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Introduction

What is popular fiction?

'Popular fiction' is a deceptively simple phrase, at once indispensable and commonplace, yet often left unsettlingly vague. One of the problems with finding a clear definition of popular fiction is that the object of study is not always clear. The cultural formation designated by 'popular fiction' has changed over time and varies according to its cultural and geographical situation. In this volume, we identify the late nineteenth century as the period when the genres that constitute so much of popular fiction emerge; but we recognise that the reception of these genres is in a state of continuous evolution. A key factor in this evolution has been the productive relationship between popular fiction and new media technologies from radio, to cinema, to the internet. This amounts to a wide view of culture and this means that when we study popular fiction we are studying just such a broad cultural field rather than a single object or objects.

But let us start with the simplest definition: popular fiction is frequently thought of as those books that everyone reads, usually imagined as a league table of bestsellers whose aggregate figures dramatically illustrate an impressive ability to reach across wide social and cultural divisions with remarkable commercial success. In itself, this open-ended definition tells us very little, since it suggests that popular fiction is merely an empty box within which almost any novel might find a highly lucrative place. But a quick glance at the weekly charts shows that this is not so: certain popular genres predominate. In the first week of July 2010, for example, seven of the top ten paperback fiction titles in Britain were crime narratives by such writers as Stieg Larsson, Harlan Coben, James Patterson, Lynda La Plante and Patricia Cornwell, books that could variously be classed as 'murder mysteries', 'crime thrillers', 'police procedurals' or 'detective fiction'.[1] Indeed, if one adds another title from the list, *Picture Perfect* by the American author Jodi Picoult, arguably this tally would be even higher,

for Picoult's story of a woman's painful escape from violent domestic abuse begins with the heroine awakening bruised and bloody in a graveyard and struggling to recover the memory of who she is and what has happened to her.

The fact that it is possible to pick out recurrent topics and formulae in these weekly compilations suggests another way of understanding popular fiction. According to this approach, popular fiction is primarily based upon a limited number of forms or genres of narrative pleasure, such as suspense, romantic complications, bodily horror or futuristic speculation. These repertoires of devices effectively bring their audiences into existence using fictional lures that hook readers into the text, so that they are driven to repeat the experience at regular intervals. In one of the earliest analytic surveys of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell* (1960), the novelist Kingsley Amis identified this type of pleasure-seeking as a type of addiction that characteristically begins in adolescence. To get to the heart of any given genre, so the argument goes, it is necessary to probe the nature of this intense fixation. Despite Amis's somewhat dated insistence on the inherently addictive properties of genre reading – today we would speak of 'fans' or 'fandom' – readers who are strongly committed to particular kinds of writing can certainly be identified.

But two important qualifications need to be made here. First, while it is undoubtedly true that much contemporary reading is organised in this way, typical instances of popular genre, such as those narratives shelved under 'crime fiction' or 'romance', are more loosely structured than the metaphor of addiction suggests. As the variety of possible labels for several of the July 2010 bestsellers indicates, narratives that are built around crime scarcely comprise a homogeneous category. *Picture Perfect* involves a mystery and an investigation, but it is also about making sense of emotional entrapment and dealing with difficult personal relationships. A book by Lynda La Plante which sold roughly the same number of copies as *Picture Perfect* in the same week provides an instructive comparison. Set within a team of police detectives, La Plante's *Silent Scream* clearly belongs among the more orthodox traditions of crime writing than does Picoult's novel, yet its central concern is with the professional tensions experienced by its heroine DI Anna Travis, as she attempts to do her job successfully in a predominantly male working environment.

