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Jayne Waterman, Ashland University, US

Alexander McCall Smith and the Novel of Cultural Consumption: an Experiment in Quantitative Analysis

Daniel Allington, The Open University, UK

The fine gradations of the middlebrow matter intensely to real readers, as any observer of book group discussions will swiftly discover: the upper-middlebrow reader rejects the lower-middlebrow text, and vice-versa. But what is it that marks a text out as belonging to a particular stratum of the middlebrow? One candidate is the representation of taste displays and acts of consumption within a fictional text, and this paper will demonstrate a form of quantitative content analysis that enables texts to be compared and contrasted in this regard. It focuses on one particular novel – Alexander McCall Smith’s *44 Scotland Street* (2004) – in relation to two others – Sophie Kinsella’s *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (2000) and Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* (2005) – putting forward the hypothesis that the former novel’s representations of cultural consumption correlate with its position vis-a-vis the cultural field, and may partially explain its popularity and that of its sequels: a perhaps surprising phenomenon in itself, given their ‘little Scotland’ parochialism and brutal stereotyping of outsiders to their genteel world.

Making the Middlebrow: Emerging Literacies and the Material Culture of Print Culture

Ann Ardis, University of Delaware, US

This talk will be an occasion for reflecting on the contributions of periodical studies and “thing theory” to the study of middlebrow culture. Recent efforts to rethink the “great divide” between high and low culture have both enhanced and greatly altered our mappings of turn-of-the-twentieth-century literary and cultural history. In key regards, however, the cultural *habitus* of the middlebrow continues to be occluded by modernist histories of the period. Rather than assuming that the middlebrow can be adequately theorized via the more expansive models of modernism offered by the new modernist studies, I’d like to make a case for thinking more deliberately about both the materiality of middlebrow culture and the intensely visual (and rapidly expanding) media ecology that supported this growth market at the turn of the century. Anchoring my theoretical claims in a discussion of fiction, poetry, and visual art published in the first several years of *The Crisis*, the monthly magazine edited by W. E. B. DuBois and published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, I hope to demonstrate how a willingness to embrace what media historian William Ulricchio calls “the mundane specificity of historical practice” not only “disrupt[s] and reconfigure[s]” historical generalizations but also requires us to recognize literary texts as “aesthetic interventions” (to borrow Russ Castronovo’s phrasing) into the conditions of modernity.

Present Laughter? or, How to Laugh out of Context

Dr Sophie Blanch, University of Surrey, UK

In his introduction to the Virago 30th Anniversary edition of *Excellent Women* in 2008, Alexander McCall Smith describes Barbara Pym's novel as 'one of the most endearingly amusing novels of the twentieth century.' He goes on to say that 'one does not laugh out loud while reading Barbara Pym; that would be too much. One smiles. One smiles and puts down the book to enjoy the smile.'¹ This tribute to the seemingly gentle comedy of Pym's once neglected post-war novel is entirely in keeping with its re-issue as part of Virago's heritage collection, as well as its place within the bookseller Waterstone's 'English Lawns' marketing strategy. McCall Smith is himself ideally placed to characterise the nature of Pym's humour to a contemporary audience; his own best-selling social comedies of manners share much of the same understated humour, precisely drawn female characters, and 'local colour' that he recognises in Pym's writing. However, on its first publication in the relatively cheerless 1950s, *Excellent Women* assumed a very different comic tone.

Read in light of its immediate post-war context, and set within the domestic spaces of austerity Britain, Pym's use of a self-deprecating narrative tone echoes a very 'English' comic idiom of decades past, but projected as it is across the gloomy domestic spaces of Blitz-ravaged London, her readers are quickly reminded of a world that has been brutally erased. Instead, Pym's depiction of characters and scenarios at once achingly familiar and, yet, somehow dangerously out-of-time, produces a form of satiric story-telling that conceals sharp social commentary beneath an apparently benign exterior. From the over-reaching 'spinster' Mildred Lathbury, to the glamorous and unsettling Napiers; the calculating widow Allegra Gray, and the hopelessly naive vicar, Julian Mallory, and his sister Winifred – Pym's cast of once provincial archetypes appear to be in the wrong place at entirely the wrong time. The author's own acute awareness of her contemporary moment – her comic 'timeliness' – is ventriloquized by the figure of Everard Bone, an anthropologist who emerges onto the scene to document the lives of this dying breed.

My purpose in reading Pym's *Excellent Women* for this paper is to begin to ask how we can, or should, respond to comic fiction, especially historically specific social satire, once the comic moment has passed. In other words, how do we learn to laugh out of context? Pym's novel is particularly apposite in this regard as it has fallen in and out of critical and comic favour a number of times; it was most famously resuscitated by Philip Larkin and David Cecil in their extended review for the Times Literary Supplement in 1977. While the novel is largely engaged in a mock revival of a lost provincial world, so the contemporary reader is aware that many of the material conditions that determine the characters' lives are also confined to the past. The social conscience ascribed to the novel's 'excellent women' speaks of a community on the brink of significant social upheaval: the emergence of second-wave feminism; the death of colonialism; shifting notions of 'Britishness' and the opening of national borders; the promise of political revolution in Europe and across the globe.

In the final part of my paper, I will consider what strategies might be open to readers and critics of time and place-specific satires that enable the comedy to translate, or, at least, might enable us to laugh in a different way. This is arguably of particular

¹ Barbara Pym, *Excellent Women*. London: Virago, 2008. pp. vii-xii

concern to the question of 'middlebrow' comedy, as the comic effect is so often deemed to be subject to issues of historical, gendered and generic specificity.

Comedy and the Middlebrow Reader: Elizabeth Taylor's *At Mrs Lippincote's* (1945)

Erica Brown, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Thus far, with the admirable exception of Alison Light, the study of the female middlebrow novel has neglected their style and technique. As Tory Young observes of Nicola Humble's influential work, it is 'a cultural rather than a literary study: it is the subject matter, not the style of the novels, which demarcates its temporal boundaries'. Young's analysis is that 'the revival of interest in the feminine middlebrow novel is not only a continuation of feminist revisionism but seems to mask an anxiety about the contemporary preoccupation with literary form'.² I argue that Elizabeth Taylor's use of the comedic form is crucial to an understanding of both her achievements, and her reception as 'middlebrow'. Her novel *At Mrs Lippincote's* has received a relatively large amount of critical attention, in Humble's study and in Hartley and Lassner's books on British women's World War Two writing, yet from reading their accounts one would never know that this is a deeply funny book. Humble argues that the 'middlebrow' is defined by its female, middle-class readers, and that the references and signifiers within the text in fact define 'a certain sort of woman'.³ The novel therefore defines its own community of readers. Drawing on Freud's theory of jokes, I contend that similarly, the comedic middlebrow novel addresses a female, middle-class reader who will perceive the jokes, the irony and the serious subjects of these techniques and perform the work necessary to find these novels funny, ironic and serious. The comedy of Taylor creates a specific community of readers, thus speaking to the attentive middlebrow reader in ways that appear to elude those critics who would dismiss the novels as limited or trivial.

"A Monument to Bad Taste": Public Art and Middlebrow Politics Circa 1930

Janet Casey, Skidmore College, US

In 1927, an unusual contest brought attention to the role of public art in the U.S. Oklahoma oil magnate E. W. Marland, inspired to commemorate the role of women on the American frontier, set aside \$300,000 for the eventual erection of a monument and invited prominent sculptors to submit appropriate designs. Over the next several months, twelve miniature casts based on those designs were exhibited in major cities throughout the U.S., and public opinion as to their various merits was solicited through formal ballot. When the winning sculpture, created by Bryant Baker, was unveiled in 1930 before a crowd estimated at 40,000—a day-long celebration including Indian pow-wows, fiddling contests, and parades of Conestoga wagons—the competition's cultural significance was reinforced through a public address by none other than President Herbert Hoover.

² Tory Young, 'Torrents of Trash', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 33 (2004), p. 188-89.

³ Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 178.

But this paper is less about the winning statue than about the controversies provoked by the exhibition of the models. The Pioneer Woman Statue project is significant because it engaged the ideological perspectives of not merely its patron and its creator, but also a broad swath of the American populace. Dozens of newspaper accounts followed the progress of the exhibition, and public disputes concerning the validity of the different designs erupted in every city in which the casts were shown. More specifically, the contest served as a lightning rod for debates about taste. Marland's methodology—namely his decision to give ordinary citizens a chance to vote—stirred the resentment of an educated elite feeling imperiled by the encroachment of an “inferior” mass culture. Critics maintained that allowing the public a voice in the design selection would result in nothing more than, as one put it, “a monument to bad taste.” Yet the populist press countered with the argument that genuine cultural authority in this matter resided not with artists or historians, but with those descended from actual pioneers, who were assumed, not incidentally, to harbor a “natural” aesthetic sensibility.

While the Pioneer Woman Statue is never mentioned in studies of the best American sculpture, it became a popular icon of the West that was replicated on various consumer products, including pitchers, lamps, and bookends. If, as artifact, it fails to capture the complex historical realities of westward expansion, this paper will argue that it nonetheless stands as a monument to a populist experiment that championed the tastes of ordinary people—a monument, literally, to the force and stature of middlebrow perspectives in the early twentieth century.

“‘I wanna be known as a Highbrow’”: *Time and Tide* and the ‘battle of the brows’ in the 1930s.’

