Cheap Books and US Culture

A thesis

submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

May 2011

ADVISOR: Professor Reed Ueda

Abstract

This thesis examines the cheap library movement of the late 19th century and the paperback revolution of the 1950s and the impact of these eras on print culture. In doing so it discusses similarities and differences between the two movements and makes connections to the current electronic revolution in publishing.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my parents, Greg Colati and Maureen Johnston, for their continued support of my academic pursuits. I want to thank my brother, Scott Colati, who patiently listened to hours of phone conversations on esoteric historical topics. I also want to thank Molly Palmer, Dave Starr, Tim Mudie, Andy Stevenson, Laura Cutter, James Schmidt, Dan Modini, Bidiak Amana, Anne Sauer, and all my friends and loved ones who helped me along with this process. Finally I would like to thank my thesis committee, Professor Virginia Jackson, Professor Steve Cohen, and of course my adviser Professor Reed Ueda, who helped me craft my ideas into a comprehensible paper. Thank you everyone.

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Introduction

Cheap Editions in the United States

On June 19, 1939, a company called Pocket Book published their first ten paperback books, beginning the modern wave of softcover book publishing in the United States. At the outset, these books were distributed solely in New York City, however, this phenomenon would, after World War Two quickly expand to bookstores, department stores and magazine racks across the country. Initially sold for just twenty-five cents, the paperback book became hugely popular amid the expanding middle class of post-war America. The paperback revolution, as it would come to be called, represented a lasting change in the philosophy of publishing and book consumption; however, it was hardly the first movement of its type.

Scholars note that the paperback revolution of the 1950s, in fact, signifies the third wave of paperback publishing in the United States.[1] The first instance of mass publication of inexpensive paperbacks or softcover books came in the period before the Civil War. By the end of the 1840s, publisher Erastus Beadle had become the name synonymous with inexpensive book editions, inaugurating the era of the "Dime Novel." Much as Pocket Books and the modern paperback movement would not reach its apex until after World War Two, the Dime Novel would similarly not fully achieve success until after the Civil War.

The Dime Novel or Cheap Library dominated the inexpensive publishing world from the 1870s to the 1890s, ushering in an explosion of domestic fiction

[1] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry 1630-1865*, Vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 240.

writing. Cheap edition publishers emerged from the periodical industry and began to emulate Beadle, producing inexpensive books at a massive scale. In order to maintain the supply of material, these publishing houses employed domestic writers to produce genre fiction in a manner that included the efficiency of an industrial assembly line.[2] Beyond this formulaic production, many of the new cheap publishers engaged in the reprinting of successful hardcover books. These reprints were exceptionally popular, as prices of "legitimate" trade books had soared following the Civil War. The cheap reprints were sold at a price nearly half the cost of their larger, more decorated counterparts.[3] At a time before copyright laws, these printings were technically legal, however, the passing of the Platt-Simons Bill in 1891 guaranteed copyright rights to both foreign and domestic writers. By the end of the decade the pirated reprints had been eradicated from the publishing world. Having come to an increasing reliance on illegal reprints, many cheap publishers closed their doors and by 1893 publishing journals were proclaiming the end of the Dime Novel.[4]

The cheap paperback began its comeback in the early 20th century. While it wouldn't be until 1939 that we would see a large scale publishing house dedicated to this medium, the phenomenon of Little Blue Books is representative of the modern precursor to the revolution of the 1950s. Begun in 1919 by Emanuel Julius and his wife, Marcet Haldeman, Little Blue Books were small, cheaply produced

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[2] E. W. Bok, "Literary Factories," *Publishers Weekly*, August 13, 1892: 11.
[3] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 483.
[4] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 488.

books sold through mail order for a nickel apiece. Julius, a socialist, began his career in publishing by purchasing the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason* with funding from his wife Marcet, a niece of Jane Addams and, ironically, a bank manager. Together they took out advertisements in newspapers with a list of available books. Beginning with socialist propaganda and moving into reprints of intellectual classics that had fallen into the public domain, Little Blue Books flourished as a business. Due in part to the inherited wealth of Julius' wife, they were able to keep costs low and survive the Great Depression. It is estimated that by the time Julius died in 1951, he had sold 300 million Little Blue Books.[5]

In 1939 Pocket Books achieved nearly instantaneous success. Popularity for these types of books was steady even through World War Two. During the Civil War Beadle's Dime Novels were coveted by soldiers, and Pocket Books, too, found success in this market, often unable to meet demand. Even before World War Two, the US market received interest from overseas publishers. New American Library began its life as the American branch of the British Company, Penguin Books. Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books (established in 1935), expanded to the United States in 1939 and was initially the sole paperback competition to Pocket Books. The American branch was initially in the hands of Ian Ballantine. Lane discovered Ballantine when he was a student at the London School of Economics, where Ballantine had written his thesis on the feasibility of the reprint paperback business. Due to Ballantine's relative inexperience in business, Lane hired Kurt Enoch in 1942. Enoch, a highly educated businessman, was a German Jewish refugee living in the

[5] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Golden Age Between Two Wars 1920-1940*, Vol. 3, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1978), 205-209.

United States. Before fleeing Nazism, he had run a successful family-owned publishing company. Enoch's reputation as a successful publisher followed him to England where he worked for a number of years before moving to the United States. While Lane was confident in the direction of his new American enterprise, it would not be long before tensions between Enoch and Ballantine led to a change of leadership.

Ballantine and Enoch ran Penguin America for only three years. Ballantine left the company in 1945 due to differing conception of the future of the company, "Ballantine was not convinced, as Enoch was, that Penguin should undertake a peacetime publishing program with an accent on literary fiction and educational or informational nonfiction."[6] Reinforcing the direction set forth by Enoch, Lane brought in a new editor, Victor Weybright. Weybright came from a wealthy family and grew in a wealthy suburb of Washington D.C. As a result of his family's financial position, he was able to live something of a cosmopolitan lifestyle holding volunteer positions at Hull House and traveling extensively in Europe. This sort of intellectual freedom contributed to Weybright's fascination with creative cultural pursuits.

Weybright began the scholarly Pelican branch of Penguin America. Enoch and Weybright would disagree about a number of things during their joint tenure at Penguin/New American Library; however, they were able to always agree on and produce quality literature and non-fiction. As a multitude of paperback book companies sprung up in the United States focused on the most basic formulaic

[6] John Tebbel, *Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of Book Publishing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 428.

fiction, Enoch and Weybright always found a way to incorporate highbrow offerings among their publication lists. Under Weybright's direction, the editorial staff at Penguin America grew to incorporate a handful of academics and literature connoisseurs all operating with the same philosophy of literary integrity amid the influx of cheap fiction.

In 1948, just three years after Weybright joined Penguin, Enoch and Weybright purchased the company from Allen Lane and renamed it to New American Library. The combination of Enoch's business prowess and Weybright's editorial guidance thrust New American Library to the forefront of the paperback publishing industry. In May of 1952, *Newsweek* ran an article declaring NAL the biggest in the business citing the combination of art and enterprise as the determining factor of success.[7] Enoch, while often outwardly a stoic businessman, ascribed to the ideal that the publishing industry provided a valuable service to society. The book and publishing historian John Tebbel, heralded him as "one of the social philosophers of the paperback business."[8]

Initially the two areas of success for most paperback book publishers were with reprints of popular hardcover books and mass publication of formulaic genre fiction that reputable traditional publishers would not publish. While New American Library would specialize in reprints, they experimented with ways to expand beyond these areas. Weybright's attempt at breaking through these barriers

[7] Newsweek Magazine, "Reprints Resurgent," *Newsweek*, 1952 5-May: 104-107.
[8] John Tebbel, *Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of Book Publishing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 429.

included the creation and publication of *New World Writing*. He discussed its creation in his memoirs.

> "It occurred to me that NAL had an obligation to discover and deliver authors on behalf of others as well as entirely for ourselves. After a good deal of reflection, I determined that the best next move at NAL would be the initiation of a literary publication – a 'little magazine' – in book form. "[9]

Billed as a the first mass produced literary magazine, *New World Writing*, included samples of established writers but also published submissions from unknown authors. Its initial run of a modest 100,000 copies sold well and was critically acclaimed, however, in the end it was not a financial success. The program folded after four editions, but not before it had promoted authors such as Shirley Ann Grau, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Berger.

The paperback or cheap book movement, beginning in the 19th century and continuing in the 20th century challenged the trade book establishment of the United States. The first chapter of this thesis will engage with the technology that helped enable both movements, and how the physical form of these cheap publications evolved into what we would recognize today as a paperback book. Chapter 2 will examine the wave of late 19th century cheap editions more closely, identifying the content provided in this medium, the criticism leveled at the cheap publishing industry and finally the legal battle surrounding the passing of international copyright in the United States. Chapter 3 will discuss the 20th century paperback wave, again identifying how despite negative critical New American Library emerged as the dominant force in the reprint of high culture literature and nonfiction. The success of the most modern wave of publishing pushed cheap

[9] Victor Weybright, *The Making of a Publisher; A Life in the 20th Century Book Revolution* (New York, NY: Reynal, 1967), 232.

paperbacks into the realm of legitimacy, breaking down barriers between the caretakers of high culture and the masses.

Class Divisions and High Art

Beyond challenging the business model of the publishing industry, the cheap book movements of the 19th and 20th century unearthed some significant questions about the nature of high literature and print culture in the United States. In chapters two and three, when the critical reaction to cheap books is examined, a division between high culture and the low class will emerge.

Print culture has had the ability to aid in the organization of political and social ideas across large distances. Through the power of print, common ideas are transmitted forming connections among social groups. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson outlined how the technology of moveable type allowed an emerging middle class to organize their thoughts along a common language in the 16th century.

> The coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism, exploiting cheap popular editions, quickly created large new reading publics – not least among merchants and women, who typically knew little to no Latin – and simultaneously mobilized them for politico-religious purposes. Inevitably, it was not merely the Church that was shaken to its core. The same earthquake produced Europe's first important non-dynastic, non-city states in the Dutch Republic and the Commonwealth of the Puritans.[10]

The power of print in a common language was able to unite and organize a class of people who had previously lacked the ease of communication. Indeed, the power of information transmitted through newspapers or social and political symbols

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York City: Verso, 2006), 40.

transferred through novels can have the ability to tie social groups together in a common understanding. However, differences between the content of print media across classes has the ability to create a dichotomy between them. In the United States this has played out in a division between the conception of high literature held generally by upper classes, and the material available to the lower classes.

Cultural observers have long stated that among the general populace of the United States there has existed a suspicion of high art and literature. The historian Neil Harris outlined the formative years of this conception in *The Artist in American Society*. He intimates that the suspicion of art and high culture has not simply originated from puritanical religious virtues, but rather in the neoclassical rationalism that served as the foundation of the political and economic system of the United States.[11] This movement, while accepting the political and economic ideals of ancient philosophers, rejected the symbols of luxury and extravagance from the classical period as indicators of political decay.

The formation of high culture in US society experienced a series of obstacles. Some early cultural observers believed that art and literature could not flourish amid the virtues of democratic capitalism. It seemed to some that high culture would always be tied to an aristocratic organization, the antithesis of the ideals of the revolution. Among the founding fathers, there was much discussion on this sentiment. John Adams argued that art had always been at the whim of despots.[12] However, even in the midst of the revolutionary era there were thinkers who

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[11] Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 28.
[12] Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 36.

rejected the simple connection between art and extravagance, most notably Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Indeed both men argued that art was an essential part of a healthy functioning society. Franklin quipped that if luxuries from Europe were the precursors, to collapse the United States would have fallen before it began.[13]

Despite the existence of some champions of high culture amid the founding fathers, a separation developed between the cultural norms of the working classes and that of the upper classes. Alexis de Toqueville, maintained that the lack of an aristocratic tradition along with the steadfast belief in the principles of the early republic combined to create an atmosphere that, while not entirely hostile to artists, was not adept at producing them. Tocqueville conceded that the importance of an American print culture was evident, but at the time of his observations, no artistic culture of any merit existed.[14] Instead of great art, the citizens of the United States had cultivated a culture of journalism with newspapers as the paramount medium of conveying information.[15] He made the case that newspapers and associations of a democratic manner are self-reinforcing. They led to the establishment of an informed citizenry equipped with the tools necessary to participate in the democratic process.[16] Roughly a hundred years later another foreign cultural observer echoed this sentiment. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, a noted bibliographer and book historian, in his study of US society, *The Book in America: A History of the*

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[13] Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 50.
[14] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 445-449.
[15] *Ibid*
[16] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 493-495.

