the war stemmed from its semi-failure in the Modern Library. The novel was out of print until 1949, when Viking reprinted it in the *Sherwood Anderson Portable*. No other edition of *Poor White* appeared until 1966, with the release of the novel in Viking’s Compass Books series with an introduction by Walter Rideout.

Even today, the major paperback series of reprints used in literary courses (Penguin Classics, Signet Classics, Oxford World’s Classics, Norton Critical Editions) include *Winesburg, Ohio* in their catalogue but no other texts by Anderson. This is in part due to the long history of neglect of Anderson’s other texts: even in the 1970s, at the height of Anderson’s popularity in academia, *Poor White* appeared only under the Viking imprint (the original copyright holder). It was not attractive enough for other publishers to negotiate reprint rights with Viking and issue their own editions. From the 1980s, there was a sharp decrease in scholarship on Anderson. As Figure 3-4 shows, the number of MLA Bibliography entries dropped by around 30 points in the 1980s from the previous decade. In the 2000s, there were approximately four times fewer books, articles and reviews on Anderson than in the 1970s. John Bassett notes that, “like Sinclair Lewis, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, and other stars of the Chicago Renaissance but for Theodore Dreiser, he seems to be disappearing from college syllabi, although *Winesburg, Ohio* does occasionally show up” (17). In fact, there is now more work done on Lewis than on Anderson (Figure 3-5). The reasons for the decline in Anderson scholarship are complex, and beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice to say that Anderson has generally failed to attract the attention of literary scholars who use theoretical frameworks such as poststructuralism, New Historicism, and feminist theory. In his review of Bassett’s 2006 book, however, M. D. Whitlatch notes that “after

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63 Eleanor Anderson to Ivan Von Auw, Jr., 22 Aug. 1947, box 99, SA.
years of critical neglect, Anderson is enjoying some well-earned critical attention thanks to a new generation of scholars.” Robert Dunne’s poststructuralist analysis of Sherwood Anderson’s early fiction was followed by Andrew Corey Yerkes’s article on the neurology of Winesburg, and Molly Gage’s network theory approach on the same collection of short stories. These examples point to a relative renewal in Anderson scholarship, but also to a concentration on Winesburg, Ohio. A search in the MLA Bibliography shows that one fifth of all Anderson scholarship focused on Winesburg in the 1970s, a proportion that increased to one third in the 2000s. This emphasis can, to a large extent, be traced back to the popularity of the Modern Library edition – the first edition that presented Winesburg as a “classic.”

Figure 3-3: Printing Figures, Modern Library ed. of Winesburg, Ohio, 1926-45
Figure 3-4: MLA Bibliography Entries for Selected Writers of the Chicago Renaissance (1940-2009)

Figure 3-5: MLA Bibliography Entries for Selected Writers of the Chicago Renaissance (1942-2011)
Note on methodology: I have compiled these figures using the MLA International Bibliography (accessed through EBSCO database). Results include all articles, books, reviews and theses that contain “Anderson, Sherwood” (or “Dreiser, Theodore,” etc.) as a keyword. This methodology is inspired by David Damrosch’s chapter “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age.”
Chapter 4 - Blurring the Boundaries: Detective Fiction and Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the Modern Library

In March 1928, the Modern Library added two new titles – *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (a novel that, like *Winesburg, Ohio*, had first been published by Ben Huebsch in the United States). While reprints were generally not reviewed in periodicals, the cheap price and stylish presentation of the Modern Library attracted plenty of attention. For example, the *Hartford Courant* published a review that praised these additions to a “remarkable series.”\(^1\) For today’s reader, it seems surprising that Joyce’s text could be reviewed in a few sentences after a lengthy discussion on detective tales. The “great divide” between modernism and mass culture, described by Andreas Huyssen, conveys the impression of two radically different cultural spheres – even if recent scholarship has traced the influence of popular culture on many modernist works.\(^2\) Despite this increasing interest in the intersections between the “high” and the “low,” most scholars have failed to notice that modernist and detective texts were often published in the same venues.\(^3\) It is generally assumed that in the 1920s, writers such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf were read by a small coterie of followers, while detective writers reached the masses. Small presses and little magazines

\(^1\) "Detective Tales and James Joyce." *The Hartford Courant* 1 April 1928: E6.

\(^2\) It should be noted that scholars generally examine *textual* interactions between “high” and “low” cultures. See Kershner’s work on Joyce and “popular” culture. On the influence of modernist style on a crime writer like Dashiell Hammett, see McGurl, “Making Literature” and Gray.

\(^3\) Brooks Hefner is one of the few to have studied the “interrelationships between detective fiction and the larger trends of literary history.” As Hefner notes, “from the side-by-side magazine publications of writers like Van Dine and Sinclair Lewis in *Cosmopolitan* to the Modern Library publication of Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) [sic], detective fiction has always demonstrated a strong affinity with the larger world of literary fiction” (“You’ve Got to Be” 153). *The Maltese Falcon* was published by Alfred Knopf in 1930, and reprinted in the Modern Library in 1934.
published serious literature for an elite, while pulp magazines and mass-market periodicals released mediocre fiction for the less educated. In fact, publishing enterprises such as the Modern Library crossed the divide between literary modernism and popular fiction.

In the late 1920s, many mainstream firms published both modernist texts and detective fiction. For instance, the renowned publisher Alfred Knopf released Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, *The Dain Curse* and *The Maltese Falcon* in 1929 and 1930 (the latter was then reprinted in the Modern Library). Knopf’s list also included D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Katherine Mansfield and Langston Hughes. Moreover, in 1928, *Scribner’s Magazine* serialized S. S. Van Dine’s “The Greene Murder Case.” The fact that Scribner, the publisher of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, could proudly endorse Van Dine’s story shows that popular culture and literary modernism were increasingly intertwined. This chapter argues that the Modern Library also contributed to the blurring of boundaries between modernist and popular fiction.

In 1928, literary modernism was no longer an elite product sold to a tiny audience of connoisseurs. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* had first been serialized in *The Egoist* before Ben Huebsch released a $1.50 edition in 1916. Twelve years later, the Modern Library could present the book as a classic deserving of inclusion in a prestigious series. By 1928, then, *Portrait of the Artist* had completed the transition from little magazine to small press to commercial publisher. Joyce’s novel had successfully migrated from the avant-garde to mainstream culture. *Portrait of the Artist* was not the only modernist text that attracted the attention of mainstream publishers. In 1928, the London publisher Chatto & Windus reprinted Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* in its Phoenix Library. In the United States, the Modern Library released *Dubliners* in 1926 and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1928, a few months after *Portrait of the Artist*. That year, Harcourt, Brace published Woolf’s *Orlando* and advertised it widely. As Andrew Nash puts it, “by the late 1920s, modernist or highbrow authors were being absorbed
back into a mainstream publishing culture that earlier in the decade “had become ‘openly hostile’ to them’” (199).  

This chapter positions *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* in the literary field of the late 1920s, at the time when many modernist texts were sufficiently well-known to be included in a cheap series of classics, but had not yet been dissociated from “lesser” kinds of literature. The readers of 1928 were well aware that *Portrait of the Artist* and the detective stories had not the same style and narrative pattern. But the fact that these texts were included in a uniform series shows that the boundaries between “modernist” and “popular” literatures were not so entrenched in the interwar period. This essay is organized into three parts: “marketing,” “reviewing” and “dividing.” While the first two parts focus mainly on the year 1928, the third part examines the return of the great divide between literary modernism and detective fiction after the Second World War.

**Marketing**

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the uniform format of the Modern Library created links between various kinds of texts. When Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer bought the Modern Library in 1925, they commissioned graphic designer Lucian Bernhard and typographer Elmer Adler to give a more modern look to the series. Bernhard designed the endpapers as well as the colophon, a long-legged running torchbearer. Adler, whose company Pynson Printers specialized in limited editions, created a distinguished title-page. Like all Modern Library books issued in 1928, *Portrait of the Artist* and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* had the same spine design and flexible leatherette binding. Even dust jackets had a similar appearance (Figure 4-1).

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4 Nash draws on Ian Willison’s introduction to *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (xiv).
Not only did the two books share a similar physical format, they were also displayed in the same way. Indeed, *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* was number 144 in the series, and *Portrait of the Artist*, number 145. As booksellers generally arranged Modern Library books by numbers on a special display rack (Figure 4-2), most consumers would have encountered the two books simultaneously. The fact that the Modern Library was displayed as a *coherent* collection conveyed cultural prestige. In his essay on the Leonard Bast’s Library, Robert Fraser observes that publishers of uniform series “half-snobbishly invit[ed] their patrons to lay hold of cultural capital in a palpable form: in effect to adopt a miniature of the walk-in gentleman’s libraries” (131). The immensely successful Everyman’s Library also capitalized on the democratic idea that “everyman” could build up a great gentleman’s library. As Kevin Dettmar notes, “during the modernist period, an important cultural power vacuum opened up, in which the cultural prestige (what Bourdieu dubs ‘distinction’) traditionally accorded to, variously, literacy, books, private libraries, and literary learning, recedes in the face of a greatly democratized print culture” (“Bookcases” 20). Like its competitor Everyman’s Library, the Modern Library participated in
this democratized print culture by presenting itself as distinguished and affordable. Even students and clerks could afford to buy multiple “classics” and display them as a library.

Figure 4-2: Modern Library Display Rack, 1927, box 36, BC

The Modern Library used its “power to consecrate” (Bourdieu 42) to present *Portrait of the Artist* and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* as classics that would transform the reader into a sophisticated connoisseur. As Mary Hammond puts it, “a book is a ‘classic’ almost wholly because a particular publisher says it is” (94). This expansion of the term “classic” did not endanger the balance between distinction and cheapness typical of the Modern Library, because the series defined cultural sophistication as the ability to read a wide range of books – thus reaching outside the narrow specialization characteristic of the professional-managerial class. A prospectus for the Modern Library magazine (a project aborted owing to the Depression) thus described its audience as “the civilized minority”: “It consists of people vitally interested in their own field who know what they are talking about, and want to know what people of their own
kind are thinking in other fields.” The Modern Library assured its readers that they were part of an elite of open-minded people who enjoyed reading all kinds of texts in a distinguished physical format.

In September 1928, the Modern Library advertised a list of its “fifty best sellers” (out of a total of 150 titles) in Publishers’ Weekly. The advertisement encouraged booksellers to have “a good supply of these books for Christmas.” Fourteen Great Detective Stories and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man were listed in this order, after Jude the Obscure and before The Emperor Jones and the Straw (Figure 4-3). There are no complete sales records in the Random House archives, but one document gives the figures for January-June 1928. It shows that, despite the constant reference to “bestsellers” in advertisements, Modern Library sales were relatively modest. Fourteen Great Detective Stories sold 4,116 copies and Portrait of the Artist, 3,791 copies during this period. As both books were released in March, these figures correspond to the first four months following publication. And yet, Portrait of the Artist sold three times more copies than Best Ghost Stories did in six months. Modernist and “difficult” novels could thus be more commercially successful than genre fiction.

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5 Box 145, RH. See Satterfield 42.

6 Best Ghost Stories sold 1,128 copies from Jan. to June 1928. “Modern Library Titles in order of Sales Popularity” [1928], box 765, RH.

7 For instance, D. H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers (included in the Modern Library in 1922) was one of the most successful titles in the series. “Modern Library Best Sellers” [1931], box 117, RH.
The term “bestseller,” which suggests a short cycle during which the product is manufactured, advertised, sold to the mass market and discarded, was in fact ill suited to describe Modern Library books. “Longseller” would be more accurate, as many of these books stayed for decades in the series. *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and *Portrait of the Artist* remained in the Modern Library for forty-two years and twenty-eight years respectively. *Portrait of the Artist* started with a first printing of 8,000 in 1928, and by 1942 the total number of printings had reached at least 33,000.\(^8\) Sales increased after the war, at the time when modernism was being

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\(^8\) Box 131, RH.
institutionalized in universities: between November 1951 and October 1952, nearly 6,100 copies were sold (Neavill, “The Modern Library Series” 563). *Portrait of the Artist* remained in the Modern Library until 1956, when the copyright holder Viking decided to issue its own cheap edition. From 1928 to 1956, the Modern Library probably sold at least 100,000 copies of *Portrait of the Artist*. Unlike the “slick” magazines and the book clubs, the Modern Library did not reach the masses – but it created a significantly larger market for *Portrait of the Artist* and other titles that had previously been published in little magazines and small presses.

Although the term “bestseller” was hardly appropriate, the Modern Library used it as a marketing tool to emphasize the attractiveness of its list, rather than a strict indicator of its sales figures. According to one ad in the *New York Times*, “the titles chosen for publication are the best sellers of yesterday and today. . . The Modern Library, by publishing an attractive, inexpensive edition of these books, places the world’s best literature within reach of the humblest book-buyer.” The Modern Library did not distinguish between books such as *Portrait of the Artist* and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* precisely because its marketing strategy relied on presenting all Modern Library books as bestsellers, even if some sold less well than others.

It is tempting to see the anthology of detective tales as a potboiler, a necessary addition to help less profitable titles in the list. If that were the case, Modern Library editors would have gone to great length to avoid the risk of “brand dilution,” defined as the “weakening of positive brand associations or strengthening/ addition of negative brand associations” (Loken and John 233). For instance, the Modern Library could have advertised popular titles in mass-market publications and “difficult” novels in little magazines. In fact, Joyce’s text and the detective anthology were advertised in the same literary publications such as the *New York Times Book*

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9 On the marketing use of the term “bestseller”, see Miller, “The Best-Seller List.”

Review and New Republic (Figure 4-4). Far from belonging to different categories, Portrait of the Artist and the detective stories were part of the “150 Great Modern Books.”

The blurbs and introductions of Fourteen Great Detective Stories and Portrait of the Artist presented both books as modern classics that could appeal to a large audience. In the case

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of Joyce’s novel, the blurb on the dust jacket insisted not only on its stylistic originality but also on its popularity: “No new method of writing has been more discussed in the last decade than Mr. Joyce’s so-called ‘stream of consciousness technique.’” Those who did not want to be left out of this ongoing discussion had better read *Portrait of the Artist*, beginning with Herbert Gorman’s introduction (from which the blurb was extracted).\(^\text{12}\) Far from presenting Joyce’s novel as difficult, Gorman described it as a page-turner: “it is the mind of Stephen Dedalus that enchants and absorbs us and it is our consciousness of the authenticity of this figure that makes us so reluctant to lay the book down” (x). *Portrait of the Artist* was thus presented as a classic that everybody could read.

For Gorman, Joyce’s novel offered “the promise of that new literature, new both in form and content, that will be the classics of tomorrow” (xii) – a claim that also appeared on the dust jacket. The fact that the Modern Library had chosen *Portrait of the Artist* for its series gave the novel a new authority as a modern classic, as a text that was both timely and timeless. However, Gorman stated that Joyce’s true masterpiece was not *Portrait of the Artist* but *Ulysses*, a novel in which the stream-of-consciousness method had been “carried to its eventual goal” (vii). In 1928, *Ulysses* was still banned in the United States on charges of obscenity. One reviewer also described *Portrait of the Artist* as “slightly pornographic.”\(^\text{13}\) The choice to include Joyce in the Modern Library fit well with its image as a daring collection that attempted to educate readers about current and controversial literary trends.

The dust jacket of *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* similarly conveyed the impression that the book was a classic that participated in modernity. These stories had been chosen for their literary quality, as the word “great” implied, but there were also fun to read. The blurb on the dust

\(^{12}\) Gorman later became Joyce’s first biographer.

\(^{13}\) Peter Pinto, ”We have been Reading Lately,” The Canadian Jewish Chronicle [Montreal] 8 June 1928: 6.
jacket claimed that “all” the fourteen detective stories were “notable examples of a type of fiction whose popularity seems to know no bounds.” The Modern Library edition included five stories that also appeared in *Crime and Detection* (1926), an anthology published in the Oxford World’s Classics series: Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Red-Headed League,” Arthur Morrison’s “The Stanway Cameo Mystery,” R. Austin Freeman’s “The Case of Oscar Brodski,” and Ernest Bramah’s “The Tragedy of Brookbend Cottage.” Apart from Poe, all the authors anthologized in the Oxford World’s Classics edition were British. Unlike its competitor, the Modern Library targeted the U.S. market with a balanced list of seven British and seven American authors. By the end of the 1920s, detective fiction had become a popular and respected genre, published in uniform series alongside more traditional “classics.”

The year 1928 certainly saw a boom in the demand for detective tales, fuelled by innovations such as the new book clubs. Indeed, the creation of the Book-of-the-Month Club had been followed by a wave of other clubs, including the Detective Story Club and the Crime Club. Doubleday Doran launched the latter in March 1928, the same month when the Modern Library anthology of detective stories was released (“Crime Wave”). The Crime Club’s logo, which showed a Cubist-inspired figure with a gun, decidedly anchored crime fiction in modernity (Figure 4-5). Although the essayist Simeon Strunsky maintained that it was “pleasant . . . to find how free the average detective novel is from the disintegrating forces that threaten society and constitute modern unrest,” the detective genre did in fact participate in this unrest. One

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advertisement for the Crime Club promised monthly thrills to readers: “Your pulse quickens as you take off the wrapper; your excitement grows as you look at the contents.”\textsuperscript{16} This over-stimulation of the senses characterized the modern experience, as the sociologist Georg Simmel had noted.\textsuperscript{17} It is hardly surprising that detective fiction, a genre that created intense nervous stimulation, would have reached a peak of popularity after the First World War.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{crime_club_advertisement}
\caption{Advertisement for the Crime Club, \textit{New York Times Book Review} 29 April 1928: 19}
\end{figure}

Even methods for advertising detective stories were decidedly modern. One article in the \textit{English Journal} pointed to the “unprecedented amounts” spent by book publishers on advertising detective fiction: “a book entitled \textit{Murder} was promoted through the medium of an airplane

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\textsuperscript{17} “The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the \textit{intensification of nervous stimulation} which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (Simmel 409-10, emphasis in the original).

\textsuperscript{18} There are many similarities between war novels and the “thrillers” of the 1920s. See Jaillant.
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flying over New York at night with the illuminated exhortation to ‘Read Murder’” (McKeogh and Meloney 631). Onlookers must have been stuck by this spectacle – which reminds us of the skywriting airplane in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Like literary modernism, the detective genre participated in modernity.19

While detective stories relied on a very modern appetite for nervous excitement, their setting and plot were far from the reality of crime in America. Hard-boiled writers such as Raymond Chandler would later criticize the classic detective stories published “in the big shiny magazines, handsomely illustrated, and paying due deference to virginal love and the right kind of luxury goods.” But the elitism of detective fiction was part of its appeal. Unlike working-class readers of hard-boiled fiction,20 middle-class readers eschewed cheap pulp magazines and read classic detective fiction in more distinguished periodicals such as *Scribner’s Magazine*.

S. S. Van Dine, whose novel *The Greene Murder Case* appeared in this magazine in 1928, constantly crossed the boundaries between “high” and “low” cultures. Van Dine was the penname of Willard Huntington Wright, who had edited the *Smart Set* in 1913 and selected innovative works by Ezra Pound, Floyd Dell, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford among others (Gross and Gross).21 In the mid-1910s, Wright published a novel, *The Man of Promise*, as well as essays on modern painting and on Nietzsche. The commercial failure of these works convinced him to write in a more popular vein. In September 1928, having secured a reputation as a best-selling detective writer, Wright released a mock autobiographical sketch, “I Used to Be a Highbrow but Look at Me Now,” in the *American Magazine*. As Brooks Hefner puts it, “Wright’s unique case articulates what might be called ‘brow anxieties’ in the modernist

19 R. Gordon Kelly thus argues that detective fiction developed as a response to the anxieties produced by modernity, such as the “suspicion and skepticism” caused by increased urbanization and immigration (13).