Cathy Clay, Nottingham Trent University, UK

In a paper delivered at the conference ‘Investigating the Middlebrow’ at Sheffield Hallam in June 2007 I examined the reception of middlebrow fiction in the pages of *Time and Tide* in the 1920s, and argued that the ‘delight’ registered in reviews contributed by novelist-critics Rose Macaulay, Sylvia Lynd and Naomi Royde-Smith constituted an important counter-discourse to the denigration of such literature in modernist literary criticism of the period. This paper will examine *Time and Tide*'s re-negotiation of the literary marketplace during the 1930s, years in which the journal extended beyond a feminist readership and established itself among the leading political weeklies of the day. In particular I will examine the new reviewing practices of *Time and Tide* following the journal's ‘literary turn’ in 1928, alongside a number of features which contribute to *Time and Tide*'s re-branding as a highbrow weekly. My title quotation ‘I wanna be known as a highbrow’ is a line taken from a piece of light verse contributed in March 1937 by *Time and Tide*'s assistant editor Phoebe Fenwick Gaye which voices in humorous tones ‘The Complaint of the Middlebrow Novelist.’ Evidence of increasingly embattled positions within brow culture, the line also ventriloquizes *Time and Tide*'s own complex relationship to high- and middlebrow cultures.

My argument will centre on a series of articles on ‘The Function of Literary Criticism’ to which Sylvia Lynd contributed in February 1930, and a controversy over the Book Society that emerged in *Time and Tide*'s correspondence pages in February

1932. (This controversy concerned the suggestion in an unsigned article that the Book Society's choices were based on publishers' commercial interests, not literary merit.) By 1932 Lynd – a member of the Book Society's selection committee – had ceased writing for *Time and Tide* and, in a letter defending the Society, her pointed rebuke to the editor for doubting the integrity of 'your old contributor' arguably registers her exclusion from *Time and Tide*'s review pages which courted a more highbrow readership. Another 'old contributor', Rose Macaulay, joined the debate, writing to defend both Lynd and the Society. But in her expressed disdain for the work of literary critics she effectively distanced herself from middlebrow activity and her own former involvement in the review pages of this journal. Both responses are interesting for the way that they each position *Time and Tide*: too highbrow for the middlebrow Lynd; too middlebrow for the highbrow Macaulay. In fact, as I will show with reference to further contributions by Phoebe Fenwick Gaye, *Time and Tide*'s re-branding in the 1930s as a highbrow weekly remained in tension with its middlebrow identity and readership, a tension which, I will argue, illuminates the complex discursive performances within periodical texts in relation to high-, low- and middlebrow cultures.

A Sentimental Education in Class Hierarchies: Redressing Inequality as Difference in Dorothy Canfield's *The Home-Maker* (1924) and Grace Metalious' *Peyton Place* (1956)

Birte Christ, Bonn University and Freiburg University, Germany

The points I want to make in this paper are based on a recent argument Walter Benn Michaels makes about a realm entirely different – at least at first sight – from middlebrow literature. In *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004) and its popularized follow-up, *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006) Michaels argues that US-based, left-wing academics have, over the past 30 years, focussed on questions of identity, promoted diversity, and taught tolerance as a way of averting attention from questions of economic inequality. At the bottom of his very elaborate argument is the – rather well-aimed – accusation that as tenured middle-class professors do not want to share their material cake with others, they feel safe in researching questions of (racial, gender, etc.) difference, but not in researching questions of economic inequality. When they encounter inequality, this inequality is re-cast or re-conceptualized as a factor of difference in taste and identity.

As I will argue in my paper, US American middlebrow texts employ the same strategies of re-casting inequalities in society as differences – in other words, by making poverty look like a 'difference' between individuals that results from a difference in style, taste, or ethnicity, and not from a difference in wealth. By thus legitimating economic inequality, these middlebrow texts contribute to the cultural work of maintaining class hierarchies – which benefit its middle-class readers, writers, and promoters. While this strategy might be observed in British middlebrow texts, too, my thesis is that it is particularly prominent in US texts because the ur-American 'rags-to-riches' formula features as the backbone of middlebrow narratives much more centrally than in British texts. In consequence, the question of how, towards the end of the narrative, protagonists deal with their former peer group of (rural) working-class characters and naturalize their social rise and their peers' social stagnation as just and fair needs to be dealt with more urgently than in British texts.

I will make this argument by an analysis of two classic US middlebrow texts, Dorothy Canfield's *The Home-Maker* and Grace Metalious' *Peyton Place* which employ the rags-to-riches formula and which allow me to focus on *literal* configurations of the re-dressing of the poor. *The Home-Maker* details a family's material rise from poverty to a sound middle-class status, achieved by the mother's excellence as a sales-woman in a clothes department. The text shows clearly how, as soon as the family has left poverty behind, sales-woman Eva engages in literally re-dressing the poor in inconspicuous fashions and in teaching them a middle-class style – while, at the same time, engaging in strategies that prevent the poor to partake in actual material privilege. *Peyton Place* features a comparable scene: To make Selena Cross a more appropriate comrade to her daughter and to avoid facing poverty in the form of a badly dressed girl in her own living-room, store-owner Constance McKenzie hires the girl as her assistant and encourages her to spend her earned money in her store for clothes. Selena's and her family's actual material advancement through her job, as I will argue, is re-channelled into a visual abolishment of the rural working class.

Bringing the Woman's Novel Out of Exile

Stella Deen, State University of New York, New Paltz

Writing about a subcategory of middlebrow fiction identified as the “woman's novel” by Nicola Beauman, Hilary Radner and Clare Hanson have established the nature of (in Radner's words) the “exile” of the woman's novel from legitimating academic discourses. Both Hanson and Radner find that the woman's novel occupies a beleaguered position: because the woman's novel challenges legitimate discourse, it has been marginalized. Nonetheless, they argue that the woman's novel provides a valuable forum for the kinds of discourse excluded from highbrow fiction. Hanson sees the “hybridity,” even the “exile,” of the woman's novel as the key to its attraction for its readers: the middle-class woman's novel might offer “a protected space in which topics which do not feature in any other form of artistic production can be explored,” particularly “the life of the female body and the ways in which that body is interpreted” (75)⁴.

In this paper I would like to explore the degree to which the pleasures afforded by reading the woman's novel can be attributed to topics that *are* featured in otherbrowed literature as well as in extra-literary discourses. I will advocate that we conceive of a literary tradition in which middlebrow novels, if marginalized or exiled by academic discourse, are knitted up with highbrow and lowbrow forms through intertextual resonance.

To bring the woman's novel out of exile, this paper will assume that middlebrow novelists were readers as well as writers, that their works intertextually and dialogically interact with other texts, and (drawing on Wai Chee Dimock's theory of literary resonance) that their works may well have resonance for readers of the future. I will entertain the possibility that the woman's novel did not always confirm her

⁴ “Marketing the ‘Woman Writer.’” *Writing: A Woman's Business: Women, Writing, and the Marketplace*. Ed. Judy Simons and Kate Fulbrook. Manchester and New York: Manchester U P, 1998. 66-80.

woman reader's exile, but affirmed instead her place in a meaningful tradition of reading.

I will focus on E. H. Young because her novels deploy an abundance of hybrid techniques—from narrator's and characters' dialogic adaptation of one another's words, (ironic reprise, double entendre), to plotting of doubled characters, to intertextual resonance, to participation in extra-literary cultural debates of their day.

In this paper I will explore just one of these "hybrid" features, intertextual resonance, as I compare the treatment of egoism in Young's *Miss Mole* (1930) and in Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900). Cultural anxiety and debate about egoism was not a new topic in literature; it also figured prominently in a wide range of early twentieth century discourses, including that of degeneration and the New Woman. The protagonists of both novels illustrate what Tamar Katz has referred to as the duality of the modernist subject—its openness and susceptibility doubled by an egoism marking its closure. Although of different genders and operating in different realms, both protagonists face the consequences of overweening egoism and the challenge of self-modification. The authors of both novels too, connect egoism to monologic discourse. But while in *Lord Jim* the protagonist's statements remain fixed in puzzling contradiction to one another and in opposition to others' words about him, in Young's novels the various forms of dialogism to which a character's words are exposed result in genuine modification of the protagonist.

I hope to use *Miss Mole* as a good example of how we might reintegrate middlebrow novels into a theory of literary tradition that gives priority to the resonance of texts for their original readers and for subsequent ones.

The lingerie dress and Edwardian innocence in *The Go-Between* (1970)

Sarah Edwards, University of Strathclyde, UK

L. P. Hartley's 1953 novel, *The Go-Between*, evokes the genre of Edwardian country-house fiction with its idyllic summer setting: elegant ladies in white dresses and tea on the lawn. This novel's predecessors, which included the works of E. M. Forster and H.G. Wells, were staples of Edwardian middlebrow writing that often demonstrated ambivalent attitudes to the moneyed middle classes who purchased country estates. Hartley's novel also explored the intrusions of modernity into an era that had subsequently been idealised as a 'Golden Age' - and on to an elegant heroine in a white dress - from the vantage point of the dawn of the 'second Elizabethan age'. In his work, Marion Maudsley is Virgo Astraea, worshipped as the embodiment of the new century by the titular character Leo. This thirteen-year-old schoolboy is a summer visitor at Brandham Hall, which has been bought by successful business family. The Maudsleys encourage Marion's engagement to a local aristocrat, to cement their social standing. Marion, however, is conducting an affair with a local farmer, and Leo is their unwitting 'go-between'. When Leo discovers Marion's sexual fall, his memories of the Edenic summer, femininity and sexuality are irrevocably tarnished.

Marion's white summer dresses are a key visual motif both in Hartley's novel (which uses the discourses of chiaroscuro and photography), and in Harold Pinter's and Joseph Losey's 1970 film adaptation starring Alan Bates and Julie Christie. The cultural history of the Edwardian white dress suggests a barely concealed sexuality that was developed in this film, and influenced later film and television costume dramas. On the one hand, it was worn for tea on the lawn and was designed to display a 'woman's femininity, charm and grace' in the domestic sphere (*Ladies' Home Journal*, 1905); on the other, its links to artistic and aesthetic dress, and its use of lace to both reveal and conceal skin at the arms and neck was considered quite provocative, leading to descriptions such as 'pneumonia blouse' and 'lingerie dress'.