Making and Selling of Books in the United States, recorded the predilection towards journalism and rational conveyance of information over the more subtle methods presented in literature.[17]

Both Tocqueville and Lehmann-Haupt agreed on the lack of high art in US society, and the primacy of newspapers in the print culture. However, as we will see there was a distinct group of upper class critics, academics, journalists, and other caretakers of high culture who embraced the virtue of higher forms of communication. Chapter two and three will in part examine how the custodians of high culture were challenged by new print mediums. In the musings of these cultural critics, we will see time and again the classism inherent to the protection of high art. These new print mediums, the cheap library and dime novel of the 19th century and the modern paperback of the 20th century, began the process of breaking down the barriers between high culture and the middle and lower classes.

[17] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 139 - 144.

Chapter 1

In *Imagined Communities,* Benedict Anderson described the formation of a new print culture made possible by a technological advancement. The history of mass printing in the United States similarly followed technological innovation as well. However, while access to printed newspapers was perhaps always a signifier of the power of print in the United States, books initially remained in a class apart, as high quality books continued to be expensive and somewhat difficult to acquire outside of urban centers. Advances in print technology, paper production and distribution technology allowed for the advent of the first wave of softcover book publishing in the 19th century. This movement reached its apex in the period between the 1870s and 1890s.

This chapter will follow technological innovation of the 19th century and its role in creating the Dime Novel and the subsequent modern paperback industry both in terms of printing technology and in distribution. It will examine the role of the bookstore in the 19th century and how cheap publications like the Dime Novel and the modern paperback changed the way in which books were sold. The goal of this chapter is to establish a difference between the two commodities, trade books and inexpensive Dime Novels and modern paperbacks and note how the inexpensive publishers were able to greatly expanded access to books in a way that the retail book trade did not.

Steam Power and the Cylindrical Printing Press

The most significant technological advances contributing to the explosion of print media in the United States occurred in three phases. First came the shift from wooden flatbed printing presses to metallic flatbed presses. Eventually cylindrical presses took over. Robert Hoe, a Scottish businessman, founded a machinery firm in New York City in 1805 with the intention selling iron printing presses. While the cylindrical press had been in existence, at least in theory since English inventor William Nicholson drew up plans for one in 1790, the mechanical process had yet to be perfected.[18] At the time, England stood at the forefront of printing technology and Hoe used his connections to Great Britain to study the work taking place there on metallic mechanical cylindrical presses. In the 1830s, Hoe and his associates began experimenting with cylindrical presses and steam power. Each modification of their press increased the number of cylinders used for printing, increasing the output of the machine. By 1847, Robert's son Richard had created a printing press ready for mass commercial use. The "Hoe Type Revolving Machine"[19] went into use in Philadelphia printing the *Public Ledger* newspaper.[20] Hoe's machine was initially capable of producing 8,000 newspapers per hour. By the Civil War these presses were printing upwards of 15,000 newspapers each hour of operation.[21]

New forms of typesetting were required in order to harness the efficiency of the steam powered cylinder presses. Flatbed printing had required a typeset

[18] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry 1630-1865*, Vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 258.
[19] See Fig 1
[20] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 78-79.
[21] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry 1630-1865*, Vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 259.

entirely different from the cylinder machines. In 1841, the first electrotyped plate in the United States was produced to run on large cylindrical presses and was utilized by printing magazines in New York City.[22] This new form of type creation used a technically complex process of inducing electricity to copper or wax/glue moulds (although other materials were sometimes used) to raise recognizable letters. The electrotyping process was more successful at creating type for cylindrical presses and became increasingly inexpensive by the middle of the 19th century.

Paper production is, of course, central to the printing process as well. As the impact of the Industrial Revolution spread, paper production in the United States began to catch up to its European competitors. By 1860, roughly 555 paper mills operating in 24 states were producing more paper than Great Britain or France.[23] Abundant inexpensive paper was one of the primary materials needed to produce newspapers, which had the luxury of avoiding the costs of the more expensive binding materials books required.

The printing press innovations of the 1830s and 1840s were designed primarily to increase the output of newspapers. Almost immediately after the advent of steam powered cylindrical newspaper presses, book publishers began to adopt this new technology for their own needs. With new fast reliable printing machinery and lower prices for paper, book publishing in the United States entered a phase that would continue into the 20th century. Leather bindings remained expensive, however, alternate forms of housing books began to emerge in the

[22] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 81.
[23] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 168.

publishing world in the 1830s. Cloth and paper covers became popular using glue, stitching or even metal staples as binding agents. Just before the Civil War, these new technologies and techniques came together in the form of Dime Novels. The term, initially denoting the price of the books, would come to signify an entire field of publishing. The inexpensive book was born.

In the 20th century, the modern wave of paperback publishing followed a similar pattern. The president of the paperback giant New American Library, Kurt Enoch, described the technology enabling the paperback revolution of the 1950s:

> Paper-back books are printed on high speed magazine presses and, more recently, on huge new special book presses printing from rubber plates at the rate of 18,000 impressions of 128 pages, or 12,000 copies of a 192-page book, per hour. So-called 'Perfect' binding machines, which eliminate the expensive process of sewing, have been adapted for the binding of paper books and can turn out approximately 12,000 copies per hour. New types of glue have made this type of binding almost as strong, although not so permanent, as the conventional form. New developments in materials have improved the glossy, dust-repellent, and even washable protection for the paper covers.[24]

The technological improvements Enoch discussed allowed for the paperback book industry of the 1950s to make significant improvements in the quality of inexpensive books.

Distribution

Distribution in the early 19th century was tied to waterways and all large scale publishers were found along the eastern seaboard in urban centers. After the Civil War, technological adaptations in the form of railways served to increase the territory of these new inexpensive book publishers. The industry still oriented itself

[24] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.

in the more industrial east, with New York City becoming and remaining the center of publishing in the United States early in the 19th century. Railways facilitated new ways of selling books. Mail order and subscription book clubs, already established in the connected east coast cities, spread to the countryside after the Civil War.[25] As the population expanded westward, bookstores were in short supply. Railways allowed these new forms of bookselling to flourish.

Mail order book publishers, like their subscription counterparts, were almost exclusively cornered on the eastern seaboard. They were similar in most respects. In the mid to late 19th century companies such as Estes & Lauriat in Boston and publishers like Walter Jackson and his Chicago based partner, Horace Hooper, took advantage of newspaper advertisements and relatively low shipping rates to send books into the mid-western United States. Estes & Lauriat focused on heavily illustrated works such as *France* by Guizot and *Rome* by Duruy. They established high end markets by publishing high quality editions of French and English writers. Jackson and Hooper would find success selling *Encyclopedia Britannica* subscriptions, a copyright they purchased from English publishers, rather than printing without permission; a practice many of the cheap reprint companies would make common.[26]

Subscription publishing companies, also primarily based in the east, would send salesmen door to door to help their clients select specific collections of books. They would then deliver the chosen books directly to the homes of the purchasers.

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[25] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 51-54, 241-254.
[26] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 308-472.

"Most of the subscription books were…in rather spectacular cloth binding, heavily embossed and gilded, and with copious illustrations."[27] While often inexpensive and covered with cloth, these softcover books were not in the same spirit of the cheap paperback and cloth books sold by publishers of questionable legality before the 1890s. Instead the primary motivation for purchasing literature in this method was seemingly tied into conspicuous display.

> "Some students of the nineteenth century have doubted that the books which subscription agents sold from door to door were really read. They have suggested that they were bought mainly for their prestige value, by quality folk and especially by those who wanted to be considered as such."[28]

The suspicion that these books were bought mainly for display is a product of two factors. The first was the finely decorated and detailed editions that had become the norm in the subscription and mail order business. As early as 1832, the process of stamping gold leaf onto cloth book covers became standard.[29] This process was used to ornate cheaper cloth books in the style that leather bound books had been accustomed. Finally, there was an inherent patronizing attitude taken by cultural elites when referencing the intellectual capacity of the masses. There is a certain assumption among the cultural elite that the majority of people were not interested in high culture and therefore these books must have been purchased simply for display. This is an attitude that will be discussed in the following chapters.

In the 1950s there is the beginning of a shift in the culture of bookstores and book selling. Bookstores slowly grew in numbers and exploded in the 1960s, driven

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[27] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 251.
[28] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 251.
[29] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry 1630-1865*, Vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 259.

largely by the success of inexpensive paperbacks. While paperbacks would reinvigorate the distribution of books to drugstores, bus and rail stations and soon airports, the appearance of paperbacks at legitimate bookstores was a phenomenon rooted in the paperback revolution of the 1950s. Today one can visit a large bookseller and see more expensive hardcover books with their glossy jackets flanking the ranks of paperback books from early "cheap" publishers such as Bantam Books, New American Library, and Pocket Books. This, however, represents something of a relatively recent development that began with the introduction of Pocket Books in 1939.

The Old Bookseller and Buyer

The softcover book movement of the 1870s had its roots in the magazine and newspaper industry and could be found in general stores, drug stores, railway stations, essentially anywhere magazines could have been found. One place that these cheap libraries could not be found was in the trade bookstores of the 19th century. Bookselling in the 19th century had its organizational roots in something of an antiquated formula. Book retail outlets often purchased books at large auctions where the offerings of various publishers were put up for sale to the highest bidder. This was somewhat of an inexact way to stock shelves, but it was generally inexpensive. This was a method that certainly drew the ire of publishers who felt that auctions reduced the value of their commodity, this was described in a 1873 article in *The Publisher's Weekly*.

> What seems to me the particular bad feature of these book auctions is the effect which they have on values, and a consequent unsettling of the systematic margins which it is for the truest interest of the whole book business to make uniform and safe. As an auction, by its very name and nature, implies going for it what it will fetch, those who attend them do so for what? Why for *bargins*, of course. And bargins they get…Not only this, but now you have to confront the natural effect of these bargains by having the reading purchaser grumble at being asked to pay the publishing rate.[30]

This article, written by a person, self-identified as a publisher but signed merely as "GENERAL TRADE," sees these auctions as driving down the expected price. As the educated book customer knew his or her book retailer purchased the book at a discount through auction, he therefore expected a lower price as well.[31]

The book retailer of the 19th century is representative of the separation between the commodities of hardcover trade books and their paperback cousins. In the northeastern cities of the United States, bookstores strove towards a model put forth by their European counterparts. Lehmann-Haupt describes the method of German booksellers and equates it to the standards found in the urban centers of the eastern United States.

> [In Germany] To become a bookseller you had to serve an apprenticeship of from two to four years, during which time you were thoroughly trained in the organization of the publishing trade, in ordering, shipping and accounting methods, in selling books to customers, and last but not least, in the appreciation of literature and in bibliographical methods.[32]

This model followed a master/apprentice model of training. One did not simply open a bookstore as a businessman; training in specific details of the business of bookselling was required. A bookseller at one of these traditional stores was an

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[30] General Trade, "The Trade Sale and Underselling," *Publishers Weekly*, October 18, 1873: 399-400.
[31] *Ibid*
[32] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 241.

entrepreneur, accountant, and literary critic all in one. His product was more than a book, instead a collectable, a leather-bound tome worth of display.

In the United States, while this model existed, it was not necessarily the rule. In the October 25, 1873 issue of *The Publisher's Weekly*, there was a lengthy call for an increase in book selling standards.

> Everywhere the need is felt for book clerks and library assistants who have the knowledge to really qualify them for their work…The reason [for a lack of trained book clerks] is two-fold: the old system of apprenticeship, which gave the practical training of the store or workshop, but was imperfect in having little basis of general education on which to build, has gone by, and the prevalent ambition to be "something more" than one is, works an evil as well as a good in taking away the motive to educate one's self in a trade.[33]

The apprentice model is disparaged somewhat in this article, but the sentiment that a bookseller needs to be something beyond a clerk selling wares is reinforced.

In his book, *The Home Library*, written in 1883, Brander Matthews, a prominent book collector and critic of the late 19th century, outlined in detail the essentials to creating a book study at home. Amid the pages detailing what sort of book cases to purchase for what types of books, how to properly display reference books, and what books are proper to read, he details the manner in which one should go about beginning a book collection.

> It is not easy to advise exactly as to the best way of buying books, since so much depends on circumstance and situation. In general, it is best to make a friend of the most active and intelligent bookseller within reach. Decide on the sum you can afford to spend this year. Make out a list of the books you want. Take this to the bookseller and ask him to get you the books, and to allow you a fair discount proportionate to the size of the order. After these books have come, keep on good terms with the bookseller. Form the habit of dropping into his store now and again to see what he has likely to suit you.[34]

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[33] The Editors of Publisher's Weekly, "The Education of Book Handlers," *The Publisher's Weekly*, October 25, 1873: 444-445.
[34] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 25-26.

Beyond this Matthews warned against striking out on one's own to purchase books at auctions or from a travelling book peddler. He also expressed distaste for the inexpensive softcover book movement, even offering advice on how to reclaim a friend given to reading cheap fiction of a weekly story-paper or softcover.

