



A Library of Books for the Aspiring Professional

Some Effects of Middlebrow Reading

A MORE INTIMATE HISTORY

My encounter with the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1963 had everything to do with the expansion of the professional-managerial class in the decade or so after World War II. I was part of a family that might otherwise not have been able to endow its children with professional aspirations. Although both my parents had attended college, my mother had been discouraged by her family from finishing her degree, and my father had only managed to complete his course of study in the new field of business administration with the assistance of the GI Bill. When he eventually finished, his degree enabled him to find positions in new industries associated with the postwar economy's structural need for a much larger group of people who could labor with their minds rather than their hands. As the child of such parents, I was taught to value books and to aspire to some form of intellectual work. I was a perfect candidate, then, for Mr. Shymansky's reading advice and for the Book-of-the-Month Club books he recommended. It is easy to see why I was so deeply affected by them.

In the years after the war, as more raw economic power was converted to the task of producing consumer goods in the United States, more individuals were required to manage the coordination of production with consumption. At the same time, many more professionals and knowledge workers were necessary to circulate the huge quantities of information so essential to an integrated consumer economy.¹ Like so many returning GIs, my father seized on the shimmering promise of white-collar work and eagerly took up the offer of a free university education, an education he could not otherwise afford. He pursued his degree in business administration at New York University's evening college and eventually parlayed

his diploma into entry-level jobs, first in the booming television business and then in the fledgling civilian air industry. My brother and I were particularly proud of his connection to Capital Air Lines and to the glamorous and exotic business of air travel. We thought it marked us somehow as particularly well suited to the promises of the future.² We were, I suppose, but not so much by our father's starched white collars as by a whole set of changes in middle-class schooling in the 1950s. As baby boomers, we were coached incessantly in test taking by a new battery of achievement tests, lined up in college-prep classrooms, and goaded on by Sputnik-inspired fears that Russia would outdo the United States in technical proficiency, scientific achievement, and international political success if we American kids did not do better in school and aspire to a college education.³

By the time those Book-of-the-Month Club books arrived in my room, I had already been identified as appropriate material for accelerated high school classes by an ability to follow the rules, to answer appropriately when called on, and to produce the requisite assignments when asked. Although I read a lot on my own, what I read with enormous zeal were Archie comics, Nancy Drew mysteries (every one of them, and in order no less), *Seventeen*, various movie magazines, the Hardy Boys, and an odd lot of biographies from the Englewood Public Library. Apparently when I entered the hospital for scoliosis surgery in September of my freshman year, I already felt bound for college, for I was teased by the anesthesiologist after the first operation that I had bragged to everyone, as the gas took effect, that I was going to Barnard. Even then, I think, my brother called me a snob.

In any case I was thrilled to be singled out for attention by the school librarian, and so, during long, preternaturally silent mornings in a neighborhood deserted by my friends, who had swirled off as a group to the new high school at 7:45, I opened book after book and, in the words of novelist Richard Powers, "climbed down through the portable portals, everyone an infallible *Blue Guide* to a parallel place, unsuspected, joining the town and just at hand."⁴ For me, reading was a lifeline, what Powers calls "narrative therapy" and "the cure of interlocking dreams." Fear and loneliness grafted me to those books and made of them routes to new worlds. For me, as for the past judges and the present-day editors at the Book-of-the-Month Club, those books rendered me "earless, eyeless, motionless for hours"; they left me feeling "swept away." Ultimately they left me with a passion for deep reading and enriched too, as Henry Canby had once been, by the idea that in the future I was "to rush great-heartedly upon experience."

Still, when my year at home was over, I was thrilled to be released from my private plaster prison. I returned to school and, with the kind of exuberant ingratitude only a child can afford, returned the last box of books to the library and decisively put them behind me. I remembered only the love of reading in the abstract. I cast about through high school and college for a way to fashion a life with books. My parents always thought I would end up running a bookstore, but for the longest time I could find no way to imagine a working life focused by reading. As it had for Henry Canby, then, teaching presented itself as the only solution, a solution, I have to confess, I took up somewhat grudgingly. The job certainly was not as glamorous as that of archaeologist or nuclear physicist or journalist, all professions I had tried on improbably and in fantasy at one time or another in answer to the question of what I wanted to do when I finished college. Eventually, when I wandered as an undergraduate into Dr. Russel Nye's university course "Literary Realism and Naturalism" and listened to him relate story after story about his own curious quest to unearth America's popular culture of the 1880s and 1890s, I realized for the first time that you could make a career of reading. College teaching was a job like any other. It could be aspired to and learned. At that point, like Henry Canby, and with no more of a call to teaching than he had, I "slipped" into the profession of academic English.

Only now, after years of trying to understand the differences between the high literature celebrated in those university classrooms and that earlier collection of books that had set me on this path in the first place, have I begun to wonder about the particular stories those middlebrow books told. What narratives of desire did they construct? What possibilities did they pry open in the future? What might they have contributed to my ability to be open to the example set by Dr. Nye? What exactly was the connection between middlebrow reading and the aspirations of an emerging professional? I return to Mr. Shymansky's boxes, then, and to some of the books they contained with new eyes and new goals. I want to open them again in order to examine some of the books I read in 1963 and 1964, all of which were sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club in the years between 1950 and 1963. I want to do so in an effort to explore the possibility of a connection between the substance of middlebrow culture and the appetites, motives, and limitations of a new class fraction as it consolidated its control over the country's culture and defined, at least for a time, its purposes and direction.⁵

There is a problem, of course, in presenting myself as a representative here, whether of Book-of-the-Month Club subscribers or as a member of

the professional-managerial class. I am well aware that it would be risky to claim too much for my readings either in 1963 or now, in 1996. To be sure, only a small percentage of individuals who read regularly with the Book-of-the-Month Club either held or went on to jobs as literary academics or professionals. Their reading may have been very different from my own, not least because their personal situation and needs may have been a good deal less extreme than mine. Additionally, they probably selected their own books from the club catalog without the mediating advice of an additional literary professional like the librarian who assisted me. At the same time, by virtue of my training and now long experience with the professional practice of interpretation, it may be impossible for me to access, recover, or reproduce the kind of reading I did in 1963 or that might have been done by professional people with no special expertise in the field of literature or in the business of reading. This is an imaginative exercise, clearly, born at once of a private need to remember and of the more professionally driven desire to understand what the particular mix of books sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club over the years might have conveyed to its readers.

I offer the readings that follow cautiously, then—in a reflective spirit and in an experimental mode—as a story only about one middle-class girl's encounter with the literary field of the 1950s as it was surveyed and mapped out for her by the Book-of-the-Month Club and a school librarian. Much more research will need to be done to see whether there is anything in this encounter representative of others' engagement with the club and the middlebrow culture it dispensed with such self-confidence and alacrity during this period. Even that will be difficult, however, because few records survive from this period or others, either in club archives or elsewhere, that might tell us more about what individual subscribers actually made of the books they bought. Still, it is worth making a start, since spotty information does survive about the position of the Book-of-the-Month Club during the postwar years and about its relationship to its membership.

THE BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB IN THE POSTWAR YEARS

The years after World War II were those of the Book-of-the-Month Club's greatest prominence, influence, and success. It was such a well-known institution that it was accorded extraordinary publicity and atten-

tion in a number of prominent industry publication *Advertising & Selling* featured "Why the Book Clubs Are Successful," an article by Maxwell Sackheim, one of the club's founding partners. The article focused in particular on the invention of the negative option, on the way it enabled the clubs to "capitaliz[e] on human inertia in building business" and on the potential adaptability of this key device to other business operations.⁶ That same year the *Atlantic Monthly* featured an article by Henry Seidel Canby titled "How the Book-of-the-Month Club Began."⁷ Obviously designed to provide the *Atlantic's* readers with insight into the history of an admired enterprise, Canby's article openly acknowledged the usual criticisms of the club but went on to justify the good work the organization did on behalf of a larger cause. He wrote, "In all my experience as a teacher, a writer, a critic, and an editor, I have never had so satisfactory a sense of accomplishment in what our ancestors would have called the furtherance of good literature as in my more than twenty years on the Book-of-the-Month Club." He admitted that "I could have got more academic prestige, perhaps more intellectual prestige, if I had given all my time to a professorship or to the editing of a literary journal obviously not run to make money." "But," he concluded, "the conviction of superior long-term usefulness . . . remains."⁸

Despite Canby's own sense of satisfaction and the corroborating approval that came from other quarters, the book clubs' relationship to the bookselling industry remained unsettled as late as the 1950s, and this, too, contributed to extensive publicity. In fact, during the years immediately after the war a number of different questions were argued before the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), including the issues of whether the book clubs' cut rates were in restraint of trade and whether the dividends offered to new members were actually free. But even as these complaints were reviewed by the FTC and the courts, Harry Scherman and other club officials were honored at a dinner given by the Booksellers' League of New York on the occasion of the club's twenty-fifth anniversary. At that dinner in 1951 Scherman gave a long address explaining his thinking about bookselling and argued, once again, that club operations only increased sales throughout the trade. Evidently his opinion was shared at least by some, for in August of that year, in an article reporting the FTC action, *Time* noted that "privately, most booksellers admit that the clubs have often helped their business over the past 25 years."⁹

Eventually the clubs were exonerated of all charges after a number of different and contradictory decisions, including a negative pronouncement by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York

City that peculiarly observed of the Book-of-the-Month Club, "We think it proper to note that, in the circumstances, the petitioner's practices, although they have been validly prohibited for the future, involved no moral impropriety."¹⁰ Scherman apparently was considered a man of integrity even when his organization was under legal attack. The negative decision was finally rescinded in 1953 when the FTC relaxed its previous definition of "free" and thereby allowed the clubs to advertise as they wished.

At that point the Book-of-the-Month Club seems to have achieved a certain stature as a significant cultural institution. Indeed, only shortly thereafter, in 1956, the Columbia Oral History Project began the process of interviewing all of the principals in the organization. Four years later Harry Scherman gave an invitational address before the Library of Congress in which he estimated that, together, the book clubs had distributed more than 700 million books, "double the number of books in all the public and university libraries in the United States, plus those on the shelves of this immense institution."¹¹ While that fact may have been cause for celebration at the Library of Congress and prompted other large libraries such as those at the University of Chicago and the University of Minnesota to subscribe to the club, in other arenas it continued to promote grave concern.¹² That same year, in fact, Dwight MacDonald published his diatribe against masscult and midcult in *Partisan Review*, noting that "midcult is the Book-of-the-Month Club, which since 1926 has been supplying its members with reading matter of which the best that can be said is that it could be worse."¹³ Apparently the club was so successful in establishing itself as a key cultural mediator in these years that it warranted renewed and even more vituperative criticism from writers such as MacDonald and Clement Greenberg and from the increasing numbers of literature professors whose cultural authority it challenged.

The postwar period witnessed significant expansion and diversification at the Book-of-the-Month Club as Scherman and his partners decided to build on earlier efforts to broaden the scope of the material they offered. In 1950, for example, they created the Children's Record Guild and then expanded further in 1954 with something they called the Music Appreciation Records. Designed specifically as "a kind of home university course in the appreciation of fine music," this venture drew on the talents of Scherman's son Thomas, who was the founder and conductor of the Little Orchestra Society of New York. In 1956 Scherman added the Metropolitan Opera Record Club as well. During the 1950s the Book-of-the-Month Club also added a Young Readers of America Club as a way of capitalizing

on the sudden explosion in children's book sales fueled, of course, by the baby boom. Like others in the industry, Scherman hoped that the children he reached with his new books might subsequently develop into lifelong readers and book purchasers. Evidently, given the organization's overall success, he assumed that the club would be around for a long time, since, according to Charles Lee, a duplicate of the organization's subscription list was preserved in "a special bank vault in Northern New Jersey specifically maintained against the possibility of atomic destruction of the company's regular records."¹⁴

As I have already shown in Chapter 8, it is difficult to reconstruct a detailed picture of the club membership at any moment in its history. Drawing on the aforementioned report done by the club in 1958, Charles Lee's *The Hidden Public* gives the best account of who might have belonged to the club in the postwar years. Suggesting that "one outstanding characteristic of club members is that they are a very well educated segment of the population," the report noted that 68 percent of the members had attended some college and that "a large proportion of the members are members of the professions and are influential persons in their communities." The market researchers added that two-thirds of club subscribers were married, 65 percent were women, and 40 percent lived in communities of less than 10,000 people.¹⁵ The average member was in her thirties, and 29 percent of the club's membership was drawn from the mid-Atlantic states, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

In 1958 my own parents were thirty-six years old. They lived in Bergen County, New Jersey, in a New York suburb of some 8,000 people. Neither were employed in the traditional professions, nor were they members of the club, in part, my mother suggests, because they considered themselves unable to afford the kind of financial commitment required by the Book-of-the-Month Club. Aside from this economic limitation, though, they were apparently much like the average members of the club. Club members joined, according to Dr. Ernest Dichter, who wrote "A Psychological Analysis of the Sales and Advertising Problems of the Book-of-the-Month Club," "primarily because it permitted them to state publicly that they were book readers and were interested in intellectual matters."¹⁶ My mother made a similar statement by driving us every week to a library three towns and twenty minutes away. As I recall, no other family in our development made this particular kind of effort. So even if I did not officially receive the club's selections by mail, I was at least educated to value books and culture much as Scherman's subscribers evidently were. No

if I could join the Book-of-the-Month Club. Small surprise as well that I responded with delight when my mother unpacked Mr. Shymansky's first box and stacked those weighty, gaily-covered volumes by my bedside table. I took my time paging through them. I examined their covers. I read their jacket blurbs and looked at their illustrations. Eventually, without knowing I was reading Book-of-the-Month Club selections and alternates, I began to read.

