

BIRTE CHRIST

Modern Domestic Fiction

Popular Feminism,
Mass-Market Magazines,
and Middle-Class Culture,
1905–1925

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

Volume 229



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ALFRED HORNUNG



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I use the following abbreviations for texts that I discuss in detail in this study. The page numbers that occur after these abbreviations in the text refer to the specific book editions listed here. For easier means of checking, page numbers do not refer to the magazine editions unless otherwise noted.

- AI *Angel Island*. By Inez Haynes Irwin. New York: Henry Holt, 1914.
- BC *The Brimming Cup*. By Dorothy Canfield. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921.
- DM *A Daughter of the Morning*. By Zona Gale. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1917
- FV *Friendship Village*. By Zona Gale. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908.
- FVLS *Friendship Village Love Stories*. By Zona Gale. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909
- HM *The Home-Maker*. By Dorothy Canfield. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924.
- HP *Hillsboro People*. By Dorothy Canfield. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915.
- LK *The Lady of Kingdoms*. By Inez Haynes Irwin. New York: Doubleday and Doran, 1917.
- MM *Mothers to Men*. By Zona Gale. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911.

- NS *Neighborhood Stories*. By Zona Gale. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914.
- PFV *Peace in Friendship Village*. By Zona Gale. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919.
- SC *The Squirrel-Cage*. By Dorothy Canfield. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912.

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- Page 315 Figure 18, Ad for Globe-Wernicke Sectional Bookcases, detail, *Woman's Home Companion*, November 1916: 72.

The Heroes of Ancient Greece
HOMER, the greatest of these
 immortal story-tellers, is
 preserved to us in our Globe-
 Wernicke Sectional Bookcases.

The 12th Century Troubadours
THEY were the Globe-
 Wernickes of their day. No-
 man fiction abounds, travelling
 sellers of tales and singers of
 romances.

The 14th Century Jester
HIS was a comparison of the
 great nobles' idle moments
 —their undisturbed substitute for
 the volumes of Mark Twain, Swift
 and Melville in our Globe-
 Wernicke Sectional Bookcases
 today.

The 18th Century Tutor
HIS was in every wealthy
 household — the companion
 and preceptor of every youth, sal-
 cing a genius and nerving every
 genius; as are today with every
 student's reach, in the Globe-
 Wernicke Sectional Bookcases.

Globe-Wernicke
 Sectional Bookcases
 (Built-to-Endure)

*"The Heart
 of the Home"*

—the modern substitute for the minstrels, troubadours,
 jesters and tutors of old.
 Your *Globe-Wernicke Sectional Bookcase* is the center of the
 family's intellectual life, a hall of learning and a theatre of
 amusement. Growing as the book collection grows, section
 being added to section as required, it is the outward symbol
 of your inward growth.

Write for "*The World's Best Books*," a valuable reading course
 prescribed by eminent men of action and letters, and ask for
 Globe-Wernicke Catalog No. 22008, showing the various period
 styles and wood finishes in their natural colors.

The Globe-Wernicke Co. Cincinnati

Agents in over 2,000 cities. Branch stores:
 New York Philadelphia Washington, D. C. Chicago Boston St. Louis

Globe-Wernicke
 Sectional Bookcases
Built to Endure

Figure 1: Ad from *Woman's Home Companion*, November 1916

INTRODUCTION: MODERN DOMESTIC FICTION

In November 1916, the Cincinnati-based furniture company Globe-Wernicke placed the advertisement reproduced in Figure 1 in *Woman's Home Companion*. Next to it on page 72, the reader finds a variety of seasonal ads. These include Quaker Robe's Cuddledown Set for "Big Brother and Baby Sister," Hamilton Bed Blankets and Girls' Doll Blankets, or a patented Keepwarm Klip so that "Baby Can't Get Cold." The contemporary reader most probably turned to this page at the back of the magazine because she was indulging in the second and last installment of Zona Gale's novelette *A Daughter of the Morning*. This is the story of the rise of Cosma Wakeley: Cosma, a farmer's daughter, goes to the city, studies at school and college, and eventually finds fulfillment in her work as a secretary to John Ember who, among other things, runs a lecture bureau for adult education. On this specific page of the *Companion*, the reader learned about Ember's difficulties of paying his collaborators at Chautauqua.¹ While reading, her gaze was pulled over the three columns of advertising which flank the single column of Gale's text.²

At the center of the Globe-Wernicke ad, a heart-shaped photo-engraving shows the advertised sectional bookcases filled with books *in* and *as* "The Heart of the Home." In this "heart of the home," which is identified as an interior, private space by a carpet and a curtain, husband and wife are united in the casual perusal and systematizing of their books. From this central image, the reader's view is led clockwise through a series of four heart-shaped illustrations that constitute a his-

¹ Chautauqua is an adult education movement that was initiated in 1874 at the campsite of Chautauqua Lake in New York State. It quickly grew into a national organization and remained highly popular throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. For a history of the Chautauqua movement see Rieser 2003; on Chautauqua's centrality for middle-class culture see Rieser 2001.

