SYLVA FISCHEROVÁ
JIŘÍ STARÝ (EDS.)

ANCIENT WEEDS

CONTOURS OF POPULAR AND TRASH LITERATURE IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL TIMES

KAROLINUM

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This volume is based on the monograph *Starodávné bejlí. Obrysy populární a brakové literatury ve starověku a středověku*, published in Czech in 2016. The monograph is the result of the research project *Formula Fiction: "Trivial" and "Pulp" Genres in the Context of Historical Development and Concepts of Popular Culture*, undertaken at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University (for details, see the introductory study, p. 46).

The studies published in the Czech monograph have not been translated mechanically from Czech into English; for the purposes of this volume, they have been adapted for an international audience and updated by their authors. A great deal of attention has been paid to ensure consistency of terminology. Due to the nature of the project, the book does not consist of the *disiecta membra* of individual studies; on the contrary, the authors have tried to link the book by means of mutual references. They also worked closely with the translators during the translation process.

The following is a list of the names of the translators and the chapters translated.

Kateřina Šebková translated the following chapters:
Early Christian Martyrologic Texts: Between Topoi and Entertaining Reading (*Iva Adámková*)
Coal-Biters and Their Journey Out: Popular Features of Old Norse Short Narratives (*Kristýna Králová*)
Formula Theatralis: Formulaic Elements and Structures in Central European Medieval Religious Drama (*Martin Bažil*)
The Highest Lady and the Cycle of Praise: Alfonso X's Attempt to Create Literature "for the People" (*Matouš Jaluška*)
A "Not Very Specific Term": Late Medieval Popular Literature (*Lucie Doležalová*)
Romances of the Blind as Pulp Fiction (*Juan Sánchez; the verses of the romances of the blind were translated from Spanish to English by Matthew Sweney and Daniel Esparza*)

Andrew J. Hauner and Sylva Fischerová translated following chapters:
Ancient and Modern Weeds: An Attempt at a Definition (*Sylva Fischerová*)

The Ancient Love Novel: Formula and Its Innovation (*Sylva Fischerová*)

Naďa Abdallaová (together with Robert Michael Baugh and Karolína Klibániová) translated the chapter The Author, Schema and Originality: The Case of Old Norse Lying Sagas (*Jiří Starý*)

The studies Popular Literature and Pulp Fiction in Ancient Egypt (*by Jiří Janák and Renata Landgráfová*) and The Paradox of High Popular Art and Formulaic Creativity in the Sagas of Icelanders (*by Slavica Ranković*) were originally written in English and translated into Czech for the Czech volume.

The publication of this book has been made possible by the PROGRES and COOPERATIO programmes carried out at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague.

Sylva Fischerová and Jiří Starý

ANCIENT AND MODERN WEEDS: AN ATTEMPT AT A DEFINITION

SYLVA FISCHEROVÁ

1. A (TRIVIAL) DEFINITION

Popular literature as well as so-called low literature often tend to be viewed and evaluated in the manner which the following definition, from a publication about literature for children and young adults, proposes:

> Trivial literature can be generally described as a type of mass product functioning exclusively as entertainment and relaxation, void of creative inventiveness, originality and artistic quality, distinguishing itself by conventional approaches, attractive subject matters, understandability in terms of content, an uncomplicated, illusory and idealised portrayal of reality, syuzhet schemes and stereotypes, simplified character developments, happy endings, a one-sided orientation towards adventure plotlines, an unusual setting and linguistic clichés.[1]

This kind of literature is thus characterised, first, by the amount of production, i.e., by a mass occurrence[2] that presupposes being favoured or popular; second, by its function (which is here exclusively that of entertainment and relaxation; elsewhere we read of an escapist function);[3] third, by its form and content, which are focused on by the somewhat verbose remainder of the definition where we find, on the one hand, conventionality, syuzhet schemes and stereotypes, simplified character developments, linguistic clichés and happy endings, and, on the other hand, an orientation towards adventure plotlines, attractive subject matters and unusual settings. This kind of literature *en bloc* is denied creative inventiveness, originality and artistic quality and, on the contrary, is attributed an idealised and illusory portraying of reality.

It would of course be possible to proceed from a different definition, but – as illustrative of a textbook perspective on the phenomena under scrutiny – the present characterisation will undoubtedly suffice, albeit with a few

1 Toman, *Trivialita a kýč v literatuře pro děti a mládež*, p. 3–4. Unless stated otherwise, all quoted texts are translated by Andrew J. Hauner and the author.

2 The terms mass production, mass culture etc. are discussed further in the text.

3 Cf. Cawelti, *Adventure*, p. 13–15.

addenda. First, this literature is to be distinguished by purposiveness and tendentiousness (ideological, political or generally "in the ethos of servitude towards one-sided attitudes and patterns of behaviour";[4] hence the German label "Konformliteratur"[5]).

Second, it is necessary to integrate this type of literature into the wider context of popular culture as a whole. Popular culture texts (the expression being applicable to all of popular culture's products, not only to literary products) are usually seen "as easily understood, simplistic, and formulaic. On a continuum stretching from formula to innovation, popular culture texts are most often closer to the formula than to the innovation pole. So the study of popular culture is especially concerned with genres, stereotypes, conventions, codes and rules."[6] Under the wide umbrella of pop culture, then, what can be included is a mix, spanning from commercials for Coca-Cola and potato chips all the way – via music, films and TV series – to Garfield, James Bond and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* – or, in other words, that whole "way of life we inherit, practice, and pass down on to our descendants";[7] all this is spiced, moreover, with a debate on the topic of how culture as a whole ought to be defined.[8] From a different perspective the phenomenon of "the popular" extends from "original" folk cultures right up to modern mass-culture; what is also at issue is the distinction between mass and popular (since, according to a host of authors, mass culture is only turned into popular culture by its recipients, as we shall see later).[9] From the point of view of production and commerce – which is a viewpoint that surely is not negligible – popular culture can be seen as a hybrid product that is formed, on the one hand, by a popular demand for entertainment and enjoyment and, on the other hand, by producers' efforts to engage the widest possible audience and take over the market. At the same time, if we have thus integrated popular literature into the wider context of popular culture, we can take yet another step and also connect it to the discipline known as "cultural studies," which has both its own history[10] and its own specific thematic and methodological problems. What is unmistakable

4 Zbytovský, *K německému triviálnímu románu v Čechách*, p. 133.
5 Nutz, *Der Trivialroman, seine Formen und Hersteller*.
6 Hinds, *A Holistic Approach to the Study of Popular Culture*, p. 169.
7 Browne, *Popular Culture as the New Humanities*, p. 75.
8 See e.g., Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*; Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 1 ff. What captures this well is S. Hall's bon mot: "I have almost as many problems with 'popular' as I have with 'culture'" (Hall, *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, p. 508).
9 This idea is developed by Fiske, Willis, de Certeau etc. in their respective works; cf. further in the section that deals with the reader.
10 Along with Culler (*Literary Theory*, p. 44 f.) we can summarise that modern cultural studies are of a double origin: on the one hand, they flow from 1960s French structuralism – on the other, from British Marxism-oriented literary theory (the works of R. Williams and R. Hoggart, the founders of Birmingham's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was infamously

is its sociological (or econo-political) dimension, as well as certain emphasis – that is more a product of the history of the discipline than something stemming from the matter itself – on modern times and the contemporary.

Third, another frequent claim one may encounter, in view of popular literature/culture,[11] bespeaks the time-period of its inception. These phenomena supposedly only start appearing in the 19th and 20th centuries (or arrive with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century) and later receive the label of mass culture. In connection to the spread of literacy during the abovementioned era and also thanks to the spread of free-time institutions into other layers of society, a new reader emerges, that is, a "simpler" reader. In other words, what we have here is certain "reading for maids," as it was designated, about a hundred years ago, by the Czech writer Karel Čapek.[12]

The whole matter, then, comes across as being ostensibly uncomplicated and nearly trivial. But at the very least there is one thing that ought to keep us alert and watchful, and that is the looseness of the terms for the given type of literature in different languages: *popular literature, genre fiction, pulp literature, junk literature, trash literature* and *formula fiction* in English;[13] *Trivialliteratur, Unterhaltungsliteratur, Schemaliteratur, Schmutzliteratur, Afterliteratur* and *Schundliteratur* in German;[14] the French, then, preferring the expression *paralittérature*,[15] which is joined by the Italians (*paraletteratura*), in whose case, however, we also find the expression *letterattura di consumo*.[16] What is more, the English term *popular literature/popular culture* has a double meaning, as the adjective *popular* signifies "popular" in the sense of "favourite" as well as "of the folk." This can be read as reference to the sphere of folklore and folk culture mentioned above. From this vantage point – and in view of the context of pop-culture studies and cultural studies – the phenomenon of the popular and the pulp does not come across as an unambiguously defined

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and in a somewhat embarrassing way closed in 2002 after nearly 40 years of existence; another scholar who worked in the Center was S. Hall).

11 Even though popular literature is at the centre of our focus, for methodological reasons it is also necessary to relate to popular literature as a component of popular culture; hence in what follows there is occasional switching over to the more general concept of popular/mass/folk culture.

12 Čapek, *Poslední epos*.

13 Terms used in English are discussed e.g., by Meskin, *Popular Fiction*, p. 117 f.

14 For German terminology see Zbytovský, *K německému triviálnímu románu v Čechách*, p. 132.

15 Couégnas, *Introduction à la paralittérature*; Arnaud, Lacassin, Tortel (eds.), *Entretiens sur la paralittérature*. A nice anecdote that illustrates how loosely the terms have been used in different languages is told by Burke: In the early 1970s "the phrase *culture populaire* sometimes meant bringing high culture to the people. Even in 1973, when a conference on *popular culture* – in the English sense – was held at the University of East Anglia, the French participants only discovered the difference in usage on arrival," Burke, *Revolution in Popular Culture*, p. 45.