Questions of gender are never far away in the work of both these otherwise rather different writers. And this is true of the weekly charts as a whole, suggesting that the links between generic elements and sexual difference are a major factor in the success of a bestselling text. Each week, the thematic mix displayed among the ten bestselling paperbacks undergoes a

subtle shift. In the week following the first list of bestselling paperbacks in July, two of the crime narratives had disappeared, pushed out by *Take a Chance on Me* from 'chick lit' writer Jill Mansell, and David Balducci's *True Blue*, a thriller about a former woman police officer trying to get back her old job on the force. *Picture Perfect* had moved into the number one spot, selling over 14,000 more copies in a week than the previous occupant, a book of short stories by the Irish novelist Maeve Binchy. So the second important point to make about popular fiction is the fluid and heterogeneous nature of much of its audience. Indeed, what this brief survey indicates is that it is possible to think in terms of two distinct but overlapping popular readerships: those who come closest to resembling Amis's 'addicts', locked into a given genre or subgenre, though often reading books that do not command massive sales; and a wider, more diverse audience that moves in and out of the various divisions of the popular fiction market. Such readers might pick up Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, but would not necessarily turn to crime fiction for their next read.

Thus, it would be misleading to imply that the 'popular' in popular fiction is purely a matter of sales. In fact, the concept of the 'popular' has a longer and more complex political and cultural history that also impacts upon the ways in which popular fiction has been understood. In her invaluable history of the word, Morag Shiach (1989) points out that 'popular' first began to appear in sixteenth-century legal contexts, referring to rights or prerogatives that were available to everyone, as in the concept of 'popular government' or government by all the people and not just some. This usage soon came to be regarded with suspicion by members of the political class and, by the early seventeenth century, to be described as 'popular and ambitious' meant that you were someone who sought to trick or deceive people; and 'popularity' became a pejorative term for gaining influence over people in order to serve one's own nefarious political ends.[2] At the same time, the notion of the popular was inverted and disvalued, as when the writer Jonathan Swift described riots and protests as 'popular commotions', so that the 'popular' signified what is 'low' or 'base', in the sense of vulgar, degraded or open to manipulation.

Each of these shades of meaning captures part of the truth about the concept of the popular, but they pull in different directions, posing something of a dilemma. For anyone trying to make sense of the 'popular', this tension between what is genuinely a manifestation of popular taste or will and what is imposed upon people by those for whom culture is a business constitutes the central historical dynamic of modern popular culture, 'the double movement of containment and resistance', as the cultural critic Stuart Hall once characterised it.[3] In an acute overview of the debates

around popular culture, Hall argued against emphasising one pole of this dynamic at the expense of the other. For it is crucial to see that the entire cultural field is constantly in flux, torn between competing interests and attachments:

> If the forms of provided popular culture are not purely manipulative, then it is because, alongside the false appeals, the foreshortenings, the trivialization and shortcircuits, there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a recreation of recognisable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding (p. 233).

What happens in the home or in the workplace, the relationships among men and women or between ethnic groups and social classes, furnishes the raw material out of which the characters and situations that populate the pages of popular fiction are constructed, not as an unproblematic approximation to the real, but as a stylised and highly mediated set of narrative modes. Yet while 'the cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent', their activities are always the site of an ongoing struggle around what is acceptable, what rings true, and what can be enjoyed uncritically (p. 233). In Hall's view, it is these social, political and economic conflicts that make popular culture into a kind of battleground. And although the examples he cites go as far back as the seventeenth century, it is the decades between the 1880s and the 1920s that he identifies as a watershed in 'the changed relationship between the people and the concentration and expansion of the new cultural apparatuses' (p. 231).

Defining the field

Like Stuart Hall, we, too, see the end of the nineteenth century as the period when the distinctive genres of twentieth-century popular fiction – detective stories, science fiction, romance and Gothic horror – emerge in their modern forms. This is not to deny their much older precursors. As Roger Luckhurst notes in Chapter 4, the roots of the Gothic are usually located in the eighteenth century and some critics date elements of detective stories, romance and science fiction as far back as the myths of antiquity. Nevertheless, it is the application of the new technologies of industrial production to publishing, an expanding market driven by increased literacy and urbanisation, and the emergence of new commercial media that together decisively change the conditions in which popular fiction is created. In editing this Companion, one of our main aims has been to place the growth and development of contemporary popular fiction in historical

perspective. This is a complex task because the different strands that comprise popular fiction as we know it today do not inhabit a single uniform time-frame, but are often the product of diverse kinds of histories. Genres and cultural forms have their own particular genealogies and the labels by which they are known can be highly controversial, with sharp disagreements about how, and even whether, terms like 'detective fiction' or 'graphic novel' ought to be used. Concepts such as 'pulp fiction' or the 'bestseller' do not have clear critical histories or rather their critical histories are still in the process of being made.