I cannot remember exactly what I read first, nor can I reconstruct the order in which I read those books. The titles I never forgot, though, and which even now I remember most vividly were *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*; *Marjorie Morningstar*; *Kon-Tiki*; *Advise and Consent*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *The Bull from the Sea*; *The Wall*; *Nectar in a Sieve*; *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*; *Shakespeare of London*; and *The Ugly American*.¹⁷ These are the titles I can recall mentioning to others over the years or remember thinking about even before I became involved in this project on the Book-of-the-Month Club. But I also now remember receiving and reading from Mr. Shymansky (in no particular order) *The Guns of August*; *Fail-Safe*; *Hawaii*; *Black Like Me*; *Mila 18*; *The Making of the President, 1960*; *Lust for Life*; *The President's Lady*; *The Agony and the Ecstasy*; *A Separate Peace*; *Act One*; *Anatomy of a Murder*; *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*; *Day of Infamy*; *The Egg and I*; *The Old Man and the Sea*; *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*; *A Stillness at Appomattox*; *My Cousin Rachel*; *Death Be Not Proud*; *Cry, the Beloved Country*; and *Inside Africa*. That year I also read *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, *Rebecca*, *Oliver Wiswell*, several other historical novels by Kenneth Roberts, and *Cheaper by the Dozen*—Book-of-the-Month Club books all, but selected at earlier dates.¹⁸

Although I eventually want to consider some of these books individually and to read them again for what they reveal about my adolescent, preprofessional desires, it seems essential to look at them, first, as a middlebrow library. Indeed Dichter's research revealed that the typical Book-of-the-Month Club subscriber joined the club not so much to acquire any particular title but to begin the process of assembling a home library. When subscribers talk of books in connection with the Book-of-the-Month Club, Dichter reported to Harry Scherman and the other partners, "they show much more interest in and place more importance on accumulating an extensive amount and wide variety of books than they do on the single selections."¹⁹ They joined, Dichter found, because the club enabled them to assemble their own personal library of books that they could be proud of and that they could present to their children

When Mr. Shymansky selected this particular group of titles, then, and sent them to me, he was doing nothing out of the ordinary. He was picking a few good books from a wide range of titles offered by the Book-of-the-Month Club, and he was passing them on to a bookish child who he thought might enjoy reading them for entertainment and education. It is worth pausing to think, then, about the kind of education this particular library provided in tandem with the particular pleasures it afforded.

THE CLUB'S MIDDLEBROW LIBRARY

This time the boxes of books come from the Duke University library. As I unpack them, I notice, first, that virtually every one is well thumbed and heavily used. Many are stained with food and water, and virtually all have multiple, turned-down corners, marking pauses in past readings. Some have inscriptions from loved ones; others include nameplates and donation cards, suggesting that their owners presented them to the university as gifts. Many are reinforced with heavy canvas tape. Others are underlined and filled with college students' anxious notes and exhortations. A few even hide evidence of more idiosyncratic and imaginative readings. Page 24 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for instance, is exuberantly marked up with green ink. In fact, every *o* is filled in with green, and at the bottom of the page the happy artist has scrawled, "Pot is Good." This copy, number two of the four the university owns, is also heavily marked up by someone who obviously used it to give a dramatic reading or to construct a script for a dramatic presentation. The condition of this particular library of books suggests, then, that many other readers perused these pages at the same time I did, and even well after. In fact an old due-date slip indicates that this particular copy of *The Ugly American* was last checked out in 1992.

The books are additionally striking because so many are astonishingly long and consequently very heavy. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* extends over 1,245 pages. *Marjorie Morningstar*, *Advise and Consent*, *The Wall*, *Hawaii*, *Stillness at Appomattox*, *Exodus*, and *The Agony and the Ecstasy* are all more than 500 pages. Perhaps Mr. Shymansky thought a girl with nothing to do and no place to go would have to be patient enough to wend her way through leisurely stories and nearly endless historical narratives. But when I compare these particular books to the rest of the material sent out by the club between 1950 and 1963 as announced in the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, it is clear that the club exhibited a similar preference

for very long books. Indeed, the club constantly admitted in their reports that, though their books were long, they were “exciting,” “compelling,” and “fast-paced.” Of William Shirer’s monumental tome on Nazi Germany, for example, the *News* acknowledged, “Perhaps *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* is too long (it must run to 500,000 words or more); there are sequences—for instance, in the material dealing with the outbreak of the war—where Mr. Shirer has so much to say that he entangles himself in a thicket of footnotes.” But, the author of the report reassured subscribers, “these items do not . . . detract from the worth of the book as a whole. . . . It reads like a murder mystery (which, in a sense, it indeed is), and I found it gripping on almost every page.”²⁰

Whether this preference for length and obvious heft was simply another version of the club’s long-standing interest in “bulk culture” or the product of the peculiar taste of the 1950s judges is difficult to say. Given the fact that a huge number of the books rejected by the club during this period were just as long as those they selected, it seems plausible that the phenomenon of the very long book may have been a product of the larger culture’s effort to encompass and corral an ever-more-complex society apparently wheeling into incoherence in the post-World War II era.²¹ In any case, what does seem clear is that this particular library of books suggests now, as it must have in the 1950s, that the world is an enormously intricate, rich, multilayered, and complicated place and, whether imaginary or actual, can only be adequately rendered through careful detail and at considerable length.

In this regard it is striking to note that many of these books are also bound with endpapers featuring maps and incredibly involved family trees. *Hawaii*, for example, provides two maps—one of the islands themselves and one charting “The Coming of the Peoples”—as well as genealogical charts of the relationships among the principal characters, who total more than two hundred. *Guns of August* provides maps of the western and eastern fronts during World War I; Shirer’s book charts Hitler’s “Bloodless” and “Military” conquests; *Kon-Tiki* sports a map tracking not only Thor Heyerdahl’s balsa-wood raft but also the supposed routes of sweet potatoes and stone statues of pyramids as they made their way across the Pacific from Peru to Polynesia. Even *Shakespeare of London* tries to situate the reader within its internal world by locating in Shakespeare’s London establishments such as Gresham College, Bishopsgate, The Globe and The Rose theaters, and the Royal Exchange. This library, then, like the 1950s-style elementary school classrooms I knew so well, with their heavy canvas maps on rollers almost impossible to work, tries hard to place its

inquiring readers in successfully surveyed, fully captioned, and therefore comprehensible universes. Indeed, I recall poring over these many book maps with fascination and trying to enliven their flat, abstract space with the people and events about which I was reading.

Examining this library again, I am struck by how many of the books anxiously take on topical issues and current concerns. This is true even of the fiction. World War II is here in depth and endless detail; so, too, is the Holocaust. The books also focus insistently on “the communist threat” and on “the race question.” Although the latter phrase is used most commonly in the books to demarcate the changing position of African Americans in the United States, it is also clear from this particular library that, at the Book-of-the-Month Club, the race question encompassed the problem of other dark-skinned peoples who occupied the “teeming” countries of India, China, and Africa. Although I did not see this at the time, these books seem to me now to be deeply involved in the ongoing project of reconstructing whiteness in the face of a threat posed by peoples who could no longer be ignored or fully controlled by the apparatuses of colonial administration and domination. While the books tend to mark a position on the race question that would have been called liberal at the time and exhibit a complexity I will come back to in discussing particular titles, it should be noted that they always presume a white, first world, relatively privileged reader, a person “responsibly concerned” about the “swarming Asiatic [and African] poor.”²²

When I compare Mr. Shymansky’s small selection with the larger library chosen and sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club, it is clear that topicality is the most insistent feature of both collections. In addition to the war, the Holocaust, communism, and race relations, the club’s larger library features a tenacious preoccupation with the atom bomb and its consequences. It also shows fascination with contemporary advances in science, including the development of the computer, and with the changing nature of social relations, including work and the world of the corporation. Finally, it displays a slowly dawning concern with women’s burgeoning unrest and growing ambitions. The Book-of-the-Month Club’s middlebrow library, then, relentlessly advances the proposition that the first work of literacy and print is the business of making sense of the present-day world and its contemporary problems. Writing and reading in this view are exploratory tools of illumination, lanterns lighting the way under a lowering sky and in a universe darkened by uncertainty, confusion, and even evil. Indeed, in reading preliminary reader’s reports and the *News* for these years, I am struck by how often phrases such as “our

troubled times," "fateful events," "this uncertain period," and "our confusing age" recur. Clearly, the club's judges and its preliminary readers were disturbed by the world that surrounded them and were convinced that their subscribers were as well. As a consequence, the library they assembled for their subscribers is highly topical, attuned to the pressing problems of the 1950s, and pitched precisely to give voice to the profound anxiety of the age.

Still, the universe surveyed by the Book-of-the-Month Club is not marked by high seriousness only. In further comparing the books I received from Mr. Shymansky with the larger set recommended by the club, I am surprised to note that one very large category of books featured in the *News* is represented only minimally in the collection I read. Although the club clearly preferred books that took on substantial issues, whether in a contemporary or a historical vein, it also offered its readers large quantities of what can only be called light fiction. Neither weighted down by a concern with consequential, topical matters nor designed to provoke the reader to thoughtful reflection, this sort of fiction was offered to readers as a tool to while away the hours in happy diversion. Pleasure reading, it would seem, was as central to the club's mission in the 1950s as I found it in the 1980s. And this particular form of pleasure reading aimed to absorb the reader in the tastes, textures, and emotional tenor of other worlds. Regularly offered to readers as main selections during the summer months, this sort of material suggests that the club believed its general readers wanted to be entertained as much as they desired to be informed and instructed. Accordingly, they featured various entertainment genres, including titles such as *The Flower Girls*, by Clemence Dane, described in the June 1955 *News*. Billed as the kind of English novel "full of warmth, gaiety and energy" where the "characters enjoy good hearty meals and noisy parties and challenging humorous conversations," this novel was additionally described as a "romantic comedy" and "a spacious and delightful story, which cannot be read in an evening." Judge Gilbert Highet further reported to his subscribers, "We are meant to live with it, for a week or a fortnight." He concluded, "We shall enjoy this generous and warm-hearted novel most fully if we give it the same preparatory acceptance that we accord to a good play, when we sit down in comfortable expectation, and watch the lights dim, and see the curtain rise, and prepare to admire the bold energy of the adventurous hero, the quavering tones of the wily old magician, the dark rich cello voice and the glittering eyes of the enchanting but dangerous princes."²³

Obviously this is the stuff of melodrama, and it played a substantial

role in the mix of books sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club in the 1950s. As much as the club's library was meant to provoke thought and to illumine contemporary problems, then, it was also designed to provide recreation and amusement. Literacy was as much about pleasure as it was about exploration and edification. Interestingly, though, this kind of material is virtually absent from the collection of books Mr. Shymansky provided for me. Although he sent humor books such as *The Egg and I* and *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, the only fiction he included from the entertainment genres of the thriller, mystery, and romance was *Fail-Safe*, *Rebecca*, *My Cousin Rachel*, and *Marjorie Morningstar*, and even these tend to exhibit pretensions to social commentary. Perhaps he disapproved of nonliterary genres, especially those generally dubbed "women's fiction." Perhaps he thought them insufficiently challenging for a student who was already spending too much time out of school. In any case, the fiction he did send resembles the pleasure books in that they are long, diffuse novels with many characters, carefully rendered realistic detail, and lots of dialogue and action. However, what sets them apart is their marked tendency to take on serious issues in fictional form. *Advise and Consent*, a novel relentlessly packed with detail about the daily doings of the American Senate, focuses in part on the confirmation of a controversial secretary of state and his relationship to the Soviet Union; *Nectar in a Sieve* deals with poverty, colonialism, and the suffering of the Indian peasantry; *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes up civil rights and race relations in the American South; and *The Wall* and *Mila 18* both deal with Nazism and the Polish ghetto.