In this paper, I will undertake a brief consideration of the history of the dress and its deployment in Hartley's novel as a symbol of sexuality and nostalgia. I will then consider how and why the filming of several key confrontations which feature Marion in white, amidst dark spaces, construct her as a provocative, artificial and hypocritical model of Edwardian womanhood. This opposition between darkness and light is intimately connected to both material culture and class status, as the white dress could be cheaply copied and reproduced. In the 1970 film adaptation by left-wing artists, this material object is deployed to expose Marion's class, as well as her sexual, hypocrisy.

The Feminine Middlebrow Novel Abroad: Ann Bridge's *Peking Picnic*

Wendy Gan, University of Hong Kong

The British middlebrow novel of the interwar years, especially of the feminine variety, is usually perceived as insular. At a time when the nation as a whole was inward-looking, it is no surprise that middlebrow novels were similarly focused on the delicate foibles of British domestic life. Yet there were middlebrow writers such as Winifred Holtby, Rumer Godden and Ann Bridge who were extending the British middlebrow novel geographically into Africa, India and China, and in doing so, subtly questioning the middlebrow novel's narrow domestic and largely British scope, as well as enlarging the middlebrow novel's stake in debating modernity and global events.

While Holtby and Godden have recently been the subjects of scholarly interest (see work by Phyllis Lassner and Lisa Regan), Ann Bridge remains still largely neglected. The wife of the diplomat, Owen O'Malley, who played a key role in negotiations after the Hankow Incident in 1927, Bridge wrote her first novel, *Peking Picnic*, on their return from Peking after two years there. *Peking Picnic* was a huge success and Bridge continued to use China as a setting for two more novels, *The Ginger Griffin* and *Four-Part Setting*. Her other novels continued to use foreign settings from Dalmatia to Spain and she wrote of foreign locations with such accuracy that her novels were sometimes even used as guidebooks.

This paper will examine Bridge's first novel, *Peking Picnic*, set in the diplomatic consular world of Peking. While the novel recreates the highly insular world of European consular life in Peking and at times feels as if it were an Austenian domestic drama despite the exotic setting, it also demonstrates the fissures in British

identity that occur in an alluring yet threatening foreign environment. Just as the emotional worlds of Bridge's characters are constantly being broken down and challenged, so is the idea of British insularity. Though China and the Chinese are largely kept at bay, the text nonetheless demonstrates through its heroine Laura Leroy that the best of the British must change and adapt. As a result, Britishness, domesticity and indeed what it means to be modern are reframed in a new, exotic location as being less about rigidity and insularity than about adaptability, a degree of openness and even a sense of doubleness that splits British subjectivity.

Sleeping with the Enemy?: Colonial Sex in Two Middlebrow Novels of the 1920s

Meredith Goldsmith, Ursinus College, US

This paper examines miscegenous sexual relationships in two middlebrow novels of the 1920s: Isa Glenn's *Heat* (1926) and Esther Hyman's *Study in Bronze* (1928). Both novels, published on the heels of the Harlem Renaissance, take readers into political and social terrain that exists only in the margins of canonical modernist US fiction, even that of the Harlem Renaissance—the US occupation of the Philippines in Glenn's novel and the colonial relationship between the West Indies and England in Hyman's, and both revolve around interracial romance. As Hyman exorcises white guilt through limning her heroine's pathological attraction to white men, and Glenn castigates the US for its occupation of the Philippines, both novels use miscegenous sex to explore the tenuous relationship between metropolitan and colonial, whiteness and its foreign others. Together, the novels recuperate a transnational dimension of middlebrow fiction, usually believed to be preoccupied with domestic, apolitical concerns.

Both texts relocate the lure of miscegenation for whites as part of a sexualized xenophilia. Hyman's heroine, a Jamaican migrant to London, is fetishized for her color, depicted as an art work (the "study in bronze"), and becomes the mistress of a white man; while Glenn's three American protagonists—a teacher, an engineer, and a soldier—each fall prey to the sexualized Others of the Philippines, some Spanish, some Asian, and some indigenous. As white women, both Hyman, a Jamaican colonial, and Glenn, a Southerner married to a diplomat, explored the tenuous conjunction of race and sex that marks miscegenous relationships. Both novels—Glenn more self-consciously than Hyman—underscores the complicity of white men, white women, and women of color in creating the image of the hypersexualized foreign woman. While both novels were published on the heels of the Harlem Renaissance, they exaggerate depictions of women of color that novelists like Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset had to mute, using colonial spaces to work through sexual and racial anxieties. Reading these novels in conjunction with the now-canonical classics of the Harlem Renaissance, one sees how middlebrow fiction of the period contains a repressed colonial discourse, crystallizing in the allure of the tragic mulatta.

'They're bright and easy reading, and you can find out lots of useful things': the 'sensescapes' of British Women's Magazines in the 1930s

Fiona Hackney, University College Falmouth, UK

...the magazine's function now is to provide reading fodder for odd moments, travelling and after-business hours, glanced through with a background of household chatter of 'the wireless'... the stories they provide should be short, 'snappy,' as crudely arresting as a poster... and easy enough for the jaded mind to take in without exertion. (Leavis, 1932: 28)

The 'reading habit,' literary critic Q. D. Leavis famously intoned in 1932, was as addictive and destructive as a 'drug habit,' due to the widespread commercialisation of literature and the triumph of, what she termed, 'Woolworth's literature.' Along with penny paper novels, the Readers Library and the detective stories of Edgar Wallace, Woolworth's literature included the, 'enormous steady stream' of magazines published at all levels and prices; 900 titles, Leavis claimed, were published that year. Worst of all Woolworth's literature encouraged 'passive' rather than 'critical' reading. The elitism of her argument notwithstanding, Leavis's observations about the interrupted and episodic nature of magazine reading and the fragmented form of the publications themselves, with their short stories, adverts and eye-catching appeal, suggest an experience that was multi-faceted and which, despite her claims of passivity, required high levels of interaction and negotiation, engaging visual and aural as well as literary sensibilities. Magazines, moreover, in Leavis's lexicon, were decidedly 'middlebrow.'

These observations provide the starting point for this paper, which sets out to explore women's magazines as a material culture of the middlebrow in the 1930s, through an examination of texts, their relationships with other media and their interpretive communities of readers. The 1930s was a period shaped equally by economic depression, in its early years, and the expansion of new commercial media: press, cinema, advertising, broadcasting and their related economies; upheavals and instabilities that accompanied the emergence of a new female readership for magazines. Drawing on contemporary surveys, in particular two conducted with magazine readers by Mass-Observation, as well as oral testimony and magazines, the paper argues that an imagined community of readers materialized whose shared interests, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations found expression in a culture of feminine modernity. By considering magazine reading as a practice situated within a network of relationships between magazines, readers and other contemporary media, such as film and broadcasting, the paper argues that it constituted, what Ben Highmore (2008) recently described as a "sensescape" of the modern, which articulated, not only ideas but also perceptual practices, emotions, senses and feelings that, in this case, were distinctly middlebrow and feminine.

The Religious Book Club: Marketing Religious Liberalism through Print, 1927-1939

Matthew S. Hedstrom, Roger Williams University, Bristol, US

In the decades after World War I, liberal Protestant leaders, executives of the American publishing industry, and other important cultural figures collaborated on a number of large public endeavors to encourage the buying and reading of religious books in the United States. The most significant of these reading programs were the Religious Book Week of the 1920s, the Religious Books Round Table of the American Library Association, and the Religious Book Club. These efforts capitalized

on emerging cultural practices, then as now referred to as “middlebrow,” to promote a specific religious agenda—a capacious Protestant liberalism as the modern solution to cultural and religious fragmentation. After briefly setting the larger context of this newly forming religious middlebrow culture, this paper will focus specifically on the Religious Book Club, founded in 1927.

The transformative power of the 1920s innovations in religious bookselling came from the sensitivity of modern publishers and booksellers to the anxieties of the age. In the book weeks and book clubs they managed to unite modern business practices, modern religious ideas, and a continuing faith in the wonder-working power of print. The exhortations of advertisers to improve one’s appearance, hygiene, and personality and the competitive struggle of modern life fueled consumer anxieties and stoked demand for readily available solutions. The rise of religious middlebrow culture was both an indication of these individual and social anxieties and a central means by which middle-class Americans forged new identities in the changing environment.

The founders of the Religious Book Club clearly recognized their enterprise as a response to these social anxieties. “BOOKS, BOOKS EVERYWHERE! Are you overwhelmed each month by the flood of new books?” screamed an early advertisement. “Have you the time and eyesight to spare to discover among these volumes the one or two which will minister to your spiritual needs? Have you not often felt that for the sake of your own self-development you ought to read more of the great books on religious life and thought?” Social, cultural, and spiritual self-improvement were only a book purchase away.

This paper draws on extension archival research to examine the leadership of the Religious Book Club, the Club’s book selection process and marketing strategies, and, through letters to the editor and book return data, the reception of selections among Club members. I make two related claims in this brief paper. First, I argue that religious literature—the second most popular genre of reading in the United States in the 1920s—must be incorporated into our analysis of the middlebrow if we are to fully comprehend its reach, scope, reception, and significance. In particular, religious literature, including the material cultures of production, distribution, and reception, complicates the gender analysis that predominates in traditional studies of middlebrow fiction in this period. Second, I contend that religious middlebrow culture served to further tie American religious practices to the consumer marketplace, and to bring aspects of religious liberalism, especially psychological and interfaith explorations, into the mainstream.