16 See Pecere, Stramaglia (eds.), *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino*; Fusillo, *Il romanzo antico comme paraletteratura?*

whole; rather, it is somewhat reminiscent of *weeds*. It cannot be succinctly defined; it strives to grow everywhere; its aesthetic value is problematic (as is its practical one); and it ignores borders between gardens. In any case, it was as an "imprecise hybrid" – which can also easily be read in terms of botany – that mass culture was designated in the 1960s by Umberto Eco.[17]

2. A DEFINITION: HOW TO REACH A MORE APPROPRIATE ONE

2.1 TO WHAT END, OR, FUNCTION AND IDEOLOGY

The definition presented above will now be discussed in more detail, beginning with the function and the purpose of works of this kind. The primary function of this type of literature is – as quoted above – to offer an escape as well as entertainment. For now let us set aside entertainment and pause at the concept of escape (which is already at first glance suspicious) and the related strategy of escapism. According to C. S. Lewis, one of the founders of the fantasy genre, "there is a clear sense in which all reading whatever is an escape. It involves a temporary transference of the mind from our actual surroundings to things merely imagined or conceived. This happens when we read history or science no less than when we read fictions. All such escape is *from* the same thing: immediate, concrete actuality. The important question is what we escape *to*."[18] In this way we arrive at the character of the text that is being read and not at a strategy of escape as such. "Escapism" is, in short, a highly projective category, and this is something we ought to be aware of. In the same vein, Roberts adds in response to those who like to label the readers of certain types of works with the dishonouring reproach of escapism: "We readers should have learned by now that the word escape is safe to use only when we are using it about ourselves. It is dangerous when we use it to explain the reading preferences of other people."[19] But in this context what is spoken of is not only escape; one may also encounter by far more cutting formulations: "The individual motifs that lead them [scil. the mass consumers] to reading trivial literature need not be the same …, but they end up at a question that is perhaps the most fundamental to the problematics of free time for the members of contemporary mass society. It is the necessity of somehow filling up the emptiness of the I."[20]

17 Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*, p. 12.
18 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 68.
19 Roberts, *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*, p. 96.
20 Grebeníčková, *O literatuře nízké, zábavné a masové*, p. 102. Further on in the same study, the author writes about "'hygienic reading' for moments of relaxation, tiredness, emptiness" (p. 107).

It is especially the utility of these works that is attacked. Collingwood, a typical exponent of elitism, counterpointed against works of art proper so-called amusement art, which he reproved for instrumentality and for purposedly limiting its aims: "The work of art, so called, which provides the amusement, is … strictly utilitarian. Unlike a work of art proper, it has no value in itself; it is simply means to an end. It is as skilfully constructed as a work of engineering, as skilfully compounded as a bottle of medicine, to produce a determinate and preconceived effect, the evocation of a certain kind of emotion in a certain kind of audience."[21] However, the principle of amusement implies, according to Collingwood, a division of experience into a "real" part and a part that is "pretend" or artificial; the emotions we acquire in this latter part remain settled but there and do not spill over into matters of "real" life. The bifurcation is perfect, and the consumer of works of amusement is characterised by "an inability to take any interest in the affairs of ordinary life, the necessary work of livelihood and social routine."[22]

What works of popular literature/culture do is often, however, repeatedly associated not only with the creation of these partial emotions and amusement but also with myths and dreams. The designation of Hollywood as a dream factory has long since become an overused cliché, but even popular culture as a whole can be understood as a "collective dream world"[23] or, better yet: popular culture "has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us."[24] Except that during this process something has happened to our dreams: they have been given a shape, a certain desire strategy has been formulated – all on the basis of a supposed sensibility of the masses and a new mythopoetics (which of course departs from the old one, from those constants of human nature that represent woman-man-hero-superhero and the like and that reliably elicit enjoyment, arousal or pleasurable fright). Despite the above-mentioned constancy of human nature, changes still occur. As Eco points out, the characters who earlier functioned as archetypes, i.e., as the sums of "certain collective aspirations" and desires, must necessarily become either immobilised in an emblematic and fixed nature or subjected to a development which is typical originally of novelistic characters.[25] This absolutising claim, however, may be called into question – at least after having examined the archetypes that we know from Greek mythopoetics and that are much more heterogeneous and much more dramatically structured than is claimed by a "monolithic" stylisation of the sort they are tirelessly endowed

21 Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, p. 81. Clearly, the reproach is based on a series of arbitrary aesthetic assumptions.
22 Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, p. 94 f.
23 Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 9.
24 Maltby, *Dreams for Sale*, p. 14.
25 Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*, p. 233.

with by all kinds of literary theory books.[26] Nevertheless, we are witnesses to a bricolage-based effort and combinational work in this area, too, and every introduction to popular culture has its obligatory special chapter or chapters dedicated to the myths the audience is lusting after and to their analyses from all sorts of methodological positions, psychoanalytical ones included, spanning from Freud to Lacan and Žižek.[27]

Another concept we come into contact with in connection to the function and purpose of popular literature can be labeled with the term "literature for the people."[28] "In addition to commercially distributed amusement literature directly dependent upon the public's imagination, taste and needs rather than upon the institutions and norms of elite culture (let us call it 'folk literature'), what has taken off is a 'literature for the people,' educational or agitational, coming into existence under the patronage of erudite circles, churches, states, various political movements, often expressing their particular ideological interests," writes Janáček.[29] Although Janáček is referring to no earlier than the Enlightenment and later periods, it is possible to say that this type of literature was produced by probably every society, whether as an instrument for self-affirmation, as a way to secure and affirm its functioning and the validity of its ideology, or conversely as an instrument for new ideological changes, as we also ultimately gather from the contributions in this volume. An important role has always been played by the texts' expressiveness and effectiveness: e.g., within the genre of medieval exempla we often find very amusing stories which can in and of themselves be described as amusing, but they are always followed by a moral maxim which they elucidate and illustrate. "The combination of a funny story with a serious moral can be striking and it can be difficult to believe that such exempla were ever taken seriously";[30] but the mixture of entertainment and usefulness (*delectatio et utilitas*) is omnipresent in medieval textual culture, comments L. Doležalová.[31] Let us also emphasise that although the strategies varied, "literature for the people" and "folk literature" competed for the same

26 According to Scholes and Kellogg, Homer's characters are monolithic and stark; the authors compare them to "the Druid stones of Wessex," Scholes, Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, p. 163.

27 See, e.g., Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, chapter: *Psychoanalysis*, p. 91–109.

28 I have drawn the term from a discussion devoted to the beginnings of Czech prose fiction in the 19th century, see Vodička, *Počátky krásné prózy novočeské*, p. 330. Vodička writes about a stratum of literature that "artificially mediates between artistically more elevated structures and popular literary customs in the hopes of finding the means by which it might get closer to the popular reader." According to Vodička, its counterpoint are "books for popular reading," which amount to a standardised and continually reissued product, the kind that has already attained resonance in popular milieu, like *cantastorias*.

29 Janáček, *Literární brak*, p. 46.

30 Doležalová, *Pulp Fiction in Medieval Latin Literature?*, p. 91.

31 Ibid., p. 91.

readership. No wonder that the authors of "literature for the people" were programmatically and critically in opposition to books for popular reading. To this extent, M. J. Sychra, the Czech writer active during the Czech National Revival in the first half of the 19th century, called such books for popular reading "muck" and "barren chatter."[32] Later, the attack is aimed directly "against blood-curdlers" with the following argumentation:

> The blood-curdler, the opium of Europe's pariah. A material that is unsightly, sticky, of a disgusting odour, inedible to the unaccustomed mouth, but briskly inebriating, ridding the eater of any sense of reality and carrying him over to the world of monsters. An opiophagist (opium consumer) worker has returned home from the workshop; a shoemaker-cobbler has gotten up from his bench; a seamstress has topped the sewing machine with its cover. While at work all three of them had been craving this moment. They have dinner quickly, light their lamps and are no sooner sitting by a heap of bound papers and giving themselves over to their intoxicant enjoyment. … Before you could count to ten, the opiophagist has left this world and is walking the world of brigands and monsters – the world of his heroes, the realm of his beauty. … Boys who go on to steal their fathers' savings books, setting out along with a couple of friends on a research trip to Africa which usually ends in Prague at the police station, tend to almost always be reared by blood-curdlers. And crude criminals, brigands and murderers tend to be reared by them quite often.[33]

The process of functioning presented above can thus be viewed as an instrument for conceptual indoctrination (and, consequently, for the maintaining of the status quo on the basis of manufacturing consent – according to the designation popularised by N. Chomsky in his propaganda model),[34] whether we are dealing with a modern society, a medieval European Christian society (where the opposite conceptual pole is formed at first by the cult of pagan gods, then by Christian heresy and afterwards by the mutual rivalry between Catholicism and Protestantism) or, for example, an ancient Egyptian society. We are thereby also smoothly transitioning to the realm of ideology or poli-

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32 Sychra especially disliked Till Eulenspiegel; I am quoting from Vodička, *Počátky krásné prózy novočeské*, p. 330.

33 K. Scheinpflug's philippic presented above is an advertising text printed repeatedly on the last page of each booklet of Karel Sabina's work *Oživené hroby* published by the *Románová knihovna of Zář Magazine* in 1908; the publisher was naturally concerned with propagating their own products, that is, especially novels from the revolutionary year of 1848. Bohemia and Moravia are at this point still a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the revolutionary year of 1848 functions as a marked political symbol. *Zář Magazine* has been published by the Press Committee of the Czechoslavonic Social Democratic Workers' party.