Mr. Shymansky, it would seem, thought I ought to learn even as I enjoyed myself. In this he was not all that different from the Book-of-the-Month Club judges themselves, for even when they touted pleasure reading and admitted that it had no redeeming value beyond that of its capacity to entertain, they exhibited clear nervousness about their transgression. In fact their presentation of entertainment reading was nearly always defensive in tone and almost furtive in its assertiveness, as if the judges were somehow looking over their shoulders, waiting for the reaction of disapproving elders. And the elders they imagined were clearly literary critics and English teachers, those professional readers of fiction feared equally in the 1980s by their successors at the club. It was the professional critic's preference for intricacy, subtlety, and complexity, the judges' worried self-justifications make clear, that had obviously come to dominate the literary field. These qualities dictated how new novels were supposed to be evaluated. Listen, for instance, to Clifton Fadiman introduce the thriller *Fail-Safe*:

Experience teaches reviewers to shun superlatives, especially cliché superlatives. But, because I know no simpler, no better way to put the matter, I am driven to one: *Fail-Safe* is the most exciting novel I have read in at least ten years. Not best; not profound; not a contribution to literature; not rewarding for its style. Just most exciting. But, let me add, not shallow either, not cheap, not tossawayable. It is the work of two highly intelligent men, Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. One is the co-author of *The Ugly American*, the other (true of Mr. Burdick also) an able political scientist.²⁴

As if to forestall the carping complaints of literary critics like Dwight MacDonald, whom he can clearly imagine dismissing the book for its lack of profundity and for its workmanlike prose, Fadiman both admits the novel's literary failings and stresses its success as thrilling entertainment. Ironically, though, at the very moment he emphasizes the worth of sheer excitement, he reassures his readers of the intelligence of the book's authors and casually mentions their professional credentials. Even this book, he seems to say, though it makes no pretensions to literary value and seeks primarily to excite, is made weightier and therefore more justifiable by the authors' professional expertise in political matters.

The Book-of-the-Month Club judges, like Mr. Shymansky, apparently, found it difficult to abandon the idea that reading and books ought somehow to be connected with expertise, learning, and culture. A library was a library, after all, a place to seek information and instruction. Even when the judges recommended pure pleasure reading, they often fell back on qualifications, comparisons, and allusions that connected the book in question, despite its stylistic failings and lack of higher purpose, to more legitimate literary forms. Of Robert Traver's 1958 novel *Anatomy of a Murder*, for instance, Fadiman remarked it "is recommended not as a deathless work of literature, but as a wickedly quizzical melodrama of the law, perhaps less edifying than instructive. It is a lively, candid tale, blinking few of the less pretty facts of life."²⁵ Fair enough, it fails as literature. Clearly, not every book can aspire to the status of the greats. But then, having insisted on the value of melodrama in its own right, Fadiman performs an about-face and notes, "In its honest realism, its 18th-century masculine vigor, it may remind some readers of Smollett and Defoe." It is not literature, Fadiman seems to say, but it will remind the subscriber, who is anxious about wallowing in the thrills of suspense, of more legitimate literary forms. The Book-of-the-Month Club always wanted to have it both ways. It wanted to appeal to the general reader's desire for pleasure,

entertainment, and titillation and, at the same time, to cloak itself in the highbrow garb of cultural significance.

If this sounds contradictory and more than a little tense in its efforts to balance competing criteria, it is. And that tension can be found throughout the *Book-of-the-Month Club News* and in the larger mix of books sent out between 1950 and 1963. It is even evident in the surviving preliminary reader's reports from the period. Taken together, these reports demonstrate that although everyone understood that they were looking for books that would, above all, be enjoyable to read, they also found it difficult to recommend titles that failed to flaunt some form of larger cultural significance, either stylistically, through a heavily worked literary language, or topically, through treatment of important or current subject matter. In fact, the category of books that proved most problematic at the club and resulted in more rejections by preliminary readers than almost any other form was that which they called "circulating library stuff," "women's fiction," the kind of "conventional costume parade" preferred by "the bosomier book clubs" and "rental library patrons." Cultural significance, it seems, was as gendered in 1956 as it was in 1926. Although the club was committed to serving its female members and to providing them with the kind of historical and romantic fiction they seemed to prefer, both the preliminary readers and the judges tended to complain about this material and selected only those examples of it that bordered on more acceptable genres. If a melodramatic storyline was not balanced by a vigorous realism or carefully constructed, literate prose, the book was rejected outright as run-of-the-mill and unworthy of Book-of-the-Month Club attention.

Not surprisingly, the club's conflicted obeisance to higher cultural value and to the pure pleasure of entertainment reading was played out graphically in the design and layout of the *News*. Indeed, the conflict often made the cover of the catalog virtually impossible to decode at a glance. Throughout the 1950s and even into the 1960s the *News* featured a reproduction of a well-known painting on the front cover. The cultural stature of the work was underscored by a detailed description of the painting on an inside page that included details about the artist, the work's composition and style, and its place in art history. Almost never, however, did the subject of the artwork have anything to do with the book that was being announced as the month's main selection. That selection was usually introduced, though, just below the reproduction. Frequently the book title was omitted in favor of a short, tantalizing blurb summarizing the subject matter in question. The placement of the description always made it appear to be the caption to the painting. More often than

not, though, an odd dissonance was created because the topic of the book clashed with the tone of the celebrated artwork. The June 1957 issue of the *News*, for example, announced "a novel about modern American life" below an Honoré Daumier painting, "The Connoisseur," depicting a vaguely eighteenth-century gentleman contemplating a small version of the Venus de Milo. Inside the front cover the curious subscriber was further informed that this novel of modern life, *The Durable Fire*, had as its background "a struggle for power in a giant corporation" and that it also unfolded "as a tender story of a truly happy marriage." Daumier and the Venus de Milo were there, obviously, to link the club in the reader's mind with the supposedly eternal values of the high art tradition rather than with the topicality and frivolousness of this particular title. Neither avant-garde nor self-consciously challenging, this novel, the club's report made clear, was chosen to entertain. As such, perhaps, it required particularly vigorous propping up with familiar tokens of cultural esteem. In any case, in addition to contemplating the Venus de Milo, Daumier's gentleman conveniently lounged amidst open books, classical busts and urns, and heavily chiaroscuroed paintings in gilt frames.

Those cultural icons displayed on the front cover of the *News*, it seems clear, were the equivalents of Marchette Chute's Shakespeare, Mary Renault's classical Greeks, and C. W. Ceram's Egyptians, figures marketed to subscribers in the books advertised within. The presence of these subjects in the club's library, and in the smaller version of it offered to me by Mr. Shymansky, provided the authority and weight of cultural ballast. They counterbalanced the insignificance and superficiality of the literary worlds inhabited by people like Max and Rebecca de Winter, Marjorie Morningstern and her lawyer husband, and the characters in books like James Michener's *Hawaii* and Burdick and Wheeler's *Fail-Safe*. In a sense, they legitimated the library as a whole and provided fine cover for the more suspect pleasures associated with hammock literature and best-sellers.

SHAKESPEARE OF LONDON:

LONGING TO KNOW THE CLASSICS

It is difficult to know, of course, how much of this I understood consciously in 1963. I certainly could not have used the language I employed above to characterize the club if I had wanted to describe the attraction some of Mr. Shymansky's books held for me. I probably would have said

I read them because they sounded like good stories. But I did read at least some of them with a certain deliberate devotion because I thought their stature would enhance my own. I know I was entranced by the portal they promised to open onto the fabulous riches of culture and art. In fact, by the time Marchette Chute's *Shakespeare of London* arrived in my room that fall, promising to reveal the full, theatrical world inhabited by the famous bard, I already possessed my own, single-volume edition of the plays, illustrated by Rockwell Kent, prefaced by Book-of-the-Month Club judge Christopher Morley, and inscribed by my grandfather. I had known enough about the cultural value of the plays and the genius Shakespeare to request the book for a Christmas present the year before. "To Janice," my grandfather wrote, "May you find in many of these pages an inspiration to improve your English, that it may be a pride to you and a joy to others."

In paging through this book again, the volume I later used in my college Shakespeare class, it is clear to me that in 1963 my desires had already been informed by middle-class longings for the prestige conferred by familiarity with high culture. I was bent on surrounding myself with the aura of art and the status of the cultured self. In this I was not unique, I suspect, for by mid-century, at least, American public schools had already standardized a program in basic literacy grounded on the touchstones of a common cultural tradition. My grandfather's inscription implicitly recognized the centrality of Shakespeare to even the most elementary definition of the literate self, for he wrote not of the significance of the plays or of their extraordinary delineation of character, but of their language, which he held up as a model for emulation. Sentiments like my grandfather's, expressed so lovingly in so many other middle-class families, endowed many of us with the conviction that to present ourselves as educated individuals, it was necessary to know the classics.

These teachings about the value of the classics had been infused with added authority for me by the fact that they were most intensely prescribed by my sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Maw, who had arrived in our suburban town on exchange from England. He was both strange and impressively cosmopolitan, with his British accent and the way he wrote his European sevens. I was not the only one who copied his mannerisms. Perhaps we were willing to follow his lead because his constant railing about the cultural ignorance of American students tapped our worries about our country's failings and lack of sophistication in the wake of the Sputnik triumph only three years before. In any case, when he taunted us with the assertion that British students our age had already read Shakespeare, we were eager to prove we could do so as well. He had the school buy copies

of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* for every student in the class, and he set us to the task of reading the plays aloud and memorizing long passages from both. I can still recall which passages my best friend, Cathy Cheselka, and I memorized. In the spring we even boarded a bus and made a cultural pilgrimage to Manhattan to see Donald Madden portray the melancholy Dane. The combination of Mr. Maw's fastidious, refined demeanor and the authority he exercised without an iota of self-doubt must have been powerful indeed, for it induced a bunch of twelve-year-olds to sit through a four-hour play in language we could barely comprehend.

In any event, when Marchette Chute's own Will Shakespeare strode impressively into my imagination only two years later, he certainly came as one more lesson in cultural hierarchy. I wanted to know Shakespeare, to say I had read a biography of him, because of the cultural value that trailed beside his famous name. Chute was as conscious of the stature of her subject as I was. In fact she saw her task as one of counteracting the distance and abstraction that accompanied the usual hagiography. In her foreword to the book, she informed her readers that "this is an attempt to bring a very great man into the light of common day. It is an attempt to show William Shakespeare as his contemporaries saw him, rather than as the gigantic and legendary figure he has become since." "He was once life-size," she reassured me, "and this is an attempt at a life-sized portrait."²⁶

As a way of tailoring the dramatic genius to the size of a general reader like me, she then filled her book with fine-grained detail about the Elizabethan life William Shakespeare must have led. As quickly as page 2, in fact, I learned that his father was a glover who sold his wares "just under the big clock in the paved market square," and that as an inhabitant of Stratford he would have been "fined if he let his dog go unmuzzled, if his duck wandered, if he played cards 'or any other unlawful games,' . . . [or] if he borrowed gravel from the town gravel pits." That sort of detail, of course, simultaneously underscored its ordinariness and its strangeness. It made Shakespeare's world both like and far removed from my own. As much as those facts helped to render Shakespeare in flesh and blood amidst the daily doings of community life, so also did they serve to shore up Chute's own authority as the researcher who had unearthed them in the New York Public Library. In the end those details functioned as markers of the continuity between Elizabethan England and the postwar America I inhabited, thereby providing mundane ground for propositions about the universality of great art. At the same time, they came to me as a form of specialized knowledge, the result of diligent research in documents found in a great library. Thus, even as the book sought to rescue Shakespeare

from those who had "pull[ed] him away from the earth that had given him life," from the "scholars" who had "made him lord of the schoolrooms and the libraries," the very detail it marshaled so conspicuously to create the effect of a life lived on the ground, as it were, surreptitiously enhanced the value of scholarship and the authority of those whose particular business it was.

Shakespeare of London schooled me in the belief that cultural icons like the bard were as human as anybody else. Just as Harry Scherman's Little Leather Library edition of *Romeo and Juliet* had cut high culture down to manageable size, so Chute's biography unmasked the figure of the genius so as to convince me that Shakespeare, the man, was knowable by all. Ironically, though, to be known he first had to be embodied, enlivened, and inspired by the assiduous work of a true expert. In the end the book enhanced the cultural status of the figure it wanted to humanize, just as it authorized the expert who could translate him for the general reader. With Marchette Chute's biography, then, as in so many other arenas, the Book-of-the-Month Club managed to have it both ways. It made culture accessible to the non-expert even as it emphasized and underscored the historic connection between culture and an elite group of experts with special access to its mysteries and intangible riches.