Self-Portrait of the Middlebrow as Artist: Oliver Sandys on/in *Caradoc Evans* (1945)

Chris Hopkins, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Marguerite Evans (1886 - 1964) wrote under three pen names during her successful career as a novelist: as Marguerite Barclay, as Countess Barcynska and as Oliver Sandys. She was a prolific writer, producing magazine serials and one-hundred-and-thirty novels between 1911 and 1946, and her work seems to fall clearly under the label of ‘middlebrow fiction’. Her first really successful novel was the Barcynska-authored *The Honeypot* (1916). This was filmed in 1920, as were a further nine of her

novels, including *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), Alfred Hitchcock's director debut. By the mid-nineteen-twenties she was a best-seller, earning £1000 a year from sales and film rights. Her success lasted into the nineteen fifties.⁵

In 1933, Marguerite married the Welsh short story writer and novelist, Caradoc Evans (1878 - 1945). Unlike his wife, Caradoc Evans never earned a thousand pounds per annum from any of his fiction, but is better remembered than she is, as a major writer and as a subject of national controversy in Wales. His first collection of short stories, *My People* (1915), earned him the title 'the best hated man in Wales', while literary history remembers him as the founding father of 'Anglo-Welsh writing'. He has never been called middlebrow, but he has been called a satirist, a naturalist and a modernist, and his work is the subject of continuing critical interest.⁶

However, it is the conjunction of these two very different writers in the textual form of Oliver Sandys' biography of her husband after his death, *Caradoc Evans* (1945), which makes them an unusually productive avenue for exploring the idea of the artist in middlebrow cultures. In the nineteen forties Marguerite wrote two auto/biographical works very much addressing her middlebrow readership (published by her usual publisher Hurst and Blackett, who among other things had a line in prompt publication of magazine serials as books). The first of these, *Full and Frank: the Private Life of a Woman Novelist* (1941) is interesting in itself for its representation of the middlebrow author's life for a middlebrow readership. The second, her biography of her husband, is equally interesting in its handling for that same audience of the simultaneous representation of Caradoc's 'genius' as 'serious' writer and of her own self-presentation as an equally serious yet very different kind of 'artist'. This paper will explore how the self-fashioning of this middlebrow artist in dialogue with her imaging of a 'real writer' is presented to her own readership in 1945.

Panel: American Pop and the Musical Middlebrow: Negotiating Space, Place, and Class

Luxe Pop: The Six Degrees of Separation from Jay-Z to Symphonic Jazz

John Howland, Rutgers University

⁵ Information derived from entry on 'Marguerite Evans' by John Harris, and from entry on 'Alfred Hitchcock' by Peter William Evans, in Oxford *DNB online*, 2006. Further information taken from *IMDB (International Movie Database)* entry on 'The Pleasure Garden (1925)' and on 'Oliver Sandys' (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0016230/> Accessed 8/2/2009). There is some discussion of her work as adapted for cinema in Christine Gledhill's *Reframing British Cinema 1919-1929: Between Restraint and Passion*, BFI Publishing, 2003. A forthcoming book will also contain some relevant discussion (Lawrence Napper's *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*, University of Chicago / University of Exeter Press, forthcoming 2009).

⁶ The *MLA International Bibliography* lists eleven articles on him in the last two decades. For a brief introduction to his work see my entry on him in *the Literary Encyclopedia*, 2002 (<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1455>). There is more detailed discussion of his reputation in, for example, my 'James Joyce is an Irish edition of Mr Caradoc Evans' - Two Celtic Naturalists' in *Irish Studies Review*, November 1995, 'Translating Caradoc Evans's Welsh English', *Style*, Vol. 30. number 3, Fall 1996, 'Peasant Languages and Celtic Nations: the Englishes of J.M. Synge and Caradoc Evans' in *English and the Other Languages*, Rodopi Press, Amsterdam, 1999, and 'Caradoc Evans' Modernist Anti-Pastoral: *My People* (1915)' in *New Versions of Pastoral*, Associated University Press, forthcoming 2008.

This paper considers the long-standing practice of merging popular music idioms with lush string orchestrations and other related markers of musical sophistication. Most manifestations of orchestral pop are connected by what I call “acts of conspicuous symphonization.” By this term, I mean to underscore entertainment parallels to the idea of “conspicuous consumption,” wherein luxury goods and services are acquired for displays of social status, cultural sophistication, and/or wealth. A modern colloquialism that conveys a similar social meaning is “bling,” a hip hop slang term which refers to ostentatious lifestyle displays that involve ironic stylistic juxtapositions of lowly street culture and high-status symbols of social power. An ideal example of a simultaneous “bling” display in music, fashion, and performance can be found in hip hop mogul Jay-Z’s lavish 2006 concert at New York’s Radio City Music Hall in which he was backed by the so-called Hustler Symphony Orchestra. Though performed live, the plush backing arrangements of this event still closely adhered to the sample-based, audio bricolage foundations of the original recordings of this music. Under this audio production aesthetic, a given performance is often overtly set in a rich intertextual dialogue with both pop music history and other forms of cultural expression. Much orchestral pop functions in a similar manner. For instance, there are clear entertainment connections between this bestringed, spectacle-oriented hip hop event and the image constructions, performance practices, and music of earlier orchestral pop trends. This paper appropriates a structural conceit borrowed from the pop-culture notion of “six degrees of separation” (the theory that each person is no more than six personal connections away from anyone else). Through this fanciful device, I trace a brief history of the “luxe pop” aesthetic from Jay-Z back to 1920s symphonic jazz, a seminal orchestral pop genre, but an idiom that “highbrow” critics frequently disparaged as the “essence of musical vulgarity” in its overloading of interwar pop with “gilded, exotic, orchestral effects” and a “perfect fusion of the pretentious and commonplace.” Through this trajectory, I will consider artists as diverse as Jay-Z, Frank Sinatra, Isaac Hayes, Burt Bacharach, and Tommy Dorsey, as well as various media manifestations of luxe pop idioms, ranging from interwar radio to the soundtracks of the James Bond and Shaft film series. I will articulate how this aesthetic has ultimately accrued a range of social meanings that extend well beyond the original middlebrow, mongrel cultural aesthetics of symphonic jazz.

Motown and the Black Middle Class

Andrew Flory, Shenandoah Conservatory

This presentation will explore the connection between the early music of Motown Records and the aspirations of the emerging black middle-class in post-war Detroit, interpreting the class ambitions of Motown as a distinctly African American form of middlebrow culture. It will unfold in two sections. First, I will briefly recall some issues surrounding the cultural formation of the American black middle class during the 1950s, and recall how during the late-1950s Motown grew directly out of Detroit's black community, harnessing the resources, business acumen, and social standing of this group. In these discussions concerning the black middle class (also called the "black bourgeoisie") class uplift anxieties are often infused with questions of African American legacy, racial authenticity, and preferred modes of black representation. The second part of the presentation will closely examine the musical language of Motown during its formation. Focusing on the company's recorded output from 1959 to 1962, I will provide examples of far-ranging musical styles that emerged during this period when the company was searching for an artistic identity, revealing that the

company's creative range exemplified many of the ideals of the black middle class that emerged in Detroit during the late 1950s. In the end, drawing on discussions of the legacy of Duke Ellington and George Gershwin by Richard Middleton and John Howland, I will show how the aspirations of the black middle class embedded in the music of Motown furthering a long tradition of societal conflicts for African American musicians who "crossed over" into the American mainstream by creating a distinct form of middlebrow rhythm and blues during the 1960s.

Lounging: The Connoisseurship of Moments

Phil Ford, Indiana University

In *Education of the Senses*, Peter Gay considers the bourgeois home a bulwark against public life, a "fortification of the self" where one might maintain a proper façade while reserving a private space inside for the cultivation of sensuality. For Walter Benjamin, such refuges allow the bourgeoisie to collect and domesticate things from the wider world outside. The interior becomes a diorama of exteriors drained of their historicity and autonomous identity: "To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry." Recent studies of cold war mood music—music for the ideal-typical American incarnation of the bourgeoisie, the postwar suburbanite—have likewise emphasized how private spaces for lounging permit exotic imaginings to be cultivated in the heart of cold war suburbia. This paper discusses the most potent image of lounging, *Playboy* magazine's idea of the bachelor pad—an ideal of a private realm that tames and masters the modern world outside.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, *Playboy* published a series of architectural fantasies that detailed how the bachelor pad might manage every aspect of physical sensation. This project of managing sensation—visual, tactile, and auditory—was grounded in a background concept of mood. While intuitively obvious, the concept of "mood" resists easy analysis. While some records were clearly intended to be used for mood listening, any record might do. As music was brought from the wider world into the lounge, it needed to maintain something of its particularity—those details that could advertise the discrimination of the man who had chosen it. But like the world events whose shriveled husks are suspended in Benjamin's bourgeois interiors, something of the temporal animation of the imported item has been drained. Mood listening is not the same as the analytical hearing cultivated in highbrow music journals, which emphasized those details the ear was meant to follow from moment to moment. The middlebrow reception dynamic of mood listening is one of dynamic stasis: the listener cultivates a keen appreciation of particular moments, points of dynamic interest heard within and generalized to broad spans of static and undifferentiated time. This mode of listening was inscribed in what was then called mood music and is now called lounge.