34 Chomsky, Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*; the authors were primarily concerned with mass media and their ideological effect on readers, but the mechanism is also relevant to a different context. For a concise summary see Danesi, *Popular Culture*, p. 42 f.

tics. It is no coincidence that popular culture has been designated as a concept political by its nature while cultural studies have been called "ideological studies."[35] According to Gramsci, whose opinions began influencing cultural studies once the English translation of his *Prison Notebooks* was published in 1971, there exists in every culture a current of dominant meanings striving for hegemony, which we can define as the process of creating, maintaining and reproducing authoritative meanings, ideologies and practices with a duration that is of course only temporary. By means of this strategy, the ruling class not only justifies its dominance but also gains the active consent of the ruled. However, ideological functioning is not (as opposed to the above-quoted idea of "tendentiousness" and the "Konformliteratur" label) simple or purely unidirectional in the way the author of the attack "Against Blood-Curdlers" would have liked to have seen it.[36] On the contrary, we can observe (since the 1980s) a tendency of questioning the notion that readers unproblematically accept the ideological call: meaning is always renegotiated by the reader or recipient. Consequently, modern popular stories qua products of the pop culture industry, which plays an important role in this process, should not be understood exclusively as forms of deception, manipulation or social control or even expressions of a true "people's" culture that opposes the given dominant culture, scholars point out. These works should be viewed in a dynamic way: as contested terrain, a field of cultural conflict, of conflicting rhetorics, accents and masks, as a sphere within which what is being established is a certain discourse owing to the practices that correspond to the interests of the ruling elite.[37] The theory of hegemony enables us to understand popular culture in a complex and gradated way, that is to say, as a "'negotiated' mix of what is made both from 'above' and from 'below,' both 'commercial' and 'authentic'; a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation. This can be analyzed in many different configurations: class, gender, ethnicity, 'race,' region, religion, disability, sexuality etc. From this perspective, popular culture is a contradictory mix of competing interests and values: neither middle nor working class, neither racist nor non-racist, neither sexist nor non-sexist, neither homophobic nor homophilic … but always a shifting balance between the two – what Gramsci calls 'a compromise equilibrium.'"[38]

35 Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 2; 10.
36 Gramsci, *Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State*.
37 See Denning, *Mechanic Accents*.
38 Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 82.

2.2 FOR WHOM, OR, THE READER

The sphere of ideological activity is – from the very nature of the matter – tightly intertwined with the sphere of the reader's (or in general the user's) reception or with "reading modes," being *de facto* inseparable from them. One of the modes has just been introduced: It is the effort to reveal within the pop-cultural text the ruling class' ideology, which the scientist can then unmask and analyse. A noteworthy conceptualisation of the various modes of communication occurring between the reader and the text, which further develops Gramsci's analyses, was put forward in the 1970s by Stuart Hall. Hall delineates three main variants of the encoding and decoding occurring in media discourse. The reader can accept the offered dominant interpretation (the dominant/hegemonic position) and identify with the author's/producer's aim. In the middle lies the so-called negotiated position, that is, a reading along the lines of the "stipulated" code during which a part of the content is indeed questioned by the reader/consumer, though not the content as a whole, and the reader modifies the text in a way that reflects their own experiences and interests. The extreme position is then represented by an oppositional reading: The text is viewed as the product of a system which the recipient is at continual odds with, and although they understand the offered codes, they refuse to accept them.[39]

Consequently, we might view popular culture not so much as unsubtly ideologically conformist but rather as a site of contest and resistance in regard to dominant meanings (in other words, as the contested terrain already mentioned). Fiske comments on the matter in the following way: "In fact, I would argue that there cannot be popular meanings or popular pleasures which are not formed in some relationship to a dominant ideology, whether that relationship be one of resistance, or one of escape or evasion. If the dominant is not there in some form to be opposed or evaded, there is very little popular pleasure involved. The *social* practices of the subordinated are shaped by their relationship to the forces of domination, and so must their *reading* practices as well."[40] And furthermore: "The main gain is pleasure and a sense of self-control, or at least control over some of the conditions of one's existence. While this does not explain everything that is going on, I think that pleasure is certainly a very powerful motivator for people to engage in this business of production of popular culture."[41]

John Fiske carries the analysis further; in his conceptualisation of the phenomena under investigation, he links up with Roland Barthes – another

39 Hall, *Encoding/Decoding*, p. 174–175.
40 *An Interview with John Fiske*, p. 5. I have reproduced the italics in the interview's text.
41 Ibid.

great inspirer of pop-cultural studies – and his by now classic distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" (*lisible – scriptible*) texts, that is, between texts that are meant "only" for reading and texts that try to turn the reader into the writer.[42] In developing this distinction, Fiske establishes a third category of texts, namely that of *producerly texts*. These are, according to him, necessary to describe a *popular writerly text* which is a text whose *writerly reading* is not necessarily difficult and which does not challenge the reader to search it for (hidden) meaning.[43] A *producerly text* has, according to Fiske, "the accessibility of a readerly one, and can theoretically be read in that easy way by those of its readers who are comfortably accommodated within the dominant ideology, but it also has the openness of the writerly. The difference is that it does not require this writerly activity, nor does it set the rules to control it. Rather, it offers itself up to popular production; it exposes, however reluctantly, the vulnerabilities, limitations, and weaknesses of its preferred meanings; it contains, while attempting to repress them, voices that contradict the ones it prefers; it has loose ends that escape its control, its meanings exceed its own power to discipline them, its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them – it is, in a very real sense, beyond its own control."[44] This statement leads Fiske to an interesting thesis: "*Popular text is an agent and resource, not an object*,"[45] and in this way popular culture is understood as an *agens* or, let us say, a *re-agens*, but not as a mere passive *obiectum*. Readers of popular texts are from here on producers of culture, not its passive consumers: a popular text functions for the reader as a battle between openness and closeness, between readerly and producerly, between the homogeneity of prioritised meanings and the heterogeneity of their readings. At the same time, the texts of this kind still have to offer – as they do – "popular meanings and pleasures."[46]

If we permit ourselves certain extrapolation, we can, according to Petr A. Bílek, define pulp (or junk) – when compared to popular texts – as "disciplined," trying to eliminate its own contradictions and produce meanings for readers who are not ready to produce them. Pulp (or junk) limits those plural patterns to a minimum. In other words, there exists a discernible dividing line: If the excessive mode is saved, then the result is a work of popular culture, if – on the contrary – it is modified and pacified into the form of stabilised clichés, then what results is junk.[47]

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42 Barthes, *S/Z*.
43 Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 103.
44 Ibid., p. 104.
45 Ibid., p. 124.
46 Ibid., p. 126 f.
47 This was a distinction introduced by Petr A. Bílek, literary theorist, during a workshop entitled *Pulp in Literature, Science and Popular Culture* that was held in Prague in November of 2012.

Fiske, however, emphasises that the creators of these kinds of products usually fail to create works of popular culture: from among what they offer to film and television studios (and in an analogical manner we can say the same of all texts), the majority will in the end still fall short in regard to the audience. People simply do not like it, and this is what the creators are unable to configure in advance. "The industry does not know which of its products will be taken up and made into popular culture. If it did, it wouldn't produce the rest."[48] Configuring this liking and enjoyment derived from consumption involves actively and participatively plugging into the text: the making of popular culture by the recipients, not by the producers.

No wonder that Fiske has been criticised for his overly open attitude to popular culture and accused of "cultural populism," of a romanticising and sentimental approach towards the object of his study.[49] His (and similar) explanatory strategies tend to be designated as a "populist celebration of existing popular forms";[50] Fiske conducts a "simple inversion of the mass culture critique at its worst"[51] and his work "represents all that is going bad in work on popular culture," thus becoming a real threat to cultural studies.[52]

Fiske's approach (the critique and further implications of which are something we shall return to in the end of this section) is again primarily anchored in older and general concepts not directly developed in popular culture studies: they are namely the analyses by the Constance School (Iser's and Jauss' works, the "implied reader," the "horizon of expectation," etc.), analyses by the French poststructuralists, by the Frankfurt School philosophers, and Umberto Eco's "open work," which fashions a spectrum between closeness and openness while the text functions as a system of the reader's competences that the text not only presupposes but itself also generates. Meanwhile, each reader is characterised by a complex hierarchy of their needs.[53] We should also mention the influence of Michel de Certeau and especially his *L'invention du quotidien* published in 1980 (and in 1984 in its English mutation *The Practice of Everyday Life*).[54] The work is based on research that was financed between 1974–77 by the French Ministry of Culture;[55] in the book, de Certeau convincingly shows the consumer of all kinds of products not as a passive recipient but as an active participant in the entire process, who themselves, by means

48 *An Interview with John Fiske,* p. 4. See also Mott, *Is There a Best Seller Formula?*
49 McGuigan, *Trajectories of Cultural Populism.*
50 Webster, *Pessimism, Optimism, Pleasure*, p. 591.
51 McGuigan, *Trajectories of Cultural Populism*, p. 607.
52 This sharp criticism was addressed to Fiske by M. Barker in his review of Fiske's works; I am quoting from Webster, *Pessimism, Optimism, Pleasure*, p. 591.
53 Eco, *Open Work* (the original published in 1962).
54 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien; The Practice of Everyday Life.*
55 More details in de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, p. XXXIV.

of their approach, help make "the work" – although not strategically, i.e., not from the position of the person "dictating" the form of the battle, but tactically, never fully determined by the plans of organising bodies. According to de Certeau, readers or recipients are "travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like *nomads* poaching their way across fields they did not write."[56] De Certeau formulates a "polemological" analysis of culture and describes the recipients' creativity as dissipated, tactical and of bricolage character (following Lévi-Strauss);[57] his concept of *braconnerie*, of textual poaching, has become important and influential in cultural studies.[58]

However, there are also more specific ways to do research into popular culture recipients. It is, for example, J. Radway's study that points out the methodological deceptiveness of the whole enterprise. In following the concept of so-called interpretive communities, which had been elaborated by Stanley Fish, and after meeting the editor of a small fanzine for the women readers of romances in a small Pennsylvania town, she began researching this Pennsylvanian community, doing so by interviewing individual women readers. They remain anonymous to us, as does the town itself, renamed Smithton. Radway considers their reading of romances a therapeutic activity, having the value of "symbolic resistance" and protest against their life circumstances – i.e., against the situations in which they find themselves in their real lives, and she interprets her readers' attitudes in terms of the psychoanalytical theories of N. Chodorow.[59] But as Ang remarks, there is quite a catch to this: *Reading the Romance* is a report on the encounter between a feminist academic and (non-feminist) romance readers, so what occurs during the research is "the deromanticization of the romance in favor of a romanticized feminism," which is supposed to appear to the women in question as the only appropriate therapy and a departure point from the given status quo.[60] Ang herself garnered renown for her research into those watching the television series Dallas in Holland in the 1980s. Her research strategy was nevertheless notably different from that of J. Radway. She placed a short advertisement in a newspaper, which contained the following "confession": "I like watching the TV series Dallas but often get odd reactions to it. Would anyone like to write and tell me why you like watching it too, or dislike it?" Her advertisement was responded to by about 40 viewers, mostly fans of the show (but not exclusively), and their letters demonstrate very differenti-