That a popular biography of Shakespeare taught a lesson in cultural hierarchy and emphasized the value of expert historical research is perhaps not surprising. But I wonder now whether the experience of living side by side with Chute's fully fashioned Will did not carry with it other, more personal connotations and subtle, long-term effects. For as part of a cultural pageant that Mr. Maw had designed, I had cross-dressed in the sixth grade as the bard himself. Where my friends masqueraded as Ophelia, Hamlet, and the ghost, and as Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio, and the nurse, a weird, cheeky hubris had inspired me to present myself in the guise of the writer who had imagined them all and set them about their affairs. I can still conjure the cloying smell of the theatrical glue my mother had found to apply a mustache and whiskers. I cannot remember why I wanted to be William Shakespeare or how I felt in the midst of the impersonation, but the act of identification seems consistent, if extraordinarily self-inflated, with my earlier efforts to imagine myself as Louisa May Alcott's Jo March. In homage to Jo and in imitation of her own efforts to make herself a writer, I had once fashioned a book out of loose-leaf paper, bound it with knitting yarn and a crudely illustrated yellow cover, and then attempted to compose a mystery story about a girl detective like Nancy Drew. I wrote only two pages, perhaps because I did not have the

wherewithal to imagine what a girl might really do, what the shape of her future might look like. The only thing I was sure of was that she ought to drive a sporty roadster like Nancy's own. Did *Shakespeare of London* seem so impressive later because it promised to tell me what the course of a writing life looked like? Did I open it with anticipation after each interruption because I wanted to know more about how to make myself into a writer who could imagine the end to the story? Did I read it as an exercise in self-fashioning, however improbable the comparison it was based on?

I don't know. But it seems more than merely possible, for the nature of the other two books that were my favorites that year suggests that reading served as much more than a momentary diversion or as a course in middle-class self-improvement. Reading also enabled the halting work of what can only be called identity formation. Indeed, my memories of Marjorie Morningstar and of the archaeologists that peopled the pages of *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* suggest that Mr. Shymansky's books were so valuable and intensely loved because they enabled me to trace paths in imaginary futures, to try on the desires experienced by others, to think myself into new shape and form. Had you asked me what Herman Wouk's novel was about before I reread it two years ago, I could have recounted very little of the story, especially not Marjorie's capitulation to middle-class respectability. In fact I would have been very hazy about the details of the plot. What I could have recalled, though, were vignettes of Marjorie crossing a New York street at night and sitting in a cafe in Paris, a sense of her as independent and vaguely bohemian. I might even have been able to give words to the inchoate feelings the title evoked for me, a sense of exhilaration, the thrill of open-endedness and possibility. I surely would have told you that I loved the book and that I found Marjorie fascinating. About *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* I could have been more specific because I have never forgotten the figure of Howard Carter or the thrill of placing myself amidst the Egyptian dust and oppressive heat as the last boulder was rolled away from the final interior tomb of King Tutankhamen. I was mesmerized by moments when secrets were revealed. I was intrigued by lives devoted to the quest to know. What I was trying to do, I think, during that year of confinement, was to merge the emotional life of a girl like Marjorie with the cultural accomplishments of writers like Shakespeare and scholars like Carter, Lord Carnarvon, J. J. Winckelmann, and Heinrich Schliemann. It could not have been easy. The ambitions I was cultivating were open-ended, expansive—even voracious. But like Marjorie, I was a girl for whom such ambitions were not considered entirely natural.

Perhaps Herman Wouk's novel was as popular as it was among women and girls of the 1950s and 1960s because it captured with almost perfect precision the tensions and uncertainties of profound social change as it was about to erupt and explode. Those tensions and uncertainties course through the novel as a whole with almost excruciating intensity as Wouk relates every twist and turn in the life of the young woman Marjorie Morningstar while she attempts to fashion herself into the actress Marjorie Morningstar. Although Marjorie is eventually transformed by the story into Mrs. Milton Schwartz, the wife of a prosperous Jewish lawyer, most of Wouk's 560-odd pages are devoted to Marjorie's determined efforts to escape that fate and to make of herself someone more cultured and poetic, a woman more glamorous and independent than a suburban matron. The story sets in motion desires it ultimately feels it necessary to contain, but not before those longings have been laid out in such detail and with such force that they catch the reader up and enable her to participate in Marjorie's relentless quest to make of herself something different. There can be little doubt that this must have proved attractive in 1955 to women who had been fired in large numbers from their World War II jobs to make way for returning soldiers, as well as to their daughters in the years immediately afterward, who were being told that they were as essential to the fight against communism as their brothers. *Marjorie Morningstar* was a story for an unsettled age.

The tension in the book about the changing nature of women's aspirations is evident from page 1. The very first passages, in fact, vacillate back and forth, remarkably uncertain about what position to take on Marjorie's burgeoning desire. Significantly, that desire is shown to be both openly sexual and aimed at a world beyond sexuality, at a world characterized by work, professional accomplishments, and esteem. Although the novel's first pages spin out in sensuous detail a highly eroticized portrait of the seventeen-year-old Marjorie asleep on her bed, it does so in such a conflicted way that it grants the reader a position of extraordinary ambivalence about what it reveals. Wouk begins, in fact, in a distant, almost pedagogical voice intoning an abstract proposition. "Customs of courtship vary greatly in different times and places," we are told, "but the way the thing happens to be done here and now always seems the only natural way to do it."²⁷ The implication of the word "seems," of course, is that there are always other ways. Apparently we are to be told a story illustrat-

ing this lesson. We are meant to take up the distant view and to merge with this voice in order to become the ultimate judge of Marjorie's own courtship behavior.

Yet this voice gives way instantaneously to one whose point of view is much closer to what it describes and much more conflicted about what it sees. Ostensibly the third person narration is presented from the point of view of Marjorie's disapproving mother. But the details that are revealed suggest that there is another viewer as well, a concealed voyeur who takes great pleasure in Marjorie's dishabille. A feminist perspective suggests that the gaze is male, that Marjorie is displayed for the titillation of a leering male reader. But it also seems to me now that this other sight line may have granted female readers like me a view of Marjorie at a moment when she appears to have asserted herself sexually. This gaze may have enabled us to peer at ourselves as Marjorie and thus to think the unthinkable, that life might continue *after* premarital sex.

The passage begins, "Marjorie's mother looked in on her sleeping daughter at half past ten of a Sunday morning with feelings of puzzlement and dread. She disapproved of everything she saw" (3). However, the passage continues with a description that is as fascinated as it is critical: "She disapproved of the expensive black silk evening dress crumpled on a chair, the pink frothy underwear thrown on top of the dress, the stockings like dead snakes on the floor, the brown wilting gardenias on the desk. Above all she disapproved of the beautiful seventeen-year-old girl lying happily asleep on a costly oversize bed in a square of golden sunlight, her hair a disordered brown mass of curls, her red mouth streaked with cracking purplish paint, her breathing peaceful and regular through her fine little nose" (3). The snake, the red mouth, the sprawl, and the purple paint are all clearly meant to suggest some kind of sinful transgression. Yet at the same time Marjorie is caught sleeping peacefully in golden sunlight. What are we supposed to think? Has her suggested wantonness had no negative consequences? Are we to excuse such behavior? As we learn more about the nature of Mrs. Morningstern's disapproval, we are given a further hint about the extent of Marjorie's transgression, which is explicitly linked to shifting mores and changing times and subsequently explained away. "Marjorie was recovering from a college dance," we are told. "She looked sweetly innocent asleep; but her mother feared that this picture was deceptive, remembering drunken male laughter in the foyer at 3 A.M., and subdued girlish giggles, and tiptoeing noises past her bedroom. Marjorie's mother did not get much sleep when her daughter went to a college dance. But she had no thought of trying to stop her; it was the way boys met girls

nowadays. College dances had formed no part of the courtship manners of her own girlhood, but she tried to move with the times" (3).

And the times, Wouk's wandering point of view suggests, are truly out of joint. Although Marjorie's parents desire only that she marry well to a Jewish boy who will provide handsomely for her, Marjorie, the story confirms, has other plans. She envisions for her future not only glamour but independence. The fact that her dreams are first revealed in the exuberant clichés of adolescent hope is perhaps what made the opening of this very long story so enthralling for young women wondering what the uncertain future might hold for them. It is worth quoting the articulation of her dreams in full.

Since entering Hunter College in February of the previous year, Marjorie had been taking a course of study leading to a license as a biology teacher; but she had long suspected that she was going through empty motions, that chalk and blackboard weren't for her. Nor had she been able to picture herself settling into dull marriage at twenty-one. From her thirteenth year onward a peculiar destiny had been in her blood, waiting for the proper time to crop out, and disturbing her with premonitory sensations. But what she experienced on this May morning was no mere premonition; it was the truth bursting through. She was going to be an actress! [5]

It must have been her confidence and sure belief in her own destiny I found so electric and compelling. I am sure I thrilled at the way she played with her identity. If "wondrous resonance" or "stark elegance" were lacking in the name "Morningstern," then she would craft something else. Significantly, she would do it first in writing; she would simply inscribe a new self. Wouk underscores the importance of Marjorie's first willful act of self-fashioning by abandoning the characterless uniformity of print, scrawling her new name not once, but twice, in handwritten form: Marjorie Morningstar. Marjorie prints it hastily at first, but then, more carefully, more self-consciously, she almost draws it "in the small, vertical hand which she [is] trying to master" (6). Each *M* is rendered dramatically with three straight uprights and a confident, horizontal slash at the top.

Understandably, this was heady stuff. Hadn't my friends and I spent endless hours the previous summer experimenting with different ways to write our own names? In spite of the waffling in Wouk's narrative point of view, I *became* Marjorie. Clearly, however, not all of Marjorie's audience was made up of fourteen-year-old girls. Some were older, and some were already married themselves. But in a confused era, when prescrip-

tions about feminine behavior were in flux, a story that relentlessly posed the question of what Marjorie wanted and followed her every move as she pursued it must have come as a welcome primer for a new, potentially more liberated age. And what does Marjorie want? "The finest foods . . . , the finest wines, the loveliest places, the best music, the best books, the best art. Amounting to something. Being well known, being myself, being distinguished, being important, using all my abilities, instead of becoming one more of the millions of human cows" (195). Marjorie wants what only a few years later would be labeled "having it all." Even more scandalously, she wants "children, sure, when I've had my life and I'm not fit for anything else any more" (195). *Marjorie Morningstar* suggests, at least at the outset, that domesticity is the booby prize.

Still, the novel is aware of how troubling are Marjorie's desires and how threatening her rebellion. Thus the only way it can allow Marjorie to pursue her goals is through liaison with a more accomplished, more powerful man. As a consequence we are given the dissolute yet disarming Noel Airman—"Apollo," she calls him—both seducing Marjorie and pronouncing on the silliness of her desires. She will amount to nothing, he tells her, she is destined to become a Jewish "Shirley" wanting only a "big diamond engagement ring, house in a good neighborhood, furniture, children, well-made clothes, [and] furs" (173). The heir of Rochester, Heathcliff, Rhett Butler, and Maxim de Winter, Noel is even more ne'er-do-well than they. Yet he is also Marjorie's route to the bohemian world of Greenwich Village, the theater, and Paris as well as the ultimate occasion for the loss of her virginity. In fact after many pages of welling desire and tantalizing foreplay, Marjorie finally succumbs to the seduction and has sex with Noel. Surprisingly, the act is not rendered romantically but portrayed, rather, as something both distasteful and violent. "Then all changed," we are told. "It became rougher and more awkward. It became horrible. There were shocks, ugly uncoverings, pain, incredible humiliation, shock, shock, and it was over" (417).

It seems clear that we are meant to see this as the beginning of Marjorie's punishment, which is secured, finally, when she abandons her quest for a theatrical career and marries the boring, conventional lawyer, Milton Schwartz, who, knowing of her liaison with Noel, accepts her even with her "deformity," which is described as a "permanent crippling, like a crooked arm" (553). Some apparently read the novel's ending in this way. In fact, in introducing the book in the pages of the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, judge John Marquand noted that "we are most unhappy when she begins to fall for the blandishments of Sodom's superficial but charming

entertainment director." Marquand elaborated, "We hope against hope that she will not be seduced by Noel Airman, and when she is, we hope he will make her into an honest woman in spite of his flightiness and egocentricity. We wish she would not keep on loving Noel Airman, and are delighted when she throws him over." He concluded smugly, "There is something satisfying in our last view of her, years later, a gray-haired matron on the lawn of her suburban home, doing a solitary little dance with a glass in her hand when she hears her daughter 'Falling in Love with Love.'" ²⁸

That conclusion, it seems to me, is not so easily drawn as Marquand seems to think. Even Marjorie is permitted to pronounce on the capitulation that leads her to her suburban matronhood, and what she sees at her wedding is a "tawdry mockery of sacred things, a bourgeois riot of expense, with a special touch of vulgar Jewish sentimentality" (556). What Marjorie sees at the moment that she forgoes her adolescent dreams is that she is "Shirley, going to a Shirley fate, in a Shirley blaze of silly costly glory" (557). I remember thinking, "Not me." Like Marquand, I had wanted her to ditch Noel because he treated her so badly. But I also wanted her to get rid of him so she could concentrate on the theater herself. I wanted her *not* to abandon her dreams. I wanted very much to believe that she really was Marjorie Morningstar.