² Throughout this study, I use the generic "she" to refer to the reader.

tory or genealogy of this “scene of reading” that takes place in the home of 1916. The first three of the images, however, do not cast this history of reading as a history of the book, as one might expect in an ad for bookcases, but as a history of oral narrative. They refer to the Homeric and to the medieval troubadour and minstrel traditions. The fourth image and the text of the ad, then, recast this oral literary history as a history of education and the dissemination of knowledge. As the last image of the series merges back into the contemporary scene, the main text of the ad informs the reader that the Globe-Wernicke book-cases are “the modern substitutes for the minstrels, troubadours, jesters, and tutors of old.” The ad then addresses the reader directly as a potential buyer and owner of the book-cases:

Your Globe-Wernicke Sectional Bookcase is the center of the family’s intellectual life, a hall of learning and a theatre of amusement. Growing as the book collection grows, section being added to section as required, it is the outward symbol of your inward growth.

Visually and textually, the ad thus makes important claims about domestic life and literature, which it trusts will meet the consent of the reader and potential buyer. It suggests that one of the most important goals in the life of a family is the ongoing education and “intellectual growth” of its members. The primary function of literature is educational or didactic. While the content of what may be written down in a book has been transmitted in person by an author or teacher throughout most of history, today this same knowledge and moral counsel can most easily be acquired through book reading. In order to sell their actual product, the bookcase, Globe-Wernicke fosters and builds upon the reader’s desire for intellectual growth, links it to reading, and then establishes a metonymic link between the “right” educational reading and the bookcase. As the blurbs under the images inform the reader, “Homer [...] is preserved to us in our *Globe-Wernicke Sectional Bookcases*” and “so many geniuses are today within every student’s reach in the *Globe-Wernicke Sectional Bookcases*.” Owning the bookcases, the ad suggests, means as much as to own the ideal educational library. In fact, Globe-Wernicke offers “*The World’s Best Books*,’ a reading course prescribed by eminent men of action and letters” for free with its catalogue. This commercial ploy is designed to convince even

the most doubtful reader that the best kind of education, along with the bookcases, is to be had by her, too.

By referencing Homer and past “geniuses,” the short blurbs of text that accompany the historical images suggest that an education that relies on a library placed in a Globe-Wernicke bookcase will build on longstanding, traditional canons. By contrast, the ad’s visuals construct “modern” learning as something of an entirely new order. To begin with, learning in 1916 is represented as the private, individual study of a book while learning in the past is represented as a dialogue with a knowledgeable person or teacher. Learning in 1916, moreover, takes place in the privacy of the home, but as the reader can clearly see, it used to be an activity of the open air and the public sphere. Not least, learning in 1916 is something that “average people” like the reader of the *Woman’s Home Companion* are striving for and can, in fact, achieve. By contrast, the references to bards and troubadours in conjunction with the image of “The 19th Century Tutor” show education to have previously been a privilege of the higher classes of society: either of the nobility or, in the nineteenth century, of the money aristocracy of “every wealthy household.”

It is important to note that the opposition of “modern” and “historical”—or even of “modern” and “obsolete”—is visually constructed along the lines of “American” and “foreign”: Homer, the “troubadours,” and the “jesters” are shown as inhabitants of ancient Greece and medieval Europe. Even the landscape surrounding the nineteenth-century tutor and tutee suggests British scenery rather than US American wilderness or urbanism. A second construction contingent upon the opposition of American “self” and foreign “other,” which is implicit, is that of “Protestant” versus “Catholic/non-Christian.”³ The democratizing impe-

³ The implicit superiority of “modern” American society, culture, and education over “historical,” foreign, non-Protestant, and, by implication, non-democratic societies is signaled by the third image of “[t]he 14th Century Jester” and its accompanying blurb. The text claims that the jester “was a companion of the great nobles’ idler moments,” but did not amount to more than an “uninspired substitute” for what the Globe-Wernicke bookcases offer the American reader of 1916. In its undertones, the blurb rejects monarchic systems that create an idle nobility and, at the same time, allows the hard-working average American reader to feel superior over idle nobles.

tus of giving the individual direct access to the written word instead of relying on interception and interpretation by a supposedly more knowledgeable “professional” derives directly from Protestantism. In consequence, in the modern/Protestant scene, books as material objects play an important role for the “learner” and are lovingly kept in decorative cases, whereas books do not feature in the historical/Catholic scenes.⁴ These paradigmatic differences between “modern” and “historical” learning and reading are also signaled by the visual contrast created by an “old” and a “new” kind of imaging technology: The contemporary scene is represented by a “modern” photograph, which was still rather unusual in advertisements in 1916, while the historic scenes are conventionally illustrated with hand-drawn images (as are all other ads on that page).⁵ Reproduced in a magazine, the photograph and the drawings, moreover, come to stand for an “old” and a new “era” of printing technology. Whereas photographs could first be reproduced after the invention of the half-tone in the 1880s, the aesthetics of the drawings are reminiscent of the “older” techniques of etchings, engravings, and woodcuts.⁶

Idleness—the opposite of learning and education—is detestable and at most pitiable from the perspective of a reader striving for personal growth, and is so certainly within the framework of a Protestant ethos. However, the blurb is somewhat contradictory: While it replaces the supposedly shallow entertainment of “jesters” with one American comic author (Mark Twain), it also references the British/monarchist Swift and the French/Catholic Molière as authors central to education. Yet, as “classic” authors whose writings are kept within a Globe-Wernicke Bookcase, the latter two seem to be absolved from their “foreign” alliances.