For this reason, the focus of the first four chapters is upon the ways in which the broad field of popular fiction came to be established, not only through changes in the publishing industry, but also through the creation of a reading public. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the book trade was dominated by sales to private subscription libraries patronised by middle-class readers, while artisans and unskilled workers tended to rely on cheap fiction published in weekly or monthly parts. In Chapter 1, David Glover traces the rise and fall of this dual economy as inexpensive reprints created a growing market for single-volume novels and writers found new outlets in the rapidly expanding network of popular fiction magazines. It was within this new force-field that the core genres took hold – although why a relatively small sub-set of popular genres rather than others were so massively successful remains hotly contested.[4]

There are at least two factors that complicate the search for a satisfactory explanation of how specific kinds of writing, certain texts and certain authors come to dominate. In the first place, as some of the most challenging recent historical studies have emphasised, the changing *spatial* patterns of book circulation over time have long had a significant international dimension. In his *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (1998), for example, Franco Moretti has argued that France differed markedly from the rest of Europe because the high esteem enjoyed by the French language in this period allowed it to create a flourishing export trade in fiction, while importing very little. French novels could therefore 'travel faster and farther, occupying cultural niches before their rivals' – hence the pan-European success of a hugely popular writer like Alexandre Dumas.[5] But it was not just individual works of fiction that moved from country to country: some types of popular narrative, like the 'mysteries of the city' genre associated with Sue and Reynolds in the mid-nineteenth century, were picked up and rewritten for a variety of national cultures, exchanging Berlin or San Francisco for Paris and London as their familiar settings. To chart these movements and transformations we perhaps need to supplement the methods of close reading used by most literary critics and historians with

what Moretti terms 'distant reading'. For Moretti, reading at a distance sets aside the personal encounter with a particular text in order 'to focus on units that are much smaller or larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems' and to see the literary field as a whole in action.[6]

Second, when explaining the successes achieved by popular fiction, it is vital that we place them within the broader field of popular *culture*. The history of popular fiction leads into another history, that of the busy traffic between narrative fiction and those extra-literary modes of popular culture, including stage and screen, without which popular fiction is now inconceivable, either as an economic system or as a system of images and representations. As Nicholas Daly notes in his essay on 'Fiction, theatre, and early cinema' (Chapter 2), popular fiction was not only part of a two-way transatlantic commercial flow during the second half of the nineteenth century, but there was also a close and symbiotic relationship between popular literary texts and visual narrative, initially through the theatre and then via film with the entry of this new medium into the already existing spaces and practices of spectacle and performance. Silent cinema was, of course, overtaken by the so-called 'talkies' in the early 1930s, while film in turn faced competition from radio and then, from the 1950s, television, both of which offered new types of home-centred entertainment. The interrelationships identified by Daly in the late 1800s have a rather longer history than we usually assume, and in Chapter 3 John Caughie extends this link by showing the sustained historical connection between nineteenth-century serials and their varied incarnations in present-day television.