Paranoid Intermodernism: Q.D. Leavis and the Resistance to Middlebrow

Nick Hubble, Brunel University, UK

In his introduction to the Pimlico edition of Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* (2000), John Sutherland argues that 'it closely examines texts with the aim of

showing that they are unworthy of close examination. This is a cul-de-sac from which the Leavisite programme never found a successful way forward' (xvii). This paper argues that there is a way out of this cul-de-sac: turning around and acknowledging that what *Fiction and the Reading Public* demonstrates more than anything else is the very centrality of the middlebrow to the whole Leavisite programme. While the Leavises deluded themselves into the sterile binary of 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture', what they were really reflecting on in spite of themselves were the fluid oscillations of what I term 'the intermodern shift' (which subsumes the traditional distinctions between middlebrow and modernist works) from which the 'Great Tradition' can only be separated by the maintenance of relentless perversity. For example, D.H. Lawrence, the pinnacle of the 'Great Tradition', is clearly an intermodern writer in the broadest sense, literally combining 'the imaginative lives of readers and the interests of the workers' (to quote from one of Kristin Bluemel's definitions of intermodernism) and it is because of a distorted understanding of this that the Leavises valorised him. To support this thesis, I demonstrate five different ways in which *Fiction and the Reading Public* can be read as a celebration of the cultural dominance of the middlebrow, which in itself is a consequence of the wider intermodern shift:

- 1) Q.D. Leavis's book, itself, is clearly part of a specific interwar tradition, reflecting the rise of a new middle class of salaried clerks and shop-workers, that stretches from *Middletown* to *Mass-Observation*.
- 2) Q.D. Leavis's fixation with the challenge to traditional authority posed by *l'homme moyen sensuel* invites comparison with the positive use of the same trope, employed for exactly the same reason, by William Empson and George Orwell.
- 3) Q.D. Leavis's dissatisfaction with I.A. Richards's 'Theory of Value' invites comparison with Empson's consciously perverse deviations from the same theory and thus opens up the possibility of readings that release her from the forces of repression and liberate hitherto hidden values.
- 4) Q.D. Leavis's intent to trace middlebrow back through writers like Stevenson and Scott invites comparison with Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, which valorises Scott. It can therefore be argued that because the middlebrow is actually the logical successor to Scott, it represents the main strand of development of the novel as a genre (rather than high modernism).
- 5) Q.D. Leavis's constant referral to the past does little more than highlight her book's real preoccupation which, like any intermodern project, is with the future.

"I only wish Pearl Buck was alive and walk into my restaurant so I can cut out her heart and liver.' Pearl S. Buck and the Ethnicization of the Middlebrow"

Vanessa Künnemann, Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany

"I only wish Pearl Buck was alive and walk into my restaurant so I can cut out her heart and liver." This is what Chinese American author Frank Chin has one of his characters in the novel *Donald Duk* say about Pearl S. Buck. In another instance, William Faulkner confessed in a letter to a friend that he was not interested in

receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature as long as that would put him on the same list of awards as "Mrs. Chinahand Buck."

The target of this fierce criticism was Pearl S. Buck, who can be seen as a figurehead of American middlebrow fiction in the middle of the 20th century. Awarded with the Nobel Prize for literature in 1938 and a Pulitzer in 1932, Buck, who had grown up in China as the daughter of missionaries, gained prominence as a novelist, essayist, political activist and feminist and thus became one of the most visible and popular – if controversial – US-American authors of the mid-century. Because of her upbringing and as an outcome of her self-fashioning as an 'intercultural mediator,' Buck was celebrated as America's best-known authority on Asia. In her fiction, she made ample use of her position as an expert on China by depicting and (re)negotiating relations between the East and the West and – particularly in her novels of the 1930s – relying on a Chinese setting in order to flesh out or communicate her intercultural message. Still, Buck's work has, especially since the 1970s, been marginalized by criticism or at best been interpreted as lacking serious literary merit and thus being mediocre.

In my paper I seek to explore that such a criticism and trivialization of Buck's oeuvre misses the point and that Buck in fact made an important contribution to the middlebrow canon. I argue that she politicized the middlebrow by means of her representation of ethnicity and thereby rendered the category or genre of the middlebrow a new dimension. In texts like her most widely known novel *The Good Earth* (1931), Buck, an "icon of the middlebrow New Deal," as Michael Denning has called her (1997), juxtaposed East and West with the seemingly paradoxical aim to bring them together and build intercultural bridges. Buck addressed questions of economic inequality by pitting the experience of her (female) American middle-class readers against the depiction of poor, rural Chinese characters. The very engagement with race in Buck's novels, I hold, is inevitably suffused with a discussion of economic inequality, since the racialized, poor 'Other,' her Chinese characters – and her female protagonists in particular – often served her readership as role models in times of the Great Depression as they represented a hard-working ethos and embodied traditional values.

The Good Earth is one example of many middlebrow tales working with the rags-to-riches pattern. Published in a time when middle-class social rise in the United States was hardly possible, it advertises hard work as the basis of material success, but at the same time functions to console the middle-class reader as it represents wealth as morally ambiguous and dangerous to a family's integrity. I want to analyze how in this novel Buck turned to the 'exotic' setting of China and the fate of a poor peasant family to address issues of the economy in the America of the Depression. Making use of the importance of the land, which was a popular theme in American middlebrow texts of the Depression years, *The Good Earth* depicts the life-story of this Chinese farmer family against the larger background of Chinese peasant life, natural catastrophes, and political turmoil in the revolutionary China of the early twentieth century – thus, a setting and a time frame remote from the political reality of the American Thirties. Still, or precisely *because of* this very difference and distance, I claim, Buck achieved a close identification between her female readers and the fate of her female protagonist, one that was/is crucial to the functioning of middlebrow texts.

Middle of the road or divergent paths? Imagining the nation through *Three Day Road*

Anouk Lang, University of Birmingham, UK

The CBC radio programme Canada Reads is a phenomenon which offers significant insights into the workings of middlebrow culture at the start of the twenty-first century. Representing itself as finding not the *best* book, but rather a book for 'all Canada to read', the show takes five works of Canadian literature and asks a panel of celebrities (such as indie musicians, writers, broadcasters and filmmakers) to whittle them down to a single winner. Like the Book-of-the-Month Club, the show acts as a cultural arbiter: the legitimacy it gives to the five texts is reflected in increased sales. Moreover, its use of technology resonates with middlebrow formations from the mid-20th century: it uses new technologies to allow readers to respond to the texts and to each other, and in this way to participate in an interpretive community.

In this paper, I focus on the way the show's audience engaged with a text dealing with the legacy of Canada's imperial past. *Three Day Road*, by Joseph Boyden, tells the story of two Cree soldiers who fought for Canada in World War II. When one panellist critiqued the novel for the way it stereotyped and exoticised Native Canadians, the panellist defending the book objected strenuously, as did many listeners. They articulated the pleasures Boyden's text had given them, with one claiming it was "a book that Canadians can be very proud of". The divide between these ways of making sense of the text was also apparent when the novel failed to win the celebrity vote, but won the popular vote. The responses of readers revealed very different reading paths: on the one hand, interpretive modes which have developed out of postcolonial studies which are alert to representations which romanticise Aboriginal people and obscure continuing material inequities through aesthetic rendering into a unified whole, and on the other hand those of non-professional readers who saw the narrative as an important corrective to Canadian history and who resisted the idea that aspects of the novel might be problematic. As a site on which different interpretive modes were allowed to meet, then, *Three Day Road* and its dissemination through Canada Reads brings to light some of the tensions between elite and intermediate reading practices. It demonstrates, too, how in the context of a nationally-broadcast book programme, middlebrow cultural products can be intimately connected to the project of imagining the nation.

Testing the Limits of the Middlebrow: the Holocaust for the Masses

Phyllis Lassner, Northwestern University, US

Popular Holocaust films and novels share many stylistic characteristics of conventional definitions of the Middlebrow, and yet they have not been studied together. To do so and to view them through the lens of each other creates critical questions about modern literary history and the representation of cultural, historical, and social conflict and crisis. This paper will argue for the inclusion of Holocaust study in that of the Middlebrow by examining such mass audience Holocaust films as

Life is Beautiful and the novel and film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* to demonstrate the critical questions and challenges they share with Middlebrow cultural production and criticism.

A middlebrow celebrity opinion piece in *Pearson's Magazine*, 1906

Kate Macdonald, University of Ghent, Belgium

The rise in frequency of the celebrity interview in mass-market periodicals from the late Victorian period is linked to the development of printing technology, in that engravings, photographs and signatures could be reproduced as illustrations to interviews with a celebrity subject. This paper examines celebrity interviews from *Pearson's Magazine* of 1906, in the context of a broader examination contrasting this interview with a similar piece from *The Bookman* in 1932. Both sets of interviews employ the opinions, public personalities and professional reputation of the middlebrow writers and opinion-makers featured to shape the answers to the questions asked (on future women's lives, and on literary taste), and to present the reader with entertaining reading. The positioning of the articles in those particular issues of those particular periodicals affect the messages of the articles. The layers of print culture can be unpeeled to expose its function as a framework for middlebrow culture in the early twentieth century.

My purpose with this paper is to present these layers as discrete areas for exploration in the print culture of the middlebrow. By analysing the medium of the periodical I explore that title's history, its ownership, readership (in geographical and class terms), and distribution. I read the evidence of editorial decisions apparent in layout and choice of content, and in the editorial stance. I examine the choice of celebrities interviewed, the balance between 'authors' and other kinds of writers, as well as the non-writers, how the periodical presented them to the reader, and whether balance or imbalance can be observed in their responses to the question set. Finally I examine the literary context of an interviewee from *Pearson's*, the novelist Una L Silberrad. I consider her answers against her literary output and public reputation, to attempt to discern why she had been asked for an opinion by this particular periodical, and whether she, and by inference others in the same sample, were considered as middlebrow writers at the time.

Complementary Cousins: Elizabeth von Arnim and Katherine Mansfield

Isobel Maddison, University of Cambridge, UK

The connections between Katherine Mansfield's "high" modernist prose and Elizabeth von Arnim's "middlebrow" novels are unexplored. This paper brings together the work of these complementary cousins to offer an overview of the influence of von Arnim's early work on Mansfield's writing. The discussion includes a brief introduction to the familial, biographical and literary links between these women and to their shared representation of Germany immediately prior to, and during, the Great War. Selected excerpts from Mansfield's story, 'The Black Cap' (1918), are read against von Arnim's *The Pastor's Wife* (1914) to demonstrate the

points of separation and connection apparent in their prose. Certainly, the forms in which these women write differs, but the preoccupations, not fully accounted for by being contemporaneous or geographically specific, leach into each other so that it becomes difficult to definitively attach critical labels like those of “high” or “middlebrow” to their work, or to see their writing as wholly discrete. This complicates how we think about writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also amplifies what we already know: that modernism didn’t simply *arrive* fully-fashioned to instigate an aesthetic and imaginative disconnection from all that went before.