56 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, p. 251.
57 De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, p. XLIV; XL.
58 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.
59 Radway, *Reading the Romance*.
60 Ang, *Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure*, p. 586. Another author who gained fame with research into women's novels and their readers is Tania Modleski; overall, this is a specific component of pop-cultural studies, which for obvious reasons we cannot focus more closely on here.

ated user strategies as well as the specificity of the reception of this work precisely in Holland, i.e., not in its "domestic" American environment.[61] In another research project devoted to the *Dallas* series, as many as 400 viewers of the series from six different cultures were examined.[62]

The number of spontaneously arising and increasingly diverse communities sharing their pop-cultural impressions and experiences (just like the aforementioned "interpretive community" in "Smithton," Pennsylvania) continues to grow very quickly – especially after the onset of the internet. We are confronted here with a set of subcultures in which the *modus vivendi* of their adherents is formed by pop-culture in all its forms and sizes. This fan culture – or participatory culture – has managed to produce all sorts of fanzines, cons, LARPs and a huge amount of web pages and internet magazines, which all serve not only to organise their members' free time activities but also to build their identities: to separate fandom from the rest of the world, alias Mundania, which to them is simply alien – like from some other planet.[63] The central pop-cultural storylines get complemented and further developed here by means of the fan strategies of recontextualisation, refocalisation, genre shift, story elaboration before and after the events of the original narrative, as well as so-called crossover (i.e., the use of elements or characters from one story in a different story), etc.[64] A favourite is slash fiction, the homosexual remakes of the most well-known pop-culture icons (Han Solo and Luke from *Star Wars*, Spock and Kirk from *Star Trek* and even Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy having found their "other" love story here).[65] The most robust and numerous are sci-fi and fantasy fandoms (including the idolised Tolkienian pedestal); concerning the authors of fan fiction remakes, most of them are women, namely white women.[66] The culture of fandoms of every kind has even become a concern of wide scientific attention, undoubtedly for its critical and self-reflecting dimension: "Organized fandom is … an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of mass media and their own

61 Ang, *Watching Dallas*.

62 Liebes, Katz, *The Export of Reading*; see also Hinds, *A Holistic Approach to the Study of Popular Culture*, p. 172–3.

63 Compare, e.g., Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 223 ff.; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

64 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, p.162–177. Considered to be the first deep reflection on the given phenomena, the book has the disadvantage of having been published in 1992, meaning before the internet substantially transformed the face of a good deal, if not the majority, of fan strategies.

65 See, e.g., Kustritz, *Slashing the Romance Narrative*.

66 Jenkins, Martinová, *Psaní jako obranný mechanismus*, p. 20.

relationship to it."[67] It is this active trait of participation that, according to Jenkins, distinguishes adherents to fandoms from de Certeau's textual poachers and their purely tactical approaches.[68] Further proof of this is the fact that fans even organise campaigns so as to force the TV companies to go back to their favourite shows or to change in one way or another already existing shows – and these campaigns tend to be successful![69]

This striving for a maximisation of enjoyment on the part of the users leads to various phenomena that might also be relevant for other spheres and other periods of literature. And if it is true that flipping through fan fiction texts sometimes literally feels like "digging through mud,"[70] then on the contrary the best of these texts can have one advantage that officially edited and distributed texts do not get to share: "I claim that fan fiction has an enormous subversive potential because it does not undergo the same degrees of supervision that other media do," says Jenkins. "It does attain this level of subversiveness at all times. Many texts only reaffirm dominant norms; they can be misogynist, racist and homophobic, … but the best works can change us more than any other contemporary popular creativity."[71]

Even if we consider the preceding statement to be a little bit hyperbolic, the phenomena at stake at the very least confirm the Fiskean thesis about the producerly character of popular culture texts – these works could otherwise not be the source of so many various strategies of the textual remake and of so many different activities. Simultaneously, they undermine Macdonald's notion of a "mass man," an atom in no way different from other atoms that are creating a uniform mass and uniformly consuming mass culture.[72] Unique proof of the reception of pop-cultural texts (of literature, films and advertisements) can be found in the case of none other than Wittgenstein – in various respects.

First: Wittgenstein, who was always exhausted by his Cambridge lectures, often used to rush off to a cinema immediately after the class ended. As Norman Malcolm witnesses: "As the members of the class began to move their chairs out of the room he might look imploringly at a friend and say in a low tone, 'Could you go to a flick?' … He insisted on sitting in the very first row of seats, so that the screen would occupy his entire field of vision, and his

67 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, p. 86. See also Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*; Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, etc.

68 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, p. 45. Let us in this connection also emphasise the peculiar regime of repeated reading as well as its consequences; cf. Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*.

69 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, chapter 4.

70 Abbasová, *Kreativita, nikoli krádež*, p. 5.

71 Jenkins, Martinová, *Psaní jako obranný mechanismus*, p. 21.

72 Macdonald, *A Theory of Mass Culture*, p. 69.

mind would be turned away from the thoughts of the lecture and his feelings of revulsion. Once he whispered to me 'This is like a shower bath!'"[73] What is worth noticing is the fact that Wittgenstein liked American films and despised English ones. "He was inclined to think that there *could not* be a decent English film."[74]

However, this is but a part of Wittgenstein's specific attitude towards popculture. He and his friend Pattisson, who was otherwise a chartered accountant in the City and whom Wittgenstein knew from Cambridge, would cultivate their own shared consumer "rituals." Whenever Wittgenstein passed through London (as he did frequently on his way to and from Vienna, to see his relatives), they would go have tea together at the restaurant Lyons and then visit one of the big cinemas in Leicester Square that was showing a "good" film – this meant, in accordance with Malcolm's testimony quoted above – an American film, preferably a Western, or a musical or a romantic comedy, "but always one without any artistic or intellectual pretensions."[75] In their mutual correspondence they would also – with evident relish and irony – parody the language of advertisement: "Somehow or other," writes Wittgenstein, "one instinctively feels that Two Steeples No. 83 Quality Sock is a real man's sock. It's a sock of taste – dressy, fashionable, comfortable." In a postscript to another of his letters to Pattisson, we read: "You may through my generosity one of these days get a free sample of Glostora the famous hair oil, may your hair always retain that gloss which is so characteristic for well groomed gentlemen."[76] Of considerable interest is likewise the fact that in his letters Wittgenstein would address Pattisson "Dear old Blood," using the blood-curdler adjective "bloody" in them repeatedly and with evident relish (in nearly every letter) and would end letters and postcards with "Yours bloodily" or "Yours in bloodiness/bloodyness (*sic!*), Ludwig."[77]

And yet, there were artifacts of popular culture which attracted Wittgenstein's attention in a rather different way. During the war and in the years that followed, he enjoyed reading American detective magazines which were sent to him by Norman Malcolm, who in the meantime returned from Cambridge to the U.S.A. In his letters to Norman, Wittgenstein repeatedly thanks his former student for sending him the "mags" – and repeatedly asks him to send new ones. The formulations are striking: "If the U.S.A. won't give us detective mags we can't give them philosophy, & so America will be the loser

73 Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 26.
74 The italics is Malcolm's; ibid.
75 Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 266.
76 Ibid., p. 266 f.
77 Ibid., p. 266. Compare also the facsimile postcard, image 38 in the photographic appendix of the book.

in the end." (Letter from 8. 9. 45)[78] "Thanks for the detective mags! They are rich in mental vitamins & calories." (Letter from 15. 12. 45) "When I opened one of your mags it was like getting out of a stuffy room into the fresh air." (Letter from 4. 6. 48)

Wittgenstein even contrasts his favourite "mag" with the Oxford philosophical journal *Mind*: "I am looking forward very much to the mental nourishment you've promised me. If I read your mags I often wonder how anyone can read Mind with all its impotence & bankruptcy when they could read Street & Smyth mags." (Letter from 30. 10. 45) Three years later, we can read the same: "How people can read Mind if they could read Street & Smith beats me. If philosophy has anything to do with wisdom there's certainly not a grain of that in Mind, & quite often a grain in the detective stories." (Letter from 15. 3. 48) His favourite author was especially Norbert Davis. These comments of Wittgenstein's have themselves been repeatedly commented on, even put into connection with his very special way of thinking (sometimes with perhaps over-reaching conclusions).[79]

This example – as a *pars pro toto* – can also serve as an indicator of the wide-ranging debate on the consumption of works of high and popular culture and the difference between the so-called serious reader and the pop-cultural reader. An important role in this debate was played by P. Bourdieu's book *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, published in 1979.[80] The argumentation is quite complicated: it employs a series of specialised terms (e.g., habitus; cultural capital; symbolic capital, etc.) and understands taste as a part of ideological discourse. For our purposes it is significant that Bourdieu here presents a lengthy piece of research into the cultural practices of the French population and concludes that socially hiearchised French society is likewise hiearchised culturally: members of the higher classes consume high culture (in the wide sense of the word) while members of the lower classes consume low culture. It is worth noting that the book was met with cold and very critical reception in the USA.[81] When taking a closer look at at least some of the questionnaires found in the book, the criticism appears justified: If Bourdieu makes a distinction between *le goût légitime*, *le goût "moyen"* and *le goût "populaire"* (legitimate, middle and popular taste), it is difficult to understand which criteria lead him to the fact that, in the world of fine art, Utrillo and Renoir are placed in the middle group and, in the world of music,

78 This and all subsequent quotations from the letters are taken from Malcolm's memoir, see Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*.