21 John Loughery has also written a good biography of Van Dine.
era” (“I Used to Be” 32). Indeed, Wright never fully reconciled himself to writing commercial fiction. According to Mark McGurl, Wright saw his detective novels as “commercial trash that, while it could wistfully represent, could not exemplify the lofty intellectual aspirations of art. . . It was a popular genre, and yet it was also a meeting place of ‘high’ and ‘low’” (The Novel Art 162, emphasis in original). Unlike hard-boiled sleuths, Wright’s detective, Philo Vance, is an effete intellectual with a passion for modern and ancient art. Hefner notes that Vance’s apartment, with its paintings by Cézanne and Matisse, “looks a great deal like the salon of Gertrude Stein at 27 rue de Fleurus” (33). Having failed to find a large audience with his essay on aesthetics, Wright used the Philo Vance novels to educate readers to appreciate new trends in modern painting. His detective novels can therefore be seen as a site of dialogue between modernist and popular fiction.

The same could be said of Dashiell Hammett, who, in a 1928 letter to Blanche Knopf, revealed his desire to adapt modernist techniques to detective fiction:

I want to try adapting this stream-of-consciousness method, conveniently modified, to a detective story, carrying the reader along with the detective, showing him everything as it is found, giving him the detective’s conclusions as they are reached, letting the solution break on both of them together. . . I’m one of the few – if there are any more – people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously. I don’t mean that I necessarily take my own or anybody else’s seriously – but the detective story as a form. Some day somebody’s going to make ‘literature’ of it . . ., but I am selfish enough to have my hopes, however slight the evident justification may be.22

In this letter, Hammett exaggerated his marginal position: he was, of course, not the only one to take detective fiction seriously. His editor Blanche Knopf saw no contradiction in publishing

22 Hammett to Blanche Knopf, 20 Mar. 1928 (Layman and Rivett 46-7).
mystery novels alongside modernist works. In 1930, the Knopf publishing company released *The Maltese Falcon* as a Borzoi Book, a prestigious imprint marketed as “representative of the best of literature and book craft.” Amy Root has shown that Knopf used “book production as book promotion.” For example, a “note on the type,” printed at the back of the Borzoi Books, served as “a quaint reminder of a practice renewed by William Morris and his followers, harking back centuries to an era before the emergence of title-pages” (510). Thus, Hammett’s association with Knopf raised his literary status and triggered the interest of the Modern Library. Indeed, Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer often reprinted books initially published by Knopf, such as Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and André Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*.

When *The Maltese Falcon* appeared in the Modern Library in 1934, it included a new introduction by Hammett. This oft-quoted preface brought new light on the whole hard-boiled detective genre. “For your private detective does not – or did not ten years ago when he was my close colleague – want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner,” declared Hammett, “he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to get the best of anybody he comes in contact with, whether criminal, innocent by-stander or client” (Metress 70). Hammett’s effort to define the new hard-boiled genre contributed to his growing reputation among intellectuals. In his column in the prestigious *North American Review*, Herschel Brickell made clear that he did not generally review detective stories but that he would make an exception for Hammett, a “distinguished author” “generally recognized as the top of the heap in his field.” Brickell saw the Modern Library edition of the *Maltese Falcon* as “a recognition it heartily deserves, since it is one of the finest thrillers ever to be put between covers” (283). This idea of recognition was also stressed in an article in the *Palm*

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Beach Post, which compared Hammett’s style to Hemingway’s. The article declared that inclusion in the Modern Library “is a tribute to the fact that the book is of greater literary significance than that of many passing bestsellers.”

In short, publishing institutions such as Knopf and the Modern Library transformed Hammett from pulp fiction writer to distinguished author of modern classics.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, detective fiction had become sufficiently respectable to attract a sophisticated readership. Even professors of English literature took an interest in this genre. “Today we have not only a detective and mystery ‘literature’ but we are beginning to have a literature about the detective and mystery novel,” wrote Arthur McKeogh and William Brown Meloney in the English Journal (625). They argued that “all fiction is ‘literature of escape,’ from James Joyce to E. Philips Oppenheim” (626). Modern Library editors would certainly have agreed with this refusal to create boundaries between genres. For McKeogh and Meloney, detective fiction had travelled a long way from its lowbrow image: “with the increased interest in crime literature, more and more sophisticated persons began reading them and the quality and product was raised to meet this new demand” (630). Likewise, Vincent Starrett’s introduction to Fourteen Great Detective Stories insisted on this prestigious readership: “When their yarns are good, Presidents and Princes rise in meeting to advertise their delights in them” (ix).

Even the title of the introduction, “Of Detective Literature,” pointed to the new prestige of this genre. In the late 1920s, then, detective fiction was increasingly accepted as an important part of the emerging canon of modern literature.

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25 Starrett was a journalist and detective fiction writer, who had edited Stephen Crane’s Men, Women and Boats for the Modern Library in 1921.
The advertisements, blurbs, introductions and other paratextual elements presented *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and *Portrait of the Artist* as quality books that appealed to the modern mind. The idea that a classic could also be a page-turner was central to the Modern Library’s marketing strategy. How did reviewers react to this strategy? Did they show any surprise at the side-by-side publication of two books that we now consider radically different?

**Reviewing**

Joyce was already a well-known writer when *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist* were added to the Modern Library. As Karen Leick has shown, “it would have been difficult for any literate American to remain unaware of modernists like Joyce and Stein in the 1920s, since their publications in little magazines were discussed so frequently in daily newspapers and in popular magazines” (“Popular Modernism” 126). Yet, few scholars have noted that the mainstream press started reviewing Joyce’s texts in the 1910s, well before the publication of *Ulysses*. In 1917, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* observed that “no less a personage than that prime minister of literary England, H. G. Wells, has declared that James Joyce’s ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’ is the discovery of the year.”26 Joyce’s novel was even reviewed in mass-market magazines with circulation in the hundreds of thousands. *Munsey’s Magazine*, a conservative weekly, thus published a 1917 review on the “Bad Taste of a New Irish Novelist.”27 The reviewer lamented the novel’s “unnecessary and physically disgusting material,” but also recognized that “Mr. Joyce has written with remarkable power a remarkable book.” Instead of an unintelligible highbrow text, *Portrait of the Artist* was described as a realistic novel, with pages “so true to life and

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27 In 1912, Munsey’s had a circulation of 400,000 and was priced at 10 cents. In 1920, its price was up at 25 cents and its circulation had dropped to 132,000 (Mullen 145).
character that, were these all, the tale would be a contribution to the real literature of the time.” For Munsey’s, then, *Portrait of the Artist* was an important novel by a writer who had not yet overcome his adolescent fascination for pornography.

Joyce’s writings were not only discussed in daily newspapers and mass-market magazines, but also in the “slick” magazines. In 1920, *Vanity Fair* reproduced a picture of Joyce with a caption that highlighted the originality of his style: “James Joyce has departed from the English tradition: he brings a French technique to Irish material and has written in ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,’ to which he devoted ten years, some of the finest pages of prose in English” (“Younger School”).

The controversy over *Ulysses* quickly transformed Joyce into a household name. As the *Los Angeles Times* stated in 1922, “many are discussing James Joyce's ‘Ulysses,’ but few are reading it, as the book was published in Paris by subscription, in a limited edition. Meantime, owing to its fame, there has been a revival of the demand for Joyce’s other books here and in England.”28 *The New York Times* also pointed to the “new interest in the earlier writings of James Joyce,” relaying Huebsch’s report on the “heavy sales of ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,’ ‘Dubliners,’ and ‘Exiles.’”29 Despite the relatively high price of the Huebsch edition, *Portrait of the Artist* appealed to a large audience. One reader wrote to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1923 to praise *Portrait of the Artist*, “a story which has been widely read and is recognized as one of the superior literary merit.”30 A few months later, the same newspaper published an article

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entitled “James Joyce, the New Irish Immortal” in its Illustrated Magazine section. Joyce was a celebrity in America well before Random House’s publication of *Ulysses* in 1934.

By the time the Modern Library released *Portrait of the Artist* and Starrett’s anthology of detective stories, reviewers no longer viewed the cultural landscape in terms of rigid hierarchies. Daily newspapers often mentioned the publication of Joyce’s novel and *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* without distinguishing between the two texts, since both had appeared the same month in the same series of reprints. The *New York Times* briefly announced the March additions to the Modern Library, emphasizing the fact that Herbert Gorman had written the introduction to *Portrait of the Artist*. Moreover, a column in the *Atlanta Constitution* applauded the Modern Library for “continu[ing] to publish valuable little books in different colors of limp leather which have made a place all their own in the world of literature.” New additions were then listed, starting with the anthology of detective stories and *Portrait of the Artist* (“New Fiction Received”). In a review entitled “Detective Tales and James Joyce,” the *Hartford Courant* insisted that both texts belonged to modern literature. Joyce’s novel was strongly praised: “‘A Portrait of the Artist’ marks the high of Mr. Joyce's achievement as writer, and the editors of the Modern Library have done well in including it in the series.” The reviewer stated that “in spite of the hue-and-cry roused by ‘Ulysses,’ it is probable that Mr. James Joyce’s ultimate fame will rest on ‘The Dubliners,’ and ‘Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.’” As the publisher of the two latter texts, the Modern Library was presented as a series of modern masterpieces. The *Spokane Daily Chronicle* also published a review on the “two interesting volumes” included in the

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33 “New Fiction Received.” *The Atlanta Constitution*: 29 April 1928: 6G.
34 “Detective Tales and James Joyce.” *The Hartford Courant* 1 April 1928: E6.
Modern Library: “One is James Joyce's famous novel, ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,’ . . . the other is a collection of ‘Fourteen Great Detective Stories’ selected by Vincent Starrett.”

That a newspaper based in Spokane, Washington – far from the literary centers of the East Coast – could present Portrait of the Artist as a “famous novel” tells us a lot about Joyce’s celebrity in the 1920s. The two Modern Library books were described as equally pleasant to read. Gorman’s “entertaining and instructive” introduction would reassure those readers who might have feared Joyce’s reputation for stylistic experimentation. The fourteen detective stories were also “thoroughly enjoyable,” wrote the reviewer after discussing the difficulty to “agree on the greatest stories of the kind in English.”

The response of the daily press to the Modern Library’s new additions shows that literary modernism and mainstream culture were increasingly intertwined in the late 1920s.

Even a literary magazine such as The Dial eagerly engaged with “popular” culture. Interestingly, it was not the Modern Library edition of Portrait of the Artist, but Fourteen Great Detective Stories that attracted The Dial’s interest. In a long review, Gilbert Seldes praised Starrett’s choice of detective stories: “all the stories included are good and half of them certainly rank with another half dozen or so, as the best of the lot” (“Extra Good Ones” 519). Anticipating later critics (Pederson-Krag, Rycroft), Seldes attempted to apply psychoanalytic analysis to explain the “satisfaction” of reading detective stories: “I do not know whether psychoanalysts have gone to the bottom of the almost universal passion for police romances. Probably it is due to a variety of suppressed desires – to commit murder and to prevent murder, to live dangerously and to love policemen” (521). Seldes’s reference to psychoanalysis exemplifies the modernity of the detective genre. The creators of the Modern Library, Albert Boni and Horace Liveright,
largely contributed to the popularization of psychoanalysis in America. They published a number of Freud’s early books and in 1924, Liveright added An Outline of Psychoanalysis to the Modern Library catalogue. Like the Modern Library editors, Seldes did not hesitate to mix literary modernism with detective stories.

Seldes was the editor of The Dial from 1920 to 1924, an exciting period in the history of the magazine. The first American printing of T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land appeared in the November 1922 issue. That year, Seldes wrote an enthusiastic review of Joyce’s Ulysses for the Nation, “one of the (if not the very) first notices to appear in the United States.” As Michael Kammen argues, Seldes believed that “high culture and popular culture could beneficially converge” (10). By 1927, he had started reviewing detective fiction (“Diplomat’s Delight”). He even wrote his own detective stories, published under the penname of Foster Johns. Seldes’s review of Fourteen Great Detective Stories in The Dial was followed by brief reviews of newly released books, including Van Dine’s The Greene Murder Case and Yvor Winters’s The Bare Hills. Winters has since joined the canon of poets associated with New Criticism, while Van Dine has been dismissed as a second-rate detective writer. The fact that The Dial enthusiastically reviewed the works of these two writers (along with Fourteen Great Detective Stories) shows the flexibility of cultural categories in the interwar period.

37 The Victory Murders (1927) and The Square Emerald (1928).
The postwar era saw the return of the gap between the “high” and the “popular.” For the New York Intellectuals (and their allies, the New Critics), detective fiction exemplified the vices of mass culture. The postwar anxiety of contamination was not simply a reiteration of earlier fears of “vulgar” culture. The New York Intellectuals had come of age at a time of intense political tensions, and had grown disillusioned with Marxism. The examples of Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany seemed to highlight the disastrous consequences of mass culture. As Hugh Wilford points out, both the theorists of the Frankfurt School and the New York Intellectuals “had an apocalyptic vision of the future, one in which the traumatised masses erupted in directionless and barbaric violence” (64-5). Serge Guilbaut also notes that “by fighting through art against mass culture, artists [and critics] enjoyed the illusion of actively fighting against repugnant regimes, using the weapons of the elite” (37).

The reappearance of a rigid separation of the “high” and the “low” finds its origins in the political turmoil of the 1930s, but also in economical changes. “As they began to fear the prospect of being reduced to the same level as the millions of other knowledge workers,” the new generation of intellectuals insisted on isolating an elite culture from the mainstream (Wilford 21). The postwar was a period of intense criticism of corporate conformity, with books such as C. Wright Mills’s *White Collar* lamenting the “decline of the free entrepreneur and the rise of the dependent employee on the American scene” (xi). The only way to preserve the values traditionally associated with “art” – originality, independence, and creativity – seemed to create walls between the elite and the masses. Although the New York Intellectuals often criticized

38 On the “coalition” between New Critics and New York Intellectuals, see Lawrence Schwartz. Graff also offers a good overview of the rise of New Criticism in universities.
academia and other institutions that threatened an independent life of the mind, modernism came to be constructed as a difficult movement studied by professionals in university departments.39

In this intellectual context, it is hardly surprising that a diverse series such as the Modern Library would have come under attack. In the 1940s, for instance, many intellectuals criticized the decision to drop Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma* from the Modern Library list (Satterfield 146-8). Harry Levin caustically wrote that *The Charterhouse* had been dropped because publishers “thought that they were unable to sell it as numerously as such great works as *Life with Father* and *Rebecca*” (71). Levin was not the only intellectual to look down on Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, the leading bestseller in 1938 and 1939. In a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the British writer V.S. Pritchett described the book as a mediocre “Victorian thriller.”40 When *Rebecca* was reprinted in the Modern Library in 1943, it was marketed as a thriller, with a dust jacket designed by E. M. Kauffer that featured a macabre housekeeper on a black background. While Pritchett and Levin saw *Rebecca* as a mass-culture product, the Modern Library presented it as classic that deserved its place among the “world’s best books.” The series was increasingly seen as a vulgarly commercial enterprise that failed to cordon off “good” literature from thrillers and other debased genres. In an essay entitled “Will the Commercialization of Publishing Destroy Good Writing?,” James T. Farrell thus noted that the Modern Library “is sometimes watered down by such books as the works of Dashiell Hammett which are, at most, a little bit less than classics of the ages” (25). The verb “water down” suggested a failure to preserve the purity of High culture from a debased popular culture.

39 Of course, the New Critics did not share this distrust of academia (although they did criticize the narrow specialization of scholars). On the construction of modernism as a difficult movement, see Diepeveen.

While *The Maltese Falcon* had been praised by most critics in the 1930s, it moved down the “brow” hierarchy after the war. As Christopher Metress notes:

> It is only after we move away from contemporary responses to Hammett’s fiction do we see, if not a cooling of enthusiasm, then at least a warming up of critical dissent. Early on characterized almost exclusively by praise for Hammett’s achievement, the critical response since then has generated an engaging, and sometimes maddening, disagreement as to the respective merits of the five novels (xviii).

In a 1944 article titled “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?,” Edmund Wilson remembered that, ten years before, prominent critic Alexander Woollcott had called *The Maltese Falcon* “the best detective story America has ever produced” (74). With the hindsight, this reputation as a literary classic appeared undeserved. Interestingly, Wilson did not attack the masses for reading what he saw as mediocre detective fiction. Instead, he was concerned with influential critics such as Woollcott who had raised *The Maltese Falcon* to the level of a classic. Similarly, in a 1946 article in the *Sewanee Review*, Herbert Marshall McLuhan deplored that “the term ‘literature’ has been tackled to *The Maltese Falcon* of Dashiell Hammett,” a novel that shows only “emotional illiteracy and confusion” (630-31). Like Wilson, McLuhan concentrated his criticism on those who had given prestige and authority to a lowbrow hardboiled novel.

In the writings of postwar critics, modernism was often opposed to the crass commercialism of detective fiction. For example, Wilson’s 1945 essay, “Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?,” was structured by oppositions between “Literature” (with a capital L) and “rubbish” (153). Wilson praised the story-telling skills of modern writers: “even Proust and Joyce and Virginia Woolf do certainly have stories to tell, and they have organized their books with an
intensity which has been relatively rare in the novel and which, to my mind, more than makes up for the occasional viscosity of their narrative” (152). In contrast to the difficult but rewarding reading of modernist texts, the consumption of detective stories was, in Wilson’s terms, “degrading to the intellect” (153). Wilson compared the reading of detective fiction to a shameful addiction: “detective-story readers feel guilty, they are habitually on the defensive, and all their talk about ‘well-written’ mysteries is simply an excuse for their vice, like the reasons that the alcoholic can always produce for a drink” (152).41

If detective fiction was really dangerous and degrading, why did modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot and André Gide talk about their admiration for Wilkie Collins or Dashiell Hammett? Both Edmund Wilson and Dwight Macdonald agreed that Gide’s endorsement of Hammett was socially disastrous. For Wilson, “the portentously invoked examples of Woodrow Wilson and André Gide” “bullied” readers into consuming detective fiction (“Who Cares” 153). In his 1953 essay, “A Theory of Mass Culture,” Macdonald similarly condemned Gide, who was “foolish enough to admire” the “noxious” style inaugurated by Hammett (68). These metaphors of disease and corruption highlighted the risk of contamination between the “high” and the “low,” between good literature and “rubbish.”42 What was at stake was not so much the mediocrity of the detective genre, but rather the blurring of the boundaries between literary modernism and crime fiction characteristic of the interwar period. In the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when the responsibility of the writer was violently debated, intellectuals who defined themselves as “serious” could no longer endorse supposedly harmful popular genres.

41 Similarly, Q. D. Leavis wrote about the “addiction” to detective fiction (Fiction and the Reading Public 50). See also W. H. Auden’s 1948 essay “The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict.”
42 As Andrew Ross puts it, “the debate about mass culture was conducted in a discursive climate that linked social, cultural, and political difference to disease” (43).
But why did an iron curtain descend across the arts right after the Second World War? Why did intellectuals suddenly seem anxious to draw a line between modernist writings and detective stories? Jay Satterfield notes that the huge popularity of Pocket Books and other paperback series triggered attacks against the commercialization of publishing: “because of the low profit margin per unit, paperback reprint lines and most other cheap series demanded high-volume sales. Only books with significant market appeal would be reprinted” (145). In fact, the Modern Library had little in common with mass-market paperbacks. Modern Library books were nearly four times more expensive than early paperback editions, they were sold in bookstores rather than newsstands, and they reached a much smaller market. Moreover, Modern Library editions had a stylish appearance and durable hardcovers – unlike paperbacks that were meant to be thrown away after reading.