The portrayal of a bookstore by Lehmann-Haupt was reinforced by Matthews and served to make the pretensions of class fairly obvious. Matthews had sections in his guidebook on the feasibility of creating a library on a budget, but still the majority of the material catered towards "high brow" literature and quality publications; even the "cheap" editions he recommends were one to three dollars, a significant increase from the ten cent novel. Finally, the simple fact that Matthews was compelled to write such a guide on book purchasing suggests also that book buying could be intimidating for an outsider.

Cheap and Portable

> He would be told that the [home] library should have very thick walls, to exclude the damp of spring, the heat of summer, and the cold of winter. He would be informed that the library should have windows only on one side, and that these windows should be recessed, that the sun may not shine in too violently, to the increase of moths and worms, and to the destruction of bindings.[35]
>
> If the only room which can be devoted to holding books is too small to hold all the volumes the family is fortunate enough to own, or if no room at all can be given up to them exclusively, then by all means let the books overflow the house.[36]

In the span of two paragraphs, Matthews touches upon both the old and new sentiment on the viewpoint of the use of books. The portability of books is perhaps

[35] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 48.
[36] *Ibid*

one of the most distinguishing factors between trade books with leather and cloth bindings and their cheaper paper and cloth counterparts. During the great cheap book boom of the 1870s-1890s portable books led the charge, breaking out from home libraries and into daily activities.

Portable literature in the late 19th century came in three forms, two of them intrinsically related to periodical publishing and another that signified a new direction in inexpensive publication. The first was the periodical or "story paper" a newspaper style medium with serialized or short stories. The second, something of a hybrid of the newspaper and the smaller pamphlet novel came about, generally sized around 8x11 inches, this pamphlet novel was also generally of cheap construction. Finally, the pamphlet novel more closely resembled actual trade books than the former varieties, in size if not quality of construction. They were generally around fifty pages and organized around a 5x8.5 inch paper binding. These books were often known for their poor construction (some were issued without covers) but also for their cheap prices.[37]

Trade books and high quality editions at the time were significantly less portable. Bound in leather or cloth, often ornately decorated, or bound in paper with glossy jacket coverings, these books were a far cry from the cheap printings described in the preceding paragraph. Beyond binding material, these books were

[37] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 10-13.

often artificially bulked by printing on denser paper in order to add the weight and thickness considered a mark of quality.[38]

In his book *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*, Michael Denning identifies places in which people were reading the sensationalist fiction[39] of these Dime Novels.

> There were three main sites of reading: at home, at work, and while traveling. If these seem to exhaust all the possibilities, let me note where sensational fiction does *not* seem to have been read: at school where little fiction was read; at religious institutions; at saloons…[40]

Of greatest interest to a conversation about the portability of books was the introduction of travel time as a time for reading. A sub classification of the late 19th century Dime Novel is that of "Railroad Literature." It is important to note that these railroad books received their designation due primarily to the location in which they were procured. In examining publisher Frank Leslie and his embracing of railroad paperbacks, one sees how books began to encroach on casual reading, a domain previously dominated by periodicals.[41]

Frank Leslie began his publishing career utilizing the new publishing equipment of the time and created a well-known brand name in periodicals. Leslie took advantage of the new ability to generate cheap illustrations and became well known in the publishing world for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Paper*. His early work

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[38] Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc, 1952), 295-301.
[39] Denning uses the term, "sensationalist fiction" to describe these Dime Novels as their content was generally considered to be as such. A more detailed analysis of the content of Dime Novels can be found in the second chapter of this thesis.
[40] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 38.
[41] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.

was highly representative of the early pre-paperback/softcover movement. His periodicals contained stories angled towards various demographics. *Frank Leslie's Boys and Girls Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Budget of Wit*, and *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, to name a few, were some of his most highly successful productions, remaining in print even after his death in 1884.[42]

In fact, Frank Leslie's legacy was more a result of his illustrated periodicals and less for his highly successful softcover book series introduced in 1877, "Frank Leslie's Home Library of Standard Works by the Most Celebrated Authors."[43] Frank's wife, Miram Leslie, took over the publishing business when Frank died in 1880 and continued his tradition of promoting reading material at newsstands at railway stops. She was also a considerable hand at running the business that only rebounded after the introduction of the book series (Frank Leslie had a habit of running up significant debts due to his personal lifestyle expenditures.).[44]

Frank Leslie's Home Library of Standard Works by the Most Celebrated Authors was indicative of the softcover market at the time. The relationship that developed between periodical and early paperback form factors was no coincidence. Emphasizing portability and low-cost, many of these early softcover institutions, such as Frank Leslie' publishing company, began as magazine publishers and moved

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[42] The American Bookseller, "Price List of Newspapers and Periodicals," *The American Bookseller* (New York City: The American News Company, Jan-June 1884).
[43] I make this assessment for two reasons. The first is the amount of books written about Frank Leslie's illustrated periodicals such as *Frank Leslie and His Illustrated Newspaper* by Budd Leslie Gambee. Also his book series was created in 1877 only three years before his death, it was subsequently operated by his wife.
[44] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 358.

into the market of book publishing when technology, distribution and sales locations allowed for easier access to that market.

After the paperback market faded in the 1890s due to the enacting and enforcing of international copyright, the revival began roughly twenty years later. Little Blue books, sold by Emanuel Julius, reinvigorated the mail-order inexpensive book-publishing model. These books were unique because they were even smaller and less expensive than most dime novels of the 1870s. The books were, as their name suggested, covered in blue paper, and stapled with large metal staples. The binding technique limited both the number of pages and the length and width of the book. Measuring in at around 3.5x5 inches and roughly 60 pages, these Little Blue Books were sold for anywhere between a nickel and twenty-five cents, depending on length.[45] Selling exclusively through mail-order from advertisements in newspapers, magazines and in the back of the books themselves, Little Blue Books were a precursor of the late 20th century paperback revolution.

Modern Paperbacks

In the 1950s, paperbacks often sported smaller lengths and widths than the story papers and pamphlet novels of the 19th century. However, technological innovations allowed for sturdier construction and greater page numbers.[46] Similar to Little Blue Books, Pocket Books initially maintained a smaller size for increased

[45] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Golden Age Between Two Wars 1920-1940*, Vol. 3, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1978), 205-209.
[46] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.

portability. Geoffrey O'Brien, a paperback book historian described the physical form of the modern paperback:

> Pocket Books, on the other hand, were fun: they fit snugly in the hand; the shape immediately differentiated them from other books…As the slogan had it, they were 'kind to your pocket and your pocketbook.'"[47]

Indeed, the company name Pocket Books, was an accurate description. During World War Two, Pocket Books changed their shape slightly in order to fit into military uniform cargo pockets. The new shape was much wider but with less length, thus creating a unique design. Measuring roughly 6.5x9 inches, these books were quite popular among soldiers, Pocket Books, and the British company Penguin Books, were unable to meet demand.[48]

Pocket Books maintained several sizes after the war. Diminutive 6.5x4.5 editions of some series such as the Pocket Library of Great Art still existed and were being sold in the 1950s.[49] However, Pocket Books and most other companies began to produce paperbacks in sizes similar to what is seen today; measuring roughly 8-9 inches in length and 5-6 inches in width. The advent of the double feature book in the 1950s was an attempt by publishers to pair a lesser known writer with a well-known blockbuster. The result was a book with two covers and two stories with the lesser printed upside-down as compared with the feature. A famous example of this is the 1953 Ace Double Books' pairing of William Burroughs *Junkie* with a genre crime thriller *Narcotics Agent* by Maurice Helbrant.[50]

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[47] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 33.
[48] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 68-69.
[49] The book *Rouault* in this series is personally owned.
[50] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 171-174.

The form factors of the modern paperbacks shrunk from the magazine sized story-papers to the variety recognized today as a standard paperback. However, these books were often still sold and displayed in magazine style racks prompting yet another departure from the books of the 19th century and the trade books of the 20th century.

Lurid Covers of the 1950s Paperback

The modern wave of paperback publishing in the 1950s began with some similarities to the softcover boom of the 1870s-1890s. Specifically, the close association with the magazine industry unites the two movements. Through printing technology, shipping and distribution, the paperback industry of the 1950s took advantage of the periodicals trade much as the 19th century paperback did. However, as more technologically advanced printing techniques became less expensive the paperback publishers were able to add a new dimension to their emulation of magazines.

Cover illustration became a major focal point in the paperback book industry of the 1950s. Having found a place on magazine style racks, the mid 20th century paperback was displayed outwardly, cover first, as opposed to merely showing the edge of the binding.

> The covers were designed to leap at the eye of someone who was casually passing a newsstand or soda-fountain bookrack. Once the potential buyer had gotten close enough to pick up the book, the copy took over. The gaudy colors and flagrant lasciviousness of the covers aimed only a projecting visibility among the dozens of other similar covers all crying for attention. Indeed to fully appreciate the aesthetics

> of an old paperback cover, it should be contemplated from a distance of twenty to thirty feet.[51]

In keeping with the writing style of much of the genre fiction of the time, the cover illustrations were often sexually suggestive, violent or both. A 1954 Popular Library copy of *Whistle Stop* by Maritta M. Wolff, is advertised on the cover with the description "She was a Girl with a Price Tag." Its cover illustration depicted a woman in a yellow dress being ogled by a man from behind. Similarly a 1956 Popular Library edition of *The Judas Kiss* by Jay J. Dratler, is adorned with nearly the exact same cover, bearing the tagline "They Couldn't Stay Away From Each Other."[52]

Outside of genre fiction, covers also remained racy and colorful. When Ace Books published *Junkie* by William Burroughs (published under his pen name William Lee as a single story versus the double book mentioned earlier) it sported a cover of a man pulling a woman back by her throat bearing another suggestive tagline "Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict."[53] Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* was reprinted in 1948 by Bantam books with a highly sexually suggestive cover bearing the tagline, "They Stole Love From a World Afire."[54]

The nature of the cover art attracted attention from potential buyers but also from critics and government censors. David Dempsey, one of the Editors of *The New York Times Book Review* wrote in 1953:

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[51] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 39.
[52] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 31.
[53] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 175.
[54] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 58.

> It is when we approach [paperback] fiction that we meet the Mr. Hyde to the industry's Dr. Jekyll. The thinly disguised bid for the semipornographic trade is evident to anyone who has studied the lurid cover illustrations and come-on nature of the blurbs. Even the classics have been trotted out to satisfy this demand.[55]

A year before Dempsey made these remarks; the paperback industry was already under investigation by the House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials. In a *Newsweek* article from 1952, Ezekiel Gathings, the Congressman from Arkansas, who spearheaded the Committee, was quoted

> We are interested only in the extreme type of publication of pornographic material…Only what's available at the corner drugstore or what you can order through the mail…I'm not a crusader, goodness alive. I'm just trying to do something to bring about the wholesome publishing of reading material for our youth.[56]

The Committee was adamant that it was not seeking to censor legitimate writers and publishers. Instead, it was seeking to root out the lewd illustrations on legitimate books and to curtail the vulgar portrayal of subjects such as homosexuality and bachelor night life.[57]

The House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials was successful at curtailing some of the racier cover elements, rather than the content itself.[58] The literary and cultural critic Bernard DeVoto made light of the situation in 1954:

> …a Select Committee of the House of Representatives heard alarming reports about books that were said to be erotic, and for two bits at that…The covers showed next year's Miss America hurrying out of her brassiere or sliding out of her nightshirt, and the blurb said 'She LONGED to be raped!'…[The Committee] recommended that the First Amendment be repealed, at least in respect to anything under three dollars…[59]

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[55] David Dempsey, "The Revolution in Books," *The Atlantic*, 1953 January: 75-77.
[56] Newsweek, "No Witch Hunt," *Newsweek*, June 7, 1952: 80.
[57] For a greater discussion on the content of 1950s paperbacks please see Chapter 3.
[58] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981),38-45.
[59] Bernard DeVoto, "Culture at Two Bits," *Harpers*, 1954 October: 8-13: 9.

The result was a taming of cover art. As DeVoto puts it, "On the new covers Miss America is only beginning to reach for the hooks of her brassiere, the blurb is no more excited than the announcement of next week's double feature…"[60]

Cover illustrations, while somewhat tamed by the investigations of the House Committee on Pornographic Materials, were of significance because of the places in which these books were sold. In newsstands, drugstores, supermarkets, bus and train stations, one could find a paperback book. Displayed prominently with the cover facing out, these books were quite a departure from the inexpensive hardcover reprint manufactured by the traditional giants of the industry.

> …like the gloomy blue-bound hardback reprints that sold in those days for a dollar, books that gave you – in small type crammed into double columns – the collected works of Zola or Kipling or Plutarch in a form suitably ungratifying to the eye, a form somber enough to remind you of all the weight attaching to a Classic, thus catering to a reverence for learning from which the idea of pleasure had been for all time excluded.[61]

Indeed, the paperback book came to signify something separate from the traditional hardcover books.