79 See, e. g., Zimmermann, *The Philosopher and the Detectives: Ludwig Wittgenstein's Enduring Passion for Hardboiled Fiction;* Hoffmann, *Hard-boiled Wit: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Norbert Davis*; Saler, *Waste Lands and Silly Valleys: Wittgenstein, Mass Culture, and Re-Enchantment*.

80 Bourdieu, *La distinction*. The book's English translation is published in 1984.

81 See Gartman, *Culture as Class Symbolization or Mass Reification*.

Léo Ferré belongs to the first group, whereas Jacques Brel is placed in the middle group.[82] Similarly, too general a distinction – in regard to reader preferences – between classic works and modern works (*ouvrages classiques/ouvrages modernes*) can be seen as lacking any factual value.[83] What then appears rather ridiculous is research into one's "aesthetic disposition" conducted by asking, which of the following subjects would make a beautiful photo, the options being a sunset – a first communion – a pregnant woman – a woman breastfeeding – cabbages – a metal frame etc.[84]

The cold reception of the work – whose theses claimed for themselves general validity – in the USA might have also been influenced by a couple of works published in the USA prior to it. Already in 1964 (on the basis of sociological research) Wilensky maintained that nearly all educated Americans regularly spend time consuming popular culture.[85] Not long before the publication of Bourdieu's *La distinction*, DiMaggio and Useem publish their work based on the processing of more than 230 studies mapping the cultural consumption of Americans.[86]

According to both researchers, "available studies repeatedly and consistently demonstrate that the ranks of those who attend museums and theater, opera, symphony and ballet performances are dominated by the wealthy and well-educated, most of whom are professionals and managers. Blue collar workers and those with little education are virtually absent. By contrast, the popular arts, such as jazz, rock music, and the cinema, are consumed at comparable rates by all social classes. Of the several class dimensions examined, education appears to be the most salient determinant of arts involvement. … Such patterns are not unique to the United States; they have been found in other advanced capitalist societies as well, including Canada, France, England, and the Netherlands."[87]

Nevertheless, the modes of the consumption of cultural capital continue to change. A good amount of studies from the USA – sometimes, however, of a factual value that is rather problematic (judging from the character of

82 Bourdieu, *La distinction*, p. 14 f. Bourdieu does state that under *le goût moyen* fall *les œuvres mineures des arts majeurs* just as *les œuvres majeures des arts mineurs*, but the classification is by no means defined.

83 Bourdieu, *La distinction*, p. 617.

84 Ibid., p. 615.

85 Wilensky, *Mass Society and Mass Culture*.

86 DiMaggio, Useem, *Social Class and Arts Consumption*. As the authors themselves state, in the course of finding out the data they had to contact more than 1,200 (!) institutions.

87 DiMaggio, Useem, *Social Class and Arts Consumption*, p. 156. Abysmal differences in the consumption of high culture are affirmed by data from the state of New York from 1973: 55% of theatre visitors were either managerial or professional, only 2% blue-collar labour (the corresponding numbers for symphonic music are: 51/1; opera: 65/1; ballet: 62/2; art museums: 43/2). People with lower educational levels visited science and history museums instead of art museums (ibid., p. 145 f.).

the sample under scrutiny and the criteria applied) – prove that people of a higher social standing or with higher cultural capital do continue to dedicate themselves to the consumption of works of high art more than people of a lower social standing, but at the same time they have also been dedicating themselves more and more to the consumption of popular art. In short, they have become eclectic, nay, omnivorous, and over the course of time their omnivorousness keeps growing! This process has been tagged by authors with the catchy slogan "from snob to omnivore."[88]

Society as a whole, then, can be depicted in the form of a pyramid whose foundation represents the wide cultural interests of the higher social classes while its apex contains the limited and contracted interests of the lower classes (i.e., people operating with lower cultural capital).[89] From this perspective, popular culture would represent the glue of society: that which brings it together and that which members of the elite, as well as the rest, partake in. On the other hand, elite culture would embody a boundary line: that which divides society. What offers itself up is a parallel with the situation in early modern Europe, which has been commented by P. Burke in the following way: "Thus the crucial cultural difference at early modern Europe… was that between the majority, for whom the popular culture was the only culture, and the minority who had access to the great tradition but participated in the little tradition as a second culture. They were amphibious, bi-cultural, and also bilingual."[90]

There are, however, those who warn of an unjustified generalisation based on statistically acquired data and point out the importance of not merely *what* is being consumed but also *how* it is being consumed (cf. the Wittgenstein example mentioned above). An important contribution in this regard is D. B. Holt's research, realised in the form of interviews conducted with a group of 50 residents of the town of State College, Pennsylvania. Although the sample researched by him is also too small and methodologically assailable, the emphasis the author places on the different modes of consumption

88 Peterson, Kern, *Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore*. Both authors continue in the vein of a ten-year-older piece of research that focuses, though, only on the realm of music; moreover, the sample of respondents is made up of a population that is more than 80% white. Once again, we are facing difficulties with classification, and again we encounter a trichotomy in which popular music is represented by country, bluegrass, gospel, rock and blues. In the middle we find Broadway musicals, big band and easy listening music. Jazz, however, is – just in case – not placed in any of the groups, and the popularity of folk cannot be compared, since in each of the studies genre is defined differently, etc. Nevertheless, their research shows a growth in popularity of popular musical genres on the part of respondents over the course of the last ten years.

89 The schema of two inverted pyramids, one representing social standing, the other cultural consumption, is reproduced along with commentary by Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, p. 47.

90 Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, p. 28.

("different classes can use the same popular cultural objects as resources for different lifestyles")[91] as well as on researching the consumption of not only cultural works but pop-cultural items at large (including food, clothing, interior decoration, free time and vacations, sports, hobbies, mass media viewing habits etc.) appears justified – and in certain areas is reminiscent of the approach adopted by Michel de Certeau and his colleagues in *L'invention du quotidien*.[92] Ted Cohen has gone as far as designating certain works as "bilateral" due to their having bilateral audiences: such a work de facto addresses itself to two different kinds of audience (i.e., to both "high" and "low" audiences), each of which receive it in a different way. As an example of bilateral work, Cohen names the films of Hitchcock, which from this perspective can be listed under both "high" and "low" art.[93]

The highly developed theoretical discourse which maps the reception of pop-cultural texts is thus in no way singular and has in recent decades also become the scene of polemics over its own character as well as the future of popular culture studies. As the embodiment of a critical position towards what we may call the "new orthodoxy" of cultural studies we can read the often quoted words of M. Morris from her study *Banality in Cultural Studies*: "Sometimes, reading magazines like *New Socialist* or *Marxism Today* from the last couple of years, flipping through *Cultural Studies,* or scanning the pop-theory pile in the bookshop, I get the feeling that somewhere in some English publishers' vault there is a master-disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations."[94] Fiske's and Chambers' conceptions of cultural studies can then, according to Morris, be compressed into the following shortcut: "People in modern mediatised so-

91 Holt, *Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption*?, p. 22. The study is to a certain degree a defense of P. Bourdieu and an attempt to apply his approach to American society.

92 Holt, *Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption*? Aside from the fact that the studied sample is far too small and ethnically unbalanced, the study only compares informants in the top quintile of cultural capital resources with informants whose cultural capital resources are in the lowest quintile; it would certainly be interesting to see, for example, the interplay between the second and fourth group. Moreover, when reading the study, it is nearly impossible to ward off a feeling of superiority on the part of the author regarding a segment of his respondents. While some observations are precise (e.g., pointing out the fact that even though we find country music listeners among both groups of respondents, respondents with low cultural capital give preference to contemporary country, while respondents with high cultural capital like traditional songs: an ordinary statistical inquiry does not notice this distinction), others come across as entirely unconvincing (analyses of films, passages about gardening or fishing; the author also does not at all comment the fact that the only ones who, from among the observed two groups of respondents, visit the opera belong to the group of people with the lowest cultural capital, and so on).

93 Cohen, *High and Low Art*, p. 141–142.

94 Morris, *Banality in Cultural Studies*, I am quoting from the web version without pagination; the study was published in 1988.

cieties are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture."[95]

Raising the question of the nature of the discourse of cultural studies (a discourse recently enriched by the dimension of globalisation as well as national dimensions and the issue of distribution and the influence exerted by new media, new communication technologies etc.) would exceed the limits of this study.[96] However, from the less broad vantage point of popular literature/culture, what is significant is the previously mentioned critique of the populist approaches belonging to a number of researchers in the field of popular literature/culture. As Schudson argues, works of pop culture cannot be uncritically marveled at just as it cannot be claimed that all cultural forms are equal or that all interpretations are equally valid and not subject to any criticism.[97] Populist "sentimentalising" approaches moreover show themselves to be self-destructive even vis-à-vis academic research: "By celebrating on the one hand an active audience for popular forms and on the other those popular forms which the audience 'enjoy', we appear to be throwing the whole enterprise of a cultural critique out of the window."[98] Since we are, after all, simultaneously the critic and the consumer, our position is precarious; and it almost seems apt to conclude this brief methodological exposé with the (unassailable) claim that the whole matter is complex and contradictory… and that it undoubtedly calls for further reflection.

2.3 HOW, OR, FORM AND FORMULA

Another important dimension of popular literature/culture is its form or, broadly put, the ways the works are created. What kinds of narrative strategies are used? How are characters and genre categorisation dealt with? What kinds of intertextual ties can we find there? Etc. In the definition quoted in the beginning of this study, such literature is characterised, on the one hand, by conventionality, syuzhet schemes and stereotypes, including simplified character developments, and, on the other, by an orientation towards

95 Morris, *Banality in Cultural Studies*.

96 As has already been stated, the overarching domain of cultural studies is in many respects important for the study of popular culture (and hence of literature as well). At the same time, many of the questions thematised in the field of cultural studies, mass media studies and even new media studies (and the like) are for our topic inessential; this discussion, by now overgrown, which continues to proliferate along an exponential curve, cannot be focused on here.

97 Schudson, *The New Validation of Popular Culture*, p. 534.

98 So far Ann Gray, I am quoting from Webster, *Pessimism, Optimism, Pleasure*, p. 592. Webster critically mentions "academic *etudes*," which sympathetic academic research is often reduced to. See also McGuigan, *Trajectories of Cultural Populism*.

adventure plotlines and attractive subject matters, while it is said to lack creative inventiveness.

