

Â In *Writers of Conviction*, Julia C. Ehrhardt examines the literary careers of four American writers who have not received the critical attention they deserve: Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Rose Wilder Lane, and Josephine Herbst. For too long, popular twentieth-century female authors have been ignored by scholarsâ€™ mainly because their stories were considered to lack serious political content or social commentaryâ€™ despite their popularity with the general public. *Writers of Conviction* reintroduces these authors to reveal a fascinating and unexplored aspect of white, middle-class, female authorship: the provocative links between each writerâ€™s personal politics and her literary aspirations. Ehrhardt uses this innovative critical perspective to show that each woman became a writer in order to express her political beliefs to the largest possible audience. Combining feminist literary theory, womenâ€™s history, and biographical criticism, each chapter presents a compelling study of a womanâ€™s individual journey to political consciousness and the writings that resulted from it. Rather than discussing familiar issuesâ€™ such as woman suffrage and equal rightsâ€™ that usually dominate our understanding of womenâ€™s political activity in the early twentieth century as it surfaced in writings by canonical woman authors, Ehrhardt introduces readers to four lesser-known women and the political agendas they endorsed in both published and unpublished writings. In-depth analyses are presented on Galeâ€™s support of the municipal-housekeeping movement, Fisherâ€™s anxieties about the rise of New England tourism, Laneâ€™s criticisms of the New Deal, and Herbstâ€™s denunciation of the risks involved in illegal abortion. Ehrhardt offers a refreshing new perspective on Herbstâ€™s fiction by putting sexuality rather than class at the center of the analysis. *Writers of Conviction* breaks new ground by also assessing the current critical conception of legitimate political agendas. By highlighting not only the content of their writings but also the immense popularity these women enjoyed, Ehrhardt demonstrates that an investigation of personal politics forces critics to reconsider assumptions about literary movements and provides a provocative model for twenty-first-century feminist literary criticism.

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