Conclusion

Just as moveable type began a cheap print revolution in 15th century Europe, steam powered cylindrical presses opened the doors for inexpensive printing in the 19th century United States. Advances in transportation technology only helped to further the spread of the printed word across the growing country. Beyond

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[60] *Ibid*

[61] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 33.

supporting the logistical aspects of publishing, railways also provided new venues for the sale of inexpensively printed books. Railway stations helped spawn an entire "genre" of publishing. Smaller, lighter, inexpensive, and (often due to poor construction) disposable, the Cheap Library or Dime Novel thrived in the same locations in which newspapers and magazines had previously held a monopoly.

Despite the expansion of book-like publications, bookstores, in their limited number, declined to embrace the cheap publishing revolution. Bookstores and booksellers, as suggested by Matthews, catered to a social elite and cultivated an attitude of arrogance in the face of the trash literature churned out by cheap book publishers. This type of classism will become increasingly evident in the critical reaction to cheap publications and their content in the following chapter.

The physical evolution of the paperback book from the 19th century "story paper" to the modern paperback of the 20th century is perhaps as important to the eventual adaptation of the medium and its present ubiquity as the content of the books themselves. We will see in chapter three that as print quality reached trade book standards in the 1950s and, to a certain extent, racy cover art was curtailed, bookstores began carrying paperbacks, thrusting them into the realm of good taste. In the following chapters the examination of the content of cheap books will reveal the extensive history behind the literary criticism and adaptation of the paperback book in modern society.

Chapter 2

In the 19th century the paperback book publishing industry expanded largely in the areas where periodicals had previously dominated. The "story paper" published by early media companies such as Frank Leslie's Periodicals, thrived on the serialized genre fiction market and magazine-like light weekly articles. For the modern observer these story papers would appear to be magazines rather than books. The transitional "cheap library" publication measuring in at 8x11 inches and the modern paperback book-sized pamphlet novel symbolized a shift in the physical dimensions of the emerging paperback book trade, but not necessarily in the content. The content of the 19th century softcover industry will be the focus of this chapter.

Stories from these mediums in the middle to late 19th century were highly divisive. Critics such as Brander Matthews dismissed them outright, while organizations of reputable publishers such as those represented in *Publisher's Weekly* were both curious and wary at the same time. The content, Matthews felt, was below the standards of "good reading." However, in an article in *The Publisher's Weekly* from 1877, there was an interest in understanding the effect of cheap books on legitimate trade sales. This article attempted to understand the market in which these new softcover books existed without offering an opinion on the literary value

of the books.[62] By the end of the 19th century, however, the general feeling at *The Publisher's Weekly* had swayed against the cheap book industry largely due to its increased reliance on pirated copyrighted material.[63]

The genre fiction of westerns, detective stories, and mysteries has historically supplied the original substance of cheap book movements. Cheap book publishers, seeking to continuously supply new material to their customers, supported writers writing from genre formulas with topics taken from the news of the day. This sort of writing constituted the bulk of the original content that cheap books of the 19th century provided.

Reprints were another area of great success in the cheap book industry. International copyright law did not exist in the United States until 1891, and domestic copyright was often unenforced. The discussions surrounding the inception of copyright were driven largely by the influx of cheap publishers illegally reprinting both foreign and domestic copyrighted material. Even though cheap book publishers were providing original content, their profit margins were aided by effectively stealing the publishing lists of trade book manufacturers. The legitimate publishers and the government took notice, and eventually took steps to dismantle book piracy in the industry.

This chapter will begin with a look at the content of the inexpensive paperback libraries and to what audience they were directed. Then it will engage with the critics of the cheap book publishers. Dividing the critical reaction between

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[62] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Cheap Libraries," *The Publishers' Weekly*, 1877 6-October: 396-397.
[63] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 488.

derision of content and questions of legality provides evidence that there were two major discussions regarding the proliferation of cheap books. Finally, the debate surrounding the enactment of international copyright law in 1891, while not ostensibly directed at the destruction of the cheap publishing industry, had exactly that effect. The opinions both for and against international copyright in many ways interact with the questions of class and accessibility that the literary critics will introduce.

"Cheap" and Cheap

In the world of the 19th century paperback, different terms are widely used to describe slightly different alterations to a common object. The terms "Dime Novels," "Railroad Literature," and "Cheap Libraries," all generally refer to the industry of the inexpensive paperback or softcover. The commonalities of these books were cheap construction and extremely inexpensive cost. They differed greatly from their counterparts often referred to as trade books. Trade books were often leather bound but could be paper or cloth bound. In the appendix of Brander Matthew's guidebook are lists of books worth purchasing, often with cheap popular editions suggested for the book collector on a budget. However, even these cheaper editions range anywhere from two to five dollars, a significant increase from the dime novel that often went for well under fifty cents.[64] In order to more clearly differentiate these separate commodities, I will use the term "cheap" or "inexpensive" to denote the Dime Novel-type publications and use the term "trade" to refer to the established book industry.

In the area of content for these cheap libraries, there was certainly some overlap with their trade book brethren, but there was also some original content available as well. Reprints, as we will see in this chapter, were a major source of income for many of these cheap libraries. These reprint publishers, more often than not, paid no royalties to the original authors, and were, by modern standards, illegal. Critical reaction will often center on the quality of the content available, the questions of legality, or both. Eventually these questions on the legal nature of

[64] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883)125-160.

pirated reprints will lead to the passing of international copyright law in the United States, effectively ending the proliferation of the cheap book industry.

Original Content

The 1870s mark the decade where these cheap libraries began to take a serious foothold in the publishing world. Some well-known cheap publishers included T. B. Peterson & Bros., George and Norman Munro, Donnelley, Loyd & Co., Street & Smith, Frank and Miriam Leslie, and of course the infamous Beadle & Adams, the original Dime Novel publisher. In 1877, *The Publishers' Weekly* felt it necessary to discuss the cheap libraries and their influence on the trade market. In October of 1877, they note that there were already fourteen of these companies producing best-selling novels from the publishing lists of reputable publishers such as Harpers', Lippincott, Holt and Appleton.[65] Cheap publishers continued to rely on the revenue from the reprints of best sellers from larger companies, however, they would also engage with the creation of their own material.

In the 19th century there was an entire industry surrounding the production of genre fiction that had first taken hold in the story papers and then in the dime novel. E. W. Bok, wrote in 1892 of the presence of what he called "Literary Factories" in New York City.

> This literary factory is hidden away in one of the by-streets of New York, where one would never dream of finding anything in the shape of literature. It employs over thirty people, mostly girls and women. For the most part these girls are intelligent. It is their duty to read all the daily and weekly periodicals in the land…Any unusual story of city life – mostly the misdoings of city people – is marked by these girls and

[65] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Cheap Libraries," *The Publishers' Weekly*, 1877 6-October: 396-397.

> turned over to one of three managers. These mangers, who are men, select the best of these marked articles, and turn over such as are available to one of the corps of five women, who digest the happening given to them and transform it to a skeleton or outline for a story. [66]

The skeleton outline was then sent through the mail to a staff writer who then was tasked with producing a story based on the outline. These writers were given specific details on the number of chapters, and pages for each chapter. Their compensation hinged on their prominence as a writer and the length of the material requested.[67]

If this style of producing fictionalized material based on real-world events conjures up images of syndicated television courtroom dramas "ripped from the headlines," one should also recognized the potential power that topical stories on major political and social events could have on the reading public. In August of 1877, Lippincott & Co., a reputable trade book publisher, released a new version of *The Conflict Between Labor and Capital* by Albert S. Bolles. This rerelease coincided with the railway worker strike spreading across the country. *The Publishers' Weekly* opined that perhaps "Common-sense books supplied to each of the strikers would go far to put an end to the present condition of affairs, perhaps."[68] Bolles' book purported to be a levelheaded approach to the analysis of labor unions and their challenge to the capitalist. He wrote, "The Author trusts that the work will prove useful, both to the working-man and to his employer, in the way of toning down the antagonism existing between the two classes, and in leading them to see more

[66] E. W. Bok, "Literary Factories," *Publishers Weekly*, 1892 13-August: 11.
[67] *Ibid*
[68] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "Notes in Season," *The Publishers' Weekly*, August 4, 1877: 131.

perfectly their true relations to each other."[69] This rerelease, celebrated by a periodical that represented an organized group of publishing capitalists, highlights the pretensions of class dividing the trade book and the cheap book markets. This division will only become more obvious as the arguments over the value of cheap literature take hold in the industry.

Inexpensive prices, location of sales, and the content of the books themselves established a relationship between the working-class of the mid to late 19th century and cheap book publishers. Michael Denning, a cultural historian, argued, "The evidence suggests that the bulk of the dime novel audience were young workers, often of Irish or German ethnicity, in the cities and mill towns of the North and West; and, that dime novels and story papers made up most of their reading matter."[70] He made this assumption based on the prevalence of advertisements for these goods in working-class newspapers, accounts in memoirs, and autobiographies of workers and the discussion of the value of cheap fiction in the newspapers read by laborers.[71]

Periodical sources of the time also indicated a significant division between the literary culture of the high class and that of those who consumed cheap books. *The Publishers' Weekly* was the primary periodical of the publishing industry at the time. In 1877 they wrote.

> It is difficult to generalize as to what classes of readers buy these broadsheets, but we are inclined to believe, from what we can learn, that they are very largely the

[69] Albert Sidney Bolles, *The Conflict Between Labor and Capital* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1876).
[70] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 45.
[71] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 27-46.

> *clientele* of the weekly story-papers. These have not been pushed of late years as they used to be, and their readers perhaps are ready for something new.[72]

The author then made some patronizing remarks regarding the reading habits of the working-class.

> On the other hand, these publications, certainly of no immediate profit to the regular publishing trade, may ultimately prove to be of use in educating a large numerical but low intellectual body of readers into a higher class of reading than they have hitherto reached, and leading to the consequent increase, some day, of the market for good books.[73]

While certainly divisive, the sentiment here was that even cheap literature has value in that it could potentially lead to the reading of good literature. However, this is of course a view from the elite. Consistently there is a patronizing tone taken even by the critics who find reasons to come to the defense of this culture of reading.

Denning makes clear that there existed a significant distinction between the reading habits of the classes:

> This distinction is important in understanding the dime novel's public. As a cultural form, dime novels were *not* part of the popular culture of the 'middle class'. The magazines were the key literary form in that cultural universe; its metaphoric centers were the 'self-made' entrepreneur and the 'domestic' household. The dime novels were part of the popular culture whose metaphoric centers of gravity were the 'honest mechanic' and the virtuous 'working-girl'. Indeed, this is how they were seen in that 'middle-class' discourse and practice that sought to reform the culture and reading of the 'lower classes.'[74]

While Denning would admit that the dime novel was not a product of the working class, he was adamant that unlike the pretensions of the middle and upper class, the dime novel was not designed to reform the intellect of the working-class it targeted. In fact, he separated the content in order to identify symbols of the working class in the stories of the cheap books. This separation in content helped to distinguish

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[72] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Cheap Libraries," *The Publishers' Weekly*, 1877 6-October: 396-397.
[73] *Ibid*
[74] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 45-46.

between the symbols of working class unity and the projection of upper-class ideals on the working public.[75]

Bok's description of a literary factory in New York City was written in 1892, however, it was apparent that the prevalence of topical fiction writing was occurring throughout the paperback publishing wave of the late 19th century. The story of the Molly Maguires was a direct connection between working class issues and the topical literature of the time. The origin of this increasingly mythological account was the result of a mixed response to the failed mining strike of 1875. The characters that populated stories about the Molly Maguires were the sort that excelled in the sensationalized market of the cheap paperback. They often featured definitive villains and heroes. Often the failure of the strike was placed at the hands of the miners themselves, but other stories pined the blame on Pinkerton agents working within the Maguires in order to push for a knowingly futile coal mine strike. This type of story with obvious heroes and villains found success among the working class, who could identify with the plight of the heroes even if they ultimately failed to end the capitalist system.[76]

The late 19th century "Ragged Dick" series by Horatio Alger conjured up a different sort of sentimentality. The rags to riches tale was meant to provoke a sense of the American Dream where the ideals of hard work mixed with a certain amount of luck would result in financial success. *The Publishers' Weekly* described a Horatio Alger book as "the adventures of a bright boy who attained success through

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[75] *Ibid*
[76] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987)118-148.

his daring and adherence to the truth."[77] While these novels certainly were found on the book racks with other cheap libraries, the concept of the tramp moving up in the ranks of genteel society by adhering to its rules is not necessarily indicative of the period of intense labor unrest of the late 19th century.