Mansfield declared that she and von Arnim were “worms of the same family,” insisting only on a shared turn of familial phrase. She was being disingenuous. These literary cousins read and commented on each other’s work, and Mansfield’s critical assessments (along with those of her husband, John Middleton Murry) became part of the wider reception of von Arnim’s writing. In turn, von Arnim’s popularity and skill as a writer meant her own novels had a long and successful heyday during which her literary influence seeped into Mansfield’s youthful aspirations and ultimately into her early work. We know that, amongst others, Mansfield was influenced by Chekhov and the symbolist painters and it seems, at best, unlikely that von Arnim’s so-called middlebrow fiction helped generate Mansfield’s modernist oeuvre. In fact, the evidence suggests this is undoubted.

Reassessing Middlebrow Drama during the Second World War

Dr Rebecca D’Monte, University of the West of England, UK

Middlebrow drama has long been dismissed as unrealistic and unchallenging. Kenneth Tynan famously spoke of how such plays were frequently set in ‘Loamshire... a glibly codified fairy-tale world, of no more use to the student of life than a doll’s house would be to a student of town planning’ (Tynan, 1984). Terence Rattigan, himself often described as a middlebrow playwright, judged that he wrote plays for ‘Aunt Edna’, ‘a nice, respectable, middle-class, middle-aged maiden lady with time on her hands’ (Rattigan, 1953). This paper will provide a different perspective by focusing on how the Second World War affected the writing, production, and reception of middlebrow drama to show that, like the cinema, it played a part in the war effort of the time. That acting was considered of vital importance to morale can be seen in the way it was made into a Reserved Occupation on the outbreak of war, whilst the Blitz brought with it a spirit of camaraderie in the theatres, which did not always translate to the outside world. Cultural value can be seen in the utilization of popular genres like the drawing room comedy, thriller and pastoral, to represent England at a time of national crisis, by privileging perceived middle class values of stoicism, courage, duty, and loyalty. Equally, depictions of the English way of life, whether of its character, habitat, or heritage, only served to strengthen concepts of nationhood and patriotism, especially given that so many of the plays of this time were further disseminated through being adapted for the cinema. Equally, though, we can see that issues raised in the plays, as well as the material conditions of the time (the Blackout, bombed-out theatres, Service members in the audience) led to an increased informality, and presaged social, political and theatrical changes wrought at the end of the war, signalled by the 1945 Labour victory.

Ultimately, this led to the rejection by critics (though interestingly not by audiences) of the middlebrow for confrontational and experimental drama in the post-war period. Plays and films to be discussed include Noel Coward's *Still Life* (1936; filmed as *Brief Encounter*, 1945); *This Happy Breed* (1939), Dodie Smith's *Dear Octopus* (1938), Esther McCracken's *Quiet Week-end* (1941); *No Medals* (1944), J. B. Priestley's *How Are They at Home?* (1944), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1940); *The Years Between* (1945), and Lesley Storm's *Great Day* (1945).

'What Every Woman Wants to Know'; Women in the Interwar Suburban Garden

Sarah Rawlins, University of Sheffield, UK

The main focus for this presentation is the exploration of the relationship between suburban women and their gardens in interwar Britain. The rapid expansion of suburbia during the interwar period, particularly in the owner-occupier market, meant that more people had the opportunity of owning their own homes. Due to the influences of the garden city movement, almost all new homes built were provided with both a front and back garden, which increased the number of individuals who had access to a garden for the first time. A large market for gardening literature opened up, aimed at this new set of inexperienced suburban gardeners, successfully targeting women as a specific interest group. Planning and maintaining a garden allowed women to renegotiate how they interacted with their immediate external surroundings. The garden was being increasingly perceived as an extension of the home and therefore a legitimate area of female influence, challenging traditional gender roles in the process.

The sources that have been focussed upon are a selection of contemporary gardening and women's magazines, and gardening literature, primarily 'gardening autobiographies', which relate to the creation of a garden but include personal experiences from the author. These were significant middlebrow publications, aimed at the newly affluent middle classes and helped to shape identities and tastes through the advice given on the ideal form and content the garden should take. This research is addressing new areas of study; namely the horticultural experiences of the middle class suburban female, and the use of contemporary gardening magazines. These magazines are a valuable source of information on cultural trends and social opinions of the interwar period; however they are an often underused source by historians. A survey of these magazines provides a range of opinions on what were considered suitable horticultural activities for women; opinions dependent upon the class and age of the audience targeted by each magazine, and in part on the background and gender of the individual writing. In addition to the horticultural information given in gardening magazines, many had pages of advice for women that covered home economics, particularly cookery and the preservation of food, and clothing for the garden. These brief examples are representative of the attempts by gardening magazines to construct specific gender identities, by helping to define the parameters of the developing female gardening identity.

Little Worlds: Travel and the Short Fiction of Stella Benson and Winifred Holtby

Dr Lisa Regan, Liverpool John Moores University, UK

In her 1925 collection of travel-writing essays, *The Little World*, Stella Benson, remarks that ‘Ignorance is the impetus that pushes all travellers from their starting-points. We travel because we do not know’. Benson’s own curiosity took her to America, India and China, whilst the same can also be said for Winifred Holtby, whose political work for the League of Nations took her first to Europe and then to South Africa in 1926. Holtby and Benson were friends and fellow travellers committed to campaigning against exploitation. In both cases, travel experience revealed to these women unexpected and unsettling knowledge, what Benson termed ‘worlds within worlds’: the underworld of black South Africans for Holtby, and for Benson, Hong Kong’s hidden world of prostitution.

This paper will consider how Benson and Holtby represent their travel experiences in fiction with the aim of exploring middlebrow textual constructions of travel. This will involve reading their fiction alongside their life-writing, correspondence and journalism, as well as considering issues of reception. Whilst both Benson and Holtby wrote novels arising from their travel experiences, the focus for this paper will be their short fiction, including Holtby’s short story collection, *Truth is not Sober* (1934) and Benson’s *Hope Against Hope and Other Stories* (1931). Their short fiction will be briefly placed in the context of late-nineteenth-century and modernist uses of the short story genre to explore whether the middlebrow short story can also be considered as a response to what G. K. Chesterton suggests is the ‘fleetingness and fragility’ of modernity. Holtby herself acknowledges this characteristic of the genre when she remarks that short stories are ‘nice for chance guests – easy to pick up and less tantalising for one’s bedside than a novel that can never be finished unless we put undue strain on our host’s fund of hospitality’. Although light-hearted, Holtby’s observation nevertheless captures the short story’s appeal to the transitory and episodic nature of travel experience. Holtby’s and Benson’s short stories open up ways of seeing the world from the ‘betwixt and between’ perspective of the traveller and, as I will show, often represent cultural difference to self-consciously decentre imperial subjectivity and narrative authority. Finally, this paper will examine whether we might read Benson’s and Holtby’s short stories as expressing a transnational and nomadic, middlebrow subjectivity.

From Series to Cycle: The Gentrification of the Middlebrow in Canadian Literature

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This paper considers the dynamics of the middlebrow in twentieth century Canadian literature in order to chart the shift from pre-war modernism to post-war late modernism. It focuses on serial fiction (groups of novels by the same author with recurring characters or settings) as an important form to this national literature struggling to assert its autonomy from both colonial British and neo-colonial American literary production. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of the field of cultural production and Laurie Langbauer’s study of serial fictions and everyday life, I argue that shifts in the material production of serial fictions, their changing market values, and their increasingly respectable critical reception combine to gentrify the

form from the low and middlebrow realms of pulp and popular fiction in the interwar modernist period to the middle and highbrow domains of the novelistic cycle in the post-war late modernist period.

The case studies I use for this argument share the setting of the Canadian west and an interest in its European settlement and Aboriginal and Métis heritage but hold quite different positions in the Canadian field of cultural production: Laurie York Erskine's Renfrew of the Mounted series of ten popular novels for boys published between the First and Second World Wars and Margaret Laurence's Manawaka cycle of five novels celebrated by middlebrow audiences in the 1960s and 70s and consecrated as highbrow in subsequent decades. Through these two examples, which I foreground against other serial fictions such as Mazo de la Roche's Jalna series (1927-58) and a consideration of the middlebrow popularity of the short story cycle or composite novel, I argue that serial fiction moves from the lowbrow to the middlebrow and highbrow in twentieth-century Canadian literature as the form itself transitions from a masculine imperialist mode of narrative expansion and endurance to a feminist postcolonial project to refuse the containment of gender, race, and class difference.

This gentrification of the form of serial fiction in mid-twentieth century Canada highlights the ways in which the category of the middlebrow in Canadian literature needs to be understood as part of the struggle to assert a national literature independent from its colonial past and neo-colonial present that is equally a project to find the middle ground between the popular and the consecrated. The examples of Erskine's Renfrew novels and Laurence's Manawaka novels highlight the interconnected shifts from popular to prestige, colonial to postcolonial, and modernist to late modernist that constitute a larger transition in the Canadian field of cultural production that redefines the serial novel through the more respectable category of the cycle. The form of serial fiction itself, then, is a narrative mode susceptible to changes in popular and critical taste as well as the conditions of literary production and the politics of everyday life.

