The Politics of Public Library Fiction Provision:

locating theories of literature

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ABSTRACT

The "Great Fiction Question" described a debate surrounding our earliest public libraries' provision of works of fiction and their discrimination between those works. However, such a 'Question' has provided a recurrent source of dispute, with commentators continuing to debate the positioning and specifics of fiction lending into the twenty-first century.

It is clear that contemporary critics' positions on the matter are informed by their conceptions of the public library's values and purposes, and of the nature of the construction, production and capacities of fictive texts, as well as those texts' complex productive relationships with their readers. The primary aim of this research then, is to interrogate, as theories of literature, contemporary views on public library fiction provision, and to investigate the extent to which these often vociferous cases for particular approaches – and indeed, the philosophies of public librarianship that these approaches form parts of – may be critically vulnerable at the level of the theories (or assumptions) of literature that ostensibly fortify them.

This reading of the contemporary debate draws upon materialist commitments in literary and cultural studies, and reveals a measure of unstated agreement between adversaries in the form of shared subscriptions to traditional notions of literary hierarchy and the nature of aesthetic and quality-based distinctions that can be made between texts. It is suggested that where present, public librarians and critics dismantle such notions in aid of inclusive and critically engaged selection practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ‘The Great Fiction Question’: an overview of historical and contemporary articulations

> *The Great Fiction Question presented librarians with an insoluble dilemma. If libraries refused to buy fiction, or restricted fiction to novels of literary merit, their popular appeal would be immediately diminished and their rate of use would fall; furthermore, librarians would be accused of assuming the mantle of public censor. If, on the other hand, they provided popular fiction in response to demand, they were accused of neglecting their educational objectives, misusing ratepayers’ money, and failing to take a lead in developing the reading habit. To make matters worse, librarians themselves were not in full control of the situation, as they were seldom in a position to control purchasing policies and, instead, had to follow and implement the decisions made by their governing committees* (Snape, 1995, p.62).

So Robert Snape summarises “The Great Fiction Question” – that problematic original to the first public libraries which described, ostensibly at least, a debate about the politics of the institution’s collection and provision of fictive works of various kinds. As Snape’s explanation suggests, given the establishment of the novel as an enormously popular cultural form in the nineteenth century, along with public demand for access to it, early public libraries had to contend with apparently competing institutional commitments to serving the public and heeding “educational objectives”, and this naturally led to the debating of the place of fiction texts within the lending service.

However, such a debate was founded upon, and constantly called into view, fundamental questions concerning the ‘authentic’ “role and social function of the public library and the status of the library profession” (Snape, 1995, p.81) and as such, came to signify more than just questions of whether or not fiction should be provided to the public and, if it should be, which texts should be made available, but rather, questions of what the public library had been brought into being to achieve. In this sense, answers to the Fiction Question – that is, views

regarding the ‘proper’ provision of fiction – were inevitably and inexorably bound-up in the politics of their utterers.

Into the twenty-first century, commentators and public librarians have continued to debate the positioning and specifics of fiction lending within the public library service, and according to Greenhalgh et al, selection and lending practices continue to “cause embarrassment among some librarians, and an ambivalence and equivocation when it comes to formulating policy statements” (1995, p.130). However, despite the areas of disagreement between the LIS (Library and Information Science) authors discussed in this study, the debate within the profession has demonstrably evolved from its Victorian origins (in one important sense at least) in that the key commentators discussed here are united in their fundamental appreciation of the capacities of at least some kinds of fiction texts to fulfil public library goals, traditional or otherwise. That is, while the earliest articulations of the Question were concerned more primarily with posing and investigating a binary distinction between fiction-as-leisure and non-fiction-as-education (given that one answer proposed was to provide no fiction at all), the current debate, in its relative consensus regarding the value of literary art, is centred principally on the politics of the valuations that can be made of, and the quality distinctions that can be made between, fiction texts and their genres or categories.

However, Greenhalgh et al have diagnosed in the contemporary debate the formation of a new binary norm that has insisted upon, or taken for granted, the conceptual division of “serious” and “escapist” literature, with contributors’ sympathies towards one or another ‘level’ or form of literature characterising its fundamental structure. Furthermore, they contend that the continued commitment of professionals to discussing such conceptual division of the literary is a symptom of the fact that “the world of librarianship has been sheltered from, or has chosen to exclude itself from, many of the most important developments in post-war literary criticism” (1995, p.134).

1.2. Aims and Objectives

From a preparatory review of literature dealing with the politics of public library fiction provision it was considered clear that contemporary critics' positions relate both to their respective conceptions of the public library's socio-cultural and political values and purposes, and their fundamental beliefs regarding the construction, capacities and qualities of works of fiction. However, while critics will routinely couch a politics of fiction provision within a philosophy of public library value and purpose, critical commitments regarding the nature of fictive texts – their production, construction, meanings and processes of reception, for instance – may go wholly or partially unarticulated. As a result, Greenhalgh et al's assertions regarding the discipline's neglect of developments in literary criticism has formed a central point of interest for this research, and the primary aim has been to interrogate, as theories of literature, various contemporary views on public library fiction provision, and to investigate the extent to which these often vociferous cases for particular politics – and indeed, the philosophies of public librarianship that these politics form parts of – may be critically vulnerable at the level of the theories or assumptions of literature that ostensibly fortify them. To this end, the aim has been to as far as possible maintain this interrogation as discrete and focused textual analyses, with a view to subsequently elaborating how the 'literary theories' uncovered – those quite specific tenets of particular library politics – might cohere or problematise their ideological frameworks. In doing so, literary theory of a broadly materialist persuasion has been drawn upon as a means of providing a theoretical framework by which LIS authors' literary convictions may be contextualised and problematised.