The story of the outlaw, while often taking place in the "Wild West," suggested the sentimentality of the working class much more than the idealized rags to riches stories propagated by the likes of Horatio Alger. The outlaw, rather than clinging to the rules of society that had resulted in his poverty, instead decided to break from the system. While the outlaw would often achieve success, the illegality of it worked outside the mold of the self-made man.[78]

> The outlaw tales are built not around the education and success of a self-made man nor around an interclass romance but around the persecution of a hero or of a defenseless person which forces the hero into a justifiable though illegal revenge.[79]

The defining word in this section was "justifiable" as it further separated the working class from upper class sensibilities. While perhaps a bit speculative, it is certainly logical that the lower classes would identify with an illegal act, justifying it with claims of a broken social system. As the discussion on the legality of the cheap publishing industry increased in intensity, it became clear how these publishers began to embody the symbol of the outlaw in their mere existence.

Denning's admittedly allegorical reading of the stories from the cheap libraries and dime novels fit his analysis of the connection between the themes of the paperback and the sentiment of the working class in the late 19th century. Book

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[77] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "Christmas Bookshelf: For Younger Readers," *The Publishers' Weekly*, November 27, 1897: 91.
[78] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 159.
[79] *Ibid*

reviewers of the time, however, did not have the benefit of historical perspective and, as a result, were significantly less forgiving. The next section examines the opinion of the more educated book reviewer of the late 19th century. As we will see, the valuation of the content of this material will again stress the class division between the trade book and the paperback.

Critics

The "Cheap Libraries" that flourished in the late 19th century were, in a sense unfortunately named as the term cheap was easily applied to the content of their literature as well as their cost. Brander Matthews lamented the lack and quality of reading:

> The first thing one notices is that very few people read, in the exact sense of the word…while an enormous proportion of the people of these United States are capable of the physical act of readings, and do, indeed, practice it now and then, so far as to read the market reports or the deaths and marriages, only a few are habitual readers. And even of these, how many are there who read anything besides cheap fiction – cheap, I mean in quality – the ready-made literature turned out by the fiction mills?[80]

Matthews was, in essence, a symbol of the viewpoint of the highly educated middle to upper class. The distaste he exuded for the content of the cheap books the class differences outlined by Michael Denning who used the literary symbols discussed in the previous section to denote the class differences between the content of the dime novel and the literature of the middle class and the more highly educated.[81]

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[80] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 27-28.
[81] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 27-61.

The question of whether reading of "trash" fiction is better than reading nothing at all is something that continues to be debated to this day. In the eyes of Matthews, "readers of trash and nothing else, and the readers of nothing at all – save, perhaps, the probabilities in the morning papers – may well be classed together."[82] Indeed, he then lamented that these bad readers or non-readers would certainly not be in the audience of his book, and therefore it is the duty of the new intellectual reader to help guide his friends to the fold. He focuses specifically on younger readers who, he was concerned, would never be exposed to the high brow literature that came at eight dollars a book.

> But the best way to fight the evil is not by excluding fiction altogether, for, as we have seen, the love of fiction is a healthy love and a necessity, and all attempts to crush it must needs be futile. The better way is to supply good fiction in place of bad…The bad stories are cheap and fiery. Give him good stories, as cheap and better, fuller of meat, stronger in tone, and in the main as interesting, and there is hope…[83]

While it is true that this sort of criticism was indicative of the view from the top, there was some concern from within the ranks of the working class as well. Denning cites a passage from the *Workingman's Advocate* in 1866 warning of the power of sensationalist fiction to distort rational human thought, but then concluded that there was just as much danger in the overindulgence of liquor or prostitutes.[84]

In a July 1896 issue of *The Review of Reviews*, a weekly literary periodical, an author identified as "A Factory Worker" wrote a defense of the cheap library noting several themes that have already been uncovered. Like the article in *Workingman's*

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[82] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 29-31.
[83] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 41.
[84] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso Publishing, 1987), 42.

Advocate, the defense was largely centered on the fact that there is worse reading material out there. Similar to the article in *The Publishers' Weekly* there was a significant focus on the fact that reprints of highbrow literature were also available in this format. There was also a concern over the reading habits of the youth, akin to Matthew's apprehension on the same subject. The patronizing tone of the article towards the intellectual capabilities of the working class, however, thrust the distinction of the author as a "factory worker" into doubt. After noting the abundance of and excellent sales of highbrow reprints, the author wrote,

> Although I do not for one moment imagine that the ordinary factory boy is of the type that reads poetry of any description, still [the sales of cheap reprints of highbrow publications] shows the tendency in various classes of boys and girls to be both able and willing to appreciate our masterpieces.[85]

The writer concludes "the best safeguards for boys against pernicious literature are plenty of good literature, equally cheap, and plenty of outdoor exercise."[86]

Literary authorities seemingly dictated this question of good versus bad literature; however, there was an interesting point Matthews made that would seemingly contradict his position that there was a distinct authority on the value of literature. He wrote:

> Having formed the habit of reading, and having thus got your foot on the ladder of literary culture, how are you to get the most result from these? First of all, always think over a book when you have finished it. Criticise it. Form your own opinion of it…No matter how poor a book may be, the cheapest bit of cheap fiction, you ought to form an opinion about it, and be able to give some sort of reason for it. It may not be easy at first but practice makes perfect.[87]

Despite all his pretensions that there are right and wrong books to read, Matthews made this strange argument in the midst of his guide, before the section offering

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[85] A Factory Worker, "Defence of the Penny Dreadful," *The Review of Reviews*, July 1896: 148.
[86] *Ibid*
[87] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), 35-36.

advice on how to convert a friend to reading good literature. This odd snippet of sudden faith in the new reader's ability to make intellectual literary decisions was, like the question of trash reading versus not reading at all, a theme that occurred among the discussions of the cultural elite which will be revisited in the subsequent chapter on the 1950s paperback revolution.

Denning's often-favorable interpretations of the genre fiction dime stories of the late 19th century was not found even among the defenses of the cheap libraries from the critics of the time. There was a certain understanding of the separation between the fiction of the working class and that of the upper classes. One area in which there could have potentially been overlap was in the reprint market. The discussion surrounding reprints was charged with a different sort of criticism, one leveled at the legality of the loosely termed "pirate" publishers that prospered in the 1870s-1890s.

Reprints, Copyright, and the Legislation of Literary Access

The availability of inexpensive reprints was not, in the 1870s – 1890s, a new phenomenon. In the 1830s and 1840s at the advent of the Dime Novel craze, Beadle's advertised "Books for the Million!", "A Dollar Book for a Dime!" and "128 pages complete, only Ten Cents!"[88] The concern over the legality of these dime publishers began before the Civil War. The war disrupted the lobby for copyright,

[88] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Creation of an Industry 1630-1865*, Vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 250.

however it emerged soon after, becoming an ongoing discussion until it was finally written into law in 1891.[89]

In the era of the greatest success of the cheap library in the 19th century, there was a significant debate underway as to whether the inexpensive paperback industry had an impact on the sales of legitimate trade booksellers, with reprints factoring heavily into the debate. This was, of course, one of the concerns of the trade market that was hotly debated throughout the era. The Publishers' Weekly observed in 1877,

> It becomes a very interesting question as to how far these broadsheet publications have affected or will affect the regular trade. Some publishers have had the impression, in a vague way, that they are seriously cutting into the regular paper novels, but after considerable investigation, we are not able to find that such is the fact to any appreciable extent.[90]

However, an article written in "The Contributors' Club" just a month later in *The Atlantic Monthly*, suggested there was an appreciable effect on the legitimate trade business.

> To encourage this style of cheap literature is to do an injustice to every reputable publisher in America and to every man or woman in the United States who depends upon literary labor for a livelihood.[91]

Whatever the actual impact on sales at legitimate bookstores, a safe conclusion was that the legitimate publishing world was highly aware of the reprint operations of the cheap publishers and was watching them closely. In the following decade, industry opinion would rapidly swing against the cheap book publishers as the consensus grew that their reprints were hurting the trade industry.

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[89] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 634-644.
[90] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Cheap Libraries," *The Publishers' Weekly*, 1877 6-October: 396-397.
[91] The Contributors' Club, "The Contributors' Club," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1877: 619-620.

While seemingly unanimous in their distaste for the genre fiction of the medium, the cheap library reprint was a point of contention among the voices of the cultural elite. Those who believed that the availability of highbrow literature could save the masses from their obsession with the sensational factory fiction often heralded it as the saving grace of the dime novel industry. Echoing the hopeful, yet condescending tone of *The Publishers' Weekly*, another author of The Contributors' Club wrote in 1878:

> The newsdealer who sold me the History of a Crime [Victor Hugo] made one very suggestive remark. 'The oddest thing about the whole business,' said he, 'is the number of calls I have for the best novels, in this shape, from men whom I used to think of as wanting only the worst class of publications I had on my counters.'[92]

The author continues:

> Such men – women and children, too – can be won from the degrading reading to which they are accustomed only by the substitution for it of good literature, equally attractive and equally cheap.[93]

Indeed, this sentiment was highly visible among the cultural elite in their discussions of the value of inexpensive literature. A similar argument would serve as a deterrent against enacting international copyright.

In 1873, Senator Morrill from Vermont, known for his dedication to higher education in the United States after sponsoring the Land Grant College Act, made a compelling case to congress against the enactment of international copyright.

> In view of the whole case, your committee are satisfied that no form of international copyright can fairly be urged upon Congress upon reasons of general equity or of constitutional law: that the adoption of any plan for the purpose which has been laid before us would be of very doubtful advantage to American authors as a class, and would be not only an unquestionable and permanent injury to the manufacturing interests concerned in producing books, but a hindrance to the diffusion of knowledge among the people and to the cause of universal education[94]

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[92] The Contributors' Club, "The Contributors' Club," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1878: 370-371.
[93] *Ibid*
[94] Quoted from: Editors of The Nation, "Publishers and International Copyright," *The Nation*, November 20, 1879: 340-341.

Morrill's report dismantled the legislative push for international copyright in the 1870s as it found the results would not improve the position of American authors because it would drive the costs of books up, hindering the ability of domestic manufacturers to print content from domestic authors.[95] This sentiment, while ostensibly aimed at protecting both American authors and book manufacturers, maintained the supply of cheap libraries to the working class. Of course, publishers, even of formulaic original content, relied heavily on the sales from their reprints of copyrighted material.[96]

Even as publishers in the United States began to decrease their reliance on foreign novels towards the end of the 19th century,[97] cheap publishers were still heavily reliant on the income generated from reprints of the best sellers lists of the major manufacturers. As noted in the Publishers' Weekly in 1877, the cheap libraries were churning out inexpensive editions from legitimate trade publishers,

> Our list [of cheap libraries] already includes fourteen 'libraries' or series of these broadsheets, of which one outreaches a hundred numbers, while another is increasing just now at a regular rate of eight per week. They include many of the best-selling and many of the best novels, largely from the list of Harpers' Select Library, but also from those of the Lippincott, Holt, and Appleton series.[98]

These best sellers were not exclusively the work of foreign authors, but included the works of American authors ostensibly protected by domestic copyright laws.

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[95] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 635-636.
[96] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 481-488.
[97] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 487.
[98] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Cheap Libraries," *The Publishers' Weekly*, 1877 6-October: 396-397.

At the time, the legitimate publishers had a difficult time stopping the piracy of even their domestic authors. In the era of the cheap library, publisher Estes & Lauriat fought fiercely to defend their protected copyright material, specifically their "Chatterbox" line. In 1885, they took out a full-page advertisement in *The Publishers' Weekly* warning pirate publishers and sellers "against publishing or selling any book bearing the title 'Chatterbox,' either by itself or in connection with other words, which is not issued or authorized by us, as all infringers of our trade-mark will be promptly proceeded against."[99] While eventually successful, Estes & Lauriat endured ten lawsuits and paid roughly $30,000 to protect its intellectual property.[100] Among American authors, Mark Twain was a highly visible proponent of the enactment of copyright law and its enforcement. In 1880, he wrote to Congress, suggesting that book piracy should be punishable "like any other type of stealing."[101]

Indeed, while at first cautiously interested, the tone of *The Publishers' Weekly* turned drastically against the actions of the pirates running the cheap libraries. In 1882, they wrote, "The 'New Pirate'…is Mr. Munro, the manufacturer of an enormous quantity of the ten-cent reprints, and it makes him the object of much sarcasm"[102] And while it was admitted that Munro did not invent the medium, it was of no difference because:

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[99] Estes & Lauriat, "Chatterbox Caution No. 4," *The Publishers' Weekly*, February 7, 1885: 171.
[100] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 398-399.
[101] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 637.
[102] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Books of Foreign Authors," *The Publishers' Weekly*, September 23, 1982: 432.

> Its consequences are the serious matter. It has affected the book publishing business in this country to an extraordinary extent. The people now buy nearly all their light reading, and that is about three quarters of all they read, in the form of reprints, which are sold at prices not much above those of newspapers.[103]

The writer of this article was writing for the defense of the foreign author whose livelihood he claimed was drastically impaired by the abundance of pirated publishing in the United States. But as we have seen, publishers of domestic authors too had to fight against the reprinting of their material.