⁴ A book is, in fact, shown in the image of “[t]he 19th Century Tutor,” but the scene is one of conversational instruction.

⁵ It is true that photos began to appear in ads as early as 1900, but they were only used as isolated product photos with text. For scenic illustrations, drawing remained the norm until after World War I. I am grateful to Bonnie Yochelson for substantiating my own observations on the use of photography and drawing in advertisements.

⁶ For the impact of the invention of the halftone on American visual and commercial culture, see Harris 1979. In fact, the complete ad in *Woman’s Home Companion* is reproduced by the very “modern” technology of offset screen print, invented in 1907.

The optimistic belief in personal advancement through self-education—be it economical advancement, as in the ideal of the self-made man, or spiritual advancement, as in Puritan doctrine—is, of course, one of the foundational creeds of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant United States. Yet the promise and ideal of advancement takes on increased urgency for social groups who have only recently risen or are striving to rise in status, such as the so-called “new middle class” of white-collar workers around the turn of the century. Gale’s narrative autobiography of Cosma Wakeley is a case in point: A farmer’s daughter makes her way through school and becomes a secretary. Cosma’s ongoing commitment to adult education in the form of the Chautauqua movement—the epitome of the aspiring middle class’s ambition for learning—firmly characterizes the “common” reader and learner of 1916 as a middle-class subject. This is confirmed in the ad: The cultural work performed by the Globe-Wernicke advertisement and that referenced by Gale’s novelette converge around the class-bound ideological hinge of self-improvement. The claims of literature and commerce corroborate and interchangeably realize one another. They interpellate an American reader and consumer with a historically specific social and cultural identity: the white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, modern middle-class reader and consumer. At the same time, the other commercials surrounding the literary text and the ad for bookcases, then, produce this reader as female: It is the mother of the family whom the commercials attempt to coax into buying blankets and winter-wear for her children.

The Globe-Wernicke ad constructs middle-class reading as a prerequisite for advancement that is structured by a desire for education and moral direction. But moreover, it also points to the way in which texts supposedly perform their didactic work on their readers and, vice versa, to the ways in which modern middle-class readers engage with texts. The use of heart-shaped images for all scenes of reading is neither merely a cheap and rather silly ploy to attract and hold the (romantic) interest of the reader, nor is it only used to suggest the central position that reading may take in historic and contemporary lives. More importantly, the visual placement of each scene of reading “within a heart” imbues reading and learning with an affective dimension. Reading, the images claim, is a matter of the heart, rather than a matter of the head.

Texts perform their work via the reader's emotions, and readers read texts in an emotionally engaged way.

In using heart shapes to delineate both the contemporary and the historic scenes, the ad suggests that reading and education have at all times made their greatest impact on the reader and learner via the emotions. Yet the contrast between the drawings of historical scenes and the photograph of the "modern" scene also draws attention to the mode of representation in didactic modern middle-class literature. The photograph, hailed in its early days as an authentic visual copy of reality, suggests the importance of verisimilitude and circumstantial detail for "modern" literary representation. In contrast with the drawings which are products of an artistic imagination, referencing the classical, medieval, and romantic traditions, the "modern" technology of photography reinforces the notion that modern middle-class fiction is committed to the reality-effect.

1 Conceptualizing Modern Domestic Fiction: Object of Study and Aims

Modern Domestic Fiction focuses on exactly that culture of reading that the Globe-Wernicke advertisement, in liaison with Gale's narrative, constructs and employs for its own commercial goals: modern middle-class literary culture—often referred to as "middlebrow" culture. In their groundbreaking studies *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992) and *A Feeling for Books* (1997), Joan Shelley Rubin and Janice Radway have discussed modern middle-class culture as a formation thriving between the 1920s and 1950s in the United States and have analyzed its ideological agenda, intellectual coherence, and aesthetics. Two aspects of modern middle-class culture, which both Rubin and Radway focus on, are central to my study.

First, this culture is ruled by an ethos of "middleness" (Rubin 1992: xvi). This ethos is characterized by an ideological "in-between-ness" or "both/and": It balances old and new, nineteenth-century and "modern" values, concepts, and practices. The Globe-Wernicke ad and the implications of its placement and reception embody this ethos perfectly. The ad suggests that while modern middle-class readers desire a traditional, canonical education, they also take advantage of new cultural practices

to acquire it. While they cherish the bound book as a seemingly timeless guarantor of education and as the material embodiment of canonical literature, they also subscribe to a great number of new mass-marketed, ephemeral magazines, such as the *Woman's Home Companion*, and read contemporary fiction on its pages. The commercial dimension of literary culture is, on the one hand, disavowed by the emphasis of the non-material, timeless values of knowledge and moral guidance *within* the ad. Yet on the other hand, knowledge, literature, and the book emerge as material, time-bound commodities firmly integrated into a cultural mass market *through* the ad, that is, by virtue of being advertised in the first place. The balancing of the literary and the commercial, as performed by the Globe-Wernicke ad, is one of the hallmarks of modern middle-class literary culture.