The views of contemporary theorists, however, are different. The terms we repeatedly encounter are polysemia, second-hand cultures, bricolage, collage, intertextuality, re-configuration, cento and so forth. According to Eco, the narrative construction called Fleming amounts to "an unstable patchwork, a tongue-in-cheek *bricolage*, which often hides its ready-made nature by presenting itself as literary invention."[99] In short, it is clear that emphasis is placed on the intentionally secondary process of creation, that is, on the legendary Lévi-Straussean "bricolage," which does not, however, automatically mean that what is finally produced must be valueless and second-rate results. The relationship to the genres and works being repeatedly drawn from has yet another dimension: it points to the canon (but surely not to it alone), and to this corresponds Roberts' observation that if in the event of a catastrophe all books – with the exception of paperbacks – were to vanish from the face of the Earth, it would be possible to gather from the paperback bulk our entire literary canon.[100] By analogy, we can also extend this claim to the realm of mythology, without which the genre of fantasy would at the very least be gasping for air: due to the inspiration from these sources, we would evidently be able to compose most of the world's mythology traditions out of pop-cultural genres. But let us return to the literary canon: In the case of Fleming himself, we find *inter alia* an allusion to the Homeric formula *herkos odonton* or "fence of teeth" (over which nothing that ought to remain a secret is to cross).[101] With Ross MacDonald, the Platonic myth of androgynes from the *Symposium* dialogue turns into nothing less than "a story that I remembered from childhood."[102] Charming intertextual play between pulp and the canon is offered up by Phil Marlowe himself: "I bought a paperback and read it. I set my alarm watch for 6:30. The paperback scared me so badly that I put two guns under my pillow. It was about a guy who bucked the hoodlum boss of Milwaukee and got beaten up every fifteen minutes. I figured that his head and face would be nothing but a piece of bone with a strip of skin hanging from it. But in the next chapter he was as gay as a meadow lark. Then I asked myself why I was reading this drivel when I could have been memorizing The Brothers Karamasov. Not knowing any good answers, I turned the light out and went to sleep."[103] Then there is Bill Pronzini's nameless detective who has a collection of 6,500 (!) pulp magazines, quite valuable in the world of

99 Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 172.
100 I quote according to Janáček, *Konspekty, UNI* 9,3, p. 26.
101 Fleming, *On Her Majesty´s Secret Service* (repeatedly in the text).
102 MacDonald, *Blue Hammer*, p. 577.
103 Chandler, *Wrong Pigeon*, p. 23.

collecting, and who is thus, upon turning fifty, financially set. Besides that, the magazines do also provide him with reading pleasure: "I settled instead for cuddling up to my collection of pulp magazines–browsing here and there, finding something to read. … I found a 1943 issue of *Dime Detective* that looked interesting, took it into the bathtub, and lingered there reading until I got drowsy. Then I went to bed, went right to sleep for a change–".[104]

Much more sophisticated intertextual play can even be found in pop-culture. The abovementioned fan strategies of recontextualisation, refocalisation, genre shift and story elaboration before and after the events of the original narrative are in fact something we also know from pop-cultural works themselves – but even this method has its age-old predecessors. What takes place in the so-called Homeric cycle if not other stories in addition to the two Homeric poems?[105] How else are we to view the pseudo-Homeric heroicomic epic poem about a battle between mice and frogs (which is the foundational stone of the entire heroicomic genre) as well as a number of Greek dramas that present characters from the Trojan stories in new situations? For that matter, the *Odyssey* itself – in contrast to the *Iliad* – has been designated as the first "secondary" narrative which uses literally all of the aforementioned figures, and which is full of "dramatic irony."[106]

Nevertheless, it would still not be fair to present the intertextual production of contemporary pop culture as purely derived (whether intentionally or unintentionally) from its age-old models. I at least do not know of any old analogical equivalent to the elaboration of works whose existence is set forth in other works or which are being created in other works. To give an example, we can mention the American television series *Castle* situated within the world of New York police, in which the charming inspector Kate Beckett is aided in figuring out her cases by the author of detective stories Richard Castle. Inspired by his detective muse, in the series he starts writing a series of books featuring the inspector Nikki Heat. Following up on the success of the series, an entire set of book-form stories about Nikki Heat has been recently published in the USA, whose titles appeared in the top ten of the New York Times bestseller list (*Heat Wave*; *Naked Heat*; *Heat Rises*; *Frozen Heat*; *Deadly Heat*; *Raging Heat*; *Driving Heat*). What is symptomatic is the narrative style of these publications: it is stiff, contrived and barely readable especially

104 Pronzini, *Skeleton Rattle Your Mouldy Leg*, p. 238.

105 Let us, however, clarify that the individual poems of the Homeric cycle also might stem from the preceding oral tradition of epic poetry in Greece; the situation here is thus more complicated than in popular culture.

106 For more see Fischerová, *Odysseia jako ustavující dílo evropské kulturní tradice*, p. 448. Even the ways the stories are told further, the endless epilogues, amount to an old and abundantly used literary strategy (or, better yet, a malpractice); cf., e.g., the anemic sequel of *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas, featuring the Vicomte de Bragellone and the like.

when it comes to love scenes. Then inside the book we find a dedication: "To the extraordinary KB [Kate Beckett] and all my friends at the 12th."[107] No other than the "fictive" Richard Castle himself is listed as the author of the books. And as if this were not enough, the authors also created, and put into distribution, a series featuring Derrick Storm, which is written in the Castle series by Richard Castle way before he ever first sets foot in the 12th precinct...

A large portion of the analyses of popular or pulp literature focuses on exploring its conventionality. The old designation of these works as "schematic literature" had to wait for its revival until after the Second World War, when scholars tried to anchor it more sturdily and define it more precisely in connection to Saussurean structuralism and in particular Saussure's division of language into *langue*, the linguistic system, and *parole*, the realisation of this system in the form of a concrete utterance or text.[108] But Saussure himself acknowledged that individual literary genres or even individual works have their specific *langues*. What then arises are attempts to grasp the *langue* of an individual schematic genre (love novel, pornographic novel, blood-curdler novel, etc.) and figure out how the relationship between *langue* and *parole* in this case is different from that in the case of non-schematic genres (novel, tragicomedy, burlesque).

A similarly important, if not central, role in the Anglo-Saxon research into the form of pop-cultural texts is played by the concept of *formula*. Cawelti defines it as follows:

> Formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from form which is an invented system of organization. Like the distinction between convention and invention, the distinction between formula and form can be best envisaged as a continuum between two poles; one pole is that of a completely conventional structure of conventions ...; the other end of the continuum is a completely original structure which orders inventions.[109]

As opposed to myth or myths, formulas, "because of their close connection to a particular culture and period of time, tend to have a much more limited repertory of plots, characters, and settings. ... Formulas ... are much more specific."[110] On the basis of Cawelti's analyses, we can list five basic types of

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107 Castle, *Heat Wave*.

108 Let us add that the given Saussurean concepts are something that Bogatyrev along with Jakobson – as early as 1929 – tried to apply to the realm of folklore in a study entitled *Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens*.

109 Cawelti, *The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Pulture*, p. 187. What the author presents as an example of the first type of texts is Tarzan. The second type of texts is, in his eyes, embodied by *Finnegan's Wake* or *Waiting for Godot*.

110 Cawelti, *The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Culture*, p. 189.

formulas: the adventure type, the romance type, the mystery type (a mystery needs to be solved), the melodrama type (we are confronted here with a group of people whose relationships are in different ways mutually entwined) and the type featuring alien beings or states (including encounters with monsters or simply "otherness").[111] Cawelti himself became famous with his analysis of the western.[112] Thus, formula can be designated as the "principles for the selection of certain plots, characters and settings, which possess in addition to their basic narrative structure the dimensions of collective ritual, game and dream."[113] According to Janáček, formula is "an incantation by means of which popular literature touches something deep inside of us."[114] Ray B. Browne, in a more technical manner, compares formula to a cooking recipe: it outlines the ingredients to be used in the cooking and furthermore determines how they are to be mixed and cooked. Another analogy is a road map: it tells you in general where to go and which roads to use to make the journey. Nevertheless, even Browne stresses the proximity between formula and myth.[115]

Cawelti's concept of formula, developed as early as the 1960s, has also earned a number of critical responses. According to some scholars, much too large an emphasis is placed on formula. In short, Cawelti gets rather stuck on the pole of convention (even though he repeatedly claims that an oscillation between convention and invention is central to formula) and leaves us unsure as to how we should deal with what exceeds formula, i.e., the spillover that no longer belongs to it.[116] Accordingly, neither did he know what to do with comedic genres or parody; they did not fit into his theorem. "Even formulaic texts must have a balance between predictability and suspense, uniformity and variability. Indeed, even if a genre changes only slowly, … and even if a text's initial attraction is the appearance of adherence to the known rules of the game, pleasure, and thus popularity, David Feldman believes, rests on variation. And eventually, many small variations within a group of texts in a genre will add up to the creation/discovery of a new genre."[117]

In other words, whereas convention guarantees stability, invention strives to destabilise convention but does so in no other way than by attempting to create new conventions. From this perspective, all cultural expressions can be understood as combinations of convention and invention, and to extol but invention – to the detriment of convention – could be dangerous, adds

111 Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*.
112 Cawelti, *The Six-gun Mystique*.
113 Cawelti, *The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Culture*, p. 191.
114 Janáček, *Konspekty, UNI* 9, 1, p. 22.
115 Browne, *Profiles of Popular Culture*, p. 115.
116 Feldman, *Formalism and Popular Culture*, p. 196.
117 Hinds, *A Holistic Approach to the Study of Popular Culture*, p. 169. Hinds refers to Feldman's study quoted above.

