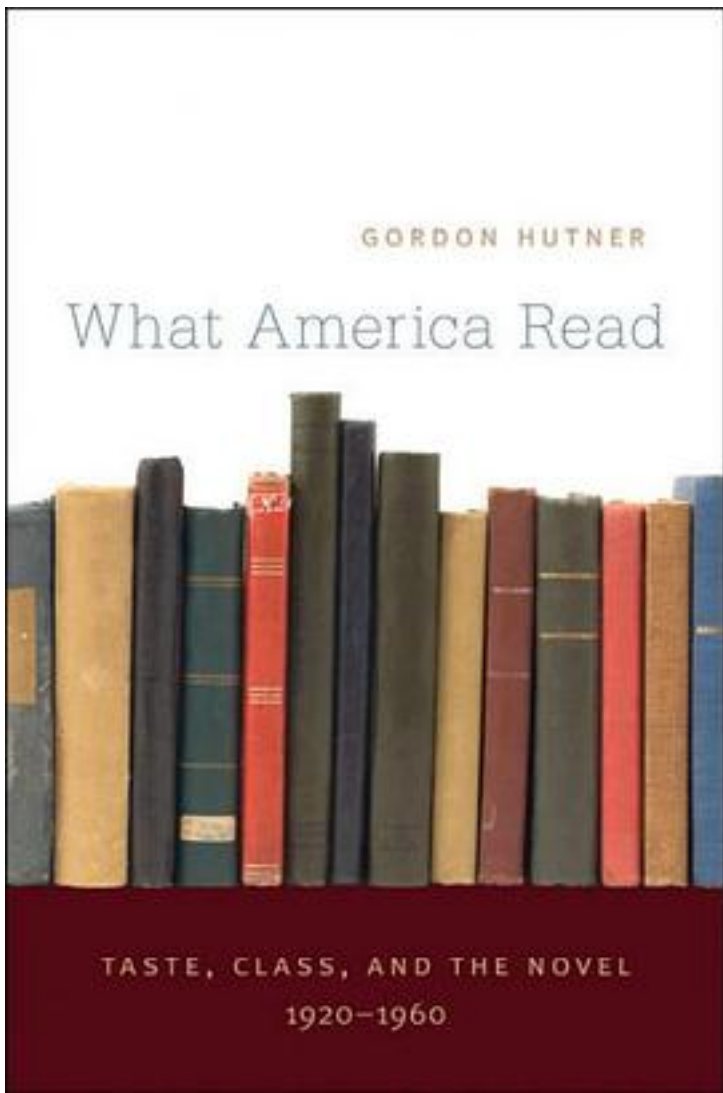


What America Read



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出版者:The University of North Carolina Press

出版时间:2008

装帧:

isbn:9780807832271

Despite the vigorous study of modern American fiction, today's readers are only familiar with a partial shelf of a vast library. Gordon Hutner describes the distorted, canonized history of the twentieth-century American novel as a record of modern classics insufficiently appreciated in their day but recuperated by scholars in order to shape the grand tradition of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. In presenting literary history this way, Hutner argues, scholars have forgotten a rich treasury of realist novels that recount the story of America's confrontation with modernity. Hutner explains that realist novels were frequently lauded when they first appeared. They are almost completely unread now, he contends, largely because they record the middle-class encounter with modern life. This middle-class realism, Hutner shows, reveals a surprising engagement with the social issues that most fully challenged readers in the United States, including race relations, politics, immigration, and sexuality. Reading these novels now offers an extraordinary opportunity to witness debates about what kind of nation America would become and what place its newly dominant middle class would have—and, Hutner suggests, should also lead us to wonder how our own contemporary novels will be remembered.

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