Second, in her study with the programmatic title *A Feeling for Books*, Janice Radway focuses on a second central characteristic of modern middle-class literary culture. She argues that, first and foremost, modern middle-class fiction's *raison d'être* was based on the promise to help its readers expand their knowledge and to provide them with moral guidance in their everyday lives. Radway speaks of the cultural work that modern middle-class texts perform on their readers as a "sentimental education." By adopting the concept of sentimentality to describe a "new" twentieth-century literature and thus associating that literature with the "old" aesthetics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she terminologically implicates the balancing of tradition and innovation characteristic of modern middle-class literature. More importantly, however, Radway's characterization of the workings of modern middle-class literature converges with the Globe-Wernicke ad's visual statement on this literature's principal aesthetics. Radway argues that modern middle-class literature becomes effective by appealing to the reader's affects and sentiments rather than to her intellect—just as the ad does by its use of the heart shapes.

This study focuses on one genre of literary texts within the context of the cultural formation of the "middlebrow." The term I use for categorizing this genre is "modern domestic fiction." Modern domestic fiction was published in the US within the period from 1905 to 1925. It was generally first serialized in mass-marketed magazines and later appeared in book format. As examples of this kind of fiction I have chosen works by Dorothy Canfield, Zona Gale, and Inez Haynes Irwin. While almost

forgotten today, all three authors were immensely popular in their time. Their novels and stories were read by millions of magazine subscribers all over the United States. Gale's *Miss Lulu Bett* (1920) and Canfield's *The Brimming Cup* (1921) even ranked first and second on annual best-seller lists. Modern domestic texts, I argue, evolved out of the domestic novel of the nineteenth century. They share comparable, yet "modernized," plot-lines, characters, concerns, aesthetics, and audiences with their nineteenth-century predecessors.

When I speak of the domestic novel of the nineteenth century, I am referring to the body of texts which Nina Baym has first described as "Woman's Fiction" (1978). These woman-centered narratives of development, or *Bildungsromane*, tell the story of a young woman's successful integration into her traditional roles as wife and mother. It is through self-disciplining and self-sacrifice that she attains her "right" place in the social order. As critics have pointed out over the past decades, these texts must be considered "training narratives" (Tompkins 1985: 176). They guide the female reader towards an emulation of the ideal of the True Woman (Welter 1966). Such an ideal woman was religious, virtuous, selfless, and devoted to creating a home for her husband and her children. She was cast as morally superior to men due to her innate qualities, but also because she lived a life separate from the egotism, competition, and corruption of the public world of business and politics. As part of the larger culture of domesticity, these texts helped their women readers to grow into their traditional roles by granting them a sense of self-esteem and attributing symbolic moral power to them. Much of the critical discussion about domestic literature has revolved around the question of whether its function is affirmative or subversive. Does this accretion of power to the domestic woman stabilize her social status quo or does it enable her to eventually transgress her limited sphere of authority? Whether in the affirmative or subversive sense, the texts become effective as the female reader identifies with the protagonist, experiences her life vicariously, can think about her own life in these new terms, and act accordingly.

My interest in the *modern* incarnations of the domestic novel was sparked by the stunned observation that in accounts of American literary

history and women's writing the genre ceases to exist after 1900.⁷ According to literary histories—to sketch the current consensus in very broad lines—texts around 1900 which evolved out of the concerns of nineteenth-century domestic fiction had come to view non-domestic work and non-domestic types of self-gratification as the protagonist's primary goal. Marriage and motherhood were seen as antithetical to self-actualization. Criticism on women's literature around 1900 does not focus on texts that struggle with the traditional domestic role of woman, but suggests that these have largely been replaced by so-called New Woman fiction and women's modernist narratives structured around other concerns. By 1900, the domestic novel had apparently written its protagonist/reader (and therefore itself) out of the domestic sphere, and hence out of cultural relevancy. Yet given the factual ongoing relevancy of domestic lives for almost all middle-class women in the early twentieth century, I could not believe that domestic fiction—as a genre which empowers women protagonists and guides readers *within* the domestic sphere and *within* their traditional roles as eligible young woman, wife, and mother—should have become culturally superfluous. The Globe-Wernicke ad, for instance, simply reflects a social reality in choosing an obviously domestic, married woman as representative of the middle-class woman reader: The great majority of middle-class women did eventually marry and stay at home. Globe-Wernicke could thus, in turn, rely on a majority of the *Companion's* readers to identify with the woman in the ad.

And indeed, in popular family and women's magazines of the first decades of the twentieth century, I came across a great number of serial novels, novelettes, and stories revolving around protagonists “still” deeply steeped in the domestic ethos. These texts told the story of women protagonists on their way to attaining heart, hearth, and home, dwelt in circumstantial detail on domestic issues, and employed a wealth of sentimental tropes. They had certainly undergone a “modernization” in comparison with the nineteenth-century domestic novel. For instance,

⁷ A case in point is the absence of domestic fiction in critical overviews of modernism, for example Bradshaw and Dettmar 2006, Childs 2000, Kalaidjian 2005, Levenson 1999a, 2011a, and 2011b. To my best knowledge, Susan Edmunds's essay on domestic fiction in John T. Matthews's *Companion to the Modern American Novel* (2009) is the only exception to date.

the domestic ethos had been secularized. The texts also featured older, married protagonists, who were not on their way to *attaining*, but rather shown in their struggle of *maintaining* love within marriage and the family, human connectedness, and moral integrity. Moreover, the texts made use not only of the sentimental, but also of the melodramatic mode. Yet, these texts did clearly testify to the fact that the genre of the domestic novel, with its basic story of female development towards the roles as wife and mother, was still very much present in the literary middle-class landscape. *Modern Domestic Fiction*, therefore, takes the history of the domestic genre beyond the moment in time where it is usually considered to break off. It joins current efforts to redraw the boundaries of domestic fiction and aims to contribute to the reconstruction of a continuous tradition of women's writing which has largely been obscured by the prevailing critical emphasis on literary modernism in the early twentieth century.