Browne.[118] Moreover, a new invention (or more precisely newly created sets of inventions) can again establish new convention, a new formula.[119]

It is in a similar ethos that Couégnas argues when he explores the horizon of expectation on the part of the reader of "paraliterature." If we compare literature with paraliterature in this regard, we can see that in the literary mode we find a preponderance of the new over the similar (*semblable*), while in the paraliterary mode we find a preponderance of the similar over the new. The horizon of the expectation of the reader of paraliterary works appears, according to Couégnas, as follows: the genre yields pleasure from conformity and repetition; yet within this framework it expects pleasure from newness – the reader wants to be *surprised*, and this is fundamental to the functioning of paraliterary narrativity.[120]

The concept of formula can also be used in distinguishing between mass and popular art. "In mass art the formula is everything – an escape from, rather than a means to, originality. … Mass art uses the stereotypes and formulae to simplify the experience, to mobilize stock feelings and to 'get them going'" – as naturally opposed to popular art, which strives "to delight the audience with a kind of creative surprise."[121]

Formula is, of course, not the only theoretical concept that might be helpful for understanding and interpreting these kinds of texts. The analyses of the individual characters' transformations are also significant – their reconfigurations and re-modelings (in particular, heroes and superheroes play a privileged role here; analyses of agent James Bond, that Ecoian "unstable patchwork," could fill an entire library in itself) as well as intertextual approaches that explore the mutual relations between texts. Feldman proposes working with the Russian Formalists' methods and delightfully demonstrates how, as a student, with the use of their formal criteria, he would manage to reveal the identity of the killers when watching Perry Mason stories (succeeding at it in 90 percent of the cases, whereas before that he had been – in his own words – "an execrable sleuth").[122]

In the face of all these reflections, we surely ought to be aware that the categorisation of a work as popular literature or pulp literature does not necessarily only stem from "within" the work itself but can, to a considerable degree, also have something to do with the expectations of its recipients. An almost textbook-like piece of evidence is the story behind the *Atlanta Nights* book. The book came about as a response to a critique of the quality of sci-fi

118 Browne, *Profiles of Popular Culture*, p. 115 f.
119 For the interplay between convention and invention see Feldman, *Formalism and Popular Culture*, p. 197 f.
120 Couégnas, *Introduction à la paralittérature*, p. 67–68.
121 Hall and Whannel, I am quoting from Browne, *Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition*, p. 19.
122 Feldman, *Formalism and Popular Culture*, p. 200 f.

and fantasy texts (in comparison to other genres) that had been published by the American publisher PublishAmerica on its website. A group of about thirty authors of the denounced genres, that is sci-fi and fantasy, subsequently created the book *Atlanta Nights* (set in contemporary Atlanta) under the leadership of James Macdonald and offered it, under the rather transparent pseudonym of Travis Tea, to aforementioned publisher. Each of the authors was assigned the task of writing no more than one chapter, receiving only very general directives as to characters and plot. Chapter sequence was a matter of drawing lots, no one knowing what order the chapters would go in (!); regarding style, everyone was instructed to write as terribly as possible.[123] Since not all of the authors managed to submit their text by the established deadline, the organiser had one chapter simply repeated and another created by a machine. The book's characters thus change their gender and their skin colour, they die and come back to life again, the timeline is confused, and the book is stuffed with stale literary clichés, etc.[124] Despite all of these deficiencies, PublishAmerica accepted the manuscript in December of 2004 for publication and only retracted its decision after the group of authors publicly announced, in January of the following year, that the whole thing was a hoax. The book was nevertheless published in January 2005 and is available on Amazon. All proceeds from its sale go to – symptomatically – supporting *The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Emergency Medical Fund*. In the Amazon discussion about the book, we can find out what *Atlanta Nights* is good for in the end: it can be used as the ideal text for teaching how NOT to write.[125] Yet can this utilitarian statement really mark the end of the discussion? Are there not additional questions to be asked? For example, is a writer who intentionally writes badly a bad writer? Is self-aware pulp writing truly pulp writing? The meta-level on which we find ourselves here resists being grasped in terms of standard evaluation criteria. What is also symptomatic in this sense are the reactions by some of the readers of *Atlanta Nights*: "The most hilarious thing of all is that this book is so awful it's good! Start reading (anywhere!) and you cannot put it down! You will howl with laughter, your eyeballs will hurt, but your fingers will not let go."[126] "It's brilliant in its

123 Here I am drawing from the Travis Tea and TVtropes website: http://www.travistea.com/; http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/AtlantaNights?from=Main.AtlantaNights. Accessed 20 May 2024.

124 A list of the literary sins is enumerated here: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/AtlantaNights?from=Main.AtlantaNights. Accessed 20 May 2024.

125 "Read Atlanta Nights," advises one of the discussants, "then read your own work. You'll see some of the same problems, and no, not just bad spelling. I mean too many adjectives, too many adverbs, distracting details, and odd syntax. You'll delete at least a third of your own words, and your book will be the better for it." http://www.amazon.com/Atlanta-Nights-Travis-Tea/dp/1411622987. Accessed 20 May 2024.

126 http://www.amazon.com/Atlanta-Nights-Travis-Tea/dp/1411622987. Accessed 20 May 2024.

horribleness. To purposefully write that bad takes a lot of talent."[127] But this wholly specific example, does it not draw attention to what is proper to the phenomena of pulp and pop culture *en bloc*? After all, ought we not be – before we start our obligatory condemnations – more vigilant and alert?

Further questions arise in the light of emerging phenomena, such as that of artificial intelligence. What does it mean that a machine is capable of producing literature? Will it affect the way in which the genre fiction is written? If a computer program offers to "write about Victorian times," or about "rural society," or about "a journey through the mountains," what kind of result can come of this? What will the ratio between "convention" and "innovation" be? Can we think of artificial intelligence not only as a reservoir of inherited patterns, but as a source of creativity as well? And is there any substantial difference between AI-generated literary fiction and AI-generated genre fiction? Who is to blame here, and for what?

2.4 WHERE DOES IT BELONG, OR, THE QUESTION OF CLASSIFICATION

Popular literature's precarious position within the field of literature has become the subject of numerous debates. Popular literature has been called a "contrast" or "residual" category,[128] a "negative reference point"[129] and, in terms of extreme approaches, even an illness or "dis-value" that is only worth treating (when value is of concern to us) for precisely contrastive reasons.[130] Further characterisation of popular literature includes pointing out its "otherness": popular literature/culture is "the other"; this concept has in the last several decades made quite a name for itself in the humanities – however, in this case its usage can be deemed legitimate.[131] But even "otherness" once again functions as a relational category, and so popular literature's sole positive characteristic seems to be popular texts being liked, whence *popular*.

Popular literature's specific position within the field of literature has been historically created, as will become clear. How it has been positioned within the aesthetic hierarchisation of this field could be the subject of a separate study; what we shall do here is make some basic remarks. The whole process is rather complicated, but what apparently plays a major role in it is the ancient classification of rhetorical styles: *genera elocutionis* (or sometimes *genera dicendi*).[132] The three essential ones are: *genus subtile* (or: *tenue*; *humile*;

127 http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/366054.Atlanta_Nights. Accessed 20 May 2024.
128 Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 6.
129 Zahrádka, *Vysoké versus populární umění*, p. 19.
130 Kaplan, *The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts*, p. 351.
131 Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (chapter *Popular Culture as the "Other" of High Culture*, p. 31–47).
132 In the following, I am drawing from the compendium: Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, p. 519 ff.; there are also references here to individual works in which we find the aforementioned terms.

gracile; in Greek *ischnon*, in French terminology it is Bary's *le style simple*, in English the simple or plain style), then *genus medium* (or: *modicum*; *mediocre sive moderatum*; in Greek *meson*, in French *le style mediocre*, in English the middle style) and finally *genus grande* (or: *vehemens*; *grandiloquum*; *amplum sive sublime*; *validum*; in Greek *hadron* or *megaloprepes*, in French *le style sublime*, in English the sublime style). Each of these is ascribed its own *materia* or *res*, then its *officium* and *virtutes*, and it is also necessary to keep in mind the fundamental rhetorical principles of *aptum* and *utile*, that is, aptness and usefulness. The looseness in terminology, however, shows that the categorisation was not at all canonical: Quintilianus points out that there are countless individual kinds, differing from one another (*ac sic prope innumerabiles species reperiuntur, quae utique aliquo momento inter se different*).[133] The doctrine of the three styles is later taken up and further elaborated by medieval rhetoric[134]; a role here is also being played by the concept of the sublime: *hypsos/sublime*,[135] which is developed by Boileau, Burke, Kant and others. However, it is the antithesis *sublimitas/humilitas* as well as the old opposition canonical/uncanonical (which had already come into existence in Alexandria) that contributed to the fact that in addition to the aforementioned trichotomous categorisation of the field of literature there also existed a dichotomous one.