Critics failed to distinguish between the Modern Library and paperback series because both published a diverse range of titles without dividing the “high” from the “low.” In 1948, for example, the New American Library reprinted Thomas B. Dewey’s *As Good as Dead* (number 663 in the series), Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist* (number 664) and Mickey Spillane’s first novel, *I, the Jury* (number 699) under its Signet imprint. Dewey and Spillane belonged to the same hard-boiled school that Macdonald and other postwar critics despised. Spillane was often singled out as the representative of the worst kind of detective fiction – full of violence and sex, and

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43 Pocket Books were priced at 25 cents in 1939, while Modern Library books sold for 95 cents.
45 Hardcovers had replaced limp leatherette bindings in 1929. Modern Library bindings were made of stiffer balloon cloth until 1939, and linen cloth over stiff cardboard until 1962.
46 The Signet imprint “was used to designate quality fiction, personal adventure, and reference books” (Tebbel 374).
written only for monetary gain.\textsuperscript{47} This unflattering reputation stemmed not only from Spillane’s unheard-of commercial success, but also from the lurid covers of the paperback editions of his novels. The 1948 Signet edition of \textit{I, the Jury} thus pictured a blonde woman undressing in front of the detective. Similarly, the cover of \textit{Portrait of the Artist} showed a young female exposed to the male gaze (Figure 4-6).\textsuperscript{48} The New American Library made no distinction between Spillane and Joyce: \textit{I, the Jury} and \textit{Portrait of the Artist} were both sold to the mass market with sexy covers and sensational blurbs (“Passion, Crime, and Suspense;” “The Popular Masterpiece by the Author of \textit{Ulysses}”).\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{covers.png}
\caption{Covers, New American Library, Signet Imprint (1948). Illustrators: Robert Jonas (Left and Center), Lu Kimmel (Right)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{47} See Rolo and La Farge. For recent scholarship on Spillane, see Stanfield 44-73.
\textsuperscript{48} On the links between modernism, obscenity and censorship, see Pease and Parkes.
\textsuperscript{49} For more on the ways in which paperback publishers marketed modernist writers, see Earle. Davis’s study of the “paperbacking of America” is also useful. For more on the New American Library, see Bonn and Tebbel.
Both the New American Library and the Modern Library positioned themselves as quality series that published a diverse selection of titles.\textsuperscript{50} In 1953, the same year when Macdonald published his essay on mass culture, a major department store in Chicago thus announced the arrival of a “complete stock” of Modern Library books. “How Many of the Best of the World’s ‘Best’ Books Have You Read?” asked the advertisement, above a list of over 200 Modern Library books listed by their number. \textit{Fourteen Great Detective Stories} and \textit{Portrait of the Artist} were still in print, and appeared in this order on the advertisement.\textsuperscript{51}

Macdonald strongly criticized this kind of “homogenized culture.” In “A Theory of Mass Culture,” he wrote:

\begin{quote}
Like nineteenth-century capitalism, Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and \textit{dissolving all cultural distinctions}. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture, after another American achievement, the homogenization process that distributes the globules of cream evenly throughout the milk instead of allowing them to float separately on top. It thus destroys all values, since value judgments imply discrimination. Mass Culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody (62, my emphasis).
\end{quote}

For Macdonald, “homogenized” institutions reduced culture to its lowest-level common denominator. He gave the example of the magazine \textit{Life}, which typically featured “nine color pages of Renoirs plus a memoir by his son, followed by a full-page picture of a roller-skating horse” (62). Drawing on Marx’s analysis of the destructive power of capitalism, Macdonald

\textsuperscript{50} According to Tebbel, NAL’s ambition was to specialize in “quality paperbacks” well before the appearance of Anchor books and other “higher priced trade lines” (374).
\textsuperscript{51} Advertisement for the Fair (Department Store). \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} 10 Nov. 1953: 6.
condemned the disappearance of cultural categories and value judgments. No art form was sacred any more, and all that was solid had melted into air.

The Modern Library, which had exemplified the democratized print culture of the interwar period, was now condemned for being too democratic. For postwar critics, institutions such as the Modern Library and the paperback series had destroyed the romantic aspiration to cultural greatness. By mixing Joyce with detective writers, these institutions sent out the message that no work was greater than another. In “Masterpieces as Cartoons,” an essay published in Partisan Review, Delmore Schwartz wrote: “even when a reader goes from James M. Cain to William Faulkner and James Joyce because they are available in pocket book form for twenty-five cents, most readers who come to Faulkner and Joyce by means of pocket books do not know the difference between James M. Cain and James Joyce or Dashiell Hammett and William Faulkner; and some of the time they do not remember the names of the authors, no matter how many of their works they read” (52-3). For Schwartz, the failure to distinguish between great modernist writers and hard-boiled hacks such as Cain or Hammett exemplified the disappearance of taste levels, and the triumph of a relativist mass culture.

This chapter has argued that in the late 1920s, literary modernism was increasingly intertwined with popular fiction. In the early years of the decade, Joyce, Stein and Woolf were already well-known figures, often discussed in the mainstream press, but their texts were published by small presses and obscure little magazines. In other words, many Americans who read reviews about Joyce, Stein and Woolf had never read anything by these writers. This changed in the mid-1920s, when commercial publishers realized that modernist texts could, in the right format, make a profit. By the late 1920s, the literary field was increasingly characterized by the blurring of cultural categories. Dashiell Hammett was both a pulp fiction writer and a
distinguished author published by Knopf. Modernist writings by Woolf and Joyce reached a large audience. In 1928, Harcourt, Brace advertised Woolf’s *Orlando* in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, a mainstream periodical. “Now She Can Be Popular!,” declared the advertisement. Woolf could certainly be described as “popular” in 1928, the year when the Modern Library published *Mrs. Dalloway*. An article in the *English Journal* observed that “even at its most obscure her work is interesting, and at its best it is more exciting than a good detective story” (Bullett 794). Readers did not have to choose between *Mrs. Dalloway* and detective stories, since both were available in the Modern Library. Modernist texts thus coexisted with “popular” literature in the literary marketplace of the late 1920s. Mainstream institutions, such as the Modern Library and the book clubs, attempted to educate their audience in appreciating “good” literature and blurred the distinction between “highbrow” modernist texts and popular fiction. Only after the Second World War did modernist literature start to be seen as an elite production available to a handful of sophisticated readers, a view dominant until the 1990s and the emergence of the New Modernist Studies.

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Chapter 5 - Woolf in the Modern Library: Bridging the Gap between Academics and Common Readers

From 1928 to 1948, the Modern Library published an edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, with an introduction that Virginia Woolf had written especially for the series. This introduction is the only commentary of its sort that she wrote for any of her works. Woolf often insisted that readers should “take no advice”\(^1\) on what and how to read, and yet she was willing to explain her work to a large audience of American readers – both common readers and academics. Indeed, the twenty-year period when *Mrs. Dalloway* was kept on the Modern Library list saw an unprecedented democratization of higher education. The Modern Library targeted the expanding population of students and their instructors, as well as all those who wanted to keep abreast of contemporary literary developments. The introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway* shows that Woolf was eager to participate in the new middlebrow culture exemplified by the Modern Library and other institutions that mediated between the “high” and the “low.” My central argument is that the Modern Library allowed Woolf not only to widen her audience, but also to cross the gap between common readers and academics (at least until the establishment of a great divide between the intellectuals and the masses after the Second World War).

While scholars have traditionally viewed Woolf as a writer of highbrow texts published by the Hogarth Press for a limited audience, a new wave of criticism has recently explored the interactions between Woolf and mainstream culture. In *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (2003), Melba Cuddy-Keane presents Woolf as “an advocate for both democratic

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\(^1\)“The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice.” Woolf, “How Should One Read a Book?” [1932] (Clarke V: 572-84). The essay was first published in the *Yale Review* of Oct. 1926 and considerably revised for the second edition of *The Common Reader*. 

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inclusiveness and intellectual education” (1). For Cuddy-Keane, Woolf can be seen as a highbrow writer eager to engage with a large audience without compromising her intellectual ideals. Although Cuddy-Keane rightly notes that “the ‘brow’ words come into currency at the beginning of the twentieth century, moving quickly from innocent description to emotionally charged slogans of battle” (18), she takes Woolf’s self-identification as a “highbrow” as her starting point, without seriously questioning the cultural baggage that comes with such a label.

Unlike Cuddy-Keane, I do not view Woolf as a “democratic highbrow,” “concerned about making highbrow intellectual culture available to all” (13, 2). Woolf certainly defined herself as a “highbrow,” but the cultural context was very different in England and in the United States. As we will see later, at the time when the “Battle of the Brows” was raging in England, Americans intellectuals had little interest in separating “high” and “low” cultural forms. While the expression “democratic highbrow” suggests that Woolf was ready to engage with a large audience, it reinforces the idea of a great divide between elite and popular cultures. Woolf’s participation in the Modern Library, a series which published all kinds of texts, exemplifies her positioning as a democratic writer who wrote for the intelligent Common Reader. Like Dorothy Canfield Fisher and other writers who have been described as “middlebrow,” Woolf tirelessly promoted her pedagogical message, and the Modern Library offered her an institutional base to popularize her ideas in America.

My point is not that Woolf should be viewed as a “middlebrow writer” (a problematic label, as noted in the introduction). Instead, I am interested in a “transatlantic Woolf” who took advantage of the different opportunities offered in the English and in the American markets. In England, Woolf constantly had to navigate between her highbrow persona and her ambition to reach the common reader. In the United States, however, Woolf could forget about her image as the Queen of Bloomsbury and concentrate on her pedagogical agenda, focused on a
“collaborative writer-reader relationship” (Daugherty 162). There were no American equivalents of J. B. Priestley or Q. D. Leavis to ridicule her as a snobbish highbrow, patronizing towards the middle class. Only in the United States could Woolf achieve her ambition of “a dialogic rather than an authoritarian relation between writer and reader” (Cuddy-Keane 2).

This chapter is organized into three parts. Few scholars have paid attention to the ways in which Woolf’s novels were published, marketed, sold, and read in the United States. The first section addresses this gap by focusing on Woolf’s presence in the American market in 1928, and her attempt to address both common readers and academics in the introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Put differently, I look at Woolf’s engagement with the vast middlebrow sphere that had become dominant in the United States in the late 1920s. The second section replaces Woolf’s self-identification as a “highbrow” writer in the English context of the late 1920s/early 1930s. The last section moves on to the postwar period, at the time when the Woolf titles were dropped from the Modern Library list. Woolf’s celebration of the common reader did not fit well with an intellectual context that valued the professional and dismissed the masses.

**1928: Bridging the Gap between Common Readers and Academics**

As we have seen in Chapter 4, nineteen twenty-eight was an important year in the history of modernism, characterized by the migration of modernist texts from small-scale institutions (little magazines and small presses) to larger-scale enterprises. In October 1928, the publisher Harcourt, Brace released the first American edition of *Orlando* and marketed Woolf as a bestselling writer. An advertisement in *Publishers’ Weekly* thus declared: “Two weeks ago we said that Virginia Woolf’s ORLANDO was a work of genius. We are now advertising it as a
literary masterpiece and as a POPULAR book.” Woolf’s latest novel was presented as a turning point in her career - no longer a coterie writer, she could now reach a larger readership:

Virginia Woolf's previous audience, though small, has been enthusiastic. It’s easy to sell ORLANDO to them. But here is the real chance to increase her audience - her first popular book; perfect in its craftsmanship, it is a knowing, witty, entertaining volume. Before publication, it sold more than MRS. DALLOWAY sold in the first six months.2

Here, Orlando is opposed to Mrs. Dalloway – a novel that had attracted the attention of a small audience when it was first published. Harcourt, Brace ordered a first printing of 2,100 copies of Mrs. Dalloway in May 1925, three times fewer copies than the first printing of Orlando in October 1928. During the first five years after publication, Harcourt, Brace printed 6,850 copies of Mrs. Dalloway, and 14,950 copies of Orlando (Kirkpatrick and Clarke 39, 63). Despite Woolf’s claims that Orlando had been written as a “joke,” it was taken seriously and sold over a long period of time.3

Alfred Harcourt and Donald Brace advertised the book not only in Publishers’ Weekly, but also in widely circulated periodicals such as the Saturday Review of Literature. The publishers tried to catch the attention of readers with bold slogans such as: “Now She Can Be Popular!” The dichotomy between Woolf-the-coterie-writer and Woolf-the-popular-writer was once again emphasized:

3 Woolf to Donald Brace, 16 July 1928 (Nicolson and Trautmann III: 513).
For years Virginia Woolf has been celebrated by the foremost critics of this country and England as the most distinguished living writer of English prose. But her unusual method of writing fiction, however brilliant, has heretofore necessarily limited her audience. Today she has produced a book, at once direct and colorful, which transcends in its amazing virtuosity any work of fiction of recent years.4

Woolf’s style was described as both a “brilliant” trademark and a limit to her popularity. But with Orlando, the publishers were confident that ordinary readers would discover “the most distinguished living writer of English prose.” Harcourt, Brace tried to convince the growing professional-managerial class that they, too, could read and enjoy Orlando, and that Woolf herself wanted to enlarge her audience: if not, why would she have altered her style to make it more accessible?

The marketing campaign for Orlando epitomized the triumph of middlebrow culture. Woolf was presented as the best and the brightest English writer, but also as a down-to-earth craftswoman who cared about her readers. Harcourt, Brace sold a product that was neither “high,” nor “low,” neither too difficult, nor too shallow. And it was precisely because Orlando belonged to the vast middle ground that it could have a lasting impact (“In our opinion, it will become a classic,” as one advertisement stated).5 Harcourt, Brace adopted a similar strategy with The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas by marketing Gertrude Stein as a previously experimental writer who could now widen her audience (Turner 111-43).

Unlike Harcourt, Brace, the Modern Library did not present Woolf and Stein as difficult writers who had finally decided to eschew elitism and write in a clear style. Instead, the Modern Library eagerly published less-accessible texts such as Mrs. Dalloway and Three Lives. It is not

coincidental that *Mrs. Dalloway* was reprinted in the series only a few weeks after the first publication of *Orlando*, and that the Modern Library edition of *Three Lives* appeared at the same time as *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Although Bennett Cerf repeatedly claimed that the Modern Library only selected texts that had been “a big success in the original higher-priced edition,”⁶ neither *Mrs. Dalloway* nor *Three Lives* had sold well when they were first released. The first edition of *Three Lives*, published by the Grafton Press in 1909, sold fewer than 100 of the 500 bound copies in the six months following its publication (Conrad 216). The Modern Library reprinted *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Three Lives*, in December 1928 and September 1933 respectively, because of the growing renown of Woolf and Stein. Cerf and his colleagues anticipated that the increased media coverage would stimulate an interest in Woolf’s and Stein’s earlier works, even if these works were perceived as more difficult.

The year 1928 can be seen as the pinnacle of Woolf’s career: she received the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse for *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* sold to a wide audience, and she began work on *A Room of One’s Own*. For Bonnie Kime Scott, the year 1928 marks an “an active, exploratory period, when it was clear that women writers were developing a new sense of the literary world and setting their own objectives” (I: 183). Woolf did not wait until 1928 to set her own objectives: her private income allowed her to write pretty much what she liked, and to publish it under her own imprint. But with the success of *Orlando*, Woolf had the satisfaction to see her audience increase significantly. In her diary, she recorded her impressions as a newly famous writer who earned a comfortable income: “my room is secure . . . I cannot at this moment very seriously doubt that I shall earn more, this next 5 years, than ever before.”⁷ Although Woolf did not reach the mass market, she now had a significant readership that made her attractive to

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⁶ Cerf to Tom Coward, 15 Oct. 1942, box 136, RH.
⁷ Entry of 18 Dec. 1928 (Bell and McNeillie III: 212).
“list” publishing firms interested in long-term profit. In short, Woolf had become “a sound investment,” as *Time* magazine later declared (“Books”).

For the Modern Library, which selected books that could sell over a long period of time, Woolf was indeed a good investment. Like *Orlando*, *Mrs. Dalloway* was marketed as a classic and a bestseller. An advertisement for the Modern Library declared: “The titles chosen for publication . . . have passed the test of time and criticism, and belong forever to the reading public.” In fact, many Modern Library books were too recent to have “passed the test of time.” *Mrs. Dalloway* was first published in 1925, just three years before the Modern Library reprint. The series employed the terms “classic” and “bestseller” as marketing categories to suggest literary respectability combined with excitement and freshness. Introductions by famous writers participated in the same strategy to regenerate reprints, to transform “old” texts into publishing sensations.

![Figure 5-1: Dust Jackets, Modern Library ed. of *Mrs. Dalloway* (Left: 1937; Right: Design by Valenti Angelo, c. 1942)](image)

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It is not surprising that the Modern Library used Woolf’s introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway* as a selling point on advertisements and dust jackets (Figure 5-1). However, it is surprising that Woolf accepted to write this introduction in the first place. Indeed, Woolf believed that readers should be free to read all kinds of books, and to read without guidance. Woolf’s relationship with the higher education system was a complex one. In a recent article, Christine Kenyon Jones and Anna Snaith have shown that she “studied at King’s College [London] Ladies’ Department for five years between 1897 and 1901, between the ages of 15 and 19” and “reached degree-level standard in some of her studies” (4). However, Woolf repeatedly claimed she was self-educated, perhaps because she preferred “to think of herself as an autodidact and felt that her real learning had taken place outside institutional walls” (40). In the draft of a talk Woolf gave to the girls at Hayes Court School in 1926, she begins: “In the first place I am going to confess a crime – not my own doing however – I have never been to school” (Daugherty 161). As a self-proclaimed autodidact, Woolf was highly suspicious of professors and professional critics. Writing at a time when literature had recently become institutionalized in university departments, she claimed that reading belonged to the literary commons, not to the narrow world of academia.

In “Hours in a Library,” an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in November 1916, Woolf distinguished between scholars and common readers: “to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill what suits us to consider the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading” (McNeillie II: 55). The same distrust of specialists can be found in “How Should One Read a Book?,” an essay that originated in the talk that Woolf gave at Hayes Court School. After celebrating “independence” as “the most important quality that a reader can possess,” Woolf claimed: “To admit authorities, however heavily furred and gowned, into our libraries and let them tell us how to read, what to read, what value to place upon what we read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breadth of those sanctuaries”
Literary critics, whether they worked in universities or for the press, were never to be trusted because they read for a living, not for their own pleasure. Thus, Woolf encouraged her fellow writers to pay more attention to common readers than to critics: “If behind the erratic gunfire of the press the author felt that there was another kind of criticism, the opinion of people reading for the love of reading, slowly and unprofessionally, and judging with great sympathy and yet with great severity, might this not improve the quality of his work?” (582, my emphasis).

A few months after addressing the pupils at Hayes Court School, Woolf published an essay in Vogue, “The Professor of Life” (later reprinted as “Walter Raleigh”). She presented Raleigh as a popular, but arrogant professor who had no real love of reading: “There is nothing to suggest that literature was a matter of profound interest to him when he was not lecturing about it” (85). For Woolf, professional critics viewed literature as a means, not as an end in itself. They knew how to teach literature and how to write literary essays and books, but they had no passion for reading and sharing their opinions in a non-professional context: “when one looks for the unprofessional talk, the talk which is talked among friends when business hours are over, one is bewildered and disappointed” (84, my emphasis). In short, Woolf used the term “unprofessional” to encompass many positive qualities of common readers: their genuine passion for literature, their disinterestedness, their autonomy and refusal to submit to the authority of professors.