In discussing modern domestic fiction as magazine fiction, my second broader aim is to direct attention to what must be considered the formative medium of modern middle-class literary culture in the US. As I have shown by way of the Globe-Wernicke ad, modern middle-class culture is marked by its integration into a medial mass market. Accordingly, Rubin's and Radway's characterizations of modern middle-class literary culture have strongly been informed by an analysis of institutions and specific marketing strategies for books and fiction. Moreover, by focusing on fiction published between 1905 and 1925, I also direct attention to what must be considered middle-class culture's formative period. The "birth of the middlebrow" (Klein 2003: 64) is generally dated in the 1920s, and more precisely in 1926, when Harry Scherman incorporated the Book-of-the-Month Club. As I intend to focus on early formations of the middlebrow, this is, however, the historic moment in which I end my analyses of modern domestic fiction. Radway argues that Scherman had begun his project of commodifying the book in 1916 by marketing a Library Package for the Whitman Candy Company that sold a box of candy with a book. Through this conjunction of eatables with a leather-bound book, Scherman recast the book as simultaneously "a consumable, ephemeral commodity and a classic permanent possession" (1997: 127). This hybrid understanding of the book, Radway further argues, was perfected ten years later when Scherman, in the Book-of-the-Month Club scheme, "united the traditional publisher's

desire to issue singular, serious books with a serially oriented, magazine distribution format" (1997: 128). In doing so, he both expanded his audience as much as possible and could rely on selling a fixed amount of books in monthly intervals.

The reason why the serial format of book-selling suggested itself to Scherman and why it was met with enthusiasm by more than 45,000 subscribers within the first year of the Book-of-the-Month Club's existence (see Radway 1997: 188) was that the boom of popular magazines in the first decade of the twentieth century had paved the way for the mass selling and mass consumption of literature in a serial format. Publishers had been sensitized for binding readers through the seriality of a product like the magazine: The magazine is simultaneously a self-contained text and a text within an ongoing series that gratifies the reader for the moment but also stimulates her desire for more. The Globe-Wernicke ad is an example of how the practice of "serial selling" invaded other commercial arenas before Scherman employed it on a large scale for books: In 1916, Globe-Wernicke offered its product, the bookcase, in *sections*. The fact that the serial ploy is used to market rather expensive commodities such as furniture makes clear once more that it is directed at the aspiring middle class that is yet financially weak: Well-off, yet without substantial reserves and always having to economize, the husband and wife in the ad purchase their bookcases on an "instalment plan" of bookcase sections. At the same time that publishers and sellers embraced "serial selling," large masses of readers became used to receiving their reading at home in the form of the magazine and to ordering products through the mail—such as the Globe-Wernicke catalogue and the accompanying reading course. Also, they derived a sense of self and belonging from serial reading. Each magazine addressed a specific community of readers that was factually circumscribed by subscription and largely class-bound.

Radway notes that the reorganization of the literary market in 1926 "had gathered momentum during [...] the early decades of the twentieth [century]" (1997: 128). She emphasizes that Scherman employs the methods of magazines by "serial selling," but her focus is on discourses surrounding the *book*. In this study, I analyze texts that were written before the era of the book clubs and were first published serially in popular magazines. In other words, the texts were published in the form that Radway considers central to "middlebrow" practices of marketing

and consuming literature. Moreover, they share almost all of the characteristics that she describes as typical of “middlebrow” literature and culture.

There are additional indications that the historical faring of the magazine and the “middlebrow” are intimately connected: Popular magazines experienced another boom in the mid-twenties when Scherman launched the Book-of-the-Month Club, and they continued to serve as the central mass medium until the 1950s. Scholarship sees the 1950s as the period in which the “middlebrow,” then, lost much of its impact due to cultural differentiation and other, competing formations. By directing attention to the first quarter of the twentieth century as the formative period of “middlebrow” or modern middle-class literary culture, I demonstrate that the foundations for this cultural formation that culminated in institutions such as the Book-of-the-Month Club after 1925 were laid in the preceding twenty years by the cultural agent of the popular magazine. While the field of periodical studies has researched the boom of popular magazines around 1905 in depth, this scholarship has only recently been brought into dialogue with inquiries into “middlebrow” culture.⁸ It is to this dialogue that *Modern Domestic Fiction* also wishes to contribute.