In the mass politics of the twentieth century, the vast audiences that these cultural forms could attract meant that they inevitably belonged to a turbulent yet increasingly profitable cultural field in which popular narratives circulated from one medium to another. Many of the chapters in this Companion seek to gain purchase on this turbulence by describing variations of that recurrent moment when the popular is identified as a problem and brought into peculiarly sharp relief. Predictably, negative definitions are the order of the day: a particular type of popular reading matter is branded as monstrous; as dangerously feminine; as sexually transgressive; or as corrupting and degenerate. Such moments are best understood as (self-)interested attempts to police and tame what are perceived to be the most unruly and recalcitrant elements within popular culture – one thinks, for example, of the moral panics around horror comics in the 1950s or the continuing concern about violent or pornographic writing in the present. While cultural critics have their work cut out in trying to unearth the underlying stakes and investments that animate such controversies, the difficulties that they face are very much a product

of the complex interrelationships between readers, genres, media and the culture industries in which they are embedded.

But, as Roger Luckhurst points out in Chapter 4, popular fiction did not merely depend upon the rise of large-scale audiences or readerships, it was also part of a new and dynamic public sphere, in which discussion and debate became possible, and through which a new public openness could be relayed. Sometimes views could be exchanged in response to newspaper or magazine reviews, but public opinion could also be directly mobilised while attending drama and other entertainments in theatres and the early picture palaces. The anxieties provoked by these forms of mass participation were integral to discussions of popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and worries about the volatility of popular taste have frequently underpinned both theory and research. As we will see in a moment, the investigation of audiences, their formation and reading habits has been a central area of interest for scholars concerned with popular fiction, not least because reading publics are continually being remade, not only in relation to new writers and new texts, but also when the constituents of well-established genres start to change their meaning. In the 1950s, for instance, no one would have predicted that Jim Thompson's lurid American 'paperback originals' like *After Dark, My Sweet* (1955) or *The Killer Inside Me* (1952) would have acquired a cult following among youthful male readers some forty years later in the aftermath of second-wave feminism, nor that these former drugstore paperbacks would be marketed under a 'classic crime' trade imprint. This example again underscores the fluidity and heterogeneity of popular fiction and also reflects the ongoing two-way influence of film and print. In this kind of volatile environment, the recycling of popular texts is often perceived as a challenge to standards of public taste, as indicated by the recent controversy surrounding the portrayal of violence in British director Michael Winterbottom's film adaptation of *The Killer Inside Me* (2010). Understandings of the readership of popular fiction are central to such controversies and Chapters 5–7 focus on these issues, but the question of the audience features in almost every chapter of this volume.

Readers and audiences

Interest in the audience of popular fiction has been part of a critical shift in the last half century that has sought to take ordinary readers seriously rather than condemning their bad taste. But the reader is as much a sociological and a historical problem as a literary one and studies of readers have often emerged from outside literary studies. Mike Denning's influential *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture* (1985) is, as its name

suggests, as much a study of working-class culture as pulp fiction. Such work continues to probe hitherto neglected historical records in order – in the words of Jonathan Rose – 'to enter the minds of ordinary readers in history, to discover what they read and how they read it'.[7] In his book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), Rose argues that we need to 'break the habit of treating high culture and popular culture as two distinct categories with mutually exclusive audiences'. The recollections of the self-educated nineteenth- and twentieth-century men and women in his study indicate that they immersed themselves in 'a promiscuous mix of high and low', irrespective of geographical location, generation or economic status and, although they often discriminated between different types of reading matter, some were keenly aware that 'even classics could appropriate themes and devices from trash literature' (pp. 369, 371).

The experience of women readers has been subject to a comparable reassessment. Women have always, from the eighteenth century onwards, been the majority of readers of fiction and, as Nicola Humble and Kaye Mitchell describe (Chapters 5 and 7) their association with the popular novel has often been used as a pretext for its dismissal. The growth of critical interest in popular fiction aimed at women was part of the wider impact of second-wave feminism on literary studies through which neglected female writers and readers have been reassessed and women's contribution to all forms of literature has been scrupulously re-examined. A feminist-inspired concern with women's experience has led to research into those forms of popular fiction where that experience is represented and contested, including those texts which command the largest audiences. In the cases of both class and gender formations, popular fiction offers not so much an authentic account of people's everyday lives, but an example of the interaction between that experience and the dominant (or hegemonic) social and cultural structures and ideologies. Thus, interpretations of popular romance are themselves the site of considerable disagreement. Mills and Boon romances (or Harlequin in North America) have been interpreted both as instances of women's oppression and subordination, and alternatively as containing repressed elements of resistance and even revenge.[8]