In October 1928, Woolf gave two lectures at Cambridge, which she later revised and published as A Room of One’s Own. She described the university system as a bastion of male power, essentially hostile to women: “Fellows and scholars only allowed on the grass! Ladies not admitted without a letter of introduction!” (93). For Woolf, the exclusion of women from rare book libraries and other academic places epitomized the patriarchal organization of the university system. And yet, in December, just one month after the lectures, the Modern Library edition of Mrs. Dalloway was published and sold to the academic market. So why did Woolf accept to write
this introduction? Why did she endorse the role of the professor explaining a text to inexperienced readers?

In fact, Woolf did not endorse that role: her introduction is essentially a criticism of introductions. She articulates her argument in three points. First, for Woolf, the meaning should come from the text itself, not from paratextual elements. It is pointless to explain something that should be clear already. Second, the book is no longer the property of the author once it is published. The authority moves from the writer to the reader, who becomes the supreme judge. In other words, the author has no privileged voice – he or she is just one reader among others. Finally, introductions that give some biographical elements fail to shed light on the text because they are too short. According to Woolf, “not a page or two of preface but a volume or two of autobiography” would be necessary to add significant insight to a text.9

Although Woolf’s introduction is rather unconventional, it also contains some elements of explanations on the text. But even when she reveals her intentions as a writer, she frames the discussion with reference to readers:

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\ldots \text{even so when everything had been brought to the surface, it would still be for the reader to decide what was relevant and what not. Of Mrs. Dalloway then one can only bring to light at the moment a few scraps, of little importance or none perhaps; as that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party. Such scraps are offered humbly to the reader in the hope that like other odds and ends they may come in useful (549, my emphasis).}
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\[9 \text{Woolf, “An Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway” (McNeillie IV: 549).}\]
Here, the reader is explicitly presented as the supreme authority. Neither the writer, nor the professional reader, should influence the reader in his or her evaluation of a text. In other words, Woolf argued for a deprofessionalization of literary interpretation – and she made that point to an audience of students, professors and other Modern Library readers. She did not try to raise common readers to the level of professionals. Instead, she downplayed the authority of professionals and she treated all readers – including herself – as common readers.

Academics who commented on Woolf’s introduction shortly after it was published in the Modern Library seemed to have been more interested in the explanatory elements on Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith, than in the discussion on common readers. In *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique* (1932), Harvard professor Joseph Warren Beach reiterated Woolf’s claim that Septimus had been designed as Clarissa’s “double” (431). The same claim was discussed by numerous scholars, including John Hawley Roberts in a 1934 article in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. After describing Woolf as “the reigning goddess of contemporary English letters,” Roberts declared, without apparent irony: “Now specialists begin to write interpretations, offering to the ‘common reader’ guides and suggestions toward comprehension” (587). As an academic, Roberts welcomed this increase in Woolf scholarship: common readers needed specialists to better understand the text. Professional readers such as Roberts or Beach focused on the few sentences of the Modern Library introduction that offered a glimpse of explanation on the novel. They viewed Woolf’s preface as an interesting window on the creative process, not as a radical statement for the independence of the common reader.

As Michael Kaufmann and others have pointed out, Woolf’s view on professionalism was radically opposed to that of T. S. Eliot. In two articles published in 1918 in the *Egoist*, Eliot envisioned an elite of creative writers who would also be professional critics. For Eliot, “a great deal of critical writing is aimless appreciation” suitable only for “a University Extension
audience.” Eliot contrasted this feminine sphere of pseudo-criticism with the masculine domain of professional criticism that took “literature seriously.”10 Eliot’s defense of professionalism should be read in a broader cultural context of professionalization of literary studies, both in England and in the United States. This impulse aimed at, in Gail McDonald’s words, “freeing the humanities from the taint of gentility and femininity” (viii). As Kaufmann notes, Woolf’s and Eliot’s opposite views on professionalism stemmed in part from the different audiences they addressed (137-8). While Eliot wrote for The Egoist, a little magazine that never had more than four hundred subscribers, Woolf’s essays appeared in widely circulated periodicals (the Times Literary Supplement, Vogue, Time and Tide) and large-scale publishing enterprises such as the Modern Library. Woolf saw the ideal writer (and critic) not as a towering authority figure, but as a modest individual who had much to learn from untutored readers.

Woolf’s unconventional introduction fit well with the Modern Library, a series that was rather ambiguous towards the professionalization of literary studies. Before the Second World War, the Modern Library owners preferred to commission introductions to writers and journalists, rather than to literary scholars. One obvious explanation is that few scholars specialized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. But even when the Modern Library reprinted older classics, introductions were generally commissioned to writers, not to professors. For example, the Modern Library edition of Tobias Smollett’s Humphry Clinker (1929) included an introduction by the decadent writer Arthur Machen. Bennett Cerf had hoped to include Machen’s The Great God Pan in the Modern Library, but the story was already published by Knopf.11 Introductions were therefore a way to add prestigious writers to the Modern Library list, even if their most famous texts were not available for reprint.

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11 Bennett Cerf’s diary, entry of 1 July 1926, box 11, BC.
It seems paradoxical that the Modern Library targeted the academic market while at the same time eschewing the authority of literary scholars. In fact, Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer wanted to widen the market for the Modern Library beyond academia. Students, but also clerks and other low-level white collars, could buy a Modern Library book for only 95 cents. Virginia Woolf’s appeal to common readers was coherent with the positioning of the Modern Library as a cheap collection of classics for a wide audience.

The Modern Library was the first publisher’s series to market Woolf as a classic writer. Ironically, Woolf disliked people who kept their “bound volumes of the classics behind plate glass” (“Middlebrow,” 116). And yet, in 1928, she also wrote an introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (Figure 5-2). By that time, she had become what Pierre Bourdieu calls a “consecrated writer,” someone who had “power to consecrate and to win assent” by writing a preface or a review (42). She received 13 guineas for this introduction – but that was her last contribution to the Oxford World’s Classics. From the 1930s onwards, Leonard Woolf refused all requests to reissue his wife’s works in the World’s Classics (Hammond 111 n77). Perhaps because he associated publisher’s series with a debased middlebrow sphere, Leonard Woolf seems to have been reluctant to allow reprinted editions in cheap series. In 1936, Everyman’s Library planned to issue a Sigmund Freud anthology “only to be blocked by Leonard Woolf, who controlled the rights for the Hogarth Press” (Rose 134-5). Everyman waited until 1938 to publish *To the Lighthouse* (one year after the Modern Library issued an edition of the same book). In other words, the Modern Library had little competition for Woolf titles. From 1928 to 1948, the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* was the cheapest
in the American market. Woolf’s novel had successfully migrated from small press to mainstream publishing enterprise, from an elite readership to a large audience.

![Figure 5-2: Oxford World's Classics Edition of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Introduction by Virginia Woolf (1928)](image)

With *Orlando* and the reprint edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf was now solidly anchored in the middlebrow sphere. Neither “high” nor “low,” her texts appealed to the expanding middle class. When the New-York publisher Appleton released André Maurois’s *Atmosphere of Love* in 1929, advertisements featured a blurb by Woolf, “the famous English author.” That Woolf could be described as “famous” in the late 1920s – well before *Time* magazine chose her for its cover – tells us a lot about Woolf’s positioning in the American literary field. Like Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Willa Cather, Woolf was seen as a renowned writer who addressed a wide range of readers.

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12 In Jan. 1931, Harcourt, Brace published a Uniform Edition of *Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse, Jacob's Room, Night And Day* and *The Voyage Out*. Each title was sold for $1.35. This was significantly cheaper than the first edition, but still more expensive than Modern Library books.

Virginia Woolf, a “Democratic Highbrow”?  

We have become so accustomed to viewing Woolf as the archetypical highbrow, that we forget that it was not necessarily the way readers (especially American readers) saw her, or even the way she defined herself (at least until the 1930s). In its very essence, the term “highbrow” suggests a position of superiority over the other “brows” – a position difficult to reconcile with Woolf’s democratic ambitions. Woolf’s belated coming-out as a highbrow should be read in the heated context of the “Battle of the Brows.” In this section, I show that Woolf’s reputation as an arch-highbrow is the product of a particular time and place: England, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. I then turn to recent scholarship on the links between Woolf and middlebrow culture. Although these studies have revealed the extent of Woolf’s engagement with widely circulated magazines and other publishing enterprises, they have continued to portray Woolf as a “highbrow” writer without seriously questioning this label.

In his essay “High, Low, Broad” (1927), J. B. Priestley attacked the highbrow as a snobbish type “convinced that no musical comedy could ever amuse him for half an hour.” For Priestley, both the highbrow and the lowbrow “are sheeplike, with no minds and wills of their own, and may always be observed trailing about in herds” (25). Only the “Broadbrow” shows his individuality by favoring cultural works on their own merit, whatever the label attached to them:

If you can carry with you your sense of values, your appreciation of the human scene, your critical faculty to Russian dramas, variety shows, football matches, epic poems, grand opera, race meetings, old churches, new town halls, musical comedies, picture galleries, boxing booths, portfolios of etchings, bar-parlours, film shows, symphony concerts, billiard matches, dance halls, detective stories, tragedies in blank verse, farces, and even studio teas and literary parties, and enjoy to the full what there is there worth enjoying, giving even the Devil his due, then you are a Broadbrow (26-7).
Priestley’s enumeration of all the cultural forms enjoyed by the Broadbrow conveyed a sense of open-mindedness and tolerance. There was clearly a class element in his celebration of the Broadbrow, as opposed to the snobbish highbrow and uneducated lowbrow. Priestley had been the first in his family to go to university (his father was a schoolmaster and the son of an illiterate mill worker). As an older student at Cambridge after the war, he felt self-conscious about his Yorkshire accent and social background. Although he went on to have a successful career, Priestley resented the metropolitan attitude towards writers from the provinces (Cook), and he ceaselessly attacked Virginia Woolf as a narrow-minded highbrow, born into the literary aristocracy and intolerant towards any writer who did not share her background and worldview (Gale 18-20).

Leonard Woolf responded to such attacks in his essay “Hunting the Highbrow” (1927). According to him, the highbrow was not the slave to fashion described by Priestley, but a daring and enlightened individual “whose standards are different from the majority” and who can see beyond passing popular trends: “It is indisputable that by far the greater number of books which live and become classics and are universally recognised as masterpieces are books which are good stuff by the standards of highbrows, not by those of the great public” (83). This is not to say that the highbrow was necessarily cut off from the rest of society. Leonard Woolf thus described Homer, Shakespeare and Dickens as highbrows who wrote for the largest readership. In other words, some bestsellers could be favored by the masses as well as the intellectual elite. Leonard Woolf therefore attempted to cross the boundary between highbrow and popular, while at the same time lamenting the persecution of the intellectual elite.

It was only in 1932 that Virginia Woolf followed her husband’s steps in defending the highbrows. The BBC had just broadcast a series of talks, including Priestley’s polemical “To a
High-Brow.” Priestley’s talk was reproduced in John O’London’s Weekly, a periodical with a circulation of around 100,000 per week (Wild 59). Priestley reiterated his now familiar attacks against the highbrow as a pedantic “slave of fashion” unable to take pleasure in anything popular (354). Unlike Leonard Woolf, Priestley viewed Shakespeare not as a highbrow, but as a victim of the highbrows of his time, who preferred more obscure and difficult dramatists. As Priestley put it, “the only people the highbrows discover for us are queer second-raters, those odd artists who have a special appeal for a small number of people” (354). Priestley concluded his address with an appeal to shun both high and lowbrows: “Be a man. Be a broadbrow” (356). For Priestley, highbrows and lowbrows were unmanly creatures, incapable of expressing their own opinions independently of fashions. The broadbrow, on the contrary, had all the qualities traditionally associated with masculinity: self-reliance, confidence, and audacity.

Unsurprisingly, Woolf rejected Priestley’s gendered hierarchy of the “brows.” In a letter that she addressed, but never sent, to the editor of the New Statesman and Nation, Woolf defined herself as a “highbrow” who despised the “middlebrows.”\(^{14}\) It is of course significant that she used the term “middlebrow” instead of “broadbrow,” which suggests open-mindedness. For Woolf, the middlebrow occupies a precarious place, “betwixt and between” the high and the low (“Middlebrow” 115). The archetypical middlebrow is the professor of English, who makes “money in teaching and in writing books about Shakespeare” with no real pleasure (117). Thinking of Walter Raleigh, Woolf attacked those who “call both Shakespeare and Wordsworth equally ‘Bill’” (116). This typical middlebrow tendency to downplay greatness is coupled with an apparent respect for the literary canon (hence the classics kept in a display cabinet). Middlebrows are described as profoundly hypocritical individuals, who pretend to be interested in art and

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\(^{14}\) This letter was later published under the title “Middlebrow” in The Death of the Moth.
culture but are in fact driven by social ambition. In other words, middlebrows think that buying
cultural products and learning how to be cultivated will allow them to increase their social status.
Neither the highbrow nor the lowbrow shares this obsession with the right kind of cultural goods
and the right ways to consume them. In short, Woolf reversed Priestley’s rhetoric by portraying
highbrows as independent and carefree, and middlebrows as class-conscious and materialistic. By
1932, then, cultural categories had solidified to the point where a self-identified highbrow like
Woolf could write in her letter: “If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat or half-crushed
worm dares call me ‘middlebrow’ I will take my pen and stab him, dead” (119).

Following Woolf’s injunction, most scholars continue to view her as an archetypical
highbrow writer, without questioning a label which dates from the interwar period. Even recent
studies of Woolf’s engagement with the middlebrow sphere take her highbrow identity for
granted. For example, the essays collected in *Leonard and Virginia Woolf: The Hogarth Press
and the Networks of Modernism* show the Woolfs’ “involvement with networks of middlebrow
writers and readers and their engagement in debates over mainstream cultural issues,” thus
tracing a movement from high to middle (Southworth 17). Instead of challenging the association
between Virginia Woolf and highbrow culture, this kind of approach tends to consolidate the
Great Divide between cultural categories. In particular, Melissa Sullivan’s essay, “The
Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press: Rose Macaulay, E. M. Delafield and Cultural Hierarchies in
Interwar Britain,” states that “middlebrow culture was aligned with popular films and periodicals,
best-sellers, leading commercial publishing houses, the middle class and literature that was
simultaneously intellectual and pleasurable” (53). Yet, Woolf herself wrote for popular
magazines such as *Vogue*, she was published by the commercial publishing firm Harcourt, Brace,
and some of her books sold widely to a middle-class audience. In other words, Woolf eagerly
participated in middlebrow culture. This is something that Sullivan is close to recognizing when
she writes that “a heterogeneous modernism and hybrid middlebrow could overlap and work alongside each other” (70). But Woolf continues to be associated with a highbrow modernist sphere (albeit a heterogeneous one) while Macaulay and Delafield are said to belong to a hybrid middlebrow. Although Sullivan shows the fluidity between the high and the middle, she does not challenge Woolf’s place as an arch-highbrow.

Sullivan’s work participates in a new wave of scholarship that examines the links between modernist and middlebrow cultures. The underlying assumption is that the category “modernism” has been stretched to its limits, and that the expansion towards less avant-garde works cannot go on infinitely. Whereas it might make sense to view Harlem Renaissance writers as “modernist,” it is more problematic to expand the category towards realist novelists such as E. M. Delafield. In this theoretical framework, each writer is assigned to a specific cultural category (Woolf to the high, Delafield to the middle, Edgar Wallace to the low). This positioning does not prevent some fluidity across the categories. For example, in her essay on “Virginia Woolf and the Middlebrow Market of the Familiar Essay,” Caroline Pollentier shows that although Woolf-the-highbrow was suspicious of the essay market, she published in widely circulated women’s magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* (145). Similarly, Catherine Clay points out that Woolf and Edith Sitwell wrote for the feminist periodical *Time and Tide*, which also featured texts by E. M. Delafield and Winifred Holtby (75). In her study of the same periodical, Sullivan notes: “Woolf used her own highbrow status both to show that the cultural capital of readers and writers continually fluctuated across the supposed ‘great divide’ and to create a fluid and shifting remapping of the literary public sphere” (“The ‘Keystone Public,’” 177). Once again, Woolf is presented as a highbrow who made incursions into middlebrow territory.

Labeling Woolf a highbrow is problematic, in part because this term is so closely intertwined with social class. It is important to note that the word “highbrow” was used by
Woolf’s critics to dismiss her not only as a pretentious intellectual, but also as a member of the English social elite. In her letter to the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, Woolf complained that her attackers ceaselessly focused on her association with “Bloomsbury”: “a great novelist, a rare and enviable combination, always calls me a highbrow when he condescends to notice my work in a great newspaper; and, further, always finds space to inform not only myself, who know it already, but the whole British Empire, who hang on his words, that I live in Bloomsbury” (“Middlebrow,” 113). Although Woolf satirized this tendency “to add the postal address of the writer” when reviewing a book (113), she knew perfectly well that Bloomsbury was not only a nice neighborhood in central London, but also a metonymy for a closely-knit circle of influential men and women. For literary critics such as F. R. Leavis and his wife Q. D. Leavis, who both came from middle-class backgrounds, “Bloomsbury” “came to epitomize all that was modish, arrogant and sciolistic in the ‘minority culture’ of inter-war England” (Mulhern 122).

In her review of *Three Guineas* (1938) published in *Scrutiny*, Q. D. Leavis criticized Woolf’s socially privileged amateurism and defended a conception of the educated class based on professionalism. As a young academic who had recently published her PhD dissertation under the title *Fiction and the Reading Public*, Q. D. Leavis had little patience for those who were born into the intellectual elite (Woolf famously described herself as “the daughter of an educated man”).

Speaking “as a member of a class of educated women Mrs. Woolf has apparently never heard of,” Q. D. Leavis viewed the opposition between amateurism and professionalism in class terms: “[Woolf] wants to penalize specialists in the interests of amateurs, and so her university, in spite of a promise that learning should be studied there for its own sake, could only be a breeding-

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ground for boudoir scholarship . . . and belletrism” (383, 386). The unprofessional reader is associated with the “idle, charming, cultivated” society hostess, a type that contrasts with the hard-working professional (388). For Q. D. Leavis, the issues raised in *Three Guineas* (education reform, peace advocacy and feminism) should be tackled by “a competent social psychologist”: “Certainly there is no longer any use in this field of speculation for the non-specialist like Mrs. Woolf” (391). In short, Q. D. Leavis reminded her readers (many of them academics) that the fight against sentimentality and amateurism had been won long ago, at the time when the Humanities and Social Sciences were institutionalized following the “scientific” model of the German university. Essayists like Woolf, with their affiliation to the upper-class establishment and their lack of rigorous academic training, had no place in an intellectual community that valued meritocracy and professional expertise.