Given these premises, the objectives of this research have been:

To Investigate Contemporary LIS literature's Engagement with 'Post-War Literary Criticism' in Relation to Fiction Provision

To Locate and Explode 'Theories of Literature' in Contemporary Answers to 'The Great Fiction Question'

To Compare and Contrast Author's 'Theories of Literature' in the Context of Their Views on Fiction Provision

1.3. Structure

The next chapter will introduce and draw out the basic opposition within literary studies between idealism (what I call 'traditional-formalist' literary criticism) and materialism, and will discuss the logic and implications of the adoption of a materialist critical perspective at greater length. It will then briefly describe the criteria utilised when considering LIS literature for inclusion in this study and the processes by which such literature was acquired.

The binary structure of the literature review mirrors the positional polarities revealed in the literature itself (and diagnosed by Greenhalgh et al), with the first section discussing those texts which share an interest in either or both of the exposition of the perils of observing consumer demand as a symptom of creeping, neoliberal marketisation, and/or the positing of a case for the prioritisation of works of 'high' culture. This is followed by the review and analysis of those ostensible opponents speaking 'in defence of the popular'.

This work's original analyses – an interrogation of authors' literary beliefs and their implications – is conducted on each primary text or group of thematically-linked texts subsequent to their introductions into the review. Conclusions and recommendations are then drawn out in the final section.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Critical Perspective: materialism in literary criticism

This work will render and draw extensively upon the distinction within literary studies between two adversative and major modes of literary criticism, namely, what I broadly term the traditional-formalist and the materialist modes.

By the traditional-formalist I intend the commitment to a literary hierarchy – "from the great who 'add' something to literary tradition by the intuition of their genius, to the popular or low who debase literature by pandering to popular taste" (Brannigan, 1998, pp.37-38) – the search for 'objective' authorial intention and meaning, a dedication to a mode of aesthetic appraisal concerned with formal characteristics of the text, and a general disregard for the significance of historical situation.

Raymond Williams, for one, opposed the politics of this approach. Viewing literature as an intimately material and culturally-situated 'practice', he sought to locate literary criticism not in the predilections of the critic but in a cultural analysis of the text's various and fluid conditions of production and 'reading', proposing such an alternative critical practice as an enactment of a "theory of the specificities of material culture and literary production within historical materialism" (1977, p.5). As Jonathan Dollimore elaborates,

> materialist criticism relates both the literary canon and changing interpretations of it to the cultural formations which produce(d) them, and which those interpretations in turn reproduce, or help to change. In the process it attends to non-canonical texts and offers different conceptions of (for instance) human identity, cultural, social and historical process, as well as the activity of criticism itself (1984, p.100).

While perhaps principally associated with Marxist criticism, the materialist imperative might be more broadly distinguished by that "demand for history" which underpins various like-minded critical strategies, and through its opposition to the traditional interest in 'timeless' and 'objective' aesthetic value and meaning, seeks to expose such notions "as empty, ideological

concepts", instating instead "history itself as the new governing concept" (Wilson, 1995, pp.121-123). For Wilson then, the traditional literary critic, as viewed by a materialist,

> imaginarily occupies a transcendent, virtual point outside of history, and from this position proceeds to exert his or her own acumen through establishing a knowledge of the author in such a way that the author is made the work's standard of unity and coherence, the assumption being that the meaning and significance of a text is limited to what an author could have intended or meant. There is no suggestion, for example, that the meaning of a play, established in the language that makes it comprehensible, might reside in those, the audience, who share that language and make sense of it, or that, since language and audiences change over time, its meaning and significance might change. For this sort of traditional approach the author is the principle of limitation because it is assumed that a text can only mean what is judged to have been possible for that author to have meant or intended. The effect of this assumption is that the author becomes a function of the traditional critic's own authority (1995, p.xv).

From a materialist perspective, this insistence upon texts' autonomy from their respective and specific historical conditions of production is problematic because it compels an illusion of their sovereignty from culturally situated ideological conflict. One function of the materialist strategy is then to explode processes of ideological determination; that is, to expose how canonical texts are "bound up with a repressive, dominant ideology, yet also provide scope for dissidence" (Wilson, p.35).

As Brannigan summarises, the materialist critical mode is "useful as a series of ways of analysing the material existence of ideology, concentrated in the study of literary texts" (1998, p.12)[1], but moreover, because it offers a means of resisting the requirements of the traditional-formalist critic through a commitment to plurality, the significance of cultural situation for textual signification, and the denial of a-historical universalism. In doing so, it stringently avoids any "attempt to mystify its perspective as the natural, obvious or right interpretation of an allegedly given textual fact" (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985, p.viii), instead acknowledging the

[1] He is speaking specifically here about Cultural Materialism as a subtly distinct movement but his statement is applicable to the basic materialist strategy.

individual's interaction with the text, interrogating processes of meaning-creation and dominant ideological reproduction, and thus avoiding the exclusivity diagnosed by Dollimore and Sinfield as inherent in the traditional-formalist mode:

> Studying 'formal properties' in detachment tends to efface the differences between readers and hence makes it easy to absolutize the reading position of the teacher. This has facilitated the assumption, in Englit., of an essential humanity, supposedly informing both text and critic, and hence contributed to the oppression of out-groups. If a lower-class person, woman, student, person of colour, lesbian or gay man did not 'respond' in an 'appropriate' way to 'the text', it was because they were reading without insight, sensitivity, perceptiveness - i.e. not from the privileged position (1990, p.100,).