At the same time, Christianity intentionally commingles the stylistic categories, for "in the incarnation and passion of Christ … *sublimitas* is to more than the fullest extent realised precisely as *humilitas*, one fusing with the other."[136] What is important are the transformations that occurred in Europe during the 19th century: Besides the role of "the discovery of the people" and of "folk culture,"[137] the role of *l'art pour l'art* and similar movements has become essential during the second half of the 19th century. The social dimension of the entire matter was of the utmost importance.[138] This is even more evident in the case of the United States: As Levine and DiMaggio showed in their analyses, plays by Shakespeare, just as opera performances, were in the first half of the 19th century in the United States a part of popular entertainment which took on the form of performances and spectacles visited by a variegated public. The principle of mixing and of heterogeneity thus characterised both the type of production and the type of public. Only gradually did a cultural transformation take place: DiMaggio, in the form of a case study, mapped out how in Boston, in a culturally aristocratic environment within "snobby" New England, these cultural commodities began

133 Quintilianus, *Inst. orat.* XII,10,67.
134 See Curtius, *Die Lehre von der drei Stilen in Altertum und Mittelalter*; Walker, *The Canons of Style*.
135 Cf. Ps.-Longinus, *De sublimitate*; for more detail on the topic see Porter, *The Sublime*.
136 See Šidák, *Úvod do studia genologie*, p. 203.
137 See below, p. 41.
138 Cf. especially Bourdieu, *La distinction*.

to be limited to specialised audiences thanks to the activity and financial sponsoring of local "cultural capitalists" (the so-called "Boston Brahmin"). As a further step, the Museum of Fine Arts is established, as well as the professionalised Boston Symphony Orchestra, which sought out its members as far away as in Europe, etc. During this period Shakespeare once again goes from being a popular, familiar and continuously played and parodied author (theatre companies in the USA moved to steamboats on the Mississippi and, by other means, often to even small settlements and mining towns) to become a healthy and nourishing "theatre spinach" whose consumption was indispensable for further intellectual development.[139] In other words, it is through the establishment of organised, and not primarily profit-based forms of cultural life, that ordinary entertainment turns into a respectable and "high" art that should be perceived and consumed in a certain way (which requires a certain kind of training and furthermore a certain regime of operating with the texts). In this manner "cultural capitalists" strengthen their privileged social status and culture is divided into highbrow and lowbrow.[140]

Even in English-speaking areas, this division does not remain unique and exclusive. We can also encounter a trichotomous structuring specified as highbrow, middlebrow, lowbrow. Dwight Macdonald, one of the first theorists (and critics) of mass culture, understands highbrow in opposition to the pair midcult and masscult. The brunt of his criticism is aimed primarily at the "petit-bourgeois" midcult, i.e., the set of works that pretend to have all the attributes of contemporary culture but are *de facto* a parody of it: they represent "corrupted" high culture. According to Macdonald, a typical product of midcult is Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*: in addition to a draining poeticising style, the book distinguishes itself with a diffusion of "*stilemas* and cultural attitudes devoid of their original energy, thoroughly banalised (due to many years of falsification of taste) and presented to a lazy public that tells itself it is using cultural values, while in reality it is buying up whatever is left from an antiquated storehouse."[141] Midcult, in short, programmatically borrows its stylistic techniques and advancements from the avant-garde once they have long been well-known; it fashions them into a message understandable to everybody – but it passes them off as Art which also ought to be consumed as Art, even though it is kitsch. Even Umberto Eco in his, by now, classic work from the 1960s *Apocalittici e integrati* criticises – in

139 Levine, *William Shakespeare*, p. 38; 47.

140 Levine, *William Shakespeare*; DiMaggio, *Cultural Entrepreneurship*; for a summary see the chapter entitled *Making of High Culture*, in: Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*. The terms *highbrow-lowbrow* were used in the given context by Van Wycks Brooks, *America's Coming of Age*. See also Levine, *Highbrow-Lowbrow*.

141 In this manner Macdonald's critique is summarised by Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*, p. 53 ff. For more detail see Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult*.

the footsteps of Macdonald – the triad of high – middle – low and introduces some ways to improve this situation.[142]

A trichotomous model of American culture is also put forth by Shils: his model operates with a division into three cultural "classes," i.e., superior/refined culture; mediocre culture; brutal culture. Mass society changed the cultural terrain by restricting the significance of the highest culture and instead elevating the importance of the two other kinds, which itself should not be understood as a con.[143] A trichotomous categorisation – once again slightly different from the two preceding ones – is also offered up by Fiske; this "populist" theorist constructs the triad of high – popular – mass. Both popular and high culture are, according to him, separate from mass culture by means of an active reception of text, which requires more creativity from the perceiver than does the mere consumption of a pre-prepared and stabilised meaning. As opposed to the reception of high culture, pop-cultural reception is a playful reception that actively uses the text rather than semiotically diving into it.[144]

Similar is the case in German literary theory: in the 1960s, Foltin proposed a trichotomous categorisation: *Dichtung – Unterhaltungsliteratur – Trivalliteratur*,[145] and since then German handbooks have customarily differentiated between "*U-Literatur*" and "*T-Literatur*." "*U-Literatur*" is presented and defined here as "more or less a comparative of the traditional features of trivial literature."[146] Kreuzer proposes not to make sweeping statements about trivial literature as a whole but to focus on works of trivial literature as historically attestable phenomena belonging to specific epochs.[147]

However, what also plays a role and shuffles the deck is aforementioned folk culture (or folkbrow), which can further complicate (or nuance) the categorisation.[148] The classic of pop-cultural theory R. B. Browne, the first editor of the *Journal of Popular Culture* (a magazine first published in the USA in the 1960s) and the founder of the department of popular culture at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, where some of the first undergraduate and graduate programs in popular culture were established,[149] proposed differentiating between four basic spheres of culture: elite, popular, mass and folk.[150] At the same time these domains or spheres cannot be understood as being sharply separated. On the contrary, we witness active communication

142 Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*, p. 31–131.
143 Shils, *Mass Society and its Culture*, p. 206; cf. also Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 32.
144 See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture;* in a condensed form, *An Interview with John Fiske*.
145 Foltin, *Die minderwertige Prosaliteratur*.
146 Zbytovský, *K německému triviálnímu románu v Čechách,* p. 133.
147 Kreuzer, *Trivialliteratur als Forschungsproblem.*
148 Cf. Browne, *Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition*, p. 15.
149 See Nelson, *Introduction*, p. 2.
150 Browne, *Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition.*

and at least partially mutual influence between them[151] (see, e.g., drawing of elite art from both folk and popular art).[152] In short, these spheres do not form a vertical hierarchy but rather a horizontal continuum, the nature of which is approximated by the metaphor of an eye lens: "In the center, largest in bulk and easiest seen through is Popular Culture, which includes Mass Culture. On either end of the lens are High and Folk Cultures, both looking fundamentally alike in many respects …, for both have keen direct vision and extensive peripheral insight and acumen."[153] Then, proceeding from prioritising strategies of inclusivity as opposed to those of exclusivity, Browne takes yet another step. He proposes having popular culture include everything but elite culture.[154] The fact that thereby he actually returns to a simpler system dichotomy apparently does not bother him – and in doing so, he in a way proves right Janáček's thesis that the model representing the world of "modern letters" is at its core binomial.[155] Another, even more subtle classification has been proposed by Gans, who distinguishes five "tastes" according to class stratification of the society (his attitude is largely indebted to the Marxist concepts), i.e., high culture; upper-middle culture; lower-middle culture; low culture; quasi-folk low culture.[156]

No wonder that – facing these confused and intricate phenomena – some scholars use terms like unibrow or unbrow; another very popular candidate is "nobrow" label and the whole aesthetics of nobrow which has been elaborated on in the course of last decades, based on the following assumptions:

First, the artistic strategies of high culture and the genre aesthetics of popular art are often not that different and we can speak about "deliberate crossover"; the concept of nobrow embraces both of them;

Second, only very few cultural products, if any at all, fit into "the trinitarian orthodoxy" of highbrow – middlebrow – lowbrow; today we are freer to navigate between them;

Third, nobrow is much more than a reception strategy or a type of cultural consumption; thus, "going nobrow means acknowledging that highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow are not measures of aesthetic value, but rather sociocultural formations that help organize our cultural creations and our cultural lives."[157]

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151 So far A. Kaplan, I am quoting from Browne, *Popular culture: Notes Toward a Definition*, p. 17.

152 Browne, *Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition*, p. 20.

153 Ibid., p. 21.

154 Ibid.

155 Janáček, *Literární brak*, p. 53.

156 Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*.

157 An enlightening overview for a reader is the introduction in the volume dedicated to the nobrow aesthetics, written by its editors, Swirski and Vanhanen: Swirski, Vanhanen, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow*; for the last quote see p. 9.

However, even if we might be sympathetic towards some of these premises (the validity of which we have already seen in the preceding pages), it is hardly acceptable to follow the chronology of "brows" introduced by Swirski and Vanhanen, which traces the evolution of these concepts to the beginning of the twentieth century (mainly on the basis of the American cultural milieu and American "cultural wars").[158] On the contrary, categories like this have a long tradition and the hierarchical attitude towards literary styles and works of literature is already rooted in the rhetorical concepts and ancient canon as well, as showed above.

To sum up: the fact undoubtedly remains that we ought to be aware of the inadequacies of a hierarchical structuration, just as we ought to be aware of "across-the-board contact and a many-sided interpenetration" among the individual elements of literary culture.[159] Besides that, as has already been stated, what is fluctuating and permeable "is not solely the border between marginal and artistic literature; … what is fluctuating and permeable are also the historical categories in which literature is perceived."[160]

2.5 WHEN

The final, but not insubstantial question is that of date, i.e., when exactly popular literature came into existence or rather, when it was constituted. As mentioned in the beginning of this study, popular literature tends to be associated with the era of the industrial revolution and its technical accomplishments: "Popular art is a specific historical phenomenon whose existence was facilitated by the invention of specific production devices within modern industrial society."[161] This perspective can lead to a focus on the birthplace of the industrial revolution, i.e., Britain, and to the claim that the beginning of popular culture happens precisely there – as a result of the socio-political changes that transformed the structure of society, namely urban society, in

158 Swirski, Vanhanen, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow*, p. 3 f. Whence, speaking about "prequels to nobrow" in connection with the deliberate crossover between the highs and lows (which can be, according to Swirski and Vanhanen, traced but to the beginning of the twentieth century), as K. Krabbenhoft does, does not make much sense (Krabbenhoft, *Prequels to Nobrow*).

159 Janáček, *Literární brak*, p. 55. Cf. Grebeníčková: "If there no longer existed the opinion that solely peripheral literature appropriates, in degraded form, the models of great literature, there was no reason to conceal that borrowing often occurred in the opposite direction – more than discretion and decorum in regard to the distinguished authors allow to be admitted." Grebeníčková, *O literatuře nízké, zábavné a masové*, p. 98.

160 Grebeníčková, *O literatuře nízké, zábavné a masové*, p. 100. What, in fact, even the proponents of the "nobrow" concept admit, cf. Swirski: "Institutional aesthetics is less a Rosebud of crystalline purity and more like … a time-indexed jigsaw of opinions, cross-influences, and accretions," (Swirski, *From Highbrow to Lowbrow*, p. 64). Nevertheless, sometimes they forget to draw the consequences of this thought for their own analyses.

161 Zahrádka, *Vysoké versus populární umění*, p. 22.

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