The Battle of the Brows can thus be read as a class war between, on the one hand, the traditional intellectual elite to which Woolf belonged, and on the other, the new professional-managerial class exemplified by J. B. Priestley and the Leavises. As Francis Mulhern puts it, “by the early 1930s, the national intelligentsia was more numerous, more disparate in social origin and occupational composition, and culturally less homogeneous than before” (9-10). Reviewing Cyril Connolly’s *Enemies of Promise* in 1939, Q. D. Leavis once again criticized the upper-class establishment, in which positions are gained through contacts rather than hard work and personal merit: “you see how it is that these elegant unemployables get into the higher journalism, and even the academic world, and how reputations are made – you have only to get the right people, whom you already know or can get introductions to, to write the right kind of thing about you in the right places” (164). Of course, these comments could apply to Woolf, who had started her career as a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In the same review, Q. D. Leavis celebrated American society and education system, described as classless and meritocratic: “The
advantages Americans enjoy in having no public-school system, no ancient universities and no tradition of a closed literary society run on Civil Service lines, can hardly be exaggerated” (166). For Q. D. Leavis, American intellectuals came from a larger pool of talents than their English counterparts. The idea of an American “Bloomsbury” seemed out of question because only England could produce this level of social reproduction. In short, the different class systems between the two countries largely explain why the Battle of the Brows was fought on the English soil, leaving the United States untouched.

American intellectuals did not share the same kind of anxieties over the “brows” in the 1920s and 1930s, partly because the rise of the professional-managerial class was less contested than in England. Whereas the new class of English critics fought against two enemies (the upper-class literary establishment and the masses), Americans were content with the development of a vast middlebrow sphere, with less distinct “high” and “low.” Of course, the myth of a classless society was far from the reality: F. Scott Fitzgerald might have been a “failure” at Princeton, as James L. W. West III puts it, but his passage there helped him secure a contract with the prestigious publishing firm Charles Scribner’s Sons (“Did F. Scott Fitzgerald” 652). It is fair to say, however, that there was no upper-class literary establishment comparable to that in England. There was no American parallel to Virginia Woolf mocking Winifred Holtby’s uncouthness (“She is the daughter of a Yorkshire farmer and learnt to read, I’m told, while minding the pigs”). And for the American equivalent of the university-educated Holtby or Q. D. Leavis, there was no “Bloomsbury” to overthrow.

Another reason why the Battle of the Brows raged in Britain and not in the United States pertains to the relationship of the universities to commercial enterprises. As Erica Brown and

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16 Woolf to Hugh Walpole, 26 Oct. 1932 (Nicolson and Trautmann V: 114).
Mary Grover note, “in the 1920s, the authority of the English Literature Degree at Cambridge University was predicated on its links to the established authority of the Greek and Latin classics, and the new criticism of I. A. Richards insisted on its kinship to the intellectually respectable field of scientific enquiry” (11). In the United States, the university system was less of an ivory tower and more open to commercial enterprises. As we have seen in the introduction, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Henry Seidel Canby and others had been trained as academics before becoming public educators associated with commercial organizations such as the Book-of-the-Month Club. In short, “the language of democracy, cultural aspiration and social change was readier to hand than it was in Britain, and downright hostility to supposedly ‘middlebrow’ consumers surfaced later in America, after the Second World War” (11).

In the United States, then, Woolf’s celebration of the common reader was read differently. As Beth Rigel Daugherty puts it, “Woolf as a teacher in ‘How Should One Read a Book?’ sets goals students can reach – be an amateur; read for pleasure rather than for knowledge, power, or money; wander around in books, including ones on the rubbish heaps, without method or direction; try to make connections among works and ideas and writers” (166). This pedagogy bore many similarities to the “student-driven, student-centered concept of education” pioneered by John Dewey and others (Lintner). Tim Lintner notes that the Progressive Movement in Education reached a highpoint in America in the 1920s. During this decade, John Erskine was able to implement his Great Books course at Columbia University, with pedagogical objectives resembling Woolf’s pronouncements about the student/reader as a supreme judge. As Rubin points out, Erskine favored small discussion groups in which “instructors were assigned Socratic roles: they were ‘not to lecture nor in any way to behave like professors’ but only to keep ideas flowing by asking questions and prompting debate” (166). Erskine also eschewed the narrow specialization that had so far characterized English literary studies. The instructor’s role was not
to teach undergraduate students the methods of literary analysis (philology, literary history, biography and the like), but rather to invite majors and non-majors to read and discuss the great books that had shaped Western civilization. Erskine’s program relied on the idea that “all books enshrined as ‘great’ were at one time recent publications intended for wide audiences” and that professors of English should treat them as such (165). Likewise, the Modern Library sold classics as bestsellers, as works that were still exciting and challenging.

Woolf’s democratic pedagogy fit well with the context of the Depression, characterized by a huge rise in public investment in education and art programs. “Working through structures parallel to traditional education – such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA) – the federal government constructed schools, helped employ teachers, and offered a wide variety of courses,” as Paula Fass points out (1). With unemployment at record high, education and self-improvement became priorities for institutions and individuals. In 1936, Dale Carnegie published his bestselling self-help book, How to Win Friends & Influence People. In 1937, St. John’s College was established in Annapolis, Maryland, with a “curriculum which consisted solely of reading ‘great books’” (Rubin 189). Random House later signed a contract with St. John’s to publish a number of books used in courses. These texts were all listed in How to Read a Book by Mortimer Adler, a former student of Erskine. Random House’s investment in the Great Books movement complemented its publication of the Modern Library, a series that also aimed to give a liberal education of a sort.

At the time when so many Americans were eager to educate themselves through reading, it is hardly surprising that Woolf’s positive discourse on common readers would have been well

received. Rather than an attack against the new class of professional writers and critics, Woolf’s emphasis on the non-professional reader was seen as a democratic gesture towards a large audience. A review of the Second Common Reader in the New York Times declared: “attempting to be her fellow-worker and accomplice is the one certain way to obtain the greatest amount of enjoyment from this ‘Common Reader,’ for if there is anything that stands out from Virginia Woolf’s pages more than another, it is that the author experienced enjoyment with every line she wrote.” Terms such as “fellow-worker” and “accomplice” evoke a fellowship between reader and writer that would have delighted Woolf. Not only was she described as a distinguished writer, she was also praised for her simplicity and her real love of writing. In April 1937, shortly after the publication of The Years, Time magazine chose Woolf for its cover (Figure 5-3) and described her as “the foremost woman of her day”:

Her books are addressed not to a literary clique but to the Intelligent Common Reader. And the address is written in such a fine and flowing hand that even when it is illegible the hopeful addressee can find some profitable pleasure in puzzling over it. Even her obscurer books have something about them that attracts popular attention, for more than most stylists, she writes about the common gist of things (“Books”).

Nearly ten years after the release of Orlando, Woolf was once again presented as a popular writer who addressed the Intelligent Common Reader. As Edward Bishop points out, “The Years sold thirteen thousand copies in the first six months in Britain and thirty thousand in the United States, where it outranked Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men and ranked sixth on a best-seller list led by Gone with the Wind” (138). According to Time, Woolf’s texts brought “pleasure” to readers,

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because she wrote about the simple facts of life in a way that forced her audience to pay attention. The Woolf described by *Time* bore little resemblance to the Woolf portrayed by Q. D. Leavis. For American reviewers, the author of *Mrs. Dalloway* had been successful at widening her audience beyond a small literary clique, she showed empathy for her reader, and most importantly perhaps, her writing was enjoyable. In short, the “American Woolf” was not a haughty writer patronizing middle-class professionals, but a motherly figure who cared about her readers.

![Time Magazine Cover, April 12, 1937](image)

**Figure 5-3: Time 12 April 1937, Photograph of Woolf by Man Ray**

The Modern Library edition of *To the Lighthouse* was released just a few months after Woolf appeared on the *Time* cover. The *New York Times* presented the book as a “one of Virginia Woolf’s shimmering psychological tours de force”: 

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It is autobiographical in its description of her life in the old house on the west coast of England, where she spent her childhood’s Summers, and of her upbringing in one of the most interesting literary families of England. It is a book for those who prefer beautiful prose to fashionable starkness, character analysis to action or plot.\textsuperscript{19}

Here, Woolf’s privileged background was shown in a positive light. While Q. D. Leavis and others had described Woolf as narrow-minded and cut-off from the rest of society, the \textit{New York Times} saw her upper-class upbringing as an asset: the fact that she had been raised “in one of the most interesting literary families in England” offered a rich source of inspiration for her fiction. The same review also mentioned the Modern Library edition of \textit{Tortilla Flat}, “an amusing, picaresque novel by John Steinbeck, whose more recent ‘Of Mice and Men’ met with such success.” \textit{Tortilla Flat} and \textit{To the Lighthouse} had been released at the same time, with consecutive numbers (216 and 217, respectively). The uniformity of the Modern Library, its democratic appeal, and its refusal to distinguish the high from the low reinforced the Americans’ vision of Woolf as an approachable writer.

Near the end of her life, Woolf wrote the following draft of a letter in response to charges against Bloomsbury:

\begin{quote}
I never went to school or college. My father spent perhaps £100 on my education. When I was a young woman I tried to share the fruits of that very imperfect education with the working classes by teaching literature at Morley College; by holding a Womens Cooperative Guild meeting weekly; and, politically, by working for the vote. It is true I wrote books and some of those books, like the Common Reader, \textit{A Room of One’s Own} and \textit{Three Guineas} . . . have sold many thousand copies. \textit{That is, I did my best to make them reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of
\end{quote}

exquisite and cultivated people. And to some extent I succeeded. (Nicolson and Trautmann VI: 419-20)

If Woolf did succeed in reaching outside a small circle of admirers, it was in part due to the wide circulation of the Modern Library among American readers. The blurring of cultural categories in America allowed Woolf to escape the limitations of her “highbrow” image, and to target a large and diverse audience without risking to lose her cultural capital.

**After the War: Widening the Gap between Academics and Professional Readers**

During and after the Second World War, *Mrs. Dalloway* was consistently more popular than *To the Lighthouse*. In 1941-42, *Mrs. Dalloway* sold four copies to every three of *To the Lighthouse* (Neavill, “Bibliographical Notes and Queries” 4).\(^{20}\) This trend continued after the war, a period characterized by a huge rise in student enrollments, and an increasing number of courses on twentieth-century literature. The Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* was often adopted for use in survey courses at large universities. In 1947 for example, one professor at the University of Wisconsin ordered 1,400 copies of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and another one at the University of Chicago ordered 800 copies of the same book (Neavill, “The Modern Library Series” 402). In the 1940s, *Mrs. Dalloway* sold around 2,800 copies a year.\(^{21}\) If we look at the twenty-year period from 1928 to 1948, *Mrs. Dalloway* sold approximately 61,000 copies

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\(^{21}\) Donald Klopfer to S. Spencer Scott, 28 June 1948, box 9, RH. In this letter, Klopfer estimated that the current stock of 1,400 copies of *Mrs. Dalloway* could be sold in six months if sales volume remained constant.
The Modern Library opened up a significant market for a title that had often been considered “difficult.”

Ironically, the academization of intellectual life criticized by Woolf increased the market for the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*. More and more students read *Mrs. Dalloway* as an assignment rather than something they really wanted to read. And of course, Woolf’s introduction did not fit well with this growing academization. The criticism of professionalization became increasingly marginalized in the postwar context. Even the New York Intellectuals, who cultivated an image of independence towards institutions, gradually came to accept positions in foundations, universities and the publishing industry (Wilford vii). The postwar period was not a time for common readers, deciding by themselves of what they should read. In the Cold War struggle for hearts and minds, the American masses needed guidance towards “a sanitized and idealized version of the national identity for global consumption” (Falk 6). It was a time of increasing opportunities for academics and professional readers. The Modern Library adapted to this new intellectual context by ordering introductions to distinguished academics – rather than writers and journalists.

The leading critic of the postwar period was not Virginia Woolf, but T. S. Eliot, who became enormously influential among New Critics. Eliot’s essays allowed them to combine professionalization with a denunciation of the older forms of literary scholarship such as philological and historical research. In “Criticism, Inc.” (1938), John Crowe Ransom criticized, on the one hand, the scholar who “spend[s] a lifetime in compiling the data of literature and yet

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22 *To the Lighthouse* sold approximately 38,000 copies in the Modern Library, from 1937 to 1948 (Kirkpatrick and Clarke 49).

23 “The academization of the Modern Library began after the Second World War . . . Older introductions were gradually discarded in favor of new introductions commissioned from and directed toward the academic community” (Neavill, “The Modern Library Series and American Cultural Life” 250).
rarely or never commit[s] himself to a literary judgment” (50); and on the other hand, he rejected the generation of critics with generalist inclinations who gravitated toward journalism. This “antiacademic class of literary journalists” such as Van Wyck Brooks, H. L. Mencken, Edmund Wilson, and Malcolm Cowley, lacked the rigor that Ransom associated with criticism (Graff 147). For Ransom and those who became known as the New Critics, Eliot offered the perfect answer to both scholars and literary journalists. As Ransom argued:

Criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons – which means that its proper seat is in the universities . . .
Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. Perhaps I use a distasteful figure, but I have the idea that what we need is Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd. (50).

Like Eliot twenty years before, Ransom opposed the professional to the amateur, and the serious study to the aimless appreciation of literature. Woolf’s celebration of the ordinary reader had no place in this theoretical framework. With the triumph of New Criticism in the 1940s and 1950s, Eliot’s essays joined the literary canon, whereas Woolf’s essays sank into relative obscurity.

In 1948, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* were dropped from the Modern Library, and many people were upset by this decision. Denham Sutcliffe, a professor of English at Kenyon College, wrote an article in the *Christian Science Monitor:* “That ‘Mrs. Dalloway’ has been dropped from The Modern Library may suggest that a leading novelist of our time is nearly ignored by common readers.”

At the time when Sutcliffe wrote this article, the Modern Library

was regularly attacked for being too commercial. In this intellectual context, the decision to remove *Mrs. Dalloway* was immediately seen as a sign of cultural debasement.

But in fact, the Modern Library’s decision had nothing to do with sales. *Mrs. Dalloway* was selling quite well, and the Modern Library owners wanted to keep it in the series. So why did they drop the title? In January 1949, a professor from Hanover College in Indiana received a letter from the Modern Library, saying that both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* had been dropped because of “copyright difficulties.” The full story is that the original American publisher Harcourt, Brace planned to launch its own reprint series for the college market, and decided that the contracts with the Modern Library would not be renewed. Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer tried to keep the titles in their series, without success. *Mrs. Dalloway* eventually appeared in Harcourt’s new series, the Harbrace Modern Classics, *without* the introduction by Woolf. There is no archival evidence that Harcourt asked for the right to reprint the introduction. The relationship with the Modern Library was extremely acrimonious, which perhaps deterred Harcourt from negotiating the reprint rights. Another explanation might be that Harcourt had no interest in the introduction – which would be another sign that Woolf’s essays were largely ignored.

What we do know is that the Harbrace Modern Classics series was modeled on the Modern Library and targeted the same kind of middle-class audience. One of the first advertisements for the new series asked: “How many of these famous modern classics have you read? - do you own?” a question that echoed the Modern Library’s “How many of the ‘best’ of

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25 See Chapter 4 for more details on these attacks against the Modern Library.
26 Florence Spivak to Charles G. Cleaver, 25 Jan. 1949, box 251, RH.
27 See, for example, Klopfer to Scott, 6 July 1948, box 9, RH.
Like the Modern Library, the Harbrace Modern Classics presented *Mrs. Dalloway* as a popular classic that every common reader could enjoy: “OVER 5,000,000 COPIES SOLD . . . Those sales figures are your guarantee of good reading. They mean that when you buy a Harbrace Modern Classic you are getting a book you’ll enjoy! Every book accepted for the series must meet the double test of literary merit and proven popularity.” The idea that a modernist work could also be a bestseller was increasingly contested in the 1940s and 1950s, at the time when modernism was institutionalized in English departments. The popularity of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* was soon forgotten, as modernism came to be seen as a difficult movement for an elite.

In retrospect, Woolf’s participation in the Modern Library series occurred at a key moment in the history of American intellectual life. The blurring of cultural categories in the late 1920s meant that Woolf’s fiction was not read as “highbrow,” but as exciting and pleasurable. Woolf could not have selected a better moment to share her ideas on the common reader. Far from denouncing her as patronizing toward university-educated professionals, American reviewers celebrated her democratic conception of reading and criticism. At a time when a generation of generalists had grown disillusioned with academia, Woolf seemed to offer an alternative to the soulless literary scholarship practiced in universities. Many agreed that literary criticism did not belong to a narrow core of professionals, that it was part of the public sphere, part of the common culture shared by Intelligent Common Readers. For a moment, it seemed possible to believe that all educated readers could do criticism.

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29 Advertisement for the Fair [Department Store]. *Chicago Daily Tribune* 10 Nov. 1953: 6. See also Advertisement for the Modern Library. *New York Times* 21 Jan. 1934: BR24. (“Check over now the distinguished list of books offered at the low price of only 95 c. See how many of them you have always wanted to read.”)
But the path traced by Woolf was eventually abandoned, for two main reasons. First, the generalists lost their fight against scholars. As Graff has argued, “the complaint that research and publication have displaced teaching [and the genuine appreciation of literature] has always resembled the parallel complaint that technology or bureaucracy has displaced more human or communal relations” (5). Even the New Critics, who initially shared the generalists’ distrust of historical and philological scholarship, increasingly valued a “scientific” conception of criticism practiced by university professionals. The declining influence of Woolf’s essays was also due to the growing anxiety towards the masses. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, at the time when the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals denounced the threat of mass culture, Woolf’s celebration of the common reader must have seemed naïve, and even dangerous. Her engagement with the middlebrow sphere was also problematic, especially when compared to Eliot’s perceived choice of a limited audience of connoisseurs. It took a long time for literary critics to reconsider Woolf as a major essayist. As recently as 1997, the editors of *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* could write: “A brief overview of critical opinion of the relation of Woolf’s essays to Eliot’s will reveal her subordinate position as a literary critic in the mainstream history of literary criticism” (Rosenberg and Dubino 6). Woolf’s engagement with the Modern Library, a series that was increasingly seen as commercial after the war, might well have contributed to this subordinate position as a literary critic.
Chapter 6 - “If it’s like any introduction you ever read, I'll eat the jacket”: Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*, the Modern Library and the Literary Canon

In 1932, four years after the publication of the reprint edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the Modern Library published *Sanctuary* with an introduction by William Faulkner in which he described the story as “a cheap idea . . . deliberately conceived to make money.” Thirty years later, the introduction was dropped, and no new introduction was commissioned. There are very few instances of introductions commissioned to the author, which were later removed from the series.¹ Why did Modern Library editors decide to drop the introduction to *Sanctuary*, three decades after its publication? This decision seems all the more surprising that *Sanctuary* was available, without introduction, in a cheap paperback edition published by the New American Library. So why did the Modern Library relinquish its competitive advantage over the NAL edition of *Sanctuary*?

Faulkner’s introduction has been so influential that nearly every scholarly article on *Sanctuary* has discussed whether or not the novel was a “cheap idea.” But no one has yet looked at the links between the foreword and the series in which it first appeared. My central argument is that the introduction became controversial only in the late 1930s, when critics started dividing “high” culture from “lesser” works. This chapter shows that in the Modern Library initially used the introduction to present *Sanctuary* as a modern classic that was also sensational and exciting. When Faulkner joined the Random House list in 1936, a similar marketing strategy was applied to works that we now consider canonical (including *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*).

¹ The other two examples are the introductions to *Up Stream* by Ludwig Lewisohn (included in 1926, dropped in 1927) and *God’s Little Acre* by Erskine Caldwell (included in 1934, dropped in 1957).
Unlike small presses and little magazines, Random House did not target a niche market of sophisticated readers. Faulkner was marketed as a popular writer that everybody could understand, not as a difficult author for a restricted audience. This approach largely contributed to Faulkner’s declining reputation in the early 1940s, at the time when a new generation of critics advocated a divide between “high” and “lowlbrow” cultures. After the Second World War, Faulkner-the-serious-writer was separated from Faulkner-the-writer-of-potboilers. In this intellectual context, Faulkner’s introduction increasingly appeared as a liability rather than a selling point.