The author of the *Contributors Club* from 1878 defended the pirates claiming their businesses were, in fact, legal because, at the time, there was no international copyright law (though he failed to mention the abundant pirating of domestic copyrighted materials). He also claimed that while many American publishers did not pay copyright to English authors, those that did were "proportionally more numerous than English publishers who pay American authors."[104] This legal defense came for the sake of the consumers of the reprints who would be reduced to reading factory fiction trash or nothing at all if not for the redeeming quality of cheap highbrow publications.[105]

However, this point of view rapidly fell out of favor. The final push for international copyright began in the 1880s. In 1884, the American Publishers' Copyright League was formed. In 1885 a survey done in *The Publishers' Weekly* found that of 55 respondents from the trade book industry, 31 were heavily in favor of copyright legislation, and only three were strongly against.[106] By the late 1880s,

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[103] *Ibid*
[104] The Contributors' Club, "The Contributors' Club," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1878 September: 370-371.
[105] *Ibid*
[106] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 637.

the momentum towards international copyright had built to the tipping point. Among the literary elite, it even became a matter of pride.

> The United States of America is now the only one of the great powers of the world which absolutely refuses the protection of its laws to the books of a friendly alien. From having been one of the foremost states of the world in the evolution of copyright, the United States has now become one of the most backward. Nothing could be more striking than a contrast of the liberality with which American law treats the foreign inventor and the niggardliness with which it treats the foreign author.[107]

Brander Matthew's essay, *The Evolution of Copyright*, was reprinted in a large volume of writings supporting the advent of international copyright, collected and published by Geo. Haven Putnam, the Secretary of the American Publishers' Copyright League. Indeed, popular opinion among the trade industry leaders was solidly for the enactment and enforcement of copyright. The sentiment seemed mainly opposed to the proliferation of cheap publishers and their impact on the trade business. We will see, however, that the actual legal process in Congress centered on slightly different concerns.

While in the book industry the argument over copyright largely had to do with the cheap book profiting off the success of best selling trade books, the actual international legal agreement was organized to protect US publishers and manufacturers and to avoid drastic increases in the prices of books. When the Platt-Simonds Bill was passed, it included protections for legitimate US book publishers. Enacted in 1891, the bill imposed heavy taxes on the import of books of foreign copyright, encouraging foreign authors to employ US publishing houses to produce

[107] Brander Matthews, "The Evolution of Copyright," in *The Question of Copyright: A Summary of the Copyright Laws at Present in Force in the Chief Countries of the world*, ed. Geo. Haven Putnam, 8-34 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1891).

their works. It also extended copyright only for books published after July 1, 1891.[108]

After the enactment of the Platt-Simonds Bill in 1891, the trade industry saw a slight increase in the sales of their books. British authors were already diminishing in the realm of the US best sellers list, and due to a downward trend in sales they saw their royalties increase, it was by a marginal amount.[109] The impact the bill had on the cheap book business was devastating. In 1893 there were still "fifty publishers issuing paperback fiction, and there were ninety-four series on the market. By 1910, there were only three publishers and nine series."[110] While copyright only extended to works produced after 1891, cheap book publishers had limited ability to compete with the larger publishing houses for the rights to new books, *The Publishers' Weekly* proclaimed the end of the pirate publisher in 1893.[111]

Conclusion

The 19th century cheap paperback took the working-class world by storm. Two and a half million cheap books were produced in 1877 alone, and that number only increased up until 1891.[112] Cheap books enabled access to literature for a growing group of people in the United States. However, when examining the

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[108] The Editors of Publishers' Weekly, "The Copyright Situation," *The Publishers' Weekly*, June 6, 1891: 784-786.
[109] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 641.
[110] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 507-508.
[111] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 486-488.
[112] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919*, Vol. 2, 4 vols. (New York City, New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 481-488.

discussions on the content of these cheap libraries, there was a significant element of classism at work. An outside observer such as Michael Denning may have been able to identify class symbols and find some significance in the themes of the "trash" literature, but there was very little critical appreciation of this viewpoint at the time. Instead, both the cultural elite and the working-class intellectual were concerned about the quality of the fiction being read and worried about what it meant for the future of education and reading in the United States.

The cheap reprint was both a potential savior and a symbol of illegality. Some cultural critics praised the reprint as having the ability to reach the masses and rescue them from dregs of the factory produced original fiction. However, the question of the damage to the trade industry and the authors, both American and foreign, could not be overlooked. In a sense, the cheap paperback publishers epitomized the outlaws from their own stories. They rejected the rules of proper society and found success outside its walls.

Just as civilization and law overtook the Wild West, the outlaw publishers found themselves at the end of their era, unable to sustain their success legally. The Platt-Simonds Bill was not designed to destroy the cheap paperback market, but that was the result. As it crumbled, the medium that had brought books to the working-class world began to vanish. Certainly inexpensive books were available, but their ubiquitous nature that had become the norm in the 1870s-1890s ended.

This sort of massive wave of cheap publishing would not emerge again until the middle of the 20th century. As we will see, the paperback revolution of the 1950s began to break the barriers of legitimacy that the cheap libraries were either

unable or not interested in abolishing. In doing so, they expanded inexpensive book access to another growing segment of society. Their success, while within the confines of the law, would still be met with similar concerns and criticism that echoed from the 19th century.

Chapter 3

With the advent of international copyright, the cheap publishing industry collapsed. Companies built on the expectation of having readily available cheap editions of best sellers were unable to maintain their business models. In the early 20th century the introduction and great success of Julius' Little Blue Books, made clear that the market for these commodities still existed. Julius' operation, however, was on a scale much smaller than the ultimately unsustainable explosion of cheap publishing of the end of the 19th century. It would not be until 1939, with the creation of Pocket Books, that the scale of the industry would begin to reemerge.

Pocket Books and their counterpart Penguin Books in England, achieved a comfortable amount of success in the 1940s during World War Two. Despite paper shortages and wartime manufacturing concerns, both companies became established as the industry leaders in cheap publications. Similar to their Dime Novel and Cheap Library ancestors, they were able to maintain low cost and therefore low prices, and were able establish a market among the same groups that made the cheap libraries such a success just a few decades earlier.

In the United States, Pocket Books achieved rapid success by adhering to a strict model of fiscal responsibility. Rather than attempting to reprint the entire best sellers list of large-scale trade publishers, Robert de Graff, the founder of Pocket Books, began an extensive modern market research campaign in order to determine which reprint copyrights he should purchase. His research operation was carried out largely with the use of mailed questionnaires. In 1938, his company produced and distributed 2,000 sample copies of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*,

shipping the books along with questionnaires seeking information regarding quality and content expectations. Finally in June of 1939 the first ten paperbacks of the modern paperback revolution were printed.[113] They were as follows:

Lost Horizon, James Hilton
Wake Up and Live, Dorothea Brande
Five Great Tragedies, William Shakespeare
Topper, Thorne Smith
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Agatha Christie
Enough Rope, Dorothy Parker
Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë
The Way of All Flesh, Samuel Butler
The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Thorton Wilder
Bambi, Felix Salten

These titles chosen by Pocket Books were all reprints of successful trade books. The initial run of 10,000 copies was sold exclusively in New York City. In just a few weeks, however, de Graff was compelled to begin nationwide distribution. Sold for just twenty-five cents, Pocket Books recreated the cheap book market of the late 19th century.

There were some differences of course. Today one can purchase a paperback book from Pocket Books (or from any of the multitudes of paperback publishers that sprung up in the United States after World War Two) from any bookstore in the country; this however represents something of a relatively new phenomenon. The story of the modern paperback revolution was the achievement of legitimate success, from both a business and a critical standpoint, something that the Dime Novel never achieved.

[113] The paperback form factor that emerged from the mid 20th century is essentially the same as the current paperback book. From here on, I will use the term "paperback" to denote the "cheap" paperback from these paperback only publishers. The term "trade" will again be applied to distinguish between the two mediums.

Like its predecessors in the late 19th century, the paperback was priced within the reach of the working class. In the context of the economic boom of the post-war United States, the term working class was significantly different than in the late 19th century. The post-war United States really saw the rise and expansion of the middle class, a group of people, perhaps divided between blue-collar and white-collar vocations, but generally similar in terms of newfound consumer purchasing power. The emerging middle-class of the post-war United States was clearly the target for the new paperback market. Books were priced around twenty-five to fifty cents, and available outside of the locations of traditional booksellers. As people spread to the suburbs, paperback books followed. Just like their 19th century predecessors, the modern paperback companies used the distribution pathways of periodicals in order to maximize their availability.

This chapter will examine the rise of the modern wave of the paperback industry in the United States and its battle for legitimacy. In doing so the content of paperback books will be examined, both reprints and originals. While there were multitudes of companies publishing cheap paperbacks, New American Library (NAL) will be the focus for a majority of this chapter. NAL is a company representative of the push for paperback legitimacy. They invested heavily in highbrow literature, educational books, and academic reprints. With these types of books NAL was highly successful at targeting the expanding college population, bringing access to a multitude of books to a group of people who could benefit greatly from owning a personal library.

Paperback Originals of the 1950s and their Obscene Subject Matter

The bulk of the original paperback market of the 1950s consisted of formulaic genre fiction, similar to the originals of the late 19th century. The striking exception to this rule was the arrival of some of the lesser-known Beat Generation writers in the form of paperback (someone such as Kerouac was established enough as a writer to have his first runs from Viking Press, a trade book publisher). Paperback publisher Ace Books initially published William Burroughs' novel , *Junky* as a double novel in paperback form. Beyond the major publishers, Laurence Ferlinghetti and Peter Martin famously opened City Lights Books in San Francisco in 1953 as a combination bookstore and publishing house. City Lights focused on the selling of their lines of "pocket books," collections of poems and stories from authors who would eventually make up the Beat Generation. The arrival of City Lights created an intellectual center to the original paperback market. Ginsberg's *Howl* was perhaps the most famous publication of City Lights at the time. Released as part of the "Pocket Poets" series, *Howl*, created a name for City Lights as it became the center of an obscenity trial in 1957. Eventually City Lights was acquitted of obscenity charges and the attention of the trial unearthed national interest in the new wave of writing occurring in the San Francisco Bay area.[114] City Lights, however, was decidedly not a mass production paperback house, rather something of a sub-culture creation. However, as the paperback battled for legitimacy in the eyes of the critics, the existence of City Lights and its mission were of the utmost importance.

[114] Lynell George, "City Lights Books," *L.A. Times*, April 22, 2007.

The Beats and the San Francisco Renaissance were not typical of the majority of original paperback content that began flooding the market in the 1950s. Instead, the sort of factory fiction uncovered by Bok in the 1890s ruled the scene. The publisher that embraced this type of book production and became synonymous with it was Fawcett Publications and their line Gold Medal Books. Begun in 1950, Gold Medal advertised in newspapers looking for writers, and their contract terms were decidedly writer-friendly. Authors were given a cent per copy printed rather than sold, and were guaranteed 200,000 prints for a minimum royalty of $2,000.[115] Beyond the favorable contract guarantees, writers were allowed to maintain the copyright of their material; Gold Medal only owned the books themselves. This allowed writers to shop their work elsewhere potentially leading to increased income. Gold Medal quickly became known as a writer-friendly organization and was a giant in the original paperback market.

Just two years after the release of the Gold Medal line, Fawcett had over 220 titles on their publication list and had sold over 40 million books, all at twenty-five cents a copy. Their thirty-five cent collection, Red Seal, managed nearly 4 million sales in the same amount of time, but was discontinued while the company focused on the twenty-five cent line.[116] While the Gold Medal books flourished providing relatively high quality publications at low prices, the Red Seal series became known for trouble with quality, the binding materials disintegrated quickly upsetting

[115] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Great Change*, Vol. 4, 4 vols. (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1981), 387.
[116] William Albert, Donna Balopole, Barson Michael and et al, *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982) 115.

consumers who were paying ten cents more a copy.[117] While Gold Medal was known as a friendly destination for genre writers, they also gained a less desirable reputation as the publisher of obscene materials.