The representation of sexuality has long been a particularly fraught area, the subject of moralism and taboo for much of the previous century and beyond, not least where depictions of lesbianism or homosexuality have been at issue. As Mitchell and Erin Smith (Chapter 8) make clear, it was the most despised reaches of the mass paperback market that provided a space within which such queer sexualities could be explored, their illicit appeal struggling against (and perhaps incited by) the orthodox medical and religious discourses that sought to pathologise them. The fear and fascination

aroused by this kind of fantasmatic reading at the limit is a sign of the intensity with which such 'trashy' texts are consumed by readers who only meet in their imaginations.

This example is a reminder that, despite the upsurge of interest, as Humble and Scott McCracken (Chapter 6) remind us, the reader's experience probably remains the least understood dimension of popular fiction. Just as lesbian romance can attract a sexually diverse audience, so, in the increasingly globalised field that popular fiction has now become, cross-gendered, cross-racial and cross-cultural readerships are more often the norm than the exception. While the success of African-American writers such as Terry McMillan has benefited directly from the large market for fiction amongst African-American women in the United States, her audience extends well beyond that community. Popular forms such as romance have been remarkably adaptable across cultures and across media. For example, Latin American *telenovelas* are melodramatic, serialised television dramas with romantic themes that relate to *novelas rosas*, the Spanish equivalent of anglophone formula romance. While *telenovelas* have a clear origin and cultural base, starting in Mexico in the 1950s, with Brazil now the biggest producer, their audience now extends beyond the Hispanic population of the Americas to Eastern Europe, Asia and parts of the Middle East and Africa. Some have even been remade for different national audiences. The Colombian, *Yo soy Betty la fea*, became *Ugly Betty* in the United States, but there are also versions in at least fifteen other languages. As McCracken shows with the example of crime writer Walter Mosley, popular fiction circulates between local and global markets, taking on different meanings in different places. Yet there is relatively little known about the nuances of the different receptions of popular fictions in different places and contexts.[9] If, as Humble makes clear, research into audiences and reading communities has become an indispensable element in the study of popular fiction, there is no shortage of questions in search of answers.

One area identified by Humble and Brenda Silver (Chapter 11) as a rich source for understanding reader response is the vast quantity of fan fictions found on the internet. These usually bear a direct relationship to existing popular texts in a number of media 'canons', but create their own 'fan-on', which interprets and manipulates the original generic forms in new ways. Narrative forms such as blogs have also crossed back into paperback form, as with the sex-blogs discussed by Mitchell. Such examples give some indication of the relationship between the private (or, more accurately, 'privatised') consciousness of the individual reader and the public media, of which the internet is only the latest, if the most far-reaching apparatus. This suggests that the boundary between private and public consciousness is

permeable, that readers are actively engaged in the making and remaking of popular fiction and, as Scott McCracken in Chapter 6 suggests, popular fiction's success depends on the degree to which it can bring together and represent the diffuse temporalities of modernity in forms which the reader can relate to.

New media environments

The field of popular fiction has become more complicated in the last fifty years as new media have emerged using the internet as their platform, while older forms of fiction have gained a new prominence. We have already alluded to blogs and fan fictions as examples of the former, but these are only part – although a rapidly proliferating part – of a much bigger picture that also takes in computer gaming and interactive narratives. By contrast, pulp fiction is an area of popular writing that has changed out of all recognition since the dime novels started to appear in the United States in the middle years of the nineteenth century, the days of Buffalo Bill and Deadwood Dick. In fact, the very term 'pulp fiction', immortalised in the title of Quentin Tarantino's intensely style-conscious film (1994), evokes an aura of nostalgia that owes much to a combination of committed historical research and the collector's passion for discarded exotica. Once a byword in subliterary sensationalism, 'pulp fiction' reveals how the most universally derided of popular forms can undergo comprehensive re-evaluation, upgraded from a suspect set of narrative formulae to what could best be described as an edgy contemporary sensibility – as discussed in Chapter 8 by Erin Smith.