A third broader aim of this study is to contribute to a critical differentiation of the “middlebrow” literary field. Critical work that built on Rubin’s and Radway’s forays into “middlebrow culture” in the 1990s was comparatively sparse at first. Until around 2008, only few studies were published that employed the category of the “middlebrow” or focused on authors and texts that must be considered part of modern middle-class culture. Over the past five years, however, “middlebrow” criticism has been booming. The foundation of the research group “Middlebrow Network” in the UK and the publication of Gordon Hutner’s programmatic *What America Read* (2009) in the US can be seen as two major stimuli for a growing interest in the field. At the same time, the critical category of the “middlebrow” is increasingly used in an expansive way: It is not used as a category descriptive of a text’s posi-

⁸ Four recent essays that combine periodical studies and a reflection on early twentieth-century “middlebrow” culture are Bland 2009 and Reynolds 2005 (both without employing the term “middlebrow”), Hamilton 2012, and Kingham 2012.

tioning within a hierarchical cultural field, but instead as a marker of a scholarly perspective that reads a broad range of authors “in the context of the ‘battle of the brows’ which marked their era” (Hammill 2012: 231).

This recent theoretical re-conceptualization of the “middlebrow” is important for a more complex understanding of the construction of cultural hierarchies. Moreover, this expansive use of the category is met with a parallel expansive use of the category “modernism” in what is often called the “new modernist studies.” Scholarly inquiries from the perspective of modernist and “middlebrow” studies are thus often intersecting and produce more nuanced results. Yet, the expansion of the “middlebrow” field in historical terms has detracted attention from the period in which divisions between the high, middle, and low first emerged;⁹ more generally, the expansion of the field has increased the need for studies that engage individual authors, texts, forums of publication, and the characteristics that made them be considered “middlebrow.” In this study, I focus on one aspect that has been neglected so far: the role of literary genre in the construction of the “middlebrow” field. By focusing on one literary genre, through the works of three specific authors, within a clearly delimited time span, and along relatively narrow study questions, I single out one of the many small sub-fields of modern middle-class literature and analyze its specificities in detail. Thus, *Modern Domestic Fiction* aims to contribute to a critical differentiation of the large and heterogeneous body of cultural forms and expressions now categorized as “middlebrow.”

2 The Cultural Work of Modern Domestic Fiction: Approaches and Theses

Looking at early twentieth-century actualizations of the domestic genre, I am interested in the transformations of the cultural work which this genre performs as it enters the twentieth century, and in how it develops over the next two decades. I focus on three dynamics that are bound up

⁹ In addition, the concept has also been used to frame early twenty-first-century cultural divisions; see, for instance, Aubry 2006, Blair 2012: 195–204, and Brier 2010 for discussions of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* as “middlebrow.”

in different ways with the modern transformations of the cultural work of domestic texts. First, I am interested in the formal development of the genre. Second, I bring contemporary non-literary discourses on domesticity and women's roles to bear on modern domestic fiction. Third, I look at the co-construction of a text's cultural work through its material or commercial publication context, the popular magazine. As such, my study will move in parallel fashion on three levels, on the "material, aesthetic, and ideological planes" (Davidson 1989: 2) of texts.

My most basic assumption is that these texts, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, perform the cultural work of empowering the female reader moving towards, or struggling within, a domestic life of marriage and motherhood. Jane Tompkins's well-known concept of "cultural work," first developed in her study *Sensational Designs* (1985), implies a specific way of critically approaching literature. Following Tompkins, I understand literary texts not as "works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order." Texts "articulat[e] and propos[e] solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment" (1985: xi). With regard to modern domestic fiction, I would add, they articulate and propose solutions for the problems that women readers face in their personal lives during the first decades of the twentieth century. This perspective on literature allows Tompkins to open up literary inquiry to include non-canonical works. My inquiry, as well as any work on modern middle-class literature by definition, thus also contributes to the ongoing project of "mov[ing] the study of American literature away from the small group of master texts that have dominated critical discussion" (xi), a project initiated by Tompkins almost three decades ago.

If literary texts redefine the social order, an understanding of this social order at a specific historical moment becomes paramount for the understanding of what literature "did" for its readers, or what cultural work it performed. Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*, as one of the central books that inaugurated the New Historicism, demonstrates that a text's historical contexts—its time-bound ideological, political, institutional, material, and other contexts—need to be meticulously reconstructed in order to make sense of why "that literature has power in the world, to see how it connects with the beliefs and attitudes of large masses of readers so as to impress or move them deeply" (xiv). As the

image of the “power of literature in the world” implies, the relationship between literature and context is to be understood as reciprocal: Texts are products of context, yet at the same time they produce these contexts. They do so, for example, by educating their readers and thus “producing” new and different individuals. Focusing on the cultural work of texts in this study, my aim is not to demonstrate the multiple possible readings that the texts allow for, but to reconstruct the way the texts may have been read by their first, historical readers—white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, “new middle-class” women.