Beginning in December of 1952, the House of Representatives Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials began investigating the world of cheap paperback book publishing. Ralph Daigh, head of the Gold Medal book series was called before the committee with regard to a specific book in the Gold Medal collection, *Women's Barracks*. This book was a fictionalized account of the author's (Tereseka Torres) experiences in the Free French Forces during WWII. To give an idea of the content, this book has subsequently been categorized as "lesbian pulp fiction." It sold rapidly and was a target of the committee when questioning Daigh. The committee hearings fortunately did not end in the censorship of the material, but rather the containment of its sales locations (and of course the reduction in the racy cover illustrations discussed in Chapter 1). By 1952-1953, cheap paperback books had reemerged and had a huge presence on the market. The concern, like the critics of the late 19th century, was that young people would have access to these books and none others. An effort to reduce their availability near schools was underway as a result of the committee hearings.[118]

The original paperbacks of the 1950s again gave way to a discussion on access. There was a certain appeal to contain the spread of these books for the betterment of society. While the late 19th century critics had a legal argument, the

[117] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Great Change*, Vol. 4, 4 vols. (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1981), 389.
[118] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 216-247.

concerns of the 1950s lay largely in the content available. The following is an account of a committee hearing feature John O'Conner of Bantam Books and committee member Edwards Rees of Kansas regarding a Bantam Book *Don't Touch Me* by Mackinlay Kantor:

> Mr. Rees. Do you think the material is good, the reading of it is good?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. [having already answered in the affirmative to this question several times previously] I think MacKinlay Kantor is a very distinguished authors.
>
> Mr. Rees. I am not talking about MacKinlay Kantor; I am talking about the material in that book. Do you think it is good for folks to read?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. If they wish to read it.
>
> Mr. Rees. Do you think it is good for children?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. I think the only question is whether it is pornographic.
>
> Mr. Rees. That is not the only question. I am just asking you, do you think children ought to read that book?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. I don't think I would give it to my daughter to read for example, if that is the answer you want from me.[119]

Mr. O'Conner continued claiming that this was not a book for young people or adolescents but he believed that a grown person should be allowed the choice to purchase and read the book. O'Connor concluded with a jab at the nature of the committee:

> Chairman. What do you think, Mr. O'Connor, this committee was formed for [if not to identify and suppress pornographic material]? Had there been such a congressional committee prior to this time?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. Happily not.
>
> Chairman. To ferret out this kind of trash?
>
> Mr. Rees. Did you say "happily not'?
>
> Mr. O'Connor. Yes; because I think the testimony before this committee has been entirely one-sided.[120]

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[119] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Hardboiled America: The Lurid Years of Paperbacks* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 43-45.

Again, the result of the committee meetings was not the explicit censorship of content, but rather a toning down of the elements that brought the most dramatic reactions from the would-be government censors. From the mid-1950s onward, the cover art was significantly less racy, and the availability of the most explicit paperback books was made more limited near family neighborhoods and schools. From this point the paperback book began its journey into the "realm of good taste," seriously battling for legitimacy in the publishing industry.

New American Library, and Paperback Reprints

While a student at the London School of Economics, Ian Ballantine wrote his thesis describing in detail the feasibility of a publishing company organized specifically around reprints. While he would famously split from Penguin America, before it became New American Library, his notion that a company could survive simply on the publication of cheap reprint editions lived on with NAL.

> We have, from the very outset of our publishing program, prided ourselves…on our independence…We have prided ourselves on being single-minded specialists in our job – the re-printing of the best literature in every field. We have not originated fiction, except for a few anthologies, and we have not originated non-fiction when reprint possibilities have existed. In practically all of the instances in which we have originated non-fiction, we have worked cooperatively with an appropriate trade publisher…[121]

A founder of NAL, Victor Weybright, insisted on defining his company in relation to the factory fiction houses. The publisher he mentioned specifically was Fawcett and their Gold Medal Series.

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[120] *Ibid*

[121] Thomas Bonn, *Heavy Traffic and High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 19-20.

> We ourselves would not want Signet or Mentor books to be identified with Fawcett's Gold Medal books…their policy of publishing 25 cent editions of original fiction is antagonistic to established practices in the book publishing industry with which we enjoy the happiest of relations; and their editorial criteria are certainly at variance with ours.[122]

Indeed, Weybright and his partner and cofounder of NAL, Kurt Enoch, believed that beyond running a business, providing good books at reasonable prices was beneficial to the public. In the face of heavy government interrogation of the early to mid 1950s, Weybright penned an essay in defense of the service that NAL provided.

> Reprints make universally available, for the first time in our history, the entertainment, information, instruction and inspiration that formerly were available only to the well-to-do who could afford to pay from two dollars to ten dollars for a hard-cover book and who had access to rather limited sources of book supply. They have performed a notable public service by turning into regular readers, and hence better educated citizens, countless millions who had little or no previous access to books…[123]

Enoch took this point even further as he claimed that NAL had a part in a "cultural revolution" that was sweeping the country. He stated that NAL was involved in "the broad and general distribution of goods that are a vital factor in the dynamic expansion of a free society."[124] Contrary to what a series such as Gold Medal books represented, New American Library was very much in the forefront of the move towards the "realm of good taste." With a significant self-awareness, NAL adopted a slogan similar to that of one of their 19th century predecessors. Beadle's Books advertised "Books for the Million!" New American Library countered with the motto "Good Reading for the Millions," a slogan signifying their business philosophy.

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[122] *Ibid*
[123] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 232.
[124] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.

While Weybright was adamant in differentiating NAL from the less reputable paperback publishers, the forces within New American Library sought to make a further distinction to help their customers differentiate between their products. The Signet imprint or series was organized around popular fiction and nonfiction, while the Mentor series specialized in more scholarly reprints, but still included both fiction and nonfiction. These two lines had slightly different prices as well. Signet books generally could be found for twenty-five cents while Mentor books were priced marginally higher at thirty-five cents. This was a marketing strategy designed to further specialize the targeting of customers, the expanding middle class.

Just as the 19th century cheap book was sold to those who previously had limited access, the 20th century movement succeeded along these same lines. One notable difference was that with the expansion of the middle class in the post WWII United States, there were significant new markets developing and a drive towards more specialization to fit these markets. With the production of the Mentor series, New American Library was clearly targeting the expanding college educated or would-be college educated middle class. Thomas Bonn, a book historian and protégé of noted publishing historian John Tebbel explained

> Printed in smaller quantities, Mentors…were sold more selectively. Chiefly made up of nonfiction and some literary classics they were most effectively displayed in college and general trade bookstores as opposed to the more numerous drugstore and smoke shop racks.[125]

In 1954, Enoch wrote an article in *The Library Quarterly* that was both a defense of the industry and a statement of the philosophy of New American Library. While he

[125] Thomas Bonn, *Heavy Traffic and High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 10.

used general terms when relating to publishers, the philosophy and business practices he described were tied to the primary goals of NAL.

> [Paperback book publishers] see the co-operation of organizations and groups that will promote and purchase books of special interest. They recognize the value of better bibliographical material and more information for potential users as to the existence and the sources of supply of such books. The serious publishers have become fully aware of the large potentialities of library, college, school, and adult-education use of paper-bound books and are making great efforts to serve their needs.[126]

New American Library's Mentor series was representative of the specialized "better bibliographical material." Publishing lists included authors such as John Kenneth Galbraith, Edith Hamilton, Gore Vidal, D. H. Lawrence, and William Faulkner.

The Mentor series thrived in the education sector. David Dempsey, then an editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, wrote in *The Atlantic* in 1953:

> At present, a million high school students use reprints through their membership in the Teen Age Book Club. Some 172 titles on the New American Library's list, mostly from its excellent *Mentor* nonfiction series, are required reading in schools and colleges.[127]

Thomas Bonn explained:

> In 1948, when the New American Library evolved from the American Penguin publishing program, the Pelican imprint changed to Mentor Books. This venerable mass market imprint became the direct forerunner of the American trade paperback by attracting a broad spectrum of readers, especially on campuses, to its reprints of classics of world literature and serious nonfiction.[128]

While referencing the demand for Mentor books on college campuses, Bonn touched on another topic that would come to signify the modern paperback movement. The popularity of the sort of intellectual material that Mentor books represented was

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[126] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.
[127] David Dempsey, "The Revolution in Books," *The Atlantic*, 1953 January: 75-77.
[128] Thomas Bonn, *Undercover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* (West Hanover, MA: Penguin Books, 1982), 62.

indeed a signal to the industry that cheap paperback reprints could thrive even while adhering to the "realm of good taste."

On May 5, 1952, *Newsweek* published an article highlighting the newfound and often surprisingly high standards in the world of cheap publishing. The focus of the article was on New American Library's success in printing highbrow material.

> Partly as a matter of policy, and partly because they could not compete with the big firms – Pocket Books and Bantam – in getting best sellers for reprint, Enoch and Weybright soon found themselves concentrating on literary items. Upon the publication of the firm's first ten volumes, which included E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, veterans in the business figured they might last three months.
> But American taste proved to be better than publishers believed. Soon Weybright and Enoch were bringing out philosophers like Whitehead and Max Otto, novelists like Joyce and Faulkner, and finding an audience for them as big as that for the consciously "popular" authors.[129]

Newsweek labeled Weybright and Enoch "Literary Missionaries," describing them as academics and literary critics as well as businessmen. It concluded that due to their higher publishing standards, NAL had become the biggest in the business.

This celebration of the intellect and mission of NAL's creators was not limited to the writing on magazine racks. Historian John Tebbel wrote in the 1980s that, by "the fifties and early sixties, Enoch had become one of the social philosophers of the paperback business."[130] This sort of credential is justifiable as Kurt Enoch, could certainly have been classified as an academic. In 1932, he received his PhD from Hamburg University in Germany. His essay in *The Library Quarterly* was an eloquent piece of writing passionately detailing the ability of cheap editions of books to expand the democratic mind.

> The fundamental problem of statesmanship, from the social viewpoint, in the paper-bound book industry, is thus to achieve a mass audience while preserving the

[129] Newsweek Magazine, "Reprints Resurgent," *Newsweek*, May 5, 1952: 104-107.
[130] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Great Change*, Vol. 4, 4 vols. (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1981), 376.

> special virtues of books. It will not be altogether easy…But I believe it can be done.[131]

Here he implied that NAL had a civic duty to provide "the special virtues of books" to a wide audience, and to protect the supply of these books from intellectual dilution in the face of business interests.

New American Library's status as the purveyor of high quality content in inexpensively produced and cheaply purchased packaging was defensible, mostly. The Mentor and Signet divide separated the intellectually celebrated books from their more racy counterparts. While Mentor lines sold well in the education and academic field, there was a significant amount of money to be made in the mass reprinting of the genre fiction of the time, and New American Library did not let that opportunity pass.

The Signet line of NAL found great success in the printing of the detective fiction of Mickey Spillane. When it became public knowledge that John F. Kennedy was a fan of Ian Fleming's James Bond series, NAL purchased the rights to fourteen of his books, selling over 30 million copies in a little over a decade.[132] However, despite the seductive sales figures of genre fiction reprints, New American Library was always able to maintain a significant presence in the realm of serious fiction and nonfiction. Even after its acquisition by the Times-Mirror Company in 1960, NAL went on to publish John Kenneth Galbraith's *How to Get Out of Vietnam* and Abe Fortas *Concerning Dissent and Civil Disobedience*. These longer books with considerably controversial content were priced slightly higher at thirty-five to fifty

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[131] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.
[132] William Albert, Donna Balopole, Barson Michael and et al, *Mass Market Publishing in America*, ed. Allen Billy Crider (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), 185.

cents but still received first print runs comparable to more commercial paperbacks, roughly 250,000 to 300,000.[133] Despite NAL's dedication to the Mentor series, the proliferation of the racy genre fiction made the paperback book a target for critics of the time who were not content to simply celebrate the intellectual posturing of a select few in the industry.

Critics

The modern paperback book movement met with essentially the same type of critical reaction as its 19th century predecessor. However, while critics of the 19th century had the questionable legality of the cheap book publishers to deride, the critics of the 20th century were dealing with legitimate businesses. The paperback movement of the mid 20th century was not the outlaw, but rather Ragged Dick. The cheap publishers worked hard on their market research and took hold of an available market, legally provided what was demanded, and profited greatly. Instead of the pirate, they were representative of a capitalist-friendly version of the American Dream. Despite this noble narrative, their critics considered them opportunists; their wares reduced civil discourse and harmed young minds.

One argument critics leveled against the modern paperback wave centered on the flood of "tripe" and the seemingly limited availability of highbrow reprints. Cultural critic Bernard DeVoto discussed both of these concerns but adopted something of a unique view in his column, *The Easy Chair*, in *Harpers Magazine*.

[133] John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States: The Great Change*, Vol. 4, 4 vols. (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1981), 377.

DeVoto's editorial in October of 1954 responded directly to Enoch's essay celebrating the paperback industry in *The Library Quarterly*. "When a top-echelon publisher finds that he hasn't got anything pressing to do, which on the average is three days a week, he bats out an article on the paper-bound book."[134] While DeVoto was sympathetic to Enoch's message, he was less optimistic, even hostile about the chance that paperback books would become part of a new cultural revolution.

> But don't blow the ram's-horn trumpet just yet…If the admirer of Mickey Spillane is going to blow a quarter to find out what this guy Sinclair Lewis is like, then one of the guy's novels has got to be on the cigar counter when the adventurous mood comes over him…[if] those of us who have already read Lewis, are to get for two bits the diversity and rich variety of books which [Enoch] also talks about, the diversity and variety have got to be on sale. My point is mostly they aren't.[135]

DeVoto was not necessarily concerned with the flood of cheap paperbacks onto the market, his point was rather that the publishers of paperback books should not broadcast their role as a catalyst in a social revolution if they were unwilling to provide equal access to all their publications.