As Brannigan again suggests, the work of these significant critics "has been successful in displacing traditional humanist and formalist readings of literature", and also in normalising critical and interpretative practices which "are more sensitive to the problems of ensuring the adequate representation of oppressed and marginalised groups in literary and cultural debate" (p.116).

Ultimately, the adoption of a materialist critical perspective, drawing variously upon the work of Williams, Eagleton, Althusser, and Cultural Materialists like Dollimore, Sinfield, Wilson, Brannigan and Belsey (among others), is intended to provide a means of decoding, in the positions of LIS critics, underlying theories of literature and engaging, where present, preeminent, traditional-formalist prescriptions on meaning, value, and the division of high and low culture. The adoption of such a perspective though, is not intended to 'mystify itself as the right one', or to explicitly support the collection and provision of popular fiction at the expense of the canonical or 'literary', but rather to reveal that arguments on both sides of the library-fiction debate which invoke, or unconsciously rely upon, traditional-formalist notions, might be inclusively problematised. Given, the public library's role in the selection and provision of fiction texts for communities, this work takes it as critical that contemporary theories of the text are engaged, with those capable of conceptualising the text as a plural and contested

component of the social formation (as such, revealing its ideological natures and functions) utilised as a counterpoint to that which claims to hold access to the “textual fact”.

2.2. The Literature Review: sourcing literature and limitations

As a research method enabling the prioritisation of critical textual analyses of LIS literature, the extended narrative literature review was utilised as an expression of this theoretical perspective concerned with the explosion of critics’ theories of the fiction text.

Literature was sought and retrieved in iterations through the University OPAC, the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database, and through manual library browsing. No restrictions were imposed in terms of the date or geographic region of publication and consideration has been given to the authority of all resources utilised in accessing literature, as well as the veracity of the literature accessed.

Given both the volume of available LIS literature on various aspects of public library fiction services and the interest of this work in engaging political positions in some detail, literature sought was that which engaged with public library fiction selection as a political problematic. Therefore, authors taking some form of political position were prioritised. This did not necessarily demand that the overtly political dealt explicitly and at length with fiction provision, only that a politics was self-evidently applicable to fiction provision; however, while the authors included in this work discuss fiction provision at vastly different levels of detail, all of them *do* discuss the matter.

This criterion amounted to a narrowing of the research parameters as it was originally conceived that ‘apolitical’ treatments of fiction-service-related issues would form a broad category of literature for discussion, with this very apolitical character considered a kind of politics in itself and a level at which authors’ ideas regarding literature and public library purposes and values might be located. By this description I have in mind works such as Ooi and Lew’s *Selecting Fiction as Part of Everyday Life Information Seeking* (2011), which examined public library users’ techniques and cognitive processes for selecting fiction; Moyer’s *Adult*

Fiction Reading (2005), a review of literature dealing with the *mechanics* of fiction provision and user selection up to 2003; and Saarinen and Vakkari's *A Sign of a Good Book* (2013), which investigated readers' methods of accessing fiction from the public library to inform the design of fiction search systems. All of these works could be said to be implicitly 'pro-popular fiction' in their politics, however, given the volume and varieties of literature that might be construed in this way, as well as constraints on time and the interest of the research in conducting detailed textual analyses of works, priority was provided to fewer, overtly 'political' pieces. In a sense this narrowing of parameters problematised the acquisition process since strategic searching with inevitably broad search terms (such as 'popular' and/or 'literary fiction', 'fiction selection', 'high' and/or 'low culture', 'public library values' etc.) did little to distinguish between works engaging with, say, The Great Fiction Question, works discussing only fiction cataloguing, or works engaging in discussions of public library values in relation to data protection. The revealing of a work such as Van Fleet's *Popular Fiction Collections in Academic and Public Libraries* (2003) resulted then from extensive searching and the scrutinising of abstracts.

It must be noted too that many of the most significant works addressed here were acquired either through physical library browsing or were actively sought in hard copy as a result of some aspect of this author's pre-existing knowledge of the contemporary debate – the ongoing dispute between Usherwood and Pateman, for example, being of some notoriety within the discipline.

A further significant acquisition tool took the form of the bibliographies of works already acquired. For instance, given the depth of their discussions of relevant issues, the extensive bibliographies and reference lists of authors such as Usherwood (2007) and Goulding (2006) were manually examined for relevant works and provided invaluable suggestions of further literature for consideration. In this manner, highly relevant literature was identified and accumulated, and subsequently scrutinised too. However, while many works were identified in this way, several of potential relevance could not subsequently be accessed either in hard copy or online. This included but was not limited to: Kinnell's *Managing Fiction in Libraries* (1991), Augst and Wiegand eds. *The Library as an Agency of Culture* (2001), Folker and Hafner's *The*

Canonicity Debate (1993): (in Hafner eds. *Democracy and the Public Library*), and Worsley's *Libraries and Mass Culture* (1967).