From *A Fine Balance* to *Family Matters*: Oprah's Book Club and the Middlebrowing of Rohinton Mistry

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In 2001, Oprah Winfrey selected her first Canadian novel for her talk show Book Club, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize-winning, Giller Prize-winning, and Booker Prize-nominated *A Fine Balance* (1995) by Indo-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry. This paper examines the trajectory of reception of Mistry's work in relation to its 'Oprahfication', namely, the shift in the aesthetic categorisation of Mistry's work between *A Fine Balance*'s publication and that of his post-Oprah novel *Family Matters* (2002). Winfrey's selection of *A Fine Balance* delighted Canadian publishers with its anointing of Canadian literature, one that would inevitably translate into an increase in sales, even within Canada itself, where Winfrey's Book Club has been credited with "caus[ing] his audience to virtually double" ("Rohinton Mistry Signs"). However, this increase in economic capital associated with Mistry's work appears to have clashed with the symbolic capital linked to the more highbrow recognitions of the (Man) Booker Prize, in particular. Winfrey's selection of *A Fine Balance* in the

wake of Jonathan Franzen’s rejection of her Book Club brand for his novel *The Corrections*, and Winfrey’s approaching of Mistry betrays an anxiety about the author’s rejection of the *kind* of symbolic capital forged through the Oprah branding and the expansion of Mistry’s audience to include Winfrey’s viewers. Mistry responded favourably to Winfrey’s questions—“Do you want to come to dinner? Do you want the label on your book?” (qtd. in Stoffman, “Canadian’s Novel” D5)—but despite the claim that the selection of *A Fine Balance* constituted “a rare highbrow selection” (“A World”) from Winfrey, Mistry’s work has now been aligned with the Book Club’s “the mistress of middlebrow” and who bestowed “paperback stardom” (Prasannarajan 66). Although Mistry’s style, not to mention his narrative focus on the Bombay Parsi community, has been consistent throughout his career, from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) to *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*, reviews of his most recent novel inserted Mistry into the middlebrow category, where he had not previously appeared, as such judgments of *Family Matters* as demonstrating ‘the language of paperback genre writing’ (Grainger D12) attest. As this paper argues, the apparent ‘demotion’ of Mistry from highbrow to middlebrow was effected not through a shift in his writing itself, but rather through the framework of Oprah’s Book Club and its associations for critics.

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Mountaineering and the Middlebrow

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If “the middlebrow” describes those forms of aspiration or activity that sit between the designations of social taxonomy, generic configuration, and cultural identity itself – and I realize that such definitions are very much subject to debate – then mountaineering culture, especially as it pertains to its mountaineering clubs and to mountaineering literature, may have something to contribute to the general conversation of this conference. Mountaineering came into being through a university-based, middle-class, mid-Victorian consolidation of British club culture, and from its formation in 1857 through to the present “The Alpine Club” in London has continued to regularize mountaineering practice, and mountaineering social identities, through print technology and through ideas of community belonging. Women would not be admitted to The Alpine Club until 1976.

Scholars like Peter Hansen and David Robbins have already theorized British mountaineering as a middle-class phenomenon, one that exists at the problematic intersection of scientific, romantic, and athletic social discourses. What I hope to do in this paper is extend that theorization into the sphere of the middlebrow, and this by taking advantage of the inherent contradictions in those designations of identity that attend middlebrow communities and the representational modes that surround them. Mountaineering, for example, is generally imagined to exemplify self-determination in human mobility and independence in cultural connection: it would be difficult to find a more dependent collective – on new technology, on prosthetics, on the infrastructure of Alpine tourism, on portering classes and communities, and especially on print culture. Mountaineering writing is foundational to mountaineering practice and to the continuing fascination that mountaineering claims on a global scale – Bruce Barcott calls mountaineering “the most literary of sports.” That literature draws much of its power from the overdeterminations of generic confusion: the conventions of literary writing, technical reporting, scientific analysis, and sports commentary all play a role in the “middlebrowing” of mountaineering literature into a something that is, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf’s ungenerous definition of the middlebrow, not quite “Art” and not quite “Life.” My argument here is middlebrow contradiction – what it means to navigate between the designations of established identity – is part of what gives mountaineering literature its power and mountaineering practice its licence to self-globalise.

The second part of the paper will consider what happens to the mountaineering middlebrow when it steps over the colonial divide into postcoloniality. In 1928, British colonial administrators in India established, on the model of The Alpine Club at Empire’s centre, a “Himalayan Club” designed to “encourage and assist Himalayan travel and exploration, and to extend knowledge of the Himalaya and adjoining mountain ranges through science, art, literature, and sport.” But after Tensing Norgay’s successful first ascent of Mount Everest, in the early years of Indian independence, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stepped around the Himalayan Club in order to constitute *alternative* mountaineering associations: the Indian Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling in 1953, and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1957. The reasons why are invariably mixed. Nehru sought to associate imperial mountaineering triumph with India nationalism and post-

independence self-definition. Club culture in India necessarily echoes to the colonial past. But what interests me here is the way in which Mr. Nehru's community-building initiatives for *postcolonial* times navigates the mountaineering middlebrow, pulls at the seams of the middlebrow's structural predication in the "in-between," and aspires to something singularly national, unified, and independent. My speculation for this paper is that this particular attempt to finesse middlebrow contradiction through a postcolonial progress narrative might reveal something about how middlebrow literary and community affiliations are imagined from beyond, and how middlebrow designations of an "in-between" identity are positioned at a specific moment within an ongoing global conversation about identity thinking itself.

'Beware of the written word!': Middlebrow writing and the Thompson and Bywaters Case

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The trial of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters for the murder of Thompson's husband Percy filled many column inches in the newspapers in late 1922 and early 1923. Thompson and Bywaters had been lovers for just over year before Percy's death, including a period when Bywaters, a ship's clerk, was the Thompsons' lodger in the London suburb of Ilford. Although Bywaters wielded the knife that killed Percy Thompson, with Edith apparently an innocent bystander, both stood accused and both were eventually hanged for murder. The letters sent by Edith Thompson to Bywaters during their affair formed a key element of the evidence against her, as they seemed to prove both that she had attempted to poison her husband, and that she was complicit with Bywaters in the attempt on Percy's life. The letters also revealed Edith to be a voracious consumer of novels, particularly the works of Robert Hichens; her love of reading was used by her defence to claim that the content of her letters was merely fantasy, and by the prosecution as evidence of her suggestibility.

In this paper, I will consider two novels that draw on the facts of the Thompson and Bywaters case, E. M. Delafield's *Messalina of the Suburbs* (1924) and F. Tennyson Jesse's *A Pin to see the Peepshow* (1934). Edith Thompson was not portrayed sympathetically in the press at the time, and Tennyson Jesse in particular attempts a degree of recuperation, depicting a protagonist who is keen to exploit the social and work opportunities available to her, but who is nevertheless hemmed in by the resilient social conventions of the immediate post-First World War period. The words of the gypsy fortune-teller in Delafield's novel, 'Beware of the written word!' refer to the protagonist's incriminating love letters; each of these novelists has the task of exposing the power of the type of reading matter enjoyed by Edith Thompson whilst simultaneously distancing her own work from it. As I will show, this balancing act allows the reader to indulge in some of the low-brow pleasures produced by the sensational aspects of the case whilst also advocating the maintenance of a proper distance from its potential allure.

Creating the Imperial Adventuress in Agatha Christie's *The Man in The Brown Suit*

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In recent years, the novels of Agatha Christie have been critically recovered to challenge her reputation as a formulaic and nostalgically reactionary popular writer. Whereas in many older accounts, her works have been cited as a monolithic disillusioned rejection of the complexities of twentieth-century British nationhood, critics such as Alison Light, Susan Rowland, and Merja Makinen have woven more textured readings of the modernist richness in Christie's approaches to gender and race. In these recoveries, Christie has entered new contexts, including feminism, middlebrow culture, wartime writing, and most recently, critical representations of Empire. In the last context, the novels set in the Middle East have been mined for illuminating critiques of Orientalism and a cogent mapping of Anglo-American capitalism's intersections with older forms of European imperialism.

In my paper, I present distinctly middlebrow concerns and strategies of Christie's *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924) with regard to Empire. Narrated from the interchanging perspectives of detective and criminal, the picaresque plot follows an enterprising young sleuth, Anne Beddingfeld, in pursuit of a murderer from London to South Africa. Christie's inhabitation of romance and imperial adventure fiction creates an unusual female protagonist who engages progressive critiques of middle-class domesticity on one hand, and hears a call of imperial motives beyond the economic and political on the other. This combination results not in the frequently discussed interwar valorization of feminized knowledge and anti-heroism in her most famous detectives, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, but rather in a much more flagrant clash of gendered qualities in popular culture. As an amalgamation of imperial anthropologist, young single career woman, bedazzled tourist, and romance heroine, Anne is a composite of masculinist and feminist stock figures that were populating mass cultural media after World War I. The gendered and raced stereotypes deployed in the novel, I argue, defamiliarize colonial logic through their achievement of self-conscious excess and contradiction.

Christie politicizes the middlebrow in positioning herself between modernist pastiche and popular culture in her contradictory use of gender and imperial stereotypes. Our awareness of this position enables the inherent flatness in her characterization to acquire a set of fascinating and remarkably critical autoethnographic qualities. In the view of *The Man in the Brown Suit* as a playful autoethnography, Christie appears as a writer remarkably tapped into performativity, anthropological distancing, and racial categorization as material conditions of imperial cultures. The emphasis on autoethnography places the novel in a "middle" position in another sense. While one of my critical objects is certainly the older dismissal of Christie as a product of the escapist culture industry, another is what I regard as an overstatement of her feminist and anti-colonial resonance.