Was my reading idiosyncratic? I don't think so. The number of women who spoke to me warmly on the beach in the summer of 1994 because I was reading a copy of *Marjorie Morningstar* suggests that others remembered a book very unlike the one described by John Marquand. The title and book cover seemed to make me as approachable as pregnancy once had. "I loved that book," they told me again and again, just as others had once repeatedly shared stories of their own pregnancies and asked me when I was due. "My sister and I read it together." "My mother read it and gave it to me. We never stopped talking about it." As we spoke, I learned that most of these women had careers; they were people who had forged a place for themselves in the wider world. Could so many women have read the book, remembered it fondly, and wanted to talk about it to a stranger more than thirty years later if they had read it as a simple tale about the justifiable constriction of a woman's desire? Had all of them been satisfied by the disappearance of Noel and comforted by the house in Mamaron-neck? I doubt it.

The last word on Marjorie's fate in the novel is not one of approval at all. Spoken by the one successful writer in the story who had once, long ago, desired her intensely, the words are stern and dismissive, and they grieve for what Marjorie had once been. Wally Wronken confides to his

journal after meeting her years later that “she is dull, dull as she can be, by any technical standard” (564). What satisfaction, he wonders, “is there in crowing over the sweet-natured placid gray mamma she has turned into?” He prefers to remember her as she had once been, even recognizing “that she was an ordinary girl” and that “the image existed only in [his] own mind, that her radiance was the radiance of [his] own hungry young desires projected around her.” As Nick Caraway remembers the green light at the end of Gatsby’s dock, so Marjorie rises up before Wally Wronken as he writes—“in a blue dress, a black raincoat, her face wet with rain, nineteen years old, in my arms and yet maddeningly beyond my reach, kissing me once under the lilacs in the rain” (565).

Perhaps this last image of Marjorie in her blue dress, kissing under the lilacs, was the source of those feelings of possibility the title evoked for me over the years, the preservative behind that amber-tinted picture of Marjorie crossing a Manhattan street at dusk into the unknown. Perhaps I, too, preferred to remember Marjorie as she had once been as a way of encouraging myself to believe that my own future need not play out as hers had. It seems possible that many of us, like the women I met on a Cape Cod beach, read it as both a tutelary and a cautionary tale. Maybe we absorbed its hopeful longing for art, the theater, the excitement of the wider world, and the thrill of a freer sexuality as well as its warning that none of these are easily obtained, especially if you are a woman.

However strong the caution woven through its narrative of longing, I think *Marjorie Morningstar* was one of those experiences that taught me how to want. It built on my commonplace adolescent confusion about what the future might hold by helping me to assemble an elementary vocabulary of ideas and things that might serve as proper objects for desire. Despite its equivocation at the end with Marjorie’s marriage, the book insisted through most of its 500 pages that a house in Mamaroneck would not do, and neither would a large diamond, an ostentatious wedding, or even conventional domesticity. What was portrayed with the most narrative energy throughout the long tale was the world of writing itself, a world associated with art and culture, with work, commitment, and a kind of hearty camaraderie. The book is striking, then, not for its misogyny and for its quite ordinary disapproval of all things conventionally feminine, but for the way it comes very near to recommending the traditional masculine world of ambition to women. Indeed it comes close to suggesting that girls, too, can desire openly, and not just sexually but in a manner more oriented to the external world, where meaningful and significant work are held out as the ultimate goal.

In this way, it seems to me, the needs of a particular class at a particular historical moment managed to assert themselves over the recommendation of traditional gender arrangements. As the new information economy was beginning to consolidate, it required many more workers to staff its institutions—those fast-multiplying schools, libraries, bureaucracies, and corporations devoted to the circulation of new forms of knowledge. Undoubtedly it seemed sensible, even if unconsciously so, to draw those workers not from the traditional working classes but from the untapped ranks of the middle class itself, from the hundreds of thousands of girls born after World War II. As one of those girls, I was encouraged to want by stories like *Marjorie Morningstar* and by television shows like “I Love Lucy” and “My Little Margie.” They all encouraged girls to want more than had traditionally been accorded women in the past. What the middle-brow *Marjorie Morningstar* taught me to want in particular was the new professional’s world of knowledge, culture, cosmopolitanism, and intellectual sophistication. At the time, I did not see that to command such knowledge was also to wield power over others who were themselves excluded from indulging in the very same desires.

GODS, GRAVES, AND SCHOLARS:

THE WHITENESS OF EXPERTS

Gods, Graves, and Scholars came to me less as an account of the painstaking labors of a particular group of professional specialists than as a further lesson in the vocabulary of desire. This book seemed to suggest, with its reverent delineation of the classical worlds of Greece, Crete, Egypt, and Mesopotamia and its equally fascinated account of the travel and adventure that had led to their contemporary rediscovery, that the limits of that cosmopolitan world need not be drawn at the boundaries of New York or even at those of Paris. Rather, they might expand outward to encompass the whole world, a world made exotic by remote islands and mysterious deserts. How I could have missed the fact that all of the travelers and adventurers in this tale were men, I do not know. It seems never to have occurred to me, since for months afterward I told anyone who asked that I wanted to be an archaeologist when I grew up. Identification was not gender-specific then or fully controlled by the underlying assumptions of the text itself. As I had become Marjorie Morningstar, so for a few hours did I fancy myself Heinrich Schliemann and Howard Carter, awash in sunlight and wallowing in the sands of faraway places and distant centuries.

What, in particular, made these figures and their work so attractive? Clearly it was the knowledge they sought, the significance of their labors, and the hardship they endured to accomplish their tasks. But all of these were rendered through C. W. Ceram's eyes, and Ceram saw in characteristically middlebrow fashion. He admired the archaeologists' expertise, but he found their accounts of their exploits boring. His book, he tells us explicitly, eschews "scholarly pretensions."²⁹ He further assures the reader who might be nervous about understanding this arcane profession and its remote subjects that he will "portray the dramatic qualities of archaeology, its human side." He continues encouragingly that he has not "shied away from prying into purely personal relationships," nor has he been "afraid to digress now and then and to intrude my own personal reflections on the course of events." What has resulted, he concludes, is "a book that the expert may condemn as 'unscientific.'" In a familiar middlebrow way, Ceram reveres expertise but portrays it as unduly stuffy, not quite attuned to the human scale. He will make accessible and engaging "the whole stirring history" of the archaeologists' "romantic excursions," which are usually "hopelessly buried in technical publications" (v). Ceram will show us how scholarship and expertise can give us access to the secrets of ordinary life; he will demonstrate how useful and human they can be.

He does so by offering what the general reader is commonly thought to want, that is, "dramatic story," personal relationships, and detail at every turn. We are given details about the archaeologists' lives, to be sure, as well as details about every expedition. But detail also figures significantly in the way Ceram presents the archaeological discoveries themselves. He offers the same illusion Marchette Chute had, that the world we occupy as readers is entirely continuous with the classical world inhabited by individuals long dead. Those individuals are now exhumed for us from the earth as mere bones, shards, and fragments, yet they are made to live again through the force of Ceram's imagination and through his use of a highly concrete language. Here, for example, is Ceram's evocation of what happened at Pompeii:

Disaster began with a light fall of ash, so light that people were able to brush the powdery dust off their shoulders. Soon, however, lapilli began to come down, then occasional bombs of pumice weighing many pounds. The extent of the danger was only gradually revealed, and only when it was too late. Clouds of sulfur fumes settled down on the city. They seeped through the cracks and crevices and billowed up under the cloths that the suffocating townsfolk help up to their faces. If they ran

outdoors seeking air and freedom, they were met by a thick hail of lapilli that drove them back in terror to the shelter of their homes. Roofs caved in, whole families were buried. Others were spared for a time. For a half hour or so they crouched in fear and trembling under stairs and arched doors. The fumes reached them, and they choked to death. [7]

Ceram revivifies the ghostly cities as he records their death. His personalism is as marked as Henry Canby's. It is not the distant, analytical perspective of theory and research that he seeks but the earthly perspective of that man on the ground, the ordinary individual who feels caught up in ominous natural events and the momentous historical movements of his day. What Ceram gives in this book, then, are not only the living, breathing archaeologists themselves in all the competitiveness and ambition he can imagine, but also haunting specters of history, those individuals who once created, built, inhabited, died, and were buried at Mycaenae, Dendera, Luxor, Nimrud, and the Yucatan. He suggests with his homely details about life in Pompeii and elsewhere, as Marchette Chute had with her Elizabethan clocks, ducks, and gravel, that these distant worlds are continuous with the reader's own.

Ceram instructs us explicitly: "This has become the archaeologist's grandiose task: to cause to flow once more that historic stream in which we are all encompassed, whether we live in Brooklyn or Montparnasse, Berlin-Neukolln or Santiago de Chile, Athens or Miami" (20). I am sure I must have added "or New Jersey, too." I wanted very much to feel myself a part of this "we" and its tradition, a party to its wisdom and riches. I am sure I attended to his lessons with eager approval. Obliging, Ceram summed up his instruction boldly and with not an ounce of self-doubt: "This stream is the great human community of the Western world which for five thousand years has swum with the same flood-tide, under different flags, but guided by the same constellations" (20).

The patent imperialism underlying this statement announces itself loudly now. However, in 1964 I was not attuned to such undertones. It never occurred to me to doubt the truth of an assertion like this one. Nor do I recall bristling at Ceram's matter-of-fact racism. What I heard was simply more detail about Western civilization. In fact, in further exploring the nature of the relationship between the contemporary West and its classical past, Ceram had observed quite unconsciously that without "our heritage of five thousand years of history . . . we would be no different from the a-historical Australian bushman" (18). He assumed that not one of the readers who numbered themselves among his "we" would identify

with that primitive man in the bush. As if to ensure the impossibility of such an association, he expanded his point further with the observation that although "the white construction worker in an Australian city may never have heard of the name of Archimedes," he is necessarily better than any bushman because "he makes use of the laws formulated by Archimedes" (18). The bushman, clearly, is black, and the point of the passage is to align that blackness with primitivism so as to ensure that civilization and the West are understood to be white. And that whiteness, we are told, is expansive enough to include even the uneducated working classes, construction workers who labor with their hands. By virtue of the fact that they utilize calculations and methods traceable to the glorious Western past, presumably taught to them by experts who have real command of that knowledge, they are rendered superior to all people of color who, it is implied, have neither affinity for nor access to these traditions.

I see now why I could ignore the fact that all of the archaeologists and heroes in this tale of Western triumph were men. The book is deeply preoccupied with shoring up the identity of the white, cultured, Western reader. It is much more interested in policing the color line than in surveying the boundaries between classes or genders. What matters is the boundary between black and white, between savagery and civilization. Thus I could discount my own gender and that of the archaeologists about whom I was reading because Ceram took no pains to enforce the distinction between us. It was easy to roam imaginatively, then, to identify with these adventurers by taking up temporary residence in their bodies because those bodies were familiarly white. Our shared whiteness overrode any other differences between us.

Middle-class women's expanding possibilities, my reading of this book now suggests, may have been made possible at least in part by renewed anxiety about the activities of people of color and by ensuing efforts to establish and to maintain a clear border between white and black. The fact that my own identification as white was solicited entirely surreptitiously by this book ensured that my identification with the class of people who commanded the Western cultural tradition and positioned themselves within its stream was all that more effective. In reveling in the adventures and mysteries revealed by *God, Graves, and Scholars*, I wanted to see myself as a member of that class, a class constituted by its knowledge of the historical and cultural past and by its command of the specialized expertise necessary to add to that store of knowledge.

The book constantly encouraged and approved of that desire. More than anything else, Ceram's tale is a tale about the triumph of expertise,

a triumph achieved slowly and progressively over time. Thus he begins with the first modern archaeological expeditions in Herculaneum in the mid-eighteenth century and moves from there to document the ever-more-systematic investigations of later scholars and researchers. The real heroes of the story, finally, are Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter, the discoverers of the tomb of Tutankhamen, which represents, for Ceram, "the very summit of archaeological effort" (173).

What Ceram teaches is a belief in the efficacy of science and in the rightness of its abstract method. In fact, despite his earlier disclaimers about his modest, unscientific intentions and his disdain for the opacity of experts, Ceram's entire narrative is a hymn to the superiority of science and to its capacity to reveal the truth. Yet having said that, it is also essential to note that even his celebration of scientific expertise is tempered by that never-ceasing ambivalence characteristic of the middlebrow point of view. At the very moment when he relates the triumph of modern archaeological method, for example, the moment when Tutankhamen's sarcophagus is opened and the final coffin is exposed to air, he falls back, once again, on the power of the human detail. "There was something else on the coffin," he tells us, "that affected Carter and the others even more poignantly than the effigy" (197). It was, in Carter's words, "the tiny wreath of flowers around the symbols on the forehead, the last farewell offering of the widowed queen to her husband. . . . They told us what a short period three thousand years really was—but Yesterday and the Morrow. In fact, that little touch of nature made that ancient and our modern civilization kin."