Finally, while it was acknowledged that the binary nature of the debate outlined was based on limited literature, it was thought that it was representative of a debate defined significantly by one's positionality in relation to the core Fiction Question – an issue which in turn invokes notions of the public library's most fundamental purposes and values. As critics often contextualise and legitimate their perspectives against the oppositional and in line with the complementary it was, therefore, considered that the political breadth of work encountered through bibliographic reference was likely to be representative of the debate both historically and contemporarily. Cross-referencing bibliographies and reference sections gleaned from literature of opposing theoretical perspectives further informed an understanding of the representative spectrum of thought, while repetition across bibliographies served to highlight works of particular significance or malleability.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Historical Context: the Evolution of 'The Great Fiction Question'

In *Fiction Librarianship* Frank Atkinson proposes that the debate surrounding the politics of the public library's provision of works of fiction, and its discrimination between those works, found voice with the very introduction of the library service, on both sides of the Atlantic. Citing the example of the City of Boston Public Library, whose trustees of 1852 considered a primary objective of the service to be the provision of "the popular, current literature of the day", in numbers "such...that many persons, if they desire it, can be reading the same work at the same moment...when it is living, fresh and new" (1981, p.9), Atkinson implicitly refutes a characterisation of the provision of popular fiction as a specifically twentieth century phenomenon, suggesting instead that these trustees interpreted the role and scope of the new social service as pluralistic and encompassing the need to provide popular fiction – a service viewed in turn as essential to the public library's claims to cultural congruity and relevance, and as a tool with which users might be encouraged to eventually engage with 'higher' works (the 'higher' in this case being non-fiction). However, the trustees of the same library in 1875 refuted the assertions of their predecessors, arguing that "it is not part of the duty of the municipality to raise taxes for the amusement of people", and positing instead that the public service should be viewed strictly as a "supplement to the school system...an instrumentality of higher education to all classes of people" (Atkinson, p.9). For this generation of trustees then, not only should the public library play no role in popular cultural life but works of 'amusement' – taken in this context as the popular as well as the merely current, or not yet culturally contextualised – were not conceptualised as tools of potential pedagogical, not to mention literary, value.

Robert Snape subscribes similarly to this notion that the purposes and values of the public library service were contested upon conception. In *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library* (1995) and *Home Reading* (1996), he discusses the controversies surrounding the embryonic

British service's collection and lending of fiction, and its exaction of quality-based distinctions between types of fiction and between individual fiction texts. Describing the 1893 introduction of Open Access (the move to allow users free physical access to browse library shelves), Snape contends that since "most librarians believed in the existence of a literary hierarchy, and by implication, a hierarchy of reading in which some forms were superior to others" (1996, p.75),

> far from welcoming the fact that more and more people were reading, many librarians, and indeed some literary critics were deeply concerned that [the working class] were reading purely for pleasure in random and non-systematic ways which did not reflect contemporary concepts of recreation as utilitarian, uplifting and improving (1996, p.73).

Given this professional concern and the fact that Open Access had "fundamentally changed the role of the librarian from that of custodian of books to that of an adviser and guide in reading" (1995, p.47), Snape suggests that public librarians developed this "missionary duty" around "the two pillars of literary standards and systematic reading" (1995, p.58), and ultimately sought to enlighten the working class reading practice, since, from the preeminent utilitarian-idealist perspective, "reading for pleasure was expected to yield some result beyond mere enjoyment" (1996, pp.73-75).

3.1.1. Public Libraries and Ideology

This "missionary duty", however, was not necessarily shared by library committees or politicians, or understood as the principal political imperative for the service's introduction. As Snape writes:

> the widely held and mistaken view was, and still is, that [public libraries] were introduced solely for the purpose of providing working class readers...with access to educational books...The first public libraries were in fact used for a wide range of purposes, many of which were related to leisure rather than education; indeed if education was meant to be their principal function, why did they provide so much popular fiction and miscellaneous reading? (1996, p.68).

The answer is that the provision of fiction – both the literary and the popular – could be co-opted to serve the dominant socio-political power structure: an ideological function transcending the professional concern for utilitarian reading and conservation of an idealist literary hierarchy. Again, Snape writes:

> through varying approaches to the selection of fiction and the promotion of recreational reading, library committees controlled fiction provision in a way which they perceived would promote their own values and interests - economic, political, religious, cultural, or a mixture of these. Public libraries were thus instrumental, in a perhaps minor but important way, in supporting the power structure of their local community. They were not neutral, as conventional library history would sometimes suggest, but were expressions of political and religious beliefs, of cultural and literary values, and of both restrictive and relaxed attitudes to popular leisure (1995, p.133).

Despite the efforts of early public librarians then, popular fiction provision was a fundamental service, but more crucially, was an ideologically active one. This is evident in the rhetoric of the 1849 Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries in which it is stated:

> give a man an interesting book to take home with him to his family, and it is probable that the man will stay at home and read his book in preference to going out and spending his time in dissipation and idleness; and, therefore, the formation of...libraries would be favourable to the improvement of the moral and the intellectual condition of the working population (cited by Snape, 1996, p.69).