Working from the basic assumption that Canfield’s, Gale’s, and Irwin’s texts empower women readers and thus redefine the social order of gender relations, I first of all contextualize the question of *what* these texts want to achieve for their middle-class women readers with the public political discourse on women’s rights and its specific strategies and arguments. Nancy Cott (1987, 1990) and others have shown that in the mid-1910s, a paradigmatic shift occurs in the publicly visible objectives, strategies, and activism of the US American suffrage and women’s rights movement. This shift was accompanied by the new self-identification as “feminist” of part of the movement. The abstract dynamic underlying this shift is an argumentative move from difference-focused arguments, grounded in progressive women’s activism, to equality-focused arguments for an expansion of women’s rights and choices fuelled by liberal individualist impulses. I claim that the “popular feminism” that works through modern domestic fiction make-shifts in the same way, even if the texts are concerned with matters other than women’s political participation. Until 1915, the arguments for the female protagonists’ roles and developments are based on their difference from men, but, from the middle of the 1910s onwards, they are based on the female protagonists’ equality to men and their claim to an equal freedom of choice. I have divided my readings of modern domestic fiction into two parts: texts published between 1905 and 1915, and texts published between 1916 and 1925. This division reflects the different quality of gender-related arguments that the texts engage with, and hence, the different answers to the protagonists’ problems within their roles that the texts provide in these two periods. While I am aware that the term “feminism” is an anachronism with regard to the time before 1915, I have decided to employ the terms “progressive feminism”

and “liberalist feminism” as shorthand for the gender ideology promulgated in modern domestic texts before and after the mid-1910s.

My second focus of interest in this study is on *how* the texts didactically present these ideological stances and the choices and roles of the protagonists, and how they make them effective for the woman reader. The texts’ embeddedness in modern middle-class literary culture is reinforced by the texts’ roots in the nineteenth-century domestic novel and its sentimental mode. Accordingly, the texts perform their cultural work by engaging the reader emotionally in ideologically coded choices, as the Globe-Wernicke ad, too, suggests by its use of the heart shapes. In order to grasp the textual form that this emotional engagement of the reader hinges upon, I employ Raymond Williams’s concept of textual “structures of feeling” or “structures of experience.” While Williams employs the concept to focus on working-class resistance, I use it in the way in which Fowler (1984), Parchesky (1998), and Klein (2003) have made it productive for “middlebrow” studies. By “structures of feeling” Williams refers to the ways ideological forces work through art. They are structures into which ideological choices and ideologically significant impulses are clothed—as opposed to more formal expressions of ideology, such as political speeches or manifestos. For example, such structures of feeling may be rooted in the plot-level of modern domestic fiction where they take the form of the protagonist’s *romantic* choice between suitors, which stands for an *ideologically relevant* choice between different roles and between different versions of domesticity. This choice is thus made emotionally accessible to the reader within the well-known cultural and literary script of heterosexual romance.

The concept of “structures of feeling” lends itself particularly well to my analysis of modern domestic fiction. It addresses the aesthetics of sentiment and melodrama, brought together in the notion of modern middle-class texts’ affective “sentimental education,” but it also evokes “ideology” as a less totalizing concept. “Structures of feeling,” according to Raymond Williams, transport an ideology of the cultural mainstream which he describes as a conglomeration of “old” and “new” elements. This ideology cannot be isolated since it becomes discernible only in its workings through textual form and continually shifts shape in its specific aesthetic manifestations. As such, the concept of “structures of feeling” does not only speak to the structures of sentiment and emotional engagement that are central to modern middle-class reading

culture, but also to the modern middle class's ideological "both/and" and "in-between-ness."

Moreover, I take my lead from Williams's observation that structures of feeling constitute "social experiences in solution" (1977: 133). If structures of feeling are the form which popular feminism takes, their cultural work on the reader can become effective only when these structures model solutions on the plot level. In other words, a text offers structures to effect the reader's acting upon a "feminist" "lesson of feeling" only when it moves beyond mourning or critically analyzing the protagonist's malaise and shows her in the process of developing "feminist" alternatives that the reader can use as a model for her own life.

Third, I consider the *what* and *how* of domestic fiction's cultural work beyond the *discursive* ideological contexts of contemporary feminism and modern middle-class literary culture: I focus on the *medial* context in which the first readers encountered the modern domestic text—the popular magazine. The magazine versions of modern domestic fiction often differ from the book versions. They may be cut for the magazine or revised for the book edition. In the magazine, the novels, novelettes, and short stories are also juxtaposed with the images and texts of advertisements, as I have demonstrated with regard to Zona Gale's *A Daughter of the Morning*. The narratives are always supplemented by illustrations. Such illustrations were often carried out by staff illustrators of the respective magazine. Moreover, the modern domestic texts were commented on in plot summaries, discussed in editorials and other magazine-internal advertisements of the text, surrounded by other fiction, by poetry, by the various departments of any magazine—from recipes to advice sections to political discussions, by letters to the editor, and many more types of images and texts. In addition, installments pace the reading process and determine at which point the narrative is interrupted and taken up again.

In Chapter III and Chapter V, I exemplarily analyze the way in which these various kinds of commercial and medial contexts contribute to the construction of the text's cultural work, or in which way they support or hamper the effectiveness of structures of feeling offered by the texts. This study is highly indebted to the thriving field of periodical studies and its theorizing of the "publishing genre" of magazines. Due to a predominant focus on Victorian periodicals and their textual and visual discourses, only few in-depth analyses of novels and their "packaging"

in mass magazines of the early twentieth century exist to date.¹⁰ One exemplary essay in which a novel from this period is read in its first magazine context, and which has served as a model for my study, is Edie Thornton's "Selling Edith Wharton" (2001). Thornton looks at the way Wharton's *A Mother's Recompense* was marketed, commented upon, and constructed by the accompanying illustrations in *Pictorial Review*.¹¹ Reading modern domestic fiction both within its discursive political and its magazine contexts, this study also calls for new historicist and cultural studies-informed contextual research to integrate the findings of periodical studies more systematically into its analyses. This kind of contextualization is particularly appropriate with regard to popular cultural texts that are as obviously moored within a commercially dominated culture as modern domestic fiction is within the culture of the modern middle class.