Ceram quotes this approvingly to prove that scientists, too, are human, and that they, too, are moved by love and fellow-feeling. He even allows Carter to speak again to demonstrate his point. He has Carter tell us directly that "familiarity can never entirely dissipate the feeling of mystery—the sense of vanished but haunting forces that cling to the tomb. The conviction of the unity of past and present is constantly impressed upon the archaeological adventurer, even when absorbed in the mechanical details of his work" (197). With odd relief Ceram adds flatly, "Carter really felt these reverent statements." He editorializes further, "It is good to know that the scientist does not deny the claims of the spirit."

It is hard not to hear this as reassurance specifically for the postwar age. Behind Ceram's humanized, flesh-and-blood archaeologists solemnly impressed by their connection to others across the space of thousands of years, one detects the shadow of other scientists, who lent their expertise not merely to the business of war but to the appalling work of mass annihilation.

ration. I cannot help but think that, whatever else its aims and intentions, Ceram's book was part of an unconscious effort to provide encouragement and comfort to a shocked population. He seems at pains to reassure himself and others that the long sweep of human history could not possibly be about to end, aided and abetted by dispassionate science. At times *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* comes across as a deliberate attempt to banish fears about the abstraction and arrogance of a scientific point of view that habitually forsakes the details of the singular and the individual in order to detect the patterns and rhythms of underlying structures. Like so much of the middlebrow library assembled by the Book-of-the-Month Club, it tempers its recommendation of professional expertise and its legitimization of technical experts with the insistence that neither are at odds with a pre-eminent, highly personal humanism—which I have called personalism—that simultaneously stresses the universality of spirit and emotion and the uniqueness of the individual. It bears repeating, however, that this humanism is fatally undermined by its implicit whiteness, by the assumption that people of color are not as civilized and, as such, are radically different.

In a highly unsettled age the middlebrow point of view could not be asserted in rigid, inflexible form. As a body of ideas about history, about the nature of knowledge, and about the character of human life, middlebrow culture was pressured by the upheavals of the time and forced to adapt to fast-changing social arrangements and political situations. Oddly enough it was often its conception of the person, its distinctly middlebrow personalism, that helped to underwrite its capacity for change. However, that personalism could also prove limiting, in part because a preference for the individual, the local, and the specific hindered the ability to see larger relationships and connections and sometimes prevented acknowledgment of the value of political movements. As a consequence, when middlebrow thinking attempted to take account of the demand for recognition by new groups, those groups were characteristically individualized, and newly recognized persons were cast in the position of noble unfortunates. They were seen as needy, disadvantaged people requiring the greater expertise and responsible compassion of their educated, more knowledgeable, and still always white brothers.

THE EXEMPLARY MIDDLEBROW SUBJECT

This emphasis on individualization is especially evident in another of Mr. Shymansky's books, one that proved particularly formative for me: Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Reading it now, I am astonished by the book's complexity, which resides in the intensity of its efforts to articulate its understanding of individuality and in the rigor of its efforts to ensure that such an individuality might be recognized in all people, whether white, black, male, or female. If the book cannot finally imagine a world where the individuality of every human being is successfully secured, it nonetheless commits itself to establishing that a small group of extraordinary individuals can function as the guardians of the individuality of others. It suggests that those with special talents and abilities can function as a vanguard of insight, capable of seeing the individuality of those usually rendered invisible.

Harper Lee's novel aims for nothing less than the reconceptualization of women and "Negroes" as collections of individually different human beings rather than as categories of people rendered identifiable by certain common properties. In the end, though, it can only manage that task by modeling this newly recognized individuality on that of the white men who are presumed to be its most extraordinary exemplars. Although the book wants very much to be progressive about the subjects of gender and race, it fails finally to undo the fundamental equations that generally ensure that those with power are gendered male and tinted white. I want to look at Lee's novel in some depth, then, because I think it peculiarly revealing of the logic of a distinctively middlebrow individualism and because it fleshes out so fully the model middlebrow subject.

When I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* early in 1964, I was very much aware that the book was about race, racism, and white bigotry. At the time my intellectual world was as filled with the black and white images of television news programs as it was with characters from middlebrow books. The Kennedy assassination had taken up enormous amounts of time and emotional space soon after I returned from the hospital in November. But the months leading up to my diagnosis in July 1963 and my surgery in September of that year were also the months that witnessed the Birmingham riots, the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and the March on Washington, all events I followed with my parents on the evening news. When I opened the covers of Lee's small novel, then, what flickered in the background were images of "Bull" Connor and his snarl-

ing dogs, firehouses trained on scrambling crowds, a bombed-out church and the four young girls who died there, and waves on waves of people marching to the Lincoln Memorial. Martin Luther King Jr. had just been named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year, and Lyndon Johnson had vowed to see passage of the Civil Rights Act. To a certain extent, reading this particular book was a way of participating in momentous events that always took place elsewhere and on television.

Yet I suspect that it was also the book's carefully delineated southern setting that enabled me to focus on other aspects of its story rather than on the issue of race relations alone. In fact, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has always been associated in my mind not so much with the events of hate it documents so carefully but with the single, monumental figure of Atticus Finch. The fact that the bigotry he quietly resisted took place in "The South" kept those events distant and significantly removed from the concerns of my own daily life. But Atticus was another matter. He appeared before me with strange force and immediacy. I still remember how peculiar his name sounded the first time I encountered it—at once as antique as the Penelopes and Jedediahs I found in the historical novels of Kenneth Roberts and as noble as the names in the Bible. For me the book was about Atticus. And Atticus was a reader.

I considered that the most important fact to know about him. I was also sure it explained his moral courage. In my mind there was more than a chance connection between the endless scenes of Atticus reading at night in a halo of light and his quiet determination to defend "the Negro," Tom Robinson, against charges that he had raped a white girl. Atticus was powerful because he suggested to me that certain consequences might follow from being a lover of books. Although I am sure I did not know the word at the time, Atticus Finch was my first concrete vision of what an intellectual looked and sounded like. He was also the first to suggest that bookishness was not merely a matter of being familiar with past cultural monuments but might, perhaps, be a way of functioning in a contemporary world in a responsible, socially committed way. It would be many years before I learned to question the grounding of this idea of responsibility in a prior notion of an elite with a special command of literacy and the expertise and power that followed from it.

Of course the tall, bespectacled man with the calm composure and unshakable moral convictions appeared before me through the eyes of his daughter, Scout. And Scout was no ordinary six-year-old girl. Not only did she possess a voice as strong as her tomboyish-sounding name, but she confirmed her remarkable independence by referring to her father by his

first name as if he, too, was her equal. I marveled at his return of the favor, at the way he spoke to her honestly about everything, and at the way he refused to shield her or her brother, Jem, from the sins and hypocrisies of the adult community that surrounded them all. He appeared as extraordinary to me as he did to her. What Atticus seemed to promise Scout, more than anything else, was a way of being in the world, a model and vision for the future that most decidedly did not exclude her simply because she was a girl.

Lee's novel is as cognizant of the gender divide as it is of the line dividing black from white. Scout chafes at the bit of femininity just as her father chafes at the rigidly enforced community strictures about the proper way to treat a Negro. She is appalled by the "starched walls of the pink cotton penitentiary closing all around her" (147) and thinks deliberately of running away. In 1964 I was heartened by her disdain for girlish things. The previous summer I had been perplexed and hurt when I was told to walk more sedately, "in ladylike fashion," because I was growing up. I wanted no more the life of what I called an Alice-sit-by-the-fire than did Scout. Together she and Atticus seemed to sweep clear a new ground, a ground Scout might occupy alongside her brother and her friend Dill, who proudly introduced himself to her with only two short sentences. "'I'm Charles Baker Harris,' he said. 'I can read'" (13). Scout's world, like Dill's and Jem's, is as filled with books as it is with climbing trees, swimming holes, and old tires.

Make no mistake about it. The world of books and the intellect is gendered male in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This is initially made clear at the moment Scout leaves home to encounter the public world for the first time amidst the desks and blackboards of the first grade. School is a bitter disappointment to Scout precisely because it cannot tolerate her independence. She is disciplined as much for her intellectual precocity as she is for fighting too exuberantly like a boy. The agent of that discipline, strikingly enough, is Miss Caroline Fisher, no more than twenty-one, with "auburn hair," "pink cheeks," "crimson fingernail polish," "high-heeled pumps," and "a red-and-white-striped dress." Scout remarks with disgust, "She looked and smelled like a peppermint drop" (22). Miss Fisher earns Scout's ire by humiliating her before her peers on the first day of school. Her transgression is that she reads too well. Expecting Scout only to name the alphabet she prints on the board "in enormous square capitals," Miss Fisher is stunned when Scout can read not only *My First Reader* but the stock-market quotations from *The Mobile Register*. She responds immediately with an incomprehensible prohibition. Miss Caroline Fisher tells

Scout that her father must not teach her anymore because it will interfere with the kind of reading officially prescribed for her by her school.

Scout is stunned. She knows Atticus has never consciously taught her to read. In fact, she tells us, "I never deliberately learned to read, but somehow I had been wallowing illicitly in the daily papers" (24). A licit, schoolbook literacy, here associated with feminine women, is abjured in this novel in favor of a more defiant, more virile literacy attuned to the immediacies of the daily world. Meditating on how she has come to commit the peculiar crime of reading too well, Scout continues:

Now that I was compelled to think about it, reading was something that just came to me, as learning to fasten the seat of my union suit without looking around, or achieving two bows from a snarl of shoelaces. I could not remember when the lines above Atticus's moving finger separated into words, but I had stared at them all the evenings in my memory, listening to the news of the day, Bills to be Enacted into Laws, the diaries of Lorenzo Dow—anything Atticus happened to be reading when I crawled into his lap every night. Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing. [24]

From the first, then, Scout's reading and precocious intellectual life are associated with the world of her lawyer father. Although he has not deliberately taught her, he has shepherded her into literacy without concern for her gender or her age.

Significantly, Scout transgresses further later in the same day by showing herself capable of writing as well. Bored to death by Miss Caroline's cards with the words "the," "cat," "rat," "man," and "you" printed on them, she writes a letter to Dill. The fact that she writes in script enrages her teacher even more. This skill, we soon learn, was taught to her not by her father but by her family's cook, Calpurnia, who is first described to us in Scout's words as "all angles and bones" with a hand "as wide as a bed slat and twice as hard." Scout recalls that "she would set me a writing task by scrawling the alphabet firmly across the top of a tablet, then copying out a chapter of the Bible beneath" (25). "In Calpurnia's teaching," Scout adds tellingly, "there was no sentimentality: I seldom pleased her and she seldom rewarded me" (25).

Calpurnia's status as a stern and demanding teacher would be unremarkable were it not for the fact that she is black. Not only is she black, but she is constantly associated in the story with Atticus, who supports her authority, calls her a member of the family, and refuses his sister's subsequent efforts to dismiss her. At this point in the story, though, Scout hardly

notices the color of Cal's skin, and she certainly understands little of its significance in 1935 in her small, southern town. She has no idea that Cal's skin color ought to have denied her the ability to read and prevented her from acting as a teacher to white children. However, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the story of Scout's coming of age, and much of what she learns has to do with the complex power arrangements surrounding black-white relations. Eventually Scout discovers that Calpurnia's literacy is quite extraordinary.

The book wants us to approve of Cal's mastery of literacy just as we are meant to applaud Scout's special reading and writing skills. However, it is essential to note that the extension of literacy and recognition of Cal's individuality that seem to follow from it are conferred by authoritative, white men. Cal learned to read from a copy of Blackstone's *Commentaries* given her by Scout's Granddaddy Finch. Additionally, though Scout's and Calpurnia's reading may be associated in *To Kill a Mockingbird* with acts of transgression against traditional gender and race arrangements, when they do transgress, they do so with the encouragement of Atticus, a man who is presented to us not only as the most conspicuous reader in the story but as its social center and final moral authority. Described even by those who disapprove of his willingness to defend the Negro, Tom Robinson, as "a deep reader, a mighty deep reader" (174), Atticus comes before us as the model reader to be emulated and, ultimately, as the source of the book's own teachings about "Maycomb's usual disease," racism.

Curiously, as much as Atticus is celebrated as a wise and judicious lawyer throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the source of his wisdom does not reside in his mastery of the abstractions of the law. His principles, we learn early, are much more homely. In counseling Scout he suggests to her that she will succeed in the future if she can learn a "simple trick." "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view," he tells her, "until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (36). Atticus advises Scout not that all people are abstractly identical but that they are particular individuals and, as such, the products of specific histories. He stresses that to understand how each individual sees, it is necessary to understand where he sees from.