1932: Sanctuary in the Modern Library

Sanctuary was the succès-de-scandale of the year 1931: it was widely reviewed and attracted the attention of other publishers, including Bennett Cerf. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the decline of anti-obscenity leagues in the early 1930s encouraged Cerf and Klopfer to select a growing number of controversial titles for their Modern Library series. Faulkner’s bestselling novel was both critically acclaimed and sufficiently sensational to join a list that included titles such as The Decameron and The Sex Problem in Modern Society. Cerf negotiated the reprint rights of Sanctuary with its original publisher, Harrison Smith, and asked Faulkner to write an introduction especially for the Modern Library edition (which was to be released in 1932). In his foreword, Faulkner seemed to present Sanctuary as a potboiler, written in only three weeks:

This book was written three years ago. To me it is a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money. I had been writing books for about five years, which got published and not bought . . . I began to think of books in terms of possible money. I decided I might just as well make some of it myself. I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current
trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks and sent it to Smith, who had done *The Sound and the Fury* and who wrote me immediately, ‘Good God, I can’t publish this. We’d both be in jail.’ . . .

. . . *As I Lay Dying* was published and I didn’t remember the mss. of *Sanctuary* until Smith sent me the galleys. Then I saw that it was so terrible that there were but two things to do: tear it up or rewrite it. I thought again, ‘It might sell; maybe 10,000 of them will buy it.’ So I tore the galleys down and rewrote the book. It had been already set up once, so I had to pay for the privilege of rewriting it, trying to make out of it something which would not shame *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* too much and I made a fair job and I hope you will buy it and tell your friends and I hope they will buy it too (Faulkner, “Introduction,” 176-78).

Philip Cohen has argued that Faulkner wrote the introduction as an “attempt to set the record straight about the relative merits of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* as compared to *Sanctuary*” (55). Indeed, in April 1931, Faulkner had written to Cerf that he would like to see *The Sound and the Fury* on the Modern Library list. Instead, Cerf and Klopfer selected *Sanctuary* – a novel that had sold more copies than Faulkner’s earlier works. Moreover, many contemporary reviewers thought that *Sanctuary* was Faulkner’s greatest novel to date. As D. Matthew Ramsey notes, “the current truism that a work cannot be critically well regarded and also entertaining for the masses was apparently much less widespread in 1931” (10). In June, *Vanity Fair* chose Faulkner for an article on up-and-coming talents: “William Faulkner wrote *The Sound and the Fury*, *Soldiers’ Pay* and *As I Lay Dying*, but it was not until *Sanctuary* that he was loudly acclaimed by the critics as a ‘genius.’ The late Arnold Bennett said of him, ‘He writes like an

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2 Faulkner to Cerf, 15 April 1931, box 1, BC.
3 *Sanctuary* was published on 9 Feb. 1931 and by 1 April, it had sold 6,457 copies. Cohen notes that although *Sanctuary* “was not a bestseller by national standards,” it brought Faulkner “to a broader audience than earlier novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* had” (62-3 n2).
angel’” (“New Reputations”). Likewise, the New York Times saw Sanctuary as an improvement over Faulkner’s previous novels: “His power to tell a story has greatly increased since As I Lay Dying . . . And his grasp of character seems much firmer in Sanctuary.” It is probable that Faulkner resented this critical focus on Sanctuary, and feared that his earlier novels would soon be forgotten. But it doesn’t tell us why the Modern Library owners decided to publish such an atypical introduction. Why did Cerf and his firm let Faulkner present Sanctuary as a “cheap idea”? How could the introduction fit in a series marketed as “the world’s best books”?

Archival documents show that the introduction to Sanctuary was used as an essential part of the marketing campaign. In March 1932, Doris Schneider (the Modern Library marketing manager) sent out review copies of Faulkner’s novel. Because there was no guarantee that reviewers would be interested in a novel that was already yesterday’s bestseller, Schneider insisted that the Modern Library edition was not “‘old wine in new bottles’ but rather ‘the same moonshine with a different label.’” She encouraged book review editors to focus on the introduction: “If it’s like any introduction you ever read, I’ll eat the jacket.”

Not only reviewers but also general readers were told to pay attention to the preface. An advertisement in the New York Times announced the publication of Sanctuary “with a new introduction by Faulkner explaining the unusual circumstances surrounding the creation of his sensational novel” (Figure 6-1). In the same ad, the Modern Library was described as a collection of classics “by the great authors of the past and of today – titles that inevitably enter any intelligent discussion of literature.” Thus, Sanctuary was presented as a “sensational novel” but also as an almost-canonical work. The literary value of the text was paralleled by a distinguished

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5 Schneider to Ben Ray Redman, 17 Mar. 1932, box 117, RH.
6 Schneider to William H. Soskin [Book Review Editor, New York Evening Post], 17 Mar. 1932, box 117, RH.
physical format, with a restrained dust jacket bearing a drawing of Horace Benbow drinking from the spring (Figure 6-2). The Modern Library was the first publisher’s series to market Faulkner as a classic writer – fourteen years before the Viking Portable edited by Malcolm Cowley. In the 1930s, a work could be both critically acclaimed and entertaining for a mainstream audience.

Figure 6-1: Advertisement for the Modern Library, New York Times 10 April 1932: BR13

Figure 6-2: Dust Jacket, Modern Library ed. of Sanctuary (1932)
1936: Absalom, Absalom!

To understand the changing critical reception of Sanctuary, it is important to place this novel within the wider marketing strategy of Random House. Indeed, Sanctuary was not the only novel by Faulkner to be marketed both as a modern classic and a bestseller. In 1936, Random House bought the firm of Smith & Haas and their distinguished list of authors including Faulkner, André Malraux and Robert Graves. To Cerf’s delight, Faulkner had just finished a new novel, Absalom, Absalom! In August, an advertisement in Publishers’ Weekly announced the upcoming publication of the book: “10,000 copies are the least that have been sold of any Faulkner novel published during the past six years. ABSALOM, ABSALOM! - the story of the rise and disintegration of a strange Southern family – is an exciting and saleable successor to Sanctuary and Light in August.” Cerf hoped that this ad would encourage booksellers to order a substantial stock of the new Faulkner book. No writer was more associated with the South than Faulkner, and it seemed likely that he would benefit from the rise of Southern fiction (Gone with the Wind, released a few months before, was already immensely popular).

Cerf organized a massive advertising campaign for Absalom, Absalom! with placements in all the major periodicals (New York Herald Tribune, Saturday Review of Literature, and many others). An ad published in the New York Times described Faulkner’s novel as a mix between thriller and literary novel (Figure 6-3). On the one hand, the book was presented as “The Strange Story of the Disintegration of a Southern Family” and “The New Best-seller by the Author of Sanctuary.” But on the other hand, the quote by Harry Hansen declared: “I should place it far above Sanctuary in literary importance. A Faulkner book for which we have waited long and

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8 Advertising schedule [1936], box 156, RH.
with reward.” *Absalom, Absalom!* thus appeared as a bestseller like *Sanctuary*, but a superior bestseller.

Moreover, Faulkner’s novel was advertised side-by-side with two proletarian novels: *Moscow Skies* and *A Time to Remember*. In the midst of the Depression, “the ‘revolutionary’ movement for ‘proletarian literature’ briefly revitalized the literary world” (Eldridge 32). Random House was eager to profit from this growing interest in socialist realism and communist ideology. In 1936, the firm released Karl Marx’s *Capital* as a Modern Library Giant. In the fall of that year, *Moscow Skies* was featured in the “Publishers’ Weekly Forecast for Buyers,” alongside other potential bestsellers. It was described as the first novel of Maurice Hindus, “a popular author of non-fiction books about Russia.”

Like *Moscow Skies*, *A Time to Remember* was marketed and reviewed as a popular novel. According to one review in *The New Republic*, *A Time to Remember* was “as easy to read and as popularly interesting as the stories printed in the middle-class magazines that go into millions of homes.” For Random House, *Absalom, Absalom!* was not different from *Moscow Skies* and *A Time to Remember*. Advertisements for the three books targeted a wide audience of readers rather a tiny coterie.

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In mid-November, less than one month after the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Random House issued a press release announcing the fourth printing of the book. *Absalom, Absalom!* was described as “the first book since *Sanctuary* to carry Faulkner to the best seller lists.”\(^{11}\) Of course, Faulkner’s novel was not the same kind of bestseller as *Gone with the Wind*. The third printing of *Absalom, Absalom!* had pushed the number of copies up over 10,000 (Blotner, *Faulkner* 377) – whereas *Gone with the Wind* had a print run of 140,000 after a similar period of sale.\(^{12}\) Once again, Cerf used the term “bestseller” as a marketing tool to convince readers that *Absalom, Absalom!* was readable and exciting.

Although the Random House management marketed *Absalom, Absalom!* as a sensational page-turner, they also targeted an educated and sophisticated audience. Two months before the publication of Faulkner’s novel, extracts appeared in the *American Mercury* – one of the most

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prestigious literary periodicals. Moreover, Random House paid particular attention to the physical format of *Absalom, Absalom!* In November, the book was awarded the Book Clinic Honor for the best example of composition, presswork and binding.\(^{13}\) An advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review* mentioned the award, and described *Absalom, Absalom!* as “William Faulkner’s greatest novel” (Figure 6-4). In short, the elegant physical format of the book fitted well with the text itself.

Figure 6-4: Advertisement for *Absalom, Absalom!*, *New York Times Book Review* 15 Nov. 1936: 20

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\(^{13}\) "Book Clinic." *Publishers' Weekly* 7 Nov. 1936: 1860.
As we have seen, *Absalom, Absalom!* was marketed both as a bestseller and a quality novel. Another way of putting it is to describe Random House’s positioning as “middlebrow.” The *New York Times Book Review* advertisement (Figure 6-4) included a extract from Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s review in the *Book-of-the-Month-Club News*: “It is impossible not to feel its driving force . . . It makes most of the year’s books seem trivial and unsubstantial.” The quote gave the impression that Fisher considered *Absalom, Absalom!* a masterpiece, but in fact, her review was much more ambiguous. She also wrote: “The plot strains credulity . . . The characterization is not always consistent. Finally the language of the book is supercharged to the point of grotesqueness.”14 On the one hand, Fisher argued that *Absalom, Absalom!* could have been a much better book if Faulkner had written it in a clear style, but on the other, she recognized that it was a major novel. In short, there was no radical opposition between the middlebrow culture of the Book-of-the-Month-Club and writers that we now see as “highbrow” such as Faulkner. Fisher would not have reviewed Faulkner’s latest book if she thought that it had no interest to Book-of-the-Month-Club subscribers.

Although Faulkner was marketed as a popular writer, many contemporary reviewers believed that *Absalom, Absalom!* was too difficult for ordinary readers. Clifton Fadiman wrote a scathing review in the *New Yorker*: “Mr. Faulkner’s latest work is the most consistently boring novel by a reputable writer to come my way during the last decade.” For Fadiman, *Absalom, Absalom!* contained few “comprehensible sentences.”15 It is interesting to note that this review appeared next to an ad for *Gone with the Wind*: “When Your Grandchildren ask what you were doing in 1936 - If your answer isn’t GONE WITH THE WIND You’ll find it hard to explain how

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it was that you missed.” On the same page of the *New Yorker, Absalom, Absalom!* was thus dismissed as a pretentious and unreadable novel, while *Gone with the Wind* was presented as a modern classic. The juxtaposition between the two novels reveals a weak point in Random House’s marketing strategy. While *Absalom, Absalom!* was advertised as an exciting page-turner, its style was very different from mass-market novels. Although *Absalom, Absalom!* was a relative commercial success, its complexity undermined Faulkner’s image as a bestselling writer.

**1938-1942: Breaking the Resistance to Faulkner’s Style**

In the following years, Random House continued to present Faulkner as a popular writer – but the focus of advertisements was increasingly placed on style rather than plot. In February 1938, a few days before the release of *The Unvanquished*, Robert Linscott – who then worked as editor for Houghton Mifflin – wrote to Random House to offer some advice. He believed that the book had “a swell chance for a good sale” (after all, many of the stories incorporated in *The Unvanquished* had first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, a large-circulation weekly magazine). But for Linscott, the challenge was to convince reviewers that Faulkner was not such a difficult writer. In his response to Linscott, Donald Klopfer wrote: “I think the Faulkner book is darn good and I feel that we will do well with it, although it is a hell of a job to break down the resistance caused by confusion in ABSALOM, ABSALOM. Here’s hoping Faulkner will get his real audience.”

Every advertisement for *The Unvanquished* presented the book as clearly written and exciting. *The Unvanquished* often appeared next to another Random House book, *Out of Africa*,

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17 Linscott to Cerf, 3 Feb. 1938, box 124, RH.
18 Klopfer to Linscott, 7 Feb 1938, box 124, RH.
which had been selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club. Moreover, an ad in the *New York Times Book Review* insisted on Faulkner’s “new, clean-cut simplicity and directness” and on the Civil War background of the stories.\(^{19}\) In 1938, everybody still remembered the phenomenal success of another Civil War story, *Gone with the Wind*. The comparison between *The Unvanquished* and Margaret Mitchell’s novel was explicit in another advertisement in *Publishers’ Weekly*: “Faulkner has done the most effective writing of his career in them and it may outsell his novels. A stirring *Gone with the Wind* background of Civil War and carpet-bagging days.”\(^{20}\)

What did Faulkner think of his publisher’s marketing strategy? He could hardly have ignored that Random House advertisements presented him as a sensational writer of bestsellers. In January 1939, Cerf launched a publicity push for *The Wild Palms* in order to recreate the success of *Sanctuary*. In a letter to his publisher, Faulkner wrote: “Your advertising approach sounds all right to me, but then Random House usually is, ain’t it?”\(^{21}\) When *Time* magazine chose Faulkner for its cover, Random House immediately followed up with advertisements celebrating the achievement.\(^{22}\) An ad in the prestigious *Virginia Quarterly* (affiliated to the University of Virginia) described *The Wild Palms* as “Faulkner’s biggest hit,” “selling over a thousand copies a week!”\(^{23}\) Like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*, *The Wild Palms* was marketed as a sensational novel. With this book, Random House finally transformed Faulkner into a genuine popular writer: *The Wild Palms* was commercially successful (21,000 copies were printed in the

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\(^{21}\) Faulkner to Cerf, received 19 Jan. 1939 (Blotner, *Selected Letters* 109).


first two months), it was also critically acclaimed, and it brought prestige to the Random House brand. In 1939, Faulkner’s reputation seemed firmly anchored. So why did most of his books go out-of-print during the Second World War?

There are many explanations to the loss of interest in Faulkner’s work. One of them is that Random House’s marketing strategy did not fit well with the intellectual climate of the 1940s. While V. F. Calverton, Granville Hicks and other Marxist critics had focused on works with a popular appeal, the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals argued that quality fiction could not appeal to the masses. Yet, Random House continued to market Faulkner as a bestselling writer who wrote readable fiction for a large audience. In March 1940, a few days before the publication of *The Hamlet*, Bennett Cerf wrote to his sale representative: “A cow will sell THE HAMLET as a corncob sold SANCTUARY.” Cerf gave instructions to present *The Hamlet* as a sensational tale with a sexy heroine. Once again, Faulkner’s new book was compared to *Sanctuary*, which remained Faulkner’s most famous novel at that time. Despite Cerf’s efforts, *The Hamlet* was a commercial failure. One reviewer wrote: “in the minds of general readers [Faulkner] has been ‘typed’ like a Hollywood actress; he is merely the author of *Sanctuary*, the movie of which gave most of America its first and only labeled acquaintance with the Mississippi writer.”

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25 Cerf to James L. Crowder, 26 Mar. 1940, box 140, RH.
26 *The Hamlet* “was printed in an edition of 10,000 copies to be sold at $2.50; with an average discount of 40 percent, Random House received about $1.50 per copy. The novel sold about 6,800 copies upon publication, returning $10,000 to the firm. Associated costs were $1,162 for plates, $4,000 for printing, $2,500 for Faulkner’s advance, and about $3,000 for related expenses. The total cost was $10,500. The firm could just expect to cover expenses” (L. Schwartz 216 n14).
As Andreas Huyssen has shown, “the traditional mass culture/ modernism dichotomy has been
gendered since the mid-19th century as female/ male” (49). Although the “great divide” between
popular and modernist cultures has been rightly questioned, there is little doubt that Faulkner’s
close association with Hollywood and with mass-market print culture marginalized him in the
new intellectual climate of the Second World War.28

In the 1940s, the shadow of Sanctuary alienated both ordinary readers and intellectuals.
For ordinary readers, Faulkner’s work was too shocking, depressing and difficult to read. And for
many reviewers and professional readers, Faulkner was just a regionalist writer who wrote daring
tales to make money. In short, Faulkner suffered from an image problem – he was not
commercial enough for the mass market, and too commercial for the new wave of critics. This
problem was largely due to Random House’s marketing strategy. In the 1930s, Faulkner could be
presented as a bestselling writer without alienating the critics. But this was far more controversial
in the intellectual climate of the 1940s. After the commercial failures of The Hamlet and Go
Down, Moses, Cerf abandoned his hopes to see Faulkner become a new Sinclair Lewis – a
critically respected author whose works sold to a large audience. Faulkner’s books soon went out
of print, which paradoxically contributed to the Faulkner revival of the late 1940s. To a large
extent, Faulkner had to lose his image as a popular writer to regain critical respect.

Faulkner Revival of the Late 1940s

In the late 1940s, Bennett Cerf and his firm failed to have a clear vision of Faulkner’s
changing place in the literary field. Because of limited sales, they assumed that the author of

28 Faulkner started working for the movie studio MGM in May 1932, shortly after the release of the Modern Library
edition of Sanctuary. Although he did not work on the movie adapted from Sanctuary (released under the title The
Story of Temple Drake), it was “the most talked-about production in late 1932/ early 1933” (Ramsey 18).
Sanctuary had lost his mainstream appeal. Breaking the resistance to Faulkner’s style was a Sisyphean task that even the always-energetic Cerf had renounced. Random House executives now saw Faulkner as a once-popular writer that could still rely on a small readership. Beginning in 1946, the firm gave Faulkner $500 per month to help him complete his new novel, a fable about the First World War (Schwartz, Creating Faulkner’s Reputation, 56). Although Random House was ready to make limited investments for a Faulkner comeback, neither Cerf nor his colleagues believed that Faulkner could regain a large audience.

There were in fact not one, but two Faulkner revivals in the late 1940s, and neither of them was initiated by Random House. The first signs of a renewal of interest in Faulkner’s work came from Viking, with the publication in April 1946 of the Portable Faulkner edited by Malcolm Cowley. According to Lawrence Schwartz, “the Viking management did not have high sales expectations” (55), but they saw Faulkner as an important writer that fit well with the newly-created Viking Portable, an anthology series which included famous names such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Portable and the Modern Library had a similar positioning: both series targeted the expanding college market with a selection of old and modern classics. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Portable Faulkner was followed by the publication of a new Modern Library edition of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying. In a letter to Robert Linscott (who was now senior editor at Random House), Cowley wrote: “I think it’s a great pity that you are planning to issue the [Modern Library] book next fall . . . This business of relaunching [Faulkner] requires cooperation rather than rivalry.” Cowley was also strongly opposed to Faulkner writing a new introduction for the Modern Library edition: “He’s no good at writing introductions, to judge from the little piece he did for the Modern Library edition of ‘Sanctuary.’ That piece hurt him with the critics, because they hate to find they had
praised a book which the author himself says was only written for money.”