The pulps show the fluidity of popular genres and how idiosyncratic their histories can be, a point which is reinforced by Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven's chapter on comics and graphic novels. Although they trace the pre-history of comics back to eighteenth-century engravings, the evolution of this medium contains ruptures as well as continuities and the movement from the comic book to the graphic novel can hardly be judged a smooth transition. Authors like Alan Moore actively dislike the term 'graphic novel', dismissing it as a mere marketing tool and preferring instead the unpretentious 'comic book', a tradition which continues to flourish, not least in the thousands of webcomics and online comics available through the internet. From an international perspective, the growth of comics has been uneven, with sudden and hugely successful bursts of activity that have seen some late developers like post-1945 *manga* in Japan blossoming remarkably quickly, shaped by centuries-old indigenous techniques in printing and painting *and* by the massive importation of Western comics after the Second

World War. These kinds of cultural crossings are becoming increasingly common as publishers seek to find ways to transcend the limits of national markets. As Chute and DeKoven show in some detail, the publishing history of a text like the Iranian author Marjane Satrapi's story of her Tehran and Vienna childhood *Persepolis* (2003) achieving a mass-market first in France and subsequently in the United States in English translation and again as an animated film, is a fascinating example of what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have dubbed 'remediation', the transfer of narrative possibilities from one medium to another.[10]

Bolter and Grusin's argument suggests that the encounter of new media technologies with old leads to a complex process of redefinition affecting both form and content, which would now include adaptations for theatre, film, television, comic books and video games. But we would also want to include here official and unlicensed sequels to already well-worn texts, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, where the aim is to provide a supplement that invokes and recapitulates the original while moving the storyline forward for readers in new times. 'Late' remediation can be said to differ substantially from the 'early' remediation of the 1900s in the sheer range of possibilities for recycling narratives that twenty-first-century digital technologies have placed at our disposal. There are no better examples of this process than the adventure games and interactive fiction discussed by Brenda Silver in Chapter 11, narrative structures that can be accessed via one's home computer, in which texts that owe their inspiration to bestselling authors like J. R. R. Tolkien and Douglas Adams, or to new film series like *Toy Story* (1995–2010), acquire a radically new format.

It is not that bestsellers and blockbusters no longer matter. A glance at a trade publication like *The Bookseller* reveals that publishers and bookshops continue to be obsessed with sales figures of individual titles and the fact that Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has been the UK's biggest-selling paperback of all time carries enormous weight. There is as yet not enough work that attempts to examine the social lives of popular texts as they move across continents, their sales figures carefully tracked by the marketing departments of publishing conglomerates.[11] This lack of knowledge contributes to the sense of mystery that haunts the bestseller: its elusiveness, its unpredictability, its incalculable impact. For while genres like science fiction stubbornly persist, the bestseller is characterised by ephemerality and inconstancy. As Fred Botting observes in Chapter 9, the phenomenon of the bestseller, borrowing from each and every genre and medium, sticking to the well-worn groove of success, yet requiring something new to whet the jaded palate, capitalising on the signifiers of a

success that may not yet even have occurred – 'an international bestseller' (or so the publisher hopes) – finally defies any single explanation.