Alistair Black encapsulates the ideological implications of such statements when he suggests that public libraries "originated as antidotes to working class aspirations at a time of immense social and political tension", with the intention of offering "an alternative to the dangerous liaison of the public house", in the hope that "the 'sober' literature found in *free* local libraries would entice workers away from pernicious 'socialist' literature" (2000, p.146). John Pateman agrees, and in seeking to debunk the "enduring myth" that public libraries were conceived primarily to complement the education system, proposes that a specific 'aspiration' to which the institution offered an antidote was manifest in the burgeoning trade union project and the

collective socio-political mobilisation and ideological dissent that it signified (2013, p.125). For Pateman then, the "reality is that [public libraries] were set up and run by the Victorian establishment to control the reading habits and idle time of the "deserving poor" " (2004, p.15), a form of 'control' that functioned, through a reinforcement of dominant conditions, to exhaust, undermine and delegitimise efforts to interrogate forms and means of class oppression.

Similarly, while engaged to reinforce dominant ideology and inoculate readers against genuine public articulations of political dissent, fiction provision, especially of the popular, was mobilised to more instrumental ends in sustaining the exploitative conditions of industrial employment by providing what the Chairman of the Birmingham Library Committee, Alderman Johnson, called in 1887, "for the lives of a great many of our people, a necessary counterpoise to the monotony of mechanical employment" (cited by Snape, 1995, p.78, and Usherwood, 1989, pp.10-11). Though perhaps unaware of the political implications of his statement, Johnson clearly articulates what Greenhalgh et al describe as

> rational recreation advocated as a way of offsetting the debilitating effects of rigid and specialized industrial processes and therefore ultimately as a means of enhancing industrial productivity (1995, p.20).

Snape characterises this library 'function' as fundamentally "self-interested" and ideological, in that at the expense of the individual's positive experience, it recognises recreational reading (or perhaps entertainment) as "structurally beneficial to the whole community", in the sense that it might maintain the community's stable structure by subsidising the conservation of the dominant conditions of production (1995, p.89). In this reading, any positive effects upon the individual resulting from the reading experience are incidental to the maintenance of that individual's material and ideological subjugation.

However, Black counters that such a "social control thesis stresses the middle-class provision of public libraries for the working-classes", when, to his mind at least, a "prime role of the early public library…was the service it provided to scholarship among the respectable classes" (p.146). This is significant because it again articulates a view of the public library as site of

cultural contestation in its very earliest manifestation. However, it also reiterates that in servicing the scholarship of the educated, the early public library was, given the concerns of some librarians regarding popular literature and reading practices, concerned with the alimentation of high culture, including literary fiction. That it would appear a contradiction to promote, on the one hand, stable notions of canonicity and value, while on the other, encouraging the production and provision of antithetical popular works, is in this view, an aesthetic contradiction implicit in the institution's coherent ideological functioning and, therefore, an irrelevance.

While it is not disputed by these commentators that, in the terms of an institutionalised conception of literary hierarchy, fiction was viewed as an inferior cultural form to the literarily non-fictional, and that further, a quality, ideology, and morality-based sub-hierarchy of fiction was also subscribed to (with the sensational and popular viewed as innately inferior to literary), it is evident that leisure and popular fiction provision remained a fundamental, if contested, aspect of the public library service, both in conception and practice, and that such provision was necessarily political. Whether favouring the provision of the sensational in an apparently apolitical, empathic conviction like Johnson, or seeking to uphold the two pillars of "literary standards and systematic reading" like Snape's early public librarians, fiction provision remained fundamentally an ideological act, bound-up in the public library's potential functioning as a unit for the dispersal of ideological homogeneity, whether that was through the promotion of a notion of literary universalism or the reinforcing of preeminent socio-political conditions and practices. Crucially, in the case of the latter, it could be argued that what may have been viewed by a librarian of the time as a work of damaging and dissident popular fiction was elsewhere valued for precisely its dangerous, 'entertaining' capacities, crucially, re-appropriating and sterilising any subversive content to allow the reader to engage in something similar to that which Mark Fisher calls "gestural anti-capitalism" – that is, a safe fantasy of authentic political dissention, tolerated by the dominant for precisely its inert nature – and in the process tacitly stabilising pre-existing conditions and allowing (in this case) the reader, "to continue to consume with impunity" (2009, p.12).

This has echoes of Louis Althusser's conception of ideology as a material system of structures and his interest in accounting for the methods by which the social formation ideologically replicates exploitative production values, specifically with respect to the ideological complicity of the exploited classes in their literal and physical exploitation (2001a). Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), therefore, are defined as those social institutions or structures which allow the reproduction of the dominant mode of production through a perpetual social prescription of dominant ideology, a prescription which serves to obfuscate the relationship of the individual to their conditions of existence, positing and reproducing instead a tolerable "representation" of the individual's relationship with their lived experience:

> all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live (Althusser, 2001a, p.111).

In this view then, the public library may be read to have, upon conception, united its leisure and educational roles as a state apparatus which functioned to ensure that dominant ideology was reinforced and dissidence immunised against, with fiction of all kinds provided as a means to an end – a by-product of an ideological imperative – and not an end goal in itself. In this sense, the division set up by the likes of Snape between the early public librarian's conviction in the hierarchy of literary work and universality of value, and the political recognition of the instrumental and ideological uses of popular texts, are not, as they might appear, in themselves ideologically opposed but instead united in a higher level ideological function, promoting homogeneity and universal objectivity while repudiating plurality.