In effect Atticus recommends a familiar, middlebrow conception of the person. His vision of the individual as singular and distinct is not far removed from Henry Canby's insistence that all human beings, even fictional ones, must be understood as "warm-blooded," embodied in unique, highly particular ways. Yet the book is also nervous about its investment in this notion, for it worries incessantly that seeing the individual as distinct and therefore as irreducibly different might jeopardize its commitment

to redressing the limitations imposed on women and Negroes. The book is acutely aware, in fact, that arguments against racial bigotry, especially, are usually predicated on the idea of abstract equality. But the notion of abstract equality, a flat and universal sameness, is intolerable in the world of *To Kill a Mockingbird* because the book is driven by an equally powerful commitment to the idea of special talent and extraordinary gifts. It is torn, therefore, between the horns of a difficult dilemma: how to preserve its appreciation for singularity and uniqueness while, at the same time, conceptualizing a world where every individual's humanity is recognized and respected.

Significantly, it is Atticus who attempts to work out this conundrum for the reader in his summation to the jury deciding Tom Robinson's fate. But it is important that his reasoning is overshadowed and undercut to a certain extent by a feeling of inchoate dread that accompanies the book's narration of its framing plot, which is opened in the first pages of the novel, advanced only intermittently, and left unconnected to Tom's story until the final pages of the tale. This plot concerns a white man, the mysteriously different Boo Radley, who appears to threaten Scout, Jem, and Dill. At the end of the novel, Boo's killing of the person who actually tried to harm the children is covered up by Atticus and the town sheriff because they recognize that he did it to protect the children. Their success at protecting Boo is paralleled with their failure to protect Tom. This foregrounds, whether intentionally or not, that white men still possess the power to mete out justice and to confer rights and individuality on others and that they still do so selectively according to the color line.

Atticus's moral authority is nonetheless key to the logic of the book. It is connected to his ability to see individuals as distinct and different. Indeed he explains carefully to Scout that he is not defending a "nigger" but the individual, Tom, and that he is doing this not because of abstract principles but because Tom's case affects him personally. He does not explain how, although he admits that "the main reason" he is defending Tom "is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again" (83). At first it is difficult to discern why he reasons this way, but eventually we are led to understand that, for Atticus, authority is staked ultimately on the notion of responsibility, and responsibility is the special province of those with special talents.

This is established in what seems a gratuitous scene about the killing of a mad dog. The event is crucial because it provides the occasion for Miss Maudie to teach Scout and Jem about their father's extraordinary capa-

bilities. When Scout and Jem are shocked to discover that their father is a crack marksman who can kill a wandering dog with a single, long-distance shot, Miss Maudie takes pains to explain to them why Atticus concealed his skill from them. "I think maybe he put his gun down when he realized God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things," she explains. "People in their right minds," she clarifies, "never take pride in their talents" (107). Singular "gifts," apparently, pose a problem to social equality. As such they must never be lorded over others. In Atticus's view, Maudie tells the children, such talents and gifts must be used modestly, in the service of others, and never in aggrandizement of the self alone. If Atticus did not use his talents for reading and reasoning to defend Tom, we are left to infer, he would be guilty both of dishonoring his gifts and of failing to fulfill his responsibility to those not so endowed. His particular responsibility, the trial scene makes abundantly clear, is to recognize and thereby to protect the individuality of those who cannot manage to protect themselves.

Atticus begins his final summation to the jury, in typical legal style, by dispassionately reviewing the evidence he has assembled. Almost immediately, however, he abandons his detachment and the sign of his professional status—he loosens his vest and tie and takes off his suit coat. Atticus speaks to the men on the jury personally, "as if they were folks on the post office corner" (215). Personal address, we are prompted to hope, will be powerful enough to overcome the prejudices of the jury and the abstractions of racialized, categorical thinking. Atticus's subsequent disquisition seems to provide foundation for that hope. He asserts, in fact, that the witnesses for the state "have presented themselves . . . in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption—the evil assumption—that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women" (217). And that, Atticus observes, is itself "a lie as black as Tom Robinson's skin." "You know the truth," he adds, "and the truth is this: *some* Negroes lie, *some* Negroes are immoral, *some* Negro men are not be trusted around women—black or white." Atticus adds authoritatively, "This is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men."

With these comments Atticus seems to confirm the view adumbrated throughout the early pages of the book that human beings are different, that they are individual, and that they should be dealt with as such. Indeed his next remarks dispute the notion of abstract equality. Though "Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal," he observes,

"we know all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe—some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they're born with it, some men make more money than others . . . —some people are born gifted beyond the normal scope of men" (217–18). People are individual and different, Atticus suggests, and some, he implies, deserve the position of authority and status they command. In effect he gives a familiar defense of middlebrow individuality and expertise.

Curiously, though, Atticus does an immediate about-face. He adds almost matter-of-factly that "there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court" (218). Although Atticus concedes that "our courts have their faults, as does any human institution," he insists that "in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal" (218). Here the justification of special talent and privilege seems to be withdrawn in favor of the assertion of the abstract principle of equality in a court of law. Significantly, this will compensate for a natural inequality that appears to be inevitable. But then Atticus wheels and turns one more time and abandons his entreaty to the principle of equality and appeals to the men as individuals. He concludes, "Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family. In the name of God, do your duty" (218). Atticus's halting, contradictory argument is the sign of the book's great uneasiness about squaring its defense of individuality and talent with its desire to recognize the humanity of all.

To no one's surprise, least of all that of Atticus, the men ignore clear proof of Tom's innocence and find him guilty. Despite the power of Atticus's personal appeal, they cannot overlook Tom's unpardonable sin—not the alleged rape but the fact that in his own testimony he expressed pity for his accuser and thereby placed himself above a white woman. The fact that the men fail to do their duty, as the book conceives it, only underscores Atticus's extraordinary nature and the fact that he has performed his and thereby fully lived up to his responsibilities. Although his moral act does not lead to Tom's acquittal, we are led to believe that it has contributed to social progress simply because the jury takes hours to deliberate. The implication is that Atticus's appeal to the men as singular individuals

almost worked. In the future, social change will surely come through the responsible recognition of singular and distinct individuality.

No wonder I admired Atticus. He is presented in the book not only as an intellectual and as a witness to the individuality and humanity of both girls and Negroes, but also as the engine of social progress. But as I have already indicated, the denouement of the book casts a certain doubt on the efficacy of this personal approach to social problems. Soon after the dramatic trial scene, in fact, Tom Robinson is killed trying to escape from prison. Atticus suggests that despair led him to this desperate act. "I guess Tom was tired of white men's chances and preferred to take his own," he remarks (249). Whatever Tom's motivation, it is clear that Atticus's moral convictions and heroic performance of duty have been powerless to prevent the reestablishment of the racial status quo. In the end the black man is punished for questioning traditional arrangements of power. The punishment, it seems, will be extended even to Atticus himself. Bob Ewell, the father of the woman allegedly raped by Tom, vows revenge for Atticus's humiliation of him at the trial.³⁰ He attacks Jem and Scout. They are saved from certain death only when the two plots are finally joined and Boo Radley emerges from his hiding place, frees the children from Ewell's grip, kills him, and returns Atticus's children to him.

Significantly, Boo does not tell this story himself. His tale is pieced together by the sheriff and Atticus, who in effect speak for him. In the telling, Sheriff Heck Tate proves himself as adept at middlebrow logic as Atticus is. He will conceal Boo's heroic act not because he fears the town might misunderstand and brand Boo a murderer, but because he knows the unwanted attention will destroy Boo by "draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight" (290). Because Tate recognizes Boo's peculiar personality, he empathizes with him, and because he empathizes with him, he becomes his protector. Although we are not told explicitly why the sheriff and Atticus can understand Boo so well, the very manner in which he is described highlights his color in extraordinary ways. Scout first reveals his presence to us by pointing to him. "As I pointed," she says, "he brought his arms down and pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem's room" (284). Boo's color is stressed several more times as we watch Atticus and Tate make the decision to cover up his crime. We cannot help but wonder, then, whether the whiteness he shares with Tate and Atticus is not at least partly responsible for their ability to see the particular humanity in this otherwise strange and different man.

Are we further meant to take this ironically as Lee's sardonic comment on the true efficacy of Atticus's personalist approach to social problems? Is the familiar racist and sexist world restored at the end because Atticus's vision has failed? After all, these two white men only succeed in protecting the individuality of another white man. By the end of the story, in fact, even Scout herself realizes that although she feels "more at home in [her] father's world," she will soon have to enter the world of women, "where on its surface fragrant ladies [rock] slowly, [fan] gently, and [drink] cool water" (246). That ironic reading seems possible, but in the end, I think, we are meant not to judge these moral prescriptions about individuality wanting but to assent to their truth in concert with Atticus. Indeed the last words he pronounces in the story underscore the value of the by-now familiar lesson that Scout manages to derive from a book they are reading together. Half sleeping in her father's arms as he reads Seckatary Hawkins's *The Gray Ghost* to her, she insists that she has heard and understood the story it tells. "Yeah," she says, "an' they all thought it was Stoner's Boy messin' up their clubhouse an' throwin ink all over it. . . . An' they chased him 'n' never could catch him 'cause they didn't know *what he looked like*, an' Atticus, when they finally *saw* him, why he hadn't done any of those things. . . . Atticus, he was real nice" (295). Atticus confirms the wisdom of her assertion with his final pronouncement in the book: "Most people are, Scout, when you finally *see* them."

As *To Kill a Mockingbird* would have it, then, humanity and individuality are there to be seen. However, it takes the gaze of one with both knowledge and power, apparently, to recognize them and thereby to confer the status of personhood on those who cannot manage to establish it for themselves. For all its interest in empowering girls and Negroes, Harper Lee's novel finally assents to the rule of a learned and compassionate elite. Although we are led to believe that because this elite takes its responsibility seriously it might admit girls and Negroes to its bar in the future, it also implicitly suggests that such recognition will come only if both can remake themselves, as Scout and Calpurnia almost manage to do, in the image of a learned, white man. Indeed the very last two sentences in the novel provide inadvertent but poignant commentary on the welcome that might be accorded someone like Scout if she cannot successfully manage the masquerade. As Atticus leaves her room for the night, she tells us, "He turned out the light and went into Jem's room. He would be there all night, and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning" (296). As we close the book, then, Atticus's gaze is trained not on Scout but on her brother, Jem.

I could not have told you all this in 1964. I certainly did not notice that it was the white man who was protected while the black man was lost. But I was dissatisfied with the novel's end. I remember thinking that Atticus's sentiments seemed a little too pat, a little too easy. I did not really understand how just *seeing* other people was going to corral Bull Conner's dogs or make James Meredith's road at the University of Mississippi any easier. Still, these were problems of "the South," a world where ladies rocked on porches and sipped cool water. They were easy enough to put aside, then, as other people's problems, and since I had no intention of ever finding contentment in sitting and sipping, I closed the book still admiring Atticus and bent on making myself in his image.

THE REACH OF MIDDLEBROW DESIRE

Most of the books I read that year, as I turned fifteen, similarly celebrated the achievements of heroic men. Together with *Marjorie Morningstar*; *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*; and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they tutored me about the value of a public world rendered significant by "serious" problems and "momentous" events. If they argued that this world had to be humanized and enlivened by the actions of individuals with extraordinary warmth and compassion, they nonetheless suggested that its compass could only be taken by people with broad knowledge and special training. What these books taught me to want, then, was a professional's power, a power lodged in books, honed in institutions of higher learning, and wielded in the name of greater knowledge.

The knowledge I wanted knew few limits. *Kon-Tiki* suggested that intellectual work might eventually take me to a place like the South Pacific, put me on a raft with a few other intrepid souls, and set me to proving a theory passionately held. *The Ugly American* suggested that I might actually understand why talk of dominoes and this strange-sounding country, Vietnam, with its even stranger-sounding cities, such as Dien Bien Phu and Hue, had suddenly begun to occupy so much time on the news programs I watched religiously. If the book was profoundly nationalist in its assumption that the United States was destined to bring its superior democracy to lesser states misguidedly enamored of communism, it also suggested that a commitment to the truth, to greater knowledge, might push one to criticize one's country constructively in the interest of greater global responsibility. Indeed the book's authors counseled me that "to the extent that our foreign policy is humane and reasonable, it will be success-

ful. To the extent that it is imperialistic and grandiose, it will fail" (267). These sentiments provided fertile ground later for my participation in my generation's antiwar movement. But they also further reinforced my emergent professionalist aspirations with the exhortation, "We do not need the horde of 1,500,000 Americans—mostly amateurs—who are now working for the US overseas. What we need is a small force of well-trained, well-chosen, hard-working and dedicated professionals. . . . They must speak the language of the land of their assignment, and they must be more expert in its problems than are the natives" (284). I wanted to be such a person.

