



**America the Middlebrow: Women's Novels,
Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship
between the Wars (Studies in Print Culture and
the History of the Book)**

Jaime Harker

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Between the two world wars, American publishing entered a "golden age" characterized by an explosion of new publishers, authors, audiences, distribution strategies, and marketing techniques. The period was distinguished by a diverse literary culture, ranging from modern cultural rebels to working-class laborers, political radicals, and progressive housewives. In *America the Middlebrow*, Jaime Harker focuses on one neglected mode of authorship in the interwar period: women's middlebrow authorship and its intersection with progressive politics.

With the rise of middlebrow institutions and readers came the need for the creation of the new category of authorship. Harker contends that these new writers appropriated and adapted a larger tradition of women's activism and literary activity to their own needs and practices. Like sentimental women writers and readers of the 1850s, these authors saw fiction as a means of reforming and transforming society. Like their Progressive Era forebears, they replaced religious icons with nationalistic images of progress and pragmatic ideology. In the interwar period, this mode of authorship was informed by Deweyan pragmatist aesthetics, which insisted that art provided vicarious experience that could help create humane, democratic societies.

Drawing on letters from publishers, editors, agents, and authors, *America the Middlebrow* traces four key moments in this distinctive culture of letters through the careers of Dorothy Canfield, Jessie Fauset, Pearl Buck, and Josephine Herbst. Both an exploration of a virtually invisible culture of letters and a challenge to monolithic paradigms of modernism, the book offers fresh insight into the ongoing tradition of political domestic fiction that flourished between the wars.

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