3.1.2. The Public Library as Site of Cultural Contestation: a 'strand of continuity'

While these historical analyses provide insight into the British-Victorian articulation of the Fiction Question and its embeddedness in a larger debate regarding the political and social

values and functions of the early public library, in suggesting that in some sense the public library came into being as a conceptually contested institution, these critics offer interpretations of library history which describe the binary perspectives in relation to fiction and leisure provision as historically equal (in terms of temporal originality) interpretations of the ethos of public librarianship. This is significant because, as we will see, it is implied in the rhetoric of contemporary commentators arguing on both sides of the current debate regarding fiction selection and provision, that while the debate they are engaged in is one with historical foundations, their opponents' positions cut against the grain of the 'original' values of the public library. For the likes of Atkinson, Snape, Black and Greenhalgh et al, however, not only does the Fiction Question itself form a "strand of continuity" (Snape, 1996, p.81) with a contemporary articulation of the same debate, but it was formed precisely because of the elusiveness and ambiguity inherent in the politics of the service's original conception; that is, the very introduction of the public library service engaged debate as to its most vital functions, objectives, values and collection characteristics.

Indeed, Black structures his account of the institution's development in the twentieth century around precisely such a notion of continuity through conflict (though he does not draw it out quite in these terms). In 1930, from inside the profession, noted public librarian E.A. Baker protested that, by providing "deleterious literature", "the public library is not performing an act of kindness but doing something positively harmful, promoting the work of social corruption which it wants to counteract" (cited by Black, p.61); while in the overtly political sphere, the Kenyon Report of 1927 hailed the provision of the "deleterious" as a valuable "relief of [the] tedium of the idle hours quite irrespective of intellectual profit or educational gain" (cited by Snape, 1995, p.3). Again, however, this apparent political and aesthetic fissure functions as a component of ideological (re)production, with Black suggesting that "allied to a continuing propensity for censorship and preference for 'good' and classic literature", the inter-war library

> reflected the fears of authority over social unrest and its desire to avoid upheaval by *manufacturing* a social consensus which excluded radical solutions to the social problems of the day (p.65-66).

In this reading then, the institution, functioning as “an ideal instrument for conveying the socially calming messages that government and social elites wished to broadcast” (Black, pp.65-67), provided an incoherent fiction provision service (in the sense that it was service based upon aesthetical-political conflict) to a congruent ideological end based on the equal exploitation of the differing or opposing theories of the capacities of forms of fiction texts.

In relation to what Black describes as the “Victorian-style institutions of the 1940s and 1950s” (p.128), the “strand of continuity” that is The Great Fiction Question was nowhere more evident than in the title of the *Library Assistant* journal’s December issue of 1951: *The Sub-Literature Problem* (Atkinson, p.10). As Atkinson suggests, from within the profession, a residual desire existed to skew public library provision against fiction in general:

> well into the 1960s...most libraries...controll[ing] the numbers of types of books borrowed by having different tickets for non-fiction and fiction. The ration of tickets allowed to borrowers was always weighted towards non-fiction: two or three non-fiction tickets and one fiction ticket being the usual sort of allowance (pp.12-13).

However, the *Library Assistant’s* title describes a reaffirmed professional interest in the politics of value-based fiction selection, though exposes, through its whole linguistic framing of the debate (ie. the use of the term ‘sub-literature’), both a continued institutional subscription to a traditional hierarchy of reading, and the extent to which the debate remained uncritically informed by dominant traditional-formalist critical commitments to “uncovering the ‘truth’ about the ‘facts’ ” of texts in an ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ determination of literary value (Wilson, 1995, pp.15-16). Again, the ‘problem’ posed by ‘sub-literature’ is one of how its aesthetic/literary deficiencies and potential pedagogical use-value (or even systematic-reading-value) might be reconciled in the context of public library lending.

However, Atkinson suggests that by the 1970s, an awareness of the needs of users (including reading needs) and a resultant movement to “devise services more responsive to local needs” (p.88) had become pervasive within the profession, relegating the sub-literature question to an “outdated idea of a standard public library image” in the process (p.81). In this sense, the very popularity of popular fiction might be said to have been re-appropriated as a critical strength of

the cultural form, with library readers' desire to 'consume' the texts reflecting their 'need' to access them and, therefore, libraries' need to collect them. As we have seen though, distaste for the appeal of popular fiction has been a crucial tenet of various articulations of the Question, with literary critic Q.D. Leavis noting in 1939 that

> a librarian who has made the experiment of putting "good" fiction in his library will report that no one would take it out, whereas if he were to put two hundred copies of Edgar Wallace's detective stories on the shelves, they would be gone the same day (pp.4-5).

An institution-wide movement to wholly satiate such desires through popular provision has been alleged by the conservative Adam Smith Institute which described the public library with some derision in 1986 as a "system which largely supplies free pulp fiction to those who could well afford to pay for it" (p.41). While not necessarily politically aligned with the Adam Smith Institute, given that, in Snape's view at least, "the library profession never rationalized its position in terms of leisure" (1995, p.5), many contemporary commentators, concerned with the veracity of users' expressions of library-related needs, have engaged the politics of consumer demand culture as a basis for a reappraisal of The Great Fiction Question.