The books selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and sent by Mr. Shymansky suggested that knowledge was so powerful, in fact, that it might even enable me to understand the inexplicable events that had shaped my parents' adult lives and the history of the twentieth century, that is, the events of World War II. I cannot recall a moment when I first learned about the war or the figure of Adolf Hitler. These events were part of the everyday texture of my childhood because my father's wartime picture albums documenting his years in the Air Force were always ready to hand. Every time I pulled them down from the front closet to admire the uniformed crew of his B-24 or to puzzle over the aerial photos of bombs dropping on German cities, my mother or father would haltingly try to explain why the war was fought, who Adolf Hitler was, and what he had done. But those events always still felt just beyond comprehension, unexplained, and inexplicable. Perhaps that is why I was willing to attempt a book whose narrative fragmentation I found very difficult—*The Wall*, by John Hersey. Maybe that is why I plowed through William Shirer's 1,250 pages of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Rereading Shirer's daunting narrative now, I cannot imagine that I actually read the whole thing then. But I certainly wanted to, and even more, I know I wanted to say that I had. I suspect, in fact, that my desire to make sense of these most incomprehensible events of a generally baffling century was widely shared and the very thing that made Shirer's the most popular book ever sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club. Even if the book was not fully read in every case, it promised those who ordered it, held it in their hands, paged through it, and perhaps made their way through only the first few chapters that a singular, dedicated man, armed with a relentless desire to know and an endless willingness to read papers, documents, letters, and books, could actually comprehend the incomprehensible.

When Dr. Waugh finally sliced through my cast with a tiny, buzzing saw in October 1964, liberating me at last from the house and that bedroom, I returned to school. Freed of my plaster armor, I felt terribly fragile at

first and very small. I worried about girlish things—whether I could return to the cheerleading squad or what I would look like in a dress again. Mr. Shymansky's books already seemed an incidental part of a distant past, books that had provided only a stay against boredom, easy enough to forget, and certainly not worth mentioning to anyone. Their effects remained, though, steeling me for a future almost the way the bone grafts now straightening my spine enabled me to walk fully upright for the first time in two years. Although I was not aware of it, their powerful evocation of the riches to be found in the world of knowledge and expertise enabled me to dismiss those cheerful, cartoonish diagrams I found in my SAT booklet only a year later. Those diagrams claimed that girls with a certain SAT score would complete fewer years of higher education and make less money than boys with exactly the same score. I was determined that this would not happen to me. I wanted to be as familiar with a professional world as Atticus was and as authoritative as he seemed to be. I was determined not to take up my place on that porch Scout saw looming in her own future, nor did I want any part of the house in Mamaroneck next to Marjorie's. Books, reading, and the worlds they revealed were the hope Mr. Shymansky and the Book-of-the-Month Club gave me, the hope that I might breach the pink cotton walls of the feminine penitentiary.

For me Mr. Shymansky's middlebrow books accomplished many things. They staved off loneliness and peopled an imagination starved by enforced isolation. At the same time they preserved desire by delineating objects I might aim for at the very moment when I felt crushed by the necessity to contain every familiar want I had ever known, the desire to hang out with my friends, to ride downtown, to make the cheerleading squad, to go to a dance. Less immediately, perhaps, they surveyed, mapped, and made sense of an adult world. They described that world as one where the irreducible individual was a given, where knowledge was revered, and where expertise was to be sought after with intensity and a sense of purpose. They provided materials for self-fashioning as a result, and models to emulate. In the end they fostered my entry into middle-class selfhood and pointed me in direction of the professional middle class.

There were terrible costs, though, among them the repudiation of my gender demanded by the still-masculine image of professionalism. Indeed, I took my place in college classrooms where we read only a handful of books by women. As an undergraduate, the only female writers I read were the Brontës, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, and Edith Wharton. No Margaret Fuller, no Kate Chopin, no Gertrude Stein, no Djuna Barnes, no Virginia Woolf, and not even George Eliot. The women we

read about—Carrie Meeber, Lady Brett Ashley, Hester Prynne, Caddie Compson, and Temple Drake—all seemed to meet an awful fate. Similarly, the way of reading we were taught required our subordination to an all-powerful text, whose flinty, virile power was always highlighted by its rejection of a feminine sentimentalism. It did not occur to me to ask what was wrong with sentiment. I was too intent on the goal of acquiring the particular form of technical expertise I found so compelling, expertise about literature and high culture. I wanted the authority that seemed to follow from knowing books and understanding how to read them. I wanted to command all that New York had once signified.

But I am also sure that I found Russel Nye's classroom so welcoming because he seemed to recognize that women read and that what they read were books by Susanna Rowson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Laura Jean Libbey, Caroline Keene, and Margaret Mitchell. I chose his field of specialization, popular culture, at least in part because it promised a haven from the redundantly masculine world I had elected so unconsciously, a world whose highest accolades were reserved for writers who could display ostentatiously their refusal of all things soft, lush, mushy, and feminine. It now seems clear to me that my highly abstract dissertation managed to foster my entry into the middle-class and masculine world of professional competence because it also provided a transitional object in that its case study focused on the romance. It enabled me to cling, still, to a woman's world of haunted Gothic houses, terrified but plucky heroines, threatening heroes, and true love promised at the end.

But even as I wrote about Gothic romances as a graduate student, my view of them, their writers, and their readers changed. This happened because I was still reading and talking with other readers, women who directed me to their favorite books and who thus provided new eyes to see with, new ideas to think with, and new words to articulate both. Nancy Purcell gave me *The Bell Jar* and *The Second Sex*. Marsha Carlin introduced me to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Karen Butery told me to read Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, and Sharon O'Brien introduced me to Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. *Reading the Romance*, my own effort to explain the appeal of paperback romances, resulted from this reading. But I now think that it also grew at least in part out of grief for a willingly forsaken world. In some ways it was my unknowing act of homage to a universe I had rejected, a universe of women readers who managed to cobble together the planks, nails, nuts, bolts, joists, and beams necessary for self-fashioning from books and histories framed only to reveal the architecture of lives

lived by men. The act of writing that book was my way of transforming Atticus Finch, the heroic reader of my adolescence, into romance reader Dorothy Evans, the woman I interviewed most extensively to try to understand why women found romances so compelling. It makes sense to me now why I chose the name Dorothy as her pseudonym. Dorothy is my mother's first name.

I do not want to romanticize the hope Mr. Shymansky's middlebrow books provided for a fourteen-year-old girl. That hope was not extended to everyone. The books successfully endowed me with a vocabulary of desire because my race and relative class privilege had already positioned me in such a way that I could imagine myself a member of their projected audience. The characteristics of that imaginary audience were dictated in part by the fact that the books had germinated in a culture driven by particular social and economic changes. Those changes necessitated the creation of new kinds of subjects with new kinds of desires and capacities. Quite simply, there was work to be done and not yet enough people prepared to do it. Middlebrow books performed the necessary ideological labor of drawing the precise outlines and purposes of professional-managerial class work, and they helped to imagine the interior life of the person that might make it possible. They modeled a form of subjectivity and structured desire in a way that was recognizable to readers like me precisely because we had *already* reaped certain benefits from the accident of our middle-class birth and the educational prerogatives that came with it. Perhaps it was the very intensity of the particular desires these books cultivated that prevented so many of us from seeing that the value of the knowledge and expertise they celebrated was dependent in the end on a prior act of exclusion whereby the alternative knowledges possessed by others were construed as ignorance or naivete or, even worse, as lack of ambition in the first place.

maternal discipline is an unfortunate misogyny and fear of the maternal as well as a hidden assumption that a fully independent, autonomous, self-directing subject is a distinct and more authentic possibility.

62. Canby, *Seven Years' Harvest*, 14.

63. Ibid., 6–7.

64. Ibid., 131.

65. Ibid., 79.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid., 47.

68. Ibid., 302–3.

69. Ibid., 180.

70. "Reminiscences of Edith Walker," 877–78.

71. Charles Lee, *Hidden Public*, 138, 149.

72. Canby, *Definitions*, 227.

73. "Reminiscences of Harry Scherman," 118–19.

74. Charles Lee, *Hidden Public*, 148.

75. Strictly speaking, it is not the hegemony of the professional-managerial class that is being constructed here. Rather, it is their authority as officially deputized managers that is being legitimated. They were to work, obviously, in the service of those who actually possessed power in capitalist society—at this point, the corporations and their largest shareholders.

CHAPTER NINE

1. These developments did not go unremarked at the time. In fact they were the subject of several books now recognized as classics in American sociology and political science. See especially Mills, *White-Collar* and *Power Elite*, as well as Whyte, *Organization Man*. All three of these books were alternate selections of the Book-of-the-Month Club. For the larger context of the rise of white-collar work and its impact on labor relations, see Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, and Armstrong et al., *Capitalism since World War II*. See also Gouldner, *Future of Intellectuals*.

2. It seems odd to note that my father's job was in some ways analogous to that performed by the editors and managers of the Book-of-the-Month Club. Where they attempted to sell books to several hundred thousand "well-placed book readers" in order to promote broader consumption of books in the larger population, my father was employed by Capital Air Lines to facilitate the use of the commercial air industry by sports teams and media figures in the hope that this, too, would promote widespread air travel. As a result, he traveled a good deal with college football and basketball teams (in fact, this was how I first learned the names of most of the colleges and universities on the East Coast) and even with the New York Yankees for a time. For my brother and me, the real sign of our father's glamorous work was the fruit basket we got every Christmas from Mel Allen, "the voice of the New York Yankees."

3. In *Where the Girls Are* Susan Douglas does a wonderful job of discussing this larger cultural context and connecting it with the media consumption of those of us who grew up in the 1950s. It is important to note that inasmuch as I was an enthusiastic consumer of middlebrow books and culture during this period, I was also a great fan of the television shows, teen magazines, pop music, and celebrity idols Douglas discusses. In fact, in 1963–64 I was just as preoccupied with the Beatles as I was with Shymansky's books. About fifteen to twenty of my friends crowded into my bedroom on that Sunday night in February when the Fab Four first appeared on Ed Sullivan.

4. Powers, *Operation Wandering Soul*, 106.

5. I cannot recall every book that was in those boxes. Each title that *has* come back to me, though, as I have reflected on that year, I have discovered was selected by the club either as a main selection or an alternate.

6. Sackheim, "Why the Book Clubs Are Successful."

7. Canby, "How the Book-of-the-Month Club Began."

8. Ibid., 32.

9. "Cheaper by the Dozen."

10. Quoted in Charles Lee, *Hidden Public*, 83.

11. Harry Scherman, Speech on book clubs, 1.

12. My evidence for this comes from the copies of the club's catalog that I have recently examined. Borrowed from the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago, the copies of the catalog are variously stamped by the libraries at the University of Minnesota and the University of Chicago.

13. Dwight MacDonald, "Masscult and Midcult: II," 594.

14. Charles Lee, *Hidden Public*, 146.

15. "Audience Research Report."

16. Dichter, "Psychological Analysis," 3.

17. Ceram, *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*; Wouk, *Marjorie Morningstar*; Heyerdahl, *Kon-Tiki*; Drury, *Advise and Consent*; Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*; Renault, *Bull from the Sea*; Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*; Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*; Chute, *Shakespeare of London*; and Lederer and Burdick, *Ugly American*.

18. Tuchman, *Guns of August*; Burdick and Wheeler, *Fail-Safe*; Michener, *Hawaii*; Griffin, *Black Like Me*; Uris, *Mila 18*; White, *Making of the President*; Stone, *Lust for Life*; Stone, *President's Lady*; Stone, *Agony and the Ecstasy*; Knowles, *Separate Peace*; Hart, *Act One*; Traver, *Anatomy of a Murder*; Kerr, *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*; Lord, *Day of Infamy*; Betty MacDonald, *The Egg and I*; Hemingway, *Old Man and the Sea*; Bishop, *Day Lincoln Was Shot*; Catton, *Stillness at Appomattox*; Du Maurier, *My Cousin Rachel*; Gunther, *Death Be Not Proud*; Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*; Gunther, *Inside Africa*; Skinner, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*; Du Maurier, *Rebecca*; Roberts, *Oliver Wiswell*; Gilbreth, *Cheaper by the Dozen*.

19. Dichter, "Psychological Analysis," 21.

20. Gunther, "Great Book about Adolf Hitler."

21. This assertion is based on my reading of Book-of-the-Month Club preliminary reader's reports for the years 1950, 1951, and 1958. These reports are collected

at the Library of Congress and were donated to the library by Ralph Thompson, Harry Scherman's successor at the club. The library also holds a large collection of undated reader's reports, but these are primarily from the 1940s.

22. Fisher, "Report on *Nectar in a Sieve*."
23. Highet, "A Report."
24. Fadiman, "*Fail-Safe*."
25. Fadiman, "Selection for January."
26. Chute, *Shakespeare of London*, ix.
27. Wouk, *Marjorie Morningstar*, 3.
28. Marquand, "*Marjorie Morningstar*."
29. Ceram, *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*, v.
30. During his cross-examination of Mayella Ewell, Atticus establishes that Mayella had in fact tried to seduce Tom. Caught in the act by her father, Bob Ewell, she was then beaten by him. It is this humiliation that Ewell feels he must avenge.

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