> Nobody can ask the publisher to fill the supermarkets with novels they will lose money on. But nobody need keep his face straight when they talk about the cultural revolution, either. The grateful public is not exposed to it often enough, long enough, or at enough soda fountains to get infected.[136]

DeVoto's critical essay, like many of the critics from the 19th century had a distinctively condescending tone. However, rather than simply dismissing the content of the books and the character of their readers, he took a broader view, attacking the industry as a whole for attempting to portray its financial success as a success for good literature.

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[134] Bernard DeVoto, "Culture at Two Bits," *Harpers*, 1954 October: 8-13.
[135] *Ibid*
[136] Bernard DeVoto, "Culture at Two Bits," *Harpers*, 1954 October: 8-13.

Many of the critics of the modern paperback book wave were critical from a broad sociological point of view. Bernard Rosenberg, a professor of sociology at City College of New York, edited a large volume of essays titled *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*. One of the main sections of this book was a discussion on the paperback book as a form of mass media. Chiefly, the essays were concerned with the potential power of such a cheap, freely available medium to promote the wrong type of literature. Rosenberg wrote in his essay, *Mass Culture in America*:

> For what makes mass culture so tantalizing is the implication of effortlessness. Shakespeare is dumped on the market along with Mickey Spillane, and publishers are rightly confident that their audience will not feel obliged to make any greater preparation for the master of world literature than for its latest lickspittle[137]

As discussed before, the covers of Spillane's novels and Shakespeare were probably strikingly similar, but here again we see a distrust of the intellect of the average reader of paperbacks. Brander Matthews made a similar statement in the 19th century:

> If that man had spent his spare time reading cheap fiction, in all probability he would never have made his fortune; and of a certainty he would never have been able to enjoy Shakespeare if his appreciation of what is good had been lowered by trash.[138]

The suspicion of the reading comprehension of the average reader clearly was not limited to any era.

In the 1950s, there was a significant discussion on the value of "mass" media. Enoch, in his essay in *The Library Quarterly*, claimed that books did not fit in the category of mass media.

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[137] Bernard Rosenberg, "Mass Culture in America," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, 3-12 (Glenco, IL: The Free Press & The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957).
[138] Brander Matthews, *The Home Library* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883).

> In part it has been because books have been freer than any other medium from legal and economic pressures toward conformity of manner or of viewpoint. In a word, the peculiar services of the book to society have seemed to derive from the fact that it has not been a "mass" medium.[139]

However, he then asserted it was the duty of the paperback publishers to make their wares a mass medium, claiming:

> A democracy today cannot be well governed by a people whose insight into contemporary problems and their background is derived solely from newspapers and broadcasts. Nor can it be spiritually whole if it does not have bonds of union growing from such a common experience of the fundamental meaning of Western civilization as can be conveyed only in books.

Enoch believed that books were able to maintain an independence of their content because they were not expected to appeal to a mass audience. The challenge publishers faced moving into mass publishing, Enoch claimed, was to preserve this independence of content in the face of the new financial expectations of the industry.[140] Enoch fully expected the publishing industry to achieve this goal, however, not all social observers shared in this optimistic opinion.

Writer, social critic, and political activist Dwight Macdonald suggested that "there are theoretical reasons why Mass Culture is not and can never be any good."[141] Mass culture, he claimed, was not the work of any individual laboring to share his or her vision but rather:

> Mass culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying.[142]

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[139] Kurt Enoch, "The Paper-Bound Book: Twentieth-Century Publishing Phenomenon," *The Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1954): 211-225.
[140] *Ibid*
[141] Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in *Mass Culture: Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, 59-73 (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press & The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), 59.
[142] Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in *Mass Culture: Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, 59-73 (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press & The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), 60.

While Enoch evoked the democratic principle of free access to information and shared experiences, Macdonald took a different viewpoint.

> …Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture…the homogenization process that distributes the globules of cream evenly throughout the ilk instead of allowing them to float separately on top. It thus destroys all values, since value judgments imply discrimination Mass Culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody.[143]

Macdonald's views were reminiscent of his 19th century counterparts. There was a familiar distaste for what may have been popular among the "masses." His use of the term democratic is very much in contrast to Enoch. Macdonald saw the mass media creating a mass culture where "shared experiences" meant a singular experience. Again, we see a sort of pessimism directed at the ability of the target of these goods, the middle/working class, to transcend the role of simply consuming. Macdonald called the audience of mass culture passive, where Enoch believed that this sort of mass distribution could be empowering and could ignite new thought among people who previously could not access the material that NAL and its contemporaries made available.

An interesting contrast between Rosenberg and DeVoto's criticism brings up a significant difference between the paperback movement of the 19th century and the 20th, as well as touches upon the question of access once again. DeVoto claimed that good books were difficult to find, where Rosenberg was concerned that Shakespeare was displayed on magazine racks next to detective fiction and that no one could tell the difference. These views seem to be contentious, however, both

[143] Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in *Mass Culture: Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, 59-73 (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press & The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), 62.

were probably true to an extent. There most likely were drugstores with Shakespeare and Spillane on the same rack and it was probably difficult to find the range of Mentor's offerings outside of its targeted areas.

At this point, an interesting paradox developed in terms of the access of paperback books in the 1950s. The specialization and target marketing that made the Mentor series so popular among schools and colleges, possibly reduced the availability of this specific series of books in a broader sense. However, the success of the Mentor series partially *because* of its targeted marketing perhaps led to the greatest victory for paperback books, the acceptance of them at established bookstores. Thomas Bonn wrote on the institutional change that the paperback book brought about:

> The 1960s and 1970s saw a dramatic growth of retail bookstores – college stores, wholesaler-owned stores, and especially bookstore chains – and by 1980 they numbered almost fourteen thousand general bookstores. Paperbacks are credited with democratizing the retail bookstore, which today caters to readers who grew up with paperback racks in drugstores, newsstands, and supermarkets and had paperbacks assigned as required reading in school and college classrooms.[144]

Bonn's conception of democratization, like Enoch's, was largely positive. The final victory of the paperback book of the modern paperback revolution was that it not only found a place in the retail bookstores that shunned it previously, but its success allowed for the creation of *more* bookstores creating a network of booksellers that had not previously existed. Despite the critical concerns, the modern paperback revolution changed the face of the bookselling industry and we are still living in the era of its influence.

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[144] Thomas Bonn, *Undercover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* (West Hanover, MA: Penguin Books, 1982), 64.

The Lasting Impact

Despite reservations about the availability of good paperbacks, and concerns over the homogenizing effects of mass produced cultural items, the paperback wave of the mid 20th century was a monumental success. From 1959 to 1960, the sales of paperbacks surpassed those of trade hardcover books. This success was the result of two trends. One was the increased acceptance of paperback books as a legitimate form of literary culture and subsequently, the offering of paperbacks at retail and trade outlets.[145] The second trend was the increased success in the education market, an area previously dominated by more expensive hardcover trade books.

> Teachers had discovered the paperback, with the flexibility and options it offered as a teaching tool. Students realized that they could own the books they were required to read rather than borrowing (or stealing) them. The growth was greatest at the college and high school level.[146]

The education growth was driven by New American Library, whose Mentor series was the only mass-market paperback to actively target this particular market.[147]

Unlike the disposable cheap libraries of the 19th century, the quality of these modern paperbacks began to bridge the gap between the trade industry and the paperback upstarts. However, similar to the cheap publishing industry of the previous century, the 20th century paperback thrived by increasing availability while maintaining low costs. The modern paperback was able to break through barriers of legitimacy and not only gain acceptance in trade book stores, but also drive the movement to create a larger network of book selling outlets.

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[145] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 248-290.
[146] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 269.
[147] Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 248-290.

The Electronic Revolution

> "The People! Like our huge earth itself, which, to ordinary scansion, is full of vulgar contradictions and offense, man, viewed in the lump, displeases, and is a constant puzzle and affront to the merely educated classes…Literature, strictly considered, has never recognized the People, and, whatever may be said does not today…It seems as if, so far, there were some natural repugnance between a literary and professional life, and the rude rank spirit of the democracies."[148]

In his essay *Democratic Vistas*, Walt Whitman discussed, among other things, the nature of literature in his time. Written in 1871, Whitman suggested there was an inherent division between high art and "professional life," meaning in this context, the triumph of rational vocations. While he claimed that literature had never recognized the People, the supposition that the People had never recognized literature is absent. Primarily a political essay, *Democratic Vistas* was an observation of the current state of the democratic practices of the United States, accepting that there had been progress but suggesting that the system must constantly accept new inputs and adapt to change. Whitman's critique on literature and the voice of the People echoed these sentiments, insisting that in order to continue to perfect democratic practices, all voices must be heard.[149]

The century long expansion of inexpensive publishing in the United States was, at times, the realization of this philosophy. While critics debated the value of reading "trash", or questioned the motives of the publishers of the 20th century paperback revolution, what ultimately could not be disputed was that inexpensive books had the ability to break through the social barriers Whitman described.

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[148] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 18-19.
[149] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2010), from the introduction by Ed Folsom.

Cheap books and modern paperbacks expanded access to literature at an unprecedented scale, despite the concerns of their critical opponents.

The cheap publishing movement of the late 19th century so successfully exploited both a legal loophole and an untapped market that the established industry was forced to adapt, pushing for a modernization of copyright legislation. In the 20th century, the paperback movement again targeted underrepresented markets and showed that high quality books did not need to be a product for a certain class. Perhaps the final expression of the inherent innovation in the inexpensive book market occurred when the legitimacy barrier was broken, and the modern paperback became a fixture in bookstores. Whitman saw this sort of advance as essential, in *Democratic Vistas* he wrote:

> The eager and often inconsiderate appeals of reformers and revolutionists are indispensable to counter balance the inertness and fossilism making so large a part of human institutions. The latter will always take care of themselves – the danger being that they rapidly tend to ossify us. The former is to be treaded with indulgence, and even respect. As circulation to air, so is agitation and a plentiful degree of speculative license to political and moral sanity…[150]

The reformers and revolutionists included among others, Frank Leslie, Beadle & Adams, Emanuel Julius, Victor Weybright, and of course Kurt Enoch. Across a century, their cumulative efforts incited a new era in publishing in the United States.

In 1937, the education scholar and eventual content editor at New American Library, Eduard Lindeman, wrote a short essay on leisure time, something he felt would become a great asset to continuing education as the economy emerged from the depression. Lindeman's *Youth and Leisure* attacked the notion that self-betterment and education should be confined to either professional working hours

[150] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 23.

or the standard school day. Indeed, he believed that there was a chance for literature and the arts to become a part of everyday life, something to be enjoyed in leisure time as well as studied in an organized manner. To connect this philosophy with a concrete example Lindeman quoted a brochure from an art exhibit that was opening in Chicago, "we have in the past given the function of art a formal importance which segregates it from our daily existence, whereas, art is always present where healthy and unaffected people live."[151]

Currently, one with a specific sensibility can walk into a bookstore and observe the continued impact of the paperback revolution on the publishing culture in the United States. There is, however, another movement in the works, one that if fully realized has the capacity to continue to break the barriers between high literature and society, between art and everyday life. The electronic publishing revolution has a chance to become perhaps the most pure and widely distributed voice of the People that has come into existence. While sometimes a cacophony of voices, free blogs on the Internet provide a venue for anyone with access to a computer. Self-publishing through companies such as Amazon holds the promise of not only distributing one's intellectual property but also has the capacity for one to earn money on his or her published works.

Google and their ambitious effort to digitize every book ever published is the dime reprint "publisher" of the 21st century; and they have run into similar issues in the realm of copyright. Already Google has scanned and freely posted on the Internet roughly 15 million books. The current selections of books available

[151] Eduard C. Lindeman, "Youth and Leisure," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1937 November: 59-66.

through this service are the property of the public domain, meaning their copyrights have expired. Google's attempt to expand into the realm of copyright protected material has hit a roadblock. On March 22, 2011, a federal judge in New York rejected Google's proposed copyright settlement plan with authors and publishers, putting their digitization plan into a state of questionable legality.[152]

Much like the cheap reprints of the late 19th century, the Internet as a publishing medium and a distribution network has challenged the status of copyright law. In 1891, the challenge of the dime novel was thwarted, at least for a time. The reemergence and success of the paperback movement in the 20th century suggested that there was a demand for access to books that had yet to be satiated. Whatever the final decision of the judges and legislators in our current copyright dilemma, it has become clear that drive for the cheaper and wider distribution of books, and all forms of intellectual property, has a momentum of its own. Even if the result is yet another setback, it is nearly a certainty that the "appeals of reformers and revolutionists" will eventually succeed forcing the industry to adapt to the 21st century wave of cheap books, the electronic revolution.

[152] Julie Bosman and Miller Cain Claire, "Judge Rejects Google's Deal to Digitize Books," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2011.

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