In his response to Cowley, Linscott claimed that although there was a risk that Faulkner would not do “a good job,” it was nevertheless interesting “to have his own account of how he happened to write the book.”

The fact that Linscott did not comment on the reception of Faulkner’s books exemplifies a characteristic lack of insight on new critical trends.

In an intellectual context increasingly marked by the division between “high” and “low” cultural forms, two views on Faulkner emerged. While Viking marketed Faulkner as a serious writer for an educated audience, the second revival rejected the new cultural boundaries and constructed the author of *Sanctuary* as both a mass-market author and a literary genius. In November 1946, Victor Weybright approached Random House to discuss the possibility of reprinting some Faulkner titles in paperback form. As Schwartz puts it, “Cerf was amazed that Weybright thought 25-cent books could be profitable, and was skeptical that Faulkner would sell” (58). Indeed, Cerf had once attempted to sell Faulkner to an audience in the tens of thousands. Having failed, he could hardly believe Weybright’s claims that Faulkner had an untapped market of millions of readers. Weybright offered a generous royalty guarantee of $2,250 for *Sanctuary*, and asked Cerf for the permission to reprint the “very engaging introduction” that had first appeared in the Modern Library edition. Cerf categorically refused: “as in the case of all other Modern Library editions, we want the little introductory note to be an exclusive feature.” In 1946, Cerf still saw the preface at a selling point that distinguished the Modern Library edition from other reprints. Unlike Cowley, who was himself part of the new

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29 Cowley to Linscott, 12 Feb. 1946, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.
30 Linscott to Cowley, 15 Feb. 1946, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.
31 Weybright to Cerf, 21 and 25 Nov. 1946, box 4, RH.
32 Cerf to Weybright, 27 Nov. 1946, box 4, RH.
intellectual generation, Cerf seemed unaware that the introduction to Sanctuary had contributed to damaging Faulkner’s reputation. He saw no contradiction in publishing Sanctuary alongside more “serious” works such as As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury in the Modern Library.

Like Cerf, Weybright did not draw a line between Faulkner-the-serious-writer and Faulkner-the-writer-of-potboiler. After his separation from Penguin Books, Weybright announced the creation of the New American Library using the vocabulary of distinction: “In the genuine mass market, where popular fiction sales often run into the millions, we shall continue to gauge the public taste at a higher level than other publishers of paper-bound editions have attempted.” Weybright promised to publish “good books, produced in good taste and efficiently sold.” The positioning of the New American Library and its Signet imprint relied on the idea that the best writers were both commercial and critically acclaimed. Following the success of Sanctuary (published in April 1947), Weybright issued a series of other Faulkner titles including The Wild Palms (January 1948) and The Old Man (November 1948). By May 1951, NAL had printed 1,103,424 copies of Sanctuary and paid nearly $13,200 in royalties.

It is important to note that none of the NAL-Signet editions of Faulkner novels had introductions. In his response to Charles R. Anderson, a professor of American literature who had offered to write a preface to The Unvanquished, Weybright explained why he wasn’t interested:

33 Reflecting on the impact of the Faulkner Portable, Robert Penn Warren presented Cowley as a noted intellectual: “the fact that the reputation of Cowley himself as associated with the ‘left wing,’ as critic and as editor of The New Republic (in which The Sound and the Fury had been reviewed, though not by Cowley, under the head ‘Signifying Nothing’), gave a certain piquancy, and in some circles, an air of authority and respectability to his estimate of Faulkner” (10).

34 Press release, New American Library, 26 Jan. 1948, box 10, RH.

If our edition were to be read primarily by serious students of Literature, lay or academic, I would welcome your proposed introduction. However, our Twenty-five cent edition will be sold in the usual way through mass distribution to magazine outlets. To many purchasers and ultimate readers, therefore, an introduction would somehow tend to give Faulkner a highbrow aspect and destroy natural interest. We have sold a good many millions of Faulkner's novels and stories in reprint, obviously many of them to people who are not ordinarily addicted to the reading of books, and, since THE UNVANQUISHED is simpler in style than any other Faulkner volume, I believe it would suffer rather than gain in appeal by an introduction (my emphasis).  

In this letter, Weybright was obviously referring to an academic introduction, not to the kind of sensational preface that Faulkner had written for the Modern Library edition of Sanctuary. It is telling that Weybright opposed academia and mass market, “highbrow aspect” and “natural interest.” At a time when boundaries between different levels of “culture” were becoming increasingly rigid, Weybright realized that the profitable academic market would be difficult to conquer, as instructors were unlikely to select the NAL-Signet editions for their courses. In fact, Professor Anderson had originally written not to the New American Library, but to the Modern Library to offer his contribution for a potential reprint of The Unvanquished. Jess Stein, the editor of the Modern Library, informed him that the novel was soon to be published by NAL, and offered to forward his letter to Weybright. Anderson was disappointed, “as a serious student and scholar,” that Faulkner’s novel would be published in paperback form and not in a “substantial edition” in the Modern Library. Academics’ opposition to paperback books (or at least to the most lurid kind of paperbacks) was paralleled by the paperback publishers’ rejection of the academic sphere. Weybright made clear that NAL’s view of Faulkner – as a quality writer

36 Weybright to Anderson, 14 Dec. 1951, box 767, RH.
37 Anderson to Stein, 19 Nov. 1951; Stein to Anderson, 28 Nov. 1951; Anderson to Stein, 6 Dec. 1951, box 767, RH.
and a bestselling writer – was at odds with the academic take. For Weybright, the mass-market success of *Sanctuary* and other Faulkner titles confirmed that “good reading” could reach “the millions,” as the slogan for NAL proclaimed. But for the new generation of intellectuals, the lowbrow appeal of *Sanctuary* – printed on cheap paper with a questionable cover – confirmed Faulkner’s declarations: the novel was based on a “cheap idea” to pander to the debased taste of the masses.

**Sanctuary and the Literary Canon**

Critics who have reflected on the place of *Sanctuary* in the literary canon almost always begin with an account of the initial neglect of the novel, followed by its rediscovery. Faulkner’s introduction to the Modern Library edition is central to this narrative, since it explains both the critical dismissal (on the ground that Faulkner saw *Sanctuary* as “a cheap idea”) and the later reevaluation (since Faulkner explained that he had revised the novel to raise it to the level of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*). In 1972, forty years after the publication of the Modern Library edition of *Sanctuary*, the literary critic Joanne V. Creighton wrote: “Much of the misguided criticism of *Sanctuary* can be traced to early critics like the infamous [George Marion] O’Donnell who latched onto Faulkner's derogatory dismissal of the book’s ‘cheap’ origination - in the 1932 Introduction to *Sanctuary* - without taking heed of his concomitant explanation of its later revision” (259).\(^{38}\) In fact, this narrative ignores two important elements. It neglects a first phase of criticism, between the release of the novel in 1931 and O'Donnell’s article in 1939, at the time when *Sanctuary* was viewed both as a bestseller and a masterpiece. Moreover, it oversimplifies the second phase of *Sanctuary* criticism, characterized by the dismissal of Faulkner’s novel as a mediocre potboiler unworthy of serious study. It is important to note that

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\(^{38}\) For more recent accounts of the place of *Sanctuary* in the literary canon, see Cohen 63 n3; and Guttman 16.
this critical interpretation was the product of the “literary coalition” between New Critics and New York Intellectuals (Schwartz 154). Not all critics shared this view and it was not until the mid-1960s that *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* started to dominate *Sanctuary* in Faulkner scholarship. My argument is that in the immediate postwar, the literary coalition’s dismissal of *Sanctuary* was more influential at the level of teaching than at the level of criticism. In the long term, this had an important impact on the literary canon. Because *Sanctuary* was rarely taught at the undergraduate level, few graduate students chose to write their thesis on this novel. By the time Creighton wrote her article, it was clear that *Sanctuary* occupied a relatively marginal place in Faulkner scholarship.

From the late 1930s to the 1950s, many critics viewed *Sanctuary* as a gangster novel unworthy of a sophisticated audience. This understanding of the novel was the consequence of Faulkner’s introduction, read by a new generation of intellectuals who feared the impact of market economy on cultural production. In other words, the introduction was not by itself responsible for the damage to Faulkner’s reputation (as Cowley and others believed). Earlier critics seemed to have found Faulkner’s claims unproblematic: after all, he was not the first writer to admit having created a story with an eye on the market. But in the intellectual climate that emerged at the time of the Second World War, a “cheap idea . . . deliberately conceived to make money” was unlikely to be hailed as a masterpiece. In an influential article published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1939 and regularly reprinted afterwards, O’Donnell called *Sanctuary* a “failure”: “the book is a ‘cheap idea’ - as Mr. Faulkner himself calls it in his preface to the Modern Library edition. Its defects are those of allegory in general. The characters are distorted, being more nearly grotesques than human beings” (293). When this article first appeared, the

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39 A full-text search in *JSTOR* returns 46 results for “Faulkner” and “Sanctuary” from 1932 to 1939, but O’Donnell’s article is the only one to discuss Faulkner’s claims that *Sanctuary* was a “cheap idea.”
twenty-five-year-old O’Donnell was finishing his Master’s Degree in English at Vanderbilt University, where he had been influenced by Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, Andrew Lytle and other apostles of the New Criticism.

The new separation between “high” and “low” expanded beyond the literary sphere. Take the example of Norman Rockwell, who enjoyed a highly successful career as a commercial artist (he illustrated 321 Saturday Evening Post covers over a 47-year period) (Moffatt, “Rockwell”). After the Second World War, however, “any artist committed to making fastidiously detailed paintings was decried as old-fashioned and out of step with the times” (Rifkin 20). Although Rockwell continued to receive lucrative commissions, his critical reputation was at its lowest. In 1949, during a lecture at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, he told his audience that he had recently been approached by young art students in Chicago. He was asked by one, “You’re Norman Rockwell, right?” Touched with pride at being recognized, he was shocked by the comment, “My art professor says you stink!” As a commercial illustrator, Rockwell did not fit well with a critical climate that revered abstract expressionism. Rockwell’s postwar marginalization in art history is all the more ironic that he openly recognized his debt to “high” art. As Laurie Norton Moffatt notes, “throughout his career, Rockwell referenced and included representations of well-known works by Vermeer, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Dürer, Picasso, and even Jackson Pollock in his own pictures” (“Rockwell”). Like the Modern Library’s mix of “high” and “low,” Rockwell’s eclecticism had no place in the immediate postwar period. It was not until the late 1960s that a Rockwell revival began to emerge (Buechner 7). Three decades later, Moffatt still deplored that “art history curricula in colleges and universities routinely leave him out, and the few that include him often do so with disdain” (“The People’s Painter” 27).

The emergence of a Great Divide also affected the musical scene, with the transformation of jazz from commercial music to “serious” music played in concert halls and festivals. From the first recordings at the end of the First World War, to the 1930s, jazz was essentially dance music. As Jed Rasula puts it, “the dance audience was considerably larger than the listening audience, and even records were used mainly for dancing” (61). This changed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when jazz moved out of the clubs and into the concert halls. Towards the end of the Second World War, a new form of jazz, “characterized by complex harmony, dissonant chords and highly syncopated rhythm,” emerged in the United States (“Bebop”). Bebop, as it came to be known, appealed to a new audience who saw big-band jazz as predictable and commercial. As Dave Laing notes, “with the decline of the big bands, the bebop emphasis on jazz as music to be listened to, rather than as an accompaniment for dancing, gave credence to the idea that jazz deserved recognition as one of the arts” (322). Jazz, a form of popular music born in New Orleans, had to lose its commercial image to be transformed into “high” art. The same can of course be said of Faulkner, who first emerged from the New Orleans artistic scene, conquered a large audience, and had to be “repackaged” to appeal to the new intellectual elite.

In the postwar period, at a time when the Faulkner canon was being created, the new wave of critics separated Sanctuary from “great” novels such as Absalom, Absalom! One critic argued that “images of sadistic cruelty abound in Sanctuary” and that Faulkner generally gave “a total impression of man as filthy, stupid, and malicious” (Munro 150). Responding to this article, the Faulkner scholar Calvin S. Brown maintained that Sanctuary was an exceptionally bad novel that had little in common with the rest of Faulkner’s work: “Certainly there are filth and bestial characters, and they predominate in a story like Sanctuary . . . Faulkner is, of course, a very uneven writer, and Sanctuary was admittedly written as a shocker to demand popular attention. But in general he does take a high view of human nature, and puts his faith in it” (Alford, Brown
and Sutton 523). This exchange shows that *Sanctuary* risked contaminating the newly created Faulkner canon, and therefore had to be radically isolated from “superior” novels.

For the literary intelligentsia of the postwar, *Sanctuary* was little better than hard-boiled tales of sex and violence. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Dwight Macdonald argued that the “sensational” style of Dashiell Hammett and others was a risk to High Culture and the preservation of literary standards (68). Postwar critics found the relationship between Faulkner and hard-boiled writers extremely problematic, and resented the attitude of French intellectuals who did not distinguish between “good” and “bad” Faulkner books. As one scholar wrote, “some of us American students of French literature have been surprised by the enthusiastic tributes that such men as André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and André Malraux have paid not only to our Faulkners and Hemingways but also to our Caldwells, Dashiell Hammetts, and James Cains” (Virtanen 76). Many American intellectuals were amazed that Malraux could describe *Sanctuary* as “the intrusion of Greek tragedy into the detective story” (94). For the literary coalition of New Critics and New York Intellectuals, “high” and “low” cultural forms should never mix, for fear of a general leveling down of culture.

The publication of paperback editions of *Sanctuary* with sexy covers (Figure 6-5) reinforced this critical view on the sensationalism of the novel. In 1947, the U.S. branch of Penguin released *Sanctuary*, as well as Ludwig Lewisohn’s *The Tyranny of Sex* and Erskine Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road*. Likewise, the Modern Library, which had always been positioned as a daring collection of modern classics, published books by Lewisohn and Caldwell (*Tobacco Road* appeared in the series the same year as the Penguin reprint). Although Modern Library books did not have lurid dust jackets, the series’s refusal to distinguish the “high” from the “low” seemed scandalous in the intellectual climate of the 1940s and 1950s.
While “the literary coalition” refused to take *Sanctuary* seriously, other scholars tried to dissociate the novel from mediocre mass-market fiction. Like Malraux, the critic Robert Flynn viewed *Sanctuary* in relation to Greek tragedy and argued that the novel “is not a ‘cheap idea,’ nor is its atmosphere of horror without moral significance” (109). Likewise, Linton Massey pointed to the *apparent* similarity between Faulkner’s novel and the most violent kind of pulp fiction. For Massey, the newly released *Sanctuary* “was an immediate success and soon reached the best-seller list, as a grateful public, not then conditioned to the sadistic splendors yet to be unfolded by latter day Mickey Spillanes, manifested a shocked pleasure in the contemplation of young Southern womanhood in terms of corn cobs, rather than moonlight and honeysuckle” (195). The seeming filiation between *Sanctuary* and Spillane’s hard-boiled tales hid the genuine literary value of Faulkner’s novel – a text that had been extensively revised before publication.
Indeed, Massey included himself among those critics who “mourn[ed] the fact that Faulkner once ventured to impeach his own artistic integrity” by dismissing his own work (198). Like Cowley, Massey probably wished that the Modern Library had rejected the introduction in the first place.

Flynn’s and Massey’s positive view on Sanctuary was far from marginal in the critical landscape of the 1950s and early 1960s. In the early days of Faulkner scholarship, Sanctuary attracted roughly as much attention as Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses (Appendix 1). In 1960, for example, the MLA Bibliography listed a total of 12 articles and books on Sanctuary, and 13 each on Absalom and Moses. However, there is evidence that Sanctuary was less taught in college courses than more “serious” Faulkner novels. From November 1951 to October 1952, at the time when the Modern Library increasingly targeted the college market, Sanctuary was the lowest selling Faulkner title in the series, with 4,844 copies sold (versus 5,303 for Absalom, Absalom!, 6,264 for Light in August, and 10,640 for The Sound and the Fury & As I Lay Dying) (Neavill, “Modern Library” 562-3). Since Absalom, Absalom! had just been included in the Modern Library, some instructors might not have been able to choose it for their courses in 1951-1952 and the figures probably increased in the following years. What the sales figures clearly reveal is that Sanctuary was no longer a top-selling title in the Modern Library. As the formalist methods of New Criticism were becoming the most popular way of teaching literature at the university level, instructors were reluctant to select a novel that seemed tainted by the marketplace.

In November 1962, Modern Library editors decided to drop the preface from its edition of Sanctuary. Faulkner had died four months before, and his position in the American literary canon was secure. Modern Library editors probably thought that the introduction was associated with a lost era, when Faulkner was still a controversial writer. Faulkner’s preface was reprinted shortly after in an anthology of essays, speeches and public letters published by Random House
(Faulkner, “Introduction”). Not only was the introduction dissociated from the novel itself, it also appeared alongside Faulkner’s Nobel speech. No longer the sensational feature advertised in the 1930s, the preface had now joined the anthologized body of Faulkner’s work.

At the same time when the Modern Library decided to drop off the introduction to *Sanctuary*, it began to publish Faulkner's works in white uniform dust jackets. This new presentation distinguished Modern Library editions from the lurid aspect of Signet books. But why didn’t the Modern Library commission a new introduction to a renowned Faulkner scholar? The fact that none of the white jacket printings had prefaces was probably influenced not by the example of paperback publishers, but rather by New Directions, an independent publishing house that rejected all scholarly apparatus (despite targeting the academic market). Like his mentor Ezra Pound, James Laughlin, the owner of New Directions, saw academia as an environment fundamentally hostile to artistic experimentation. He felt that his firm should publish books for general readers, not for scholars. When New Directions reprinted Faulkner’s *Light in August* in 1947, the edition had a beautiful cover designed by Alvin Lustig, but no preface. If Laughlin despised “stooge college professors,” as he told one interviewer,41 why did he sell his books to the academic market? The academization of American intellectual life meant that independent publishers and vanguard critics could hardly survive without the patronage of universities. Like the Modern Library, New Directions published “long-sellers” with an enduring popularity. Because it relied heavily on its backlist, New Directions was particularly well suited to academia (many professors would reorder the same editions year after year, thus creating a market for “difficult” writers like Faulkner or Pound). Although Laughlin eagerly took advantage of the expanding academic market, he preserved an independent image by refusing to add footnotes,

prefaces and other scholarly apparatus to New Directions books. In the 1960s, the Modern Library edition of *Sanctuary* targeted the same kind of audience that also bought New Directions books – an audience who wanted to focus on the text itself rather than on sensational paratextual elements.

The separation between preface and novel was paralleled by a certain critical reevaluation of *Sanctuary*. In 1963, Cleanth Brooks wrote his first scholarly article on *Sanctuary*. Although Brooks despised the hard-boiled influence in Faulkner’s text, he also recognized “the brilliance of the writing.” In other words, *Sanctuary* was “a ‘gangster novel’ of a sort,” but one of the rare gangster novels that deserved critical attention (“Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*: The Discovery of Evil” 3). In the same issue of the *Sewanee Review*, Allen Tate ranked *Sanctuary* among Faulkner’s five masterpieces (above *Absalom, Absalom!* (“William Faulkner” 161). Five years later, Tate repeated his claim that *Sanctuary* should join the Faulkner canon: “no critic has included, in a list of the best, *Sanctuary*; but I do include it, although one would have to place it near the bottom” (“Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* and the Southern Myth” 419). Younger critics like T. Frederick Keefer similarly argued for a reappraisal of *Sanctuary*. According to Keefer, the wide diffusion of the Modern Library edition (before the introduction was dropped in the early 1960s) was largely responsible for the critical neglect of Faulkner’s novel: “because the Modern Library edition of *Sanctuary* was the only widely available version of it for at least three decades, every new generation of readers was exposed to the same damaging preface” (98). At the time when Keefer wrote this article, *Sanctuary* had been available in the NAL-Signet edition for twenty-two years. However, many academics looked down on paperback editions, especially those with sensational covers. The more distinguished Modern Library edition was the favorite choice among students.