3 Selling Popular Feminism: The Authors

Let me return one last time to Janet Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*. It is intriguing to me that Tompkins opens her study by claiming about Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner, and other nineteenth-century popular authors that "[t]hese *novelists* have designs upon their audiences, in the sense of wanting to make people think and act in a particular way" (1985: xi; my emphasis). While a reconstruction of the authors' individual intentions is certainly not the point of Tompkins's inquiry into the cultural work of texts, her choice of words allows for the interpretation that these authors consciously followed an ideological agenda in their writing. Of course, Tompkins's study implicitly qualifies this notion in the sense that each author's intentions are not viewed as the result of personal strokes of fate or timeless psychological predispositions, but are produced by historical context. Even if the intentionalist notion that Stowe or Warner, determined by their historically contextualized yet personal situation, had "designs upon their audi-

¹⁰ Jean Marie Lutes has pointed out that scholars in periodical studies have only recently begun to address women's fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which was often published in mass magazines (2010: 336).

¹¹ I am grateful to Gordon Hutner for drawing my attention to this article.

ences” only hovers in the background of Tompkins’s study, I cite it here because it also hovers in the background of mine. My selection of texts is based on the assumption that an author’s biography and, specifically, her political positions (shaped like Stowe’s and Warner’s by historical context) can be used as first indicators for the cultural work that her fictional texts might perform. This study examines the cultural work of *texts* in the contexts of historical publication, reception and non-fictional discourses, yet at the same time its set-up is predicated upon that theoretical paradigm which the New Criticism derided as the “intentional fallacy” and which post-structuralism attempted to eliminate from the critical landscape by declaring the author “dead.” Alongside biographical sketches of Dorothy Canfield, Zona Gale, and Inez Haynes Irwin, I will in the following discuss the practical reasons for this kind of set-up as well as its implications and, in fact, its specific value for a study in modern middle-class literature.

When I selected the modern domestic fictions to discuss in this study, I was looking for texts that represented the contemporary cultural forces of both modern middle-class literary culture and “feminism” ideologically converged in the form of modern domestic fiction. Due to the sheer mass of mainstream, modern middle-class literature of the time, the identification of paradigmatic texts by simply browsing popular magazines and library shelves of early twentieth-century popular books proved difficult. I resorted to skimming short biographical entries in literary reference books, looking for women authors who were identified both as authors of popular fiction and as feminist or progressive activists. I thus began to work from the intentionalist assumption that popular authors who were publicly active within the feminist movement would, more likely so than other authors, be interested to deal with feminist issues in their writing and to make their readers “think and act in a particular way.” I further assumed that these authors, who committed themselves to the writing of *popular* texts instead of elite-directed feminist manifestos, must likewise be interested to reach and educate, in modern middle-class fashion, a *mass* audience.

In Dorothy Canfield, Zona Gale, and Inez Haynes Irwin, I have selected three authors who were quite obviously biographically implicated in the women’s and other progressive movements. They were born in the 1870s, and their biographies are in many ways similar. At some points they even intersect. Dorothy Canfield (1879–1958), daughter of a

professor of political economy and of an artist, spent her youth in various college towns of the Mid-West until her father became librarian of Columbia University in New York. She traveled extensively in Europe with her mother, who kept a studio in Paris. Canfield spent one year in a French school, spoke Italian and Spanish, and completed her formal education with a Ph.D. in Romance Languages at Columbia University in 1904. She married John Fisher, a fellow student, in 1907. They left their New York academic and literary circles behind to move to a Vermont farm in Arlington, which Canfield had inherited from her grandparents. While she pursued her career as a professional writer, her husband kept the house, cared for their two children, and read proof. Despite her residence in Arlington, Canfield continued to travel extensively to New York, around the US, and in Europe. The whole family spent the years of 1916 to 1919 in France where Dorothy and John were engaged in war relief work and reporting from the front for American newspapers.

From 1905 onwards, Canfield established herself as a popular and prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction. She published fiction under her maiden name, which I use to refer to her in this study, and her non-fiction under her husband's name Fisher. Her two popularly most successful novels—both of which I discuss in this study—were *The Brimming Cup* (1921), which was considered an answer to Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* by contemporary reviewers, and *The Home-Maker* (1924), which was made into a film in 1925. Like most of her other fictional texts, *The Brimming Cup* and *The Home-Maker* were first published in *McCall's Magazine* and *Woman's Home Companion*, respectively. *The Bent Twig* (1915), an almost classical adolescent *Bildungsroman*, and *Seasoned Timber* (1939), which focuses on the forces of fascism and anti-Semitism in American culture, are two other novels she has been particularly noted for. Between 1907 and 1939, she wrote six more novels and assembled over ten collections of stories. Canfield published various books on education, popularized the Montessori method in the United States, and lectured on women's issues throughout the country. She also held important offices as an educator. She was the first woman elected to the Vermont State Board of Education and served as president of the American Association for Adult Education. In 1926 she was offered a position as a judge on the first selection committee of Scherman's Book-of-the-Month Club—the epitome of modern middle-