3.2. Contemporary Positions: counterfeit consumer demand and a return to 'higher ground'

3.2.1. Bob Usherwood and the Real Value of Fiction Lending

One such prominent commentator is Bob Usherwood, who, in *The Public Library as Public Knowledge* (1989), produces a nuanced case for the public library's collection of both popular and literary fiction. At once deriding uncritical disdain for popular fiction and culture, and appreciating the radical and rewarding capacities of fiction and those other cultural products most easily classified as 'traditional', 'literary' or 'high', he views it "appropriate for the public library to promote high culture", while simultaneously engaging with "mass culture, pop culture and the culture of the local community", but all the while remaining cognisant of the "more crass aspects of commercialization" (p.11). The very existence of the public library, Usherwood argues, renders the location of private-sector ideology and practice within its literal and conceptual boundaries distinctly illegitimate, because

> as a concept [the public library] embodies some most radical ideals – equality, provision for need rather than commercial profit, educational advancement, free access to, and free expression of, information and ideas (p.12).

For Usherwood then, the provision of fiction of all kinds is a public library service that is valuable only if considered out with the (illegitimate) terms and logic of market evaluation; crucially, those logical terms utilised by many other commentators to express the service's value (especially in relation to the lending of popular fiction), most pervasively through the invocation of statistical evidence of high levels of lending. However, given that he appeals to conceptions of literary quality to distinguish fiction types, the "social value[s] and function[s]" of fiction lending to be exposed depends, for Usherwood, upon the quality and type of fiction being read. While his case for 'high', or 'literary', fiction includes, but is not limited to, the idea that the dissemination of the politically and aesthetically subversive is historically "very much a part of high culture" (p.11), and that therefore, it is grossly reductive to imagine that that which is 'literary' is necessarily a product and proponent of the ideologically dominant, the popular is

not granted such status. Instead Usherwood values popular fiction as a mass of “relatable material”, without access to which readers’ “potential[s]” (taken to mean their potentials to develop capacities to deal with and enjoy fiction more advanced in terms of aesthetics, form, thematic conception etc.) may go unrealised. The very act of borrowing popular fiction too is characterised by Usherwood as a dissident act in that it implicitly protests private ownership and commercial exchange as prerequisite to experiencing a work; but this surely can be said of fiction of all kinds.

Excellence as Unorthodox Imperative of Selection

In his later works *Public Libraries and Political Purpose* (1996), *Equity and Excellence in the Public Library* (2007) and *Librarians, Librarianship and The Uses of Literacy* (2009), Usherwood concretises his politics of collection development, while appearing, in the intervening years, to have become less optimistic regarding the capacities of popular fiction and increasingly concerned that the traditional values of public libraries “are in danger of being downgraded and...eroded by a combination of commercialism, cultural relativism, and mistaken egalitarianism” (2007, p.6). Specifically in relation to contemporary approaches to fiction lending, Usherwood diagnoses an “unwillingness...to acknowledge any kind of expertise in terms of the selection of material” (2007, p.18), or “at worst [an inability] to differentiate between the good and the bad” (2007, p.25) that he views as “perhaps indicative of a kind of anti-intellectual pragmatism that is sometimes evident in the British profession” (2007, p.18). Fundamentally for Usherwood, it is as significant a purpose of the public library to “encourage discrimination between (say) good and bad writing” as it is between “accurate and false information” (Usherwood, 2007, p.50); he therefore asks rhetorically:

> If, as suggested, public libraries should seek to educate their users about the quality of factual information should they not also undertake a similar role with regard to the arts and works of imagination? (2007, p.57).

To Usherwood, this negation of criteria of ‘excellence’ in collection development amounts to a dangerous neglect of the institution’s “democratic role and political purpose” (1996, p.200), since, “by providing access to material of high quality, the public library can...help to even out

the inequalities in our society", as well as "liberate people from ignorance" and, in doing so, promote social and democratic participation (1996, p.202). Instead, Usherwood suggests that as a result of a "rightful" institutional enthusiasm for "democratization, inclusion, and access" (2007, p.73), the public library has become pervasively and publicly reconceived as "primarily...a place for entertainment" (2007, p.4), with some librarians now endorsing "a vision of the public library as a provider of services to bibliographic couch potatoes" (2007, p.36). Such a 'vision' serves to instate and perpetually reinforce a professional "orthodoxy" characterised by cultural relativism and a derision for traditional notions of (literary) value and, ultimately, ensures the political stability of a concern for 'quantity over quality' when it comes to assessing fiction lending (1996, p.200 and 2007, p.4).

Usherwood then argues for the provision of works of "high quality" fiction (as well as all other lending materials) in the face of the false hegemony that is socio-economically manufactured consumer demand, warning that implementing a demand-based service is to be "entirely dependent on the whims of the market place" (2007, p.6), a that such a condition of self-imposed dependency makes it "much more difficult, if not impossible, to provide materials and services that contribute to self-improvement, complex culture, or the public good" (2007, p.37). In doing so, he predicts that he may be "accused of ignoring social inclusion" (2007, p.4) but he refutes that social inclusion – or simply equity – and excellence are mutually exclusive ambitions. Similarly, he counters those who criticise as elitist his espousal of an 'excellence-based' service with an inversion of their charge: he suggests that they conflate elitism and excellence, and in doing so reveal a paternalistic "professional pessimism about the intellectual abilities of the people they seek to serve" (2007, p.98). In this sense, Usherwood portrays the development of collections based fundamentally on user demand as a practice that belies the function of providing popular fiction – if difficult or demanding fiction, to which to progress from the popular, is absent from collections – in that it disregards the institution's responsibility to "liberate" its users from their own ignorance.