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42 In a 1962 article on Faulkner’s moral vision, Brooks called *Sanctuary* a “brilliant and horrifying early novel” (“Faulkner’s Vision of Good and Evil” 695).
and their instructors. According to Keefer, the ubiquity of the Modern Library in the college market had paradoxically led to the exclusion of *Sanctuary* from the literary canon: “Despite the author’s high reputation since he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, this novel is seldom taught in college courses” (97).

Ironically, at the moment when New Critics no longer dismissed the novel as a potboiler, *Sanctuary* failed to benefit from the general increase in Faulkner scholarship. The late 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by an unprecedented number of books, articles and dissertations on Faulkner. While the number of entries for *Absalom, Absalom!* in the MLA Bibliography tripled from the 1960s to the 1970s, scholarship on *Sanctuary* remained constant. Put differently, there were five times more scholarly articles and books on *Absalom* than on *Sanctuary* in the 1970s (Appendix 1). Why did so few scholars and doctoral students choose *Sanctuary* as a research topic? I would suggest that the failure to teach *Sanctuary* in college courses in the 1950s and 1960s led to the marginalization of this novel in the scholarship of young academics. When choosing dissertation topics, graduate students were more likely to concentrate on novels that had already some currency in academia. In other words, the discrepancy between *Sanctuary* on the one hand, and *Absalom* and *Go Down, Moses* on the other, can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, at the time when the Modern Library editions of Faulkner books were commonly used in literature courses.

Those scholars who did write on *Sanctuary* focused on Faulkner’s claims that he had extensively revised the novel before publication. At that point, *Sanctuary* was viewed as a complex text that Faulkner, contrary to his claims, had not dashed off in three weeks. This third phase of critical response – after the initial enthusiasm, and the later dismissal of the novel as a

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43 Richard Peterson thus notes: “While the flow of dissertations on Faulkner increased dramatically in the 1960s, especially towards the end of the decade, the doctoral work in the 1970s turned into a deluge” (3).
potboiler – was initiated by academics who worked in the then-recent field of bibliography. Dating back to Linton Massey’s 1956 comparison of the original text with the final version, this scholarship argued that the published version was a significant improvement over the Ur-
Sanctuary. A bibliographer like Massey, James B. Meriwether contended that Faulkner’s revisions “affected the novel in nearly every way - in theme and structure as well as in general quality” (“Some Notes,” 193). Michael Millgate also declared: “What must strike the reader of Sanctuary in any of its unrevised states is how badly it is put together” (116). This line of analysis became especially influential in the 1980s, at the time when the scholarship on Sanctuary significantly increased (Appendix 1). Drawing on Massey’s and Meriwether’s works, David L. Minter reiterated the claims that “Faulkner’s work on Sanctuary represents a ‘minor miracle of revision’” (126). John Pilkington similarly noted: “Faulkner wrote this novel twice and during the second writing transformed a poor work into an artistic achievement” (111).

In a fourth phase, critics started seriously examining both versions of the novel, without necessarily assuming that the unrevised novel was inferior to the final text. In 1981, Noel Polk released Sanctuary: The Original Text under the Random House imprint. It was not the first time that the Ur-Sanctuary had been published (in 1972, the University of Texas Press brought out an edition of the unrevised galleys and the final version, compiled by Gerald Langford). But Polk’s edition made the original text easily available to a larger audience. More importantly, it contributed to a reevaluation of the first version, for which Polk showed a certain appreciation: “the original Sanctuary is a highly serious work, with an integrity all its own, by America’s greatest novelist, and not a glib and slipshod pandering to public taste” (295). Drawing on Polk’s analysis, Philip Cohen argued that “Faulkner’s experimental unrevised version takes far more risks than the published version does” (55). Having reclaimed Sanctuary from its lowbrow label, these critics dismissed Faulkner’s introduction as a “red herring” (Canfield 2). More recently,
Sondra Guttman has suggested to reopen this debate and to consider the preface in relation to issues of masculinity and race in the novel itself. In short, for nearly eighty years, the introduction has remained at the center of the critical response to *Sanctuary*.

This chapter has begun by replacing Faulkner’s introduction to *Sanctuary* within the publishing and the intellectual context of the 1930s. At a time when there was no clear separation between popular and literary fiction, the preface to the Modern Library edition did not damage Faulkner’s reputation. On the contrary, the fact that Faulkner admitted that he paid attention to the literary marketplace but was not ready to publish anything for money, fit well with his image as a bestselling writer of quality fiction. Without Random House’s efforts to promote Faulkner as a popular and critically acclaimed writer, it is doubtful that *Time* would have chosen the author of *The Wild Palms* for its cover in 1939. While critics had responded favorably to this accessible Faulkner, the postwar coalition of New Critics and New York Intellectuals distrusted any kind of mass culture. From the late 1930s to the early 1960s, the introduction became so controversial that a kind of “*Sanctuary* war” divided the critics. Those who argued that *Sanctuary* was a potboiler were largely responsible for the marginalization of the novel in college courses. Since the Modern Library relied heavily on the college market, it is hardly surprising that the sensational introduction to *Sanctuary* was dropped in late 1962.

It was not until the 1980s that bibliographers such as Linton Massey or James B. Meriwether, who had defended the novel in the 1950s and 1960s, became truly influential in Faulkner scholarship. The 1980s was of course a period when cultural studies started to have an important impact in English departments. A novel like *Sanctuary*, with its mix of hard-boiled fiction and classical tragedy, benefited from the turn towards “non-elitist” works – but it nevertheless remained less studied than *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*. 
It is also interesting to note that in 2005, Oprah Winfrey selected three novels by Faulkner for her book club.\textsuperscript{44} During this “Summer of Faulkner”, Oprah presented the author of \textit{Sanctuary} as a serious writer who deserved a large audience. Likewise, Random House did not draw a line between Faulkner-the-serious-writer and Faulkner-the-bestselling-writer. The blurring of cultural categories typical of the interwar period is also a feature of our present time.

\textsuperscript{44} Winfrey selected \textit{As I Lay Dying}, \textit{The Sound and the Fury} and \textit{Light in August}. 
Appendix 1: Faulkner Canon

Figure 6-6: MLA Bibliography Entries for Selected Faulkner Books (1950-2009)

Figure 6-7: Cumulated MLA Bibliography Entries for Selected Faulkner Books (1950-2010)
**Note on methodology**: Results include only articles and books that mention *Sanctuary* (or *Absalom, Absalom!* etc.) in their title. In some cases, the same article/book was listed several times, for example, in a journal and later in a collection of essays. I have counted only the first publication.

For the collection of short stories *Go Down, Moses*, I have also included articles/books on each individual story (“The Bear and Big Woods,” “The Fire and the Hearth,” “Pantalooin in Black,” “The Old People,” “Delta Autumn”).
Conclusion

The declining popularity of the Modern Library among intellectuals after the Second World War was paralleled by the unprecedented commercial success of the series in the 1940s and 1950s. Never before had the Modern Library sold so many books, in a context of heightened competition with the paperback series. Between 1940 and 1948, sales of regular Modern Library titles increasing fivefold, from $171,346 to $882,809 (Neavill, “Publishing in Wartime” 588). This commercial success exacerbated the anger of critics, who increasingly saw the Modern Library as a mass-market publishing enterprise threatening real culture.

The Ezra Pound affair exemplifies Bennett Cerf’s lack of insight on the new intellectual climate. In 1945, Cerf refused to include poems by Ezra Pound in the forthcoming Anthology of Famous English and American Poetry edited by Conrad Aiken and William Rose Benét. It was not the first time that Aiken had chosen poems by Pound for an anthology – in 1929, Random House published his Comprehensive Anthology of American Poetry in the Modern Library with poems by Pound. But things became more complicated after the war. For Bennett Cerf and for the editor Saxe Commins, who were both Jewish, Pound was an anti-Semitic traitor who deserved to be punished, not published. The purged anthology was released as a Modern Library Giant in December 1945, and the same month, Pound was incarcerated in St. Elizabeths Hospital for the insane. Cerf’s decision to exclude Pound’s poems proved extremely controversial. He was severely attacked by Pound’s publisher, James Laughlin, and by ordinary Americans, who thought that his exclusion of Pound was not different from Nazi censorship and book burning. In March 1946, Cerf publicly admitted that he had been wrong and ordered a new edition of the anthology, featuring Pound’s poems.
The Pound Affair highlights the growing gap between Cerf and the vast majority of intellectuals who sided with Aiken. An experienced anthologist and a well-respected poet himself, Aiken had been associated with the modernist movement since his college years at Harvard (it was he who first introduced T. S. Eliot to Ezra Pound). In November 1943, when Aiken was working on a revised version of his anthology of American poetry, he wrote to Cerf saying he would like to include some poems by Pound. By that time, Pound had already been indicted for treason in Washington. Either Cerf was not aware of this, or he did not care, and the poems appeared in the anthology. At around the same period, Random House decided to issue a new anthology of poetry in the Modern Library Giants series. Aiken was in charge of the American section, and unsurprisingly, he chose some poems by Pound. But this time, his selection met with hostility. In May 1945, Pound was taken into custody by the American forces in Rapallo. Commins refused to promote Pound’s work, and told Aiken that he would have to choose other poems. Aiken could hardly afford a conflict with anybody at Random House: the Modern Library anthologies were his main source of income, and the war years had been very tough (the anthologies had been in and out of print because of paper shortages). Yet, Aiken categorically refused to drop Pound. In June 1945, he wrote to Commins:

As for Pound, I’m not arguing with you, Saxe, I’m insisting. Pound stays in. Otherwise no use of my name. This, if you don’t know it, is just plain fascism -- you are proposing to violate freedom of speech and press, the very things for which the war was fought. You don’t suppress good poetry because of a man’s political or moral vagaries. Anyway, I’m not going to be a party to such, so let’s have no more fuss about it.

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1 Aiken to Cerf, 18 Nov. 1943, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.
2 Pound was indicted for treason in Washington on 26 July 1943 (Flory 284).
3 Aiken to Commins, 30 June 1945, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.
Cerf agreed with Commins that Pound should not appear in the anthology. But in an effort to compromise, he offered to print a note in the new anthology with a list of poems by Pound that Aiken had selected. The note also explained that the publisher refused “to publish a single line by Mr. Ezra Pound.” For Aiken, the whole situation was ridiculous. The poems had been written well before the war, and they had nothing to do with anti-Semitism. In July 1945, Aiken told a friend that they should ask “a few people” to write letters of complaint. When the anthology was released in the fall, several articles discussed the Pound case. The *New Masses*, a communist periodical, provocatively asked: “Should Ezra Pound Be Shot?” But by January 1946, the controversy seemed to have died down. Saxe Commins declared that they had received few letters on the subject, and that all of them were supportive of Random House’s decision to exclude Pound.

The debate was revived by an article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, in which the critic Lewis Gannett compared the exclusion of Pound’s poems to Nazi book burning. This came as a shock to Cerf, a Jewish liberal who had always opposed censorship. Angry at the comparison with Nazis burning books, he decided to launch a counter-attack in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. In February 1946, he wrote a two-page response to Gannett, saying that Modern

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4 The note declared: “At this point Conrad Aiken proposed to include in his anthology the following poems by Ezra Pound: ‘Envoi’ (1919), ‘The Tree,’ ‘The Tomb at Akr Caar,’ ‘Portrait d'une Femme,’ ‘Apparuit,’ ‘A Virginal,’ ‘The Return,’ ‘The River-Merchant’s Wife,’ ‘The Flame,’ ‘Dance Figure,’ ‘Lament of the Frontier Guard,’ and ‘Taking Leave of a Friend.’ He has consented to their omission upon condition that it be clearly stated in print that his wishes were overruled by publishers who flatly refused at this time to publish a single line by Mr. Ezra Pound.” Aiken file, Catalogued Correspondence, RH.

5 Aiken to John Gould Fletcher, 31 July 1945 (Killorin 263).


Library readers “will cherish the collection more with Pound left out.” He had two objectives. The first one was to gather support for his own position, at a time when his own literary friends and colleagues were divided. The second objective was to create a publicity stunt. A full-page advertisement for the Modern Library thus appeared just before his article. The new anthology was described as “the most ambitious, and most comprehensive, collection of verse to appear in the Modern Library series… a lavish and loving collection of familiar and surprising poetry.” Like all Modern Library books, the anthology targeted the growing education market. Cerf was confident that teachers and ordinary readers would not welcome Pound in such a collection.

In fact, the letters that Cerf received showed a wide range of opinions. Those readers who supported Cerf often interpreted the whole debate in terms of elite versus masses. This was exactly the kind of reaction that Cerf was expecting: he hoped to side with the vast majority of common readers alienated by the arrogance of the intelligentsia. But this is not what happened. After all, Cerf had put himself in a difficult position: he was one of the most prominent personalities in the publishing world, and yet, he presented himself as a victim of highbrows. His article in the Saturday Review seemed too emotional and illogical. One reader pointed out that “most of Pound’s poetry deals with virgins, books, flowers,” not with politics. Another reader wrote:

I am a Jew. I am a student at the University of Michigan, majoring in English literature. I hate Pound and every other person who shares his obscene views[,] with a hatred that is not nice to talk about. Furthermore, I don’t like Pound’s poetry. Despite this I think that you are in the wrong on this question. . . . If Pound has stayed in America, and kept his trap shut you would have made no objection to his

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11 Daniel L. Lionel [“Brooklyn Eagle”] to Cerf, 14 Feb. 1946, folder 14, BC-EP.
poetry, you are refusing to publish it because you disagree (understatement of the week) with his political views.\textsuperscript{12}

For many Americans, then, censorship was a bigger threat than Pound’s poetry. Cerf was forced to admit that he had been wrong, and to order a new edition of the anthology with poems by Pound. But to do so, he had to negotiate with Pound’s attorney, Julien Cornell (who also represented the interests of New Directions). Random House eventually agreed to pay a copyright fee of $300 to Pound, and to publish the following statement in the anthology:

Nothing could have been farther from the intention of the publishers to exercise arbitrary rights of censorship. We now have decided to include these poems of Ezra Pound in order to remove any possible hint of suppression, and because we concede that it may be wrong to confuse Pound the poet with Pound the man.\textsuperscript{13}

This was an important victory for James Laughlin, who was working hard to separate Pound the poet with Pound the man. In his study of New Directions, Gregory Barnhisel has shown that Laughlin “decided to eliminate any mention of the political or social content of Pound’s works from New Directions publicity materials, and began to focus solely on the aesthetic quality of these works” (6). The separation of art and politics was of course central to New Criticism, and it is not a coincidence that Pound’s strongest defenders were affiliated with this new critical movement. But it would be wrong to think that only a handful of intellectuals and New Critics defended the separation between art and politics. In fact, a large number of

\textsuperscript{12} David I. Segal to Cerf [1946], folder 20, BC-EP.

\textsuperscript{13} Cornell to Cerf, 10 May 1946 (Cornell 115).
ordinary Americans opposed the purging of literature. The 1946 controversy over Pound’s poems thus revealed the popularity of Laughlin’s view on the writer’s responsibility.

Despite the popular support enjoyed by Laughlin and Aiken, the Pound controversy soon became emblematic of the great divide between highbrows and middlebrows, between those who read New Directions books and those who read the Saturday Review. Cerf was no longer seen as the heroic publisher of Ulysses, but as a debased merchant of culture. Laughlin later remembered that, when he started his publishing career, he “had a sense of mission”: “I felt I was saving the world from Bennett Cerf.” Random House, a firm initially specialized in limited editions and controversial modernist fiction, now seemed to exemplify the corruption of high culture analyzed by Dwight Macdonald and others. Cerf found this new intellectual climate baffling. More than twenty years after the Pound Affair, he told the Columbia Oral History interviewer that he still could not understand why he had lost the battle:

I decided that when people I respected, like Lewis Gannett, told me that I was wrong, well then, I must have been wrong. I still in my heart don’t think that I was, but I had to admit that I was overwhelmed by people feeling the other way.15

The growing gap between Random House/ the Modern Library and the new generation of intellectuals forced a strategic repositioning. The sharp rise in the number of students, stimulated by the G.I. Bill of 1944, meant that cheap uniform series were more than ever in demand. As its presence in academia increased, the Modern Library started offering a more conventional selection of classics. In 1947, for example, the series added only five twentieth-century titles (out

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of sixteen new titles). As texts by Aristotle, Herodotus and Cicero joined its list, the Modern Library came to resemble Everyman’s Library and other uniform series of classics. However, it also continued to include recent bestsellers such as George Stewart’s *Storm* and “Isak Dinesen’s” *Out of Africa* (added in 1947 and 1952, respectively). But such books were unlikely to be studied in academia, with the New Critics now occupying positions of power. Moreover, the Modern Library had to compete with mass-market paperbacks. In 1950, editors Saxe Commins and Jess Stein launched the Modern Library College Editions, sold cheaper than the regular editions. As quality paperback collections such as Anchor Books and Vintage Books threatened to marginalize the Modern Library, the collection pursued its diversification with the launch of the Modern Library Paperbacks in 1955. By the early 1960s, the Modern Library had lost much of its competitive edge. Changing literary trends meant that bestsellers could no longer be marketed as quality fiction. The paperback revolution also led to a general decrease in the price of books, which endangered the Modern Library – a series that no longer appeared sophisticated, nor cheap.

The evolution of the Modern Library sheds light on the construction of cultural categories as “immutable givens.” In the interwar period, the Modern Library conceived modern literature as a broad category. This eclectic definition had an impact on literature departments and university libraries, as Cerf and Klopfer energetically marketed their series to the academic world. For example, Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* was taught in literature courses and described as “a work of art” (Bentley 791). The critical walls between “High Culture” and “Popular Culture” and between modernism and middlebrow literature did not emerge until the early 1940s.

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16 Jason Epstein, who founded Anchor Books, started his list with *The Charterhouse of Parma*, a book that had been dropped from the Modern Library (Satterfield 161).
Under the influence of New Criticism, “modernism” came to designate a narrow canon of male writers, mostly poets. From the 1990s, critics started expanding the category “modernism” to include neglected writers: women novelists, Harlem Renaissance authors and the like. Scholars of the middlebrow have recently challenged this tendency, arguing with Jaime Harker that “modernism is a critical construction that cannot account for the entire range of writing and authorship in the interwar period” (15). Likewise, the call for papers for a conference on middlebrow writing declared that “the conception of modernism has been expanded in order to be able to accommodate less obviously avant-garde works, but this expansion may not be continued indefinitely.”17 “Modernism” is indeed a critical construction that has been historically centered on a handful of writers. But so is the more recent construction of the “middlebrow” as a narrow category restricted to female writers such as Pearl Buck, Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Edna Ferber. The fact that these writers were published in the Modern Library, along with writers such as Dashiell Hammett and James Joyce shows that lines of demarcation between high, low and middle were much more flexible in the first half of the twentieth century.

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