But some commentators see even the bestseller as having passed its peak. According to this view, the opportunities afforded by electronic inventories to monitor and track transactions has accentuated the differences between the two tendencies within popular fiction that we noted earlier in this introduction: on the one hand the definition of the popular by a mass audience; on the other, the subdivision of that audience into distinct groups, which follow particular forms or genres. This produces a split between those books that appear in the weekly charts and those bought by the large but fragmented readership that, taken to its extreme, dissolves into a multiplicity of specialised niche markets, or what business analyst Chris Anderson has called 'the long tail' of the distribution of cultural goods.[12] Anderson's point is that internet-based sales can be based upon electronically tagged back catalogues of items (books, music downloads, DVDs, etc.) that are cheap to stock and make it possible to make an acceptable profit on transactions with a very small number of buyers. Indeed, for some critics it is the latter trend that now defines the emergent reality of the economics of contemporary popular culture. So, according to Michael Denning, while 'the capital invested in culture is more concentrated than ever, cultural commodities appear less centralized, less concentrated' and their audiences increasingly resemble 'a series of elaborate, interlocking subcultures, each with their own market share'.[13] If Denning's remarks represent at best only a partial truth, the implications of the digital inventory upon the study of popular fiction are nevertheless profound; and, not surprisingly, one can certainly discern a renewed interest in questions of consumption and circulation in recent years. It also offers a valuable corrective to overconfident talk of a global culture – that imaginary home to the international bestseller. For not only do the weekly charts vary from country to country, but the bestselling 'fiction' lists are compiled along quite different lines. India, like Japan, includes memoirs, essays and historical biography in its fiction charts, for example, with books on child-rearing alongside Bridget Jones and Dennis Lehane, as well as 'local' authors like Rohinton Mistry and Shashi Tharoor.[14]

This blurring of the distinction between matters of fact, public opinion and fiction leads us to ask: what capacity for transformation do popular narratives possess? At what point might the dialectic between the comforts of familiarity and the possibilities of the new create the conditions for cultural change? And can the audience for popular narratives ever become the locus of a desire for a better world? One answer must be that if it did not at least imply the possibility that readers might become the authors of their

own future, fiction would have no appeal at all, let alone be popular. However, it should be pointed out that this view, often counterposed to versions of the popular consumer as dupe, depends on a democratic and transformative view of society. A more conservative account might well choose to emphasise the normative structures of popular narratives and play down the principle of hope as an entertaining form of escapism. However, to think in terms of 'subcultures', the category that best describes the terrain occupied by the pulps, graphic novels, computer gaming and fan fictions, is to begin to see how readerships come to shift towards a new collective sense of who they are. While the lesbian pulps of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, were originally published with the ostensible aim of titillating straight men, their availability also created a space for an emergent, public lesbian identity. Similarly, graphic novels emerged out of the confluence of comic strips in the commercial press and the counter-culture of cartoons and pop art, demonstrating what Chute and DeKoven call 'the power of visualizing the suppressed and unspoken', with results that have been both subversive and popular. It is within these highly charged contexts that questions of cultural transformation begin to become inseparable from a language of cultural and aesthetic value, a point that moves to the forefront of analysis in the last two chapters of this Companion. For if comics and interactive games begin life as commodities that can be bought and sold across a range of cultural markets, they simultaneously create a community of enthusiasts – practitioners, readers, fans and critics – organised around a belief in the artistry *and* the political urgency of these texts and practices. As in the past, the remaking of popular fiction not only brings into being new sorts of stories, but also sets in play new modes of public discourse and debate.

NOTES

1 See 'The Weekly Charts' in *The Guardian Saturday Review*, 3 July 2010, p. 17, based upon data supplied by Nielsen BookScan.
2 Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 22–3.
3 Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 227–40, 228. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses in the text.
4 See Franco Moretti, 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', *Modern Language Quarterly* 61:1 (March 2000): 207–27.
5 Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 185.
6 Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature' (2000), reprinted in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 151.

7 Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 1. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses in the text.
8 See Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Methuen, 1982); Jean Radford (ed.), *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
9 See, however, Ien Ang, *Watching 'Dallas': Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1985).
10 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
11 For a useful recent account of sales and marketing, see Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
12 Chris Anderson, *The Longer Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand* (updated and expanded edn. London: Random House Business Books, 2009).
13 Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 102.
14 'What the World is Reading: Love and Accountants and Growing Old', *The Economist*, 1 August 2002.