The Evolution of a Provincial Lady: E. M. Delafield, *Time and Tide*, and the Translation of *The Way Things Are*

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In December 1929, *Time and Tide* published the first chapter of E.M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*. In the nearly eight decades that have passed since that initial publication, the novel has never been out of print—a fact that is quite a feat when compared with most of Delafield's *oeuvre* that preceded the *Diary*, or, indeed, women's middlebrow fiction as a whole. As a periodical that sought to negotiate both

high and middlebrow spheres, and thus to support and enlarge a women's "shared public culture" (Levine p. 223), *Time and Tide* was committed to seeking the connections among literature, the public sphere, and women's everyday lives. And more specifically for my interests, this focus upon expanding the spaces for middlebrow culture positioned the periodical as a vehicle for Delafield to experiment with and build upon her unique satiric and parodic portraits of British everyday life. Indeed, a study of Delafield's *Time and Tide* articles that bridge the gap between the *Diary of a Provincial Lady* and her earlier "problem novels" illustrates that she used the relationship between her journalism and novels to integrate her comic tone with her interests in the limitations surrounding women's lives, relationships, and careers within her earlier novels.

As others have noted, the *Diary of a Provincial Lady* is, in many ways, a revision of Delafield's realist novel, *The Way Things Are* (1927). In the earlier text, Delafield traces the life of Laura Temple as she struggles to maintain her roles as a frustrated writer, wife, and mother. While Laura Temple does have a satiric sense of humor that resembles that of the Provincial Lady, her life is far more dismal and her approach to the everyday is far more jaded and unhappy. In this paper, I argue that Delafield's transition from a respectable middlebrow woman writer to that of a bestseller should be traced through the pages of *Time and Tide*, for her series of articles under the "Miscellany" column are a record of Delafield's early forays into comic and satiric portraits of issues dealt with by many middle-class women, such as the Provincial Lady. In articles on the trials and tribulations of planting bulbs at the proper time, selecting a school for one's daughter, or travel, the reader finds early drafts of the *Diary*, as well as a portrait of *Time and Tide*'s role in negotiating and enlarging middlebrow culture. This study of the expansion of middlebrow culture through a portrait of the relationship between Delafield and *Time and Tide* also seeks to suggest a methodology for understanding and theorizing developments in middlebrow culture that are not dependent upon its intersections with high modernism, but instead focus upon the interactions of a range of fields of material culture, such as periodicals and reception studies.

'I lost my way in a bog of acquired culture': Hilda Vaughan, Anglo-American culture and the Middlebrow in Wales

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Hilda Vaughan (1892-1985) was an influential writer from the 1920s to the 1950s, whose rural, Welsh-based novels found success in Britain, America, Australia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, and India, for example. Married to Charles Morgan, something of a literary giant during the early twentieth century, the couple were at the centre of an illustrious and varied London-based literary network, which included George Bernard Shaw, George Moore, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Storm Jameson, Rose Macaulay and Elizabeth Bowen. While these names are still prominent, to varying degrees, Vaughan's work has until very recently been forgotten. As an upper-middle class female writer portraying an anglicised, rural part of Wales, her work has been ignored by Welsh critics who have favoured the male industrial fiction of the South Wales valleys. Similarly, though the work of her contemporaries, such as Mary Webb and Sheila Kaye-Smith has been reprinted by English women's presses such as Virago,

Vaughan's depiction of rural Wales has not. Her work is, in effect, too middlebrow to excite Welsh attention and too Welsh for studies of the English middlebrow.

In fact, contemporary reviews also found her work difficult to place, with critics conflictingly commenting upon her 'highbrow' style, her use of 'middlebrow' tropes while simultaneously celebrating her simplistic narrative, apparently impervious to literary trends. Vaughan's 1935 novel, *The Curtain Rises* self-consciously explores the role of the Welsh female writer within the British literary landscape of the period, as a young Welsh girl from a colliery town travels to London to become a writer. The novel shares many concerns with its English middlebrow contemporaries, such as a self-referential depiction of the culture of reading, an ambivalent attitude towards the mob and the female relationship with fiction. Vaughan, however, shows how, for the Welsh female writer and reader, the relationship with literature and the culture of the period is problematic. The growth of the culture industries at this time brought Anglo-American culture to a largely appreciative Welsh public. This development, however, led to the Anglicisation of Wales and the introduction of alien concepts of class structure and relationships with culture. This paper will take a postcolonial approach to Vaughan's portrayal of Anglo-American culture and where it positions the Welsh reader and writer. It will explore how Vaughan's construction and negotiation of Welsh identity in her work leads to a questioning and a destabilising of the very notion of the various 'brows', just as her own writing defied the categories of contemporary and modern critics alike.

The Middlebrow-ness of The Higher Thought

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While much of the research to date focuses on the middlebrow as a chiefly *literary* cultural phenomenon, Teresa Mangum's 1998 book, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel*, refers tantalizingly but briefly to a wider "women's middlebrow culture of clubs [and] societies."⁷ This paper asks what other—and unexpected—forms women's middlebrow culture of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries might take. It finds one example in the Higher Thought Centre, a previously unexamined instance of the largely middle-class, fin-de-siècle occultism described by Alex Owen in *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*.⁸

In 1914 *The Times* of London published a humorous column on "Dinner Party Cults" that targeted "some minor religions and confessions" and promised to advise on "discussions to avoid." The fashionable dinner party need not be populated by "cranks" for the conversation to turn predictably and tediously to the "vaguely philosophical, mildly improving" minor religions: "Now it is Higher Thought, now Theosophy, now some form of Mental Healing"⁹

⁷ Teresa Mangum. *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). 21-23.

⁸ Alex Owen. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

⁹ "Dinner Party Cults." *The Times*. May 6, 1914: 11.

While references to Theosophy still ring a chord with readers today, the Higher Thought Centre, formally established in Kensington in 1900 with Alice M. Callow as its Secretary, has been almost entirely forgotten.¹⁰ It published a journal, *Expression*, numerous short pamphlets, and a quarterly record of its work “in London and the provinces.” It hosted ongoing lectures on meditation and healing, as well as occasional lecture series by such well-known progressive thinkers as Edward Carpenter and Mrs. Havelock Ellis, and served as a centre for visiting Ba’hai and Sufi religious leaders. Like so many of the metaphysical movements of the time, its adherents embraced women’s rights, forming, in 1910, a Women’s Silent League of Freedom to practice silent meditation “to bring about the desired results.”¹¹ It opened Higher Thought Centres in Canada and Australia, and in 1914 it joined the International New Thought Alliance (although it continued to struggle to differentiate itself from American New Thought).

When *The Times* published its spoof of minor religions in 1914, Higher Thought had already been lampooned in H. G. Wells’s 1909 novel *Ann Veronica*, an exploration of feminism and the New Woman.¹² Passing references in later novels such as Rosa Praed’s *Lady Bridget in Never-Never Land* (1915) and George Orwell’s *Burmese Days* (1934) continued to associate the Higher Thought Centre with a dithery female eccentricity. Unlike other, better-remembered occult arts and practices of the period, which, as Alex Owen has convincingly demonstrated, were associated with a masculinized avant-garde, the esotericism of the Higher Thought was derided as decidedly middlebrow and decidedly feminine.

The Colonial Middlebrow: Louis Bromfield’s Depictions of India in *The Rains Came* (1937) and *Night in Bombay* (1940)

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In his discussion about the British civil servant and author Hugh Clifford in *Shades of Empire in Colonial and Post-colonial Literatures* (1993), H.M. J. Maier argued, after a measure of popular success with his novels about the Malay States, “Clifford is an almost forgotten author and his rise and fall are yet another proof of the fact that most ‘colonial literature’ should be seen as an aspect of middlebrow rather than highbrow culture.” Maier quickly added, “His [Clifford’s] work served as a commodity for his inquisitive contemporaries rather than as an inexhaustible source for the intelligentsia of literary and philosophical reflections on life, love and death” (94). Jamie Harker extended this argument with her discussion of Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* in *American the Middlebrow* (2007): “For reviewers, *The Good Earth* created a vicarious experience of an unknown culture. In other words, it provided a quintessential middlebrow reading experience” (101). In a sense, the middlebrow author rendered the exotic as familiar. Keeping these observations in mind, this paper

¹⁰ Alice Callow traces the earliest beginnings of the Centre to events in 1886 and 1891. See Alice Callow, *The Early History of the ‘Higher Thought’ Movement in England* [1917].

¹¹ *A Quarterly Record of “Higher Thought” Work*, No. 20, February 1913: 3.

¹² See his characterization of the Goopes, “the oddest little couple conceivable,” who pursued “a fruitarian career upon an upper floor in Theobald’s Road. They were childless and servantless, and they had reduced simple living to the finest of fine arts. ... [H]is wife wrote a weekly column in *New Ideas* upon vegetarian cookery, vivisection, degeneration, the lacteal secretion, appendicitis, and the Higher Thought generally....” H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica*. Ed. by Sylvia Hardy. London: Everyman/J. M. Dent, 1993. 98-99.

– “The Colonial Middlebrow: Louis Bromfield’s Depictions of India in *The Rains Came* (1937) and *Night in Bombay* (1940)” – unpacks the implications of this relationship between colonial literature and middlebrow culture.

After two extended trips to India in 1933 and 1934 at the invitation of the Maharajah of Baroda, Bromfield turned his experiences into two fictional tales of a dying British Empire and a cast of native and expatriate (British and American) characters who represented a range of humanity from the down-trodden and the disillusioned to the reawakened and the redeemed. As Bromfield wrote to Gertrude Stein in a letter just after his return, India “was magnificent,” adding, “I was happier and unhappier there than I have ever been in my life. You would have been fascinated by it.” Indeed, in an earlier postcard to Stein, Bromfield articulated his overwhelming impressions of India that were both “beautiful and melodramatic.” Informed by this “beautiful and melodramatic” viewpoint, an analysis of Bromfield’s two best-selling “Indian” novels begins to question the notion of ‘selling the exotic’ within the cultural hierarchy of the brow debate; a debate clearly highlighted by Maier’s and Harker’s comments.