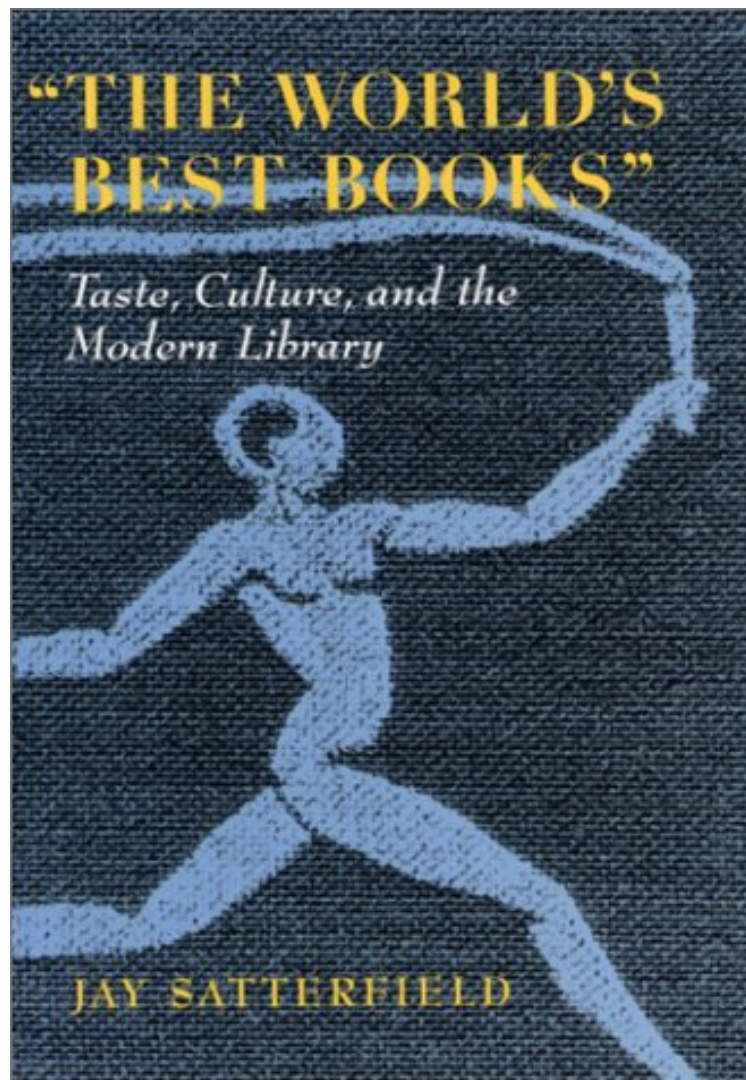


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## The World's Best Books": Taste, Culture, and the Modern Library (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book)

Jay Satterfield

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**Jay Satterfield : The World's Best Books": Taste, Culture, and the Modern Library (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The World's Best Books": Taste, Culture, and the Modern Library (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating insight into America's intellectual lifeBy CustomerFor

almost forty years I have been buying titles of the Modern Library from used book stores and flea markets in Germany, the US, Argentina, Canada, Israel and India. This range across continents, beyond the initial target market of the USA shows the importance and influence of the series that claimed to bring "The World's Best Books" to the reader in elegant editions at affordable prices. I therefore read Jay Satterfield's book with great interest and learned how Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer managed to convince critics of the intellectual sincerity and ambition of the series, at the same time catering to the reading needs (and often limited budgets) of the "civilized minority" - and making profit. In addition it provides interesting insights on the eternal efforts to establish a literary canon. The chapters of Satterfield's book look at the different aspects of the endeavour - establishing, advertising, booming, packaging, selecting and finally closing the World's Best Books when paperbacks took over. The book is a pleasure to read and provided at least me with the background story of a series that I respect and treasure.

In October 1930, Macy's department store in New York City used the inexpensive book series "The Modern Library of the World's Best Books" as a loss-leader to draw customers into the store. Selling for only nine cents a copy, the small-format, modern classics attracted crowds of buyers. Businessmen, housewives, students, bohemian intellectuals, and others waited in long lines to purchase affordable hard-bound copies of works by the likes of Tolstoy, Wilde, Joyce, and Woolf. It was a significant moment in American cultural history, demonstrating that a series of books respected and praised by the nation's self-appointed arbiters of taste could attract a throng of middle-class consumers without damaging its reputation as a vehicle of "serious culture." The Modern Library's reputation stands in sharp contrast to that of similar publishing ventures dismissed by critics as agents of "middlebrow culture," such as the Book-of-the-Month Club. Writers for the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and the *Bookman* expressed their fears that mass-production and new distribution schemes would commodify literature and deny the promise of American culture. Yet although the Modern Library offered the public a uniformly packaged, preselected set of "the World's Best Books," it earned the praise of these self-consciously intellectual critics. Focusing on the Modern Library's marketing strategies, editorial decisions, and close attention to book design, Jay Satterfield explores the interwar cultural dynamics that allowed the publisher of the series to exploit the forces of mass production and treat books as commodities while still positioning the series as a revered cultural entity. So successful was this approach that the modern publishing colossus Random House was built on the reputation, methods, and profits of the Modern Library.

This is an excellent and valuable study of the Modern Library -- the most important American reprint series of significant works of literature and thought published in the twentieth century.... The work is solidly researched, intelligently conceived, and very well written in a style that deftly combines narrative with analysis. (Gordon B. Neavill, Wayne State University) Satterfield's writing style is clear, well structured, and fluid. His arguments on behalf of the Modern Library's importance and influence are convincing. The information and observations he presents on book advertising and retailing are fresh and sound. His chapter on the production and design of the series is very engaging. (Thomas L. Bonn, author of *Heavy Traffic and High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution*) From the Publisher An insightful examination of a respected American publishing institution. A volume in the series *Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book*. About the Author Jay Satterfield is Head of Reader Services at the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.