Ultimately for Usherwood, the public library fiction collection must balance the popular and the literary but scorn the "commercial imperative", as well as relativist notions of value, in the selection of its constituent works; he writes:

> Excellence is not about elitism, neither is it restricted to what is sometimes characterized as literary fiction or high culture. It can be found in a popular novel...However, it is important to recognize the difference between excellence and the populist appeal of mass produced pap (2007, p.129).

Analysis

This statement leads Usherwood to acknowledge that the "precise nature of the boundaries between high and lowbrow, literary and popular material" are "the subject of debate" (not social constructions), but he maintains that those professionals responsible for collection development must utilise "some criteria of quality" in evaluating and selecting works of fiction, including the popular (2007, p.27). While his concern is not to expound and submit for use a specific set of quality criteria for fiction selection, it may be inferred from much of Usherwood's rhetoric that his conception of the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' texts is based upon the commitments of traditional literary criticism, valuing as he does the inherent, self-contained structural, linguistic and compositional characteristics of the text, and rejecting or just ignoring notions of socio-cultural influence or production, and the active role of the reader(s). This is exemplified by his framing of statements such as "library users will want to make use of both ephemeral and quality material" (p.22), "It is wrong...to spend a large amount of what is always going to be limited public money on material of limited quality" (p.23) and "a professionally qualified librarian should...know what constitutes good quality in writing" (p.26). For Usherwood, a conception of textual quality and its limitations appears wholly defined by the aesthetic characteristics of the interior of the aesthetic (ephemeral) object. His suggestion that public librarians should just 'know' the constitution of literary quality (presumably through the reception of basic tenets of dominant aesthetic literary codes) echoes the 'common sense' convictions of traditional literary criticism, offering as it does a means with which to (re)produce dominant and 'obvious' textual interpretations and aesthetic value systems through an ostensibly objective practice, devoid of consideration for the material means of textual production and ideological inscription (Wilson, p. 7). Similarly, in responding to the accusation of elitism by suggesting that it is paternalistic of his accusers to assume that a working class public cannot enjoy or properly engage with literary material of 'high quality',

Usherwood continues to impose a formalist hierarchy upon literature while assuming that it is in the interests of these readers to ascend it, with the benefits from the top-level texts portrayed as more myriad and beneficial in some sense than the limited, closed set of potentialities available from the bottom-level texts of "limited quality". Again though, the inescapable limitations of these popular texts are not situated in their readers or their readers' dominant critical discourse, but are defined by and contained within their own literary and perhaps, literal, boundaries as 'self-limiting' material objects.

In suggesting that he is not concerned by notions of 'high' and 'low', but of 'good' and 'bad' (2009, p.193), Usherwood implies too that what should be perceived as 'good', in terms of fiction texts and in the context of literary criticism (as opposed to reader-development), is that which subscribes to and displays the dominant, or traditional, aesthetic indicators of quality – a position that would appear to, perhaps inadvertently, prop-up the hierarchy he claims to have disregarded. For Usherwood, for a popular fiction text to be classified as 'excellent' in literary and not educationalist terms, must require its performance of dominant, 'high art' aesthetic concerns, or perhaps, a 'literary' appropriation of a popular fiction mode, as is a common predilection of members of the postmodern avant-garde (Robert Coover or Thomas Pynchon for example). His position then, would appear to clearly favour that which is already culturally construed as highbrow in a self-perpetuating system in which prescribed aesthetic signifiers are appropriated as a means of legitimating the canonical status of the canon. In this sense, to utilise traditional-formalist criteria designed to identify formal literary quality would seem only able to produce a collection representing existing literary conditions, accounting for the capacities of popular texts only in the educationalist terms of reader development models and, in doing so, maintaining the fixed boundaries purported to be the "subject of debate". Indeed, to utilise such criteria in the production of a hypothetical collection made up entirely of popular fiction would appear either impossible or the result of 'incorrect' usage.

This is not to suggest, however, that traditional critical criteria are wholly illegitimate means of engaging literary texts, or entirely unobjective instruments for interrogating proficiency in writing. As Terry Eagleton suggests, while "there are criteria for determining what counts as excellent in…fiction, as there are not for determining whether peaches taste better than

pineapples", critical aesthetic evaluation does not constitute a wholly objective practice, while "standards of excellence may also differ from one kind of literary art to another" (2013, pp.189-190). But, as Davis and Womack have written, "it would be absurd to say that aesthetic evaluation has disappeared from literary criticism", rather, "part of the legacy of formalist criticism" is that such evaluative techniques have become normalised to the extent that they unobtrusively underpin myriad specific critical strategies, including those concerned more primarily with material conditions of textual and ideological production, as well as the active subversion of dominant critical modes. Instead, "what has been discarded...is the rigid and dogmatic assertions that the aesthetic principles established by these select few should be subscribed to by the many" (2002, p.9). In this sense, it is a fallacy to assume that the formal shortcomings of texts will go unnoticed in flagrant acts of 'anti-intellectualism', but it is accurate to understand that such shortcomings will not prevent texts from being read in various ways that transcend the mere formal or aesthetic, and subsequently valued or excoriated for their politics in a maximisation of their critical potential.

However, Usherwood's portrayal of the public library profession as "unwilling or unable" to make value judgements comes in the same text (*Equity and Excellence*, 2007, which includes as an appendix the results of survey sent to public library managers) in which he publishes a series of intellectualised objections to his rhetoric from those professionals he has surveyed. Regardless, he claims that if

> libraries fade away in the next 20 years...above all, it will be the result of an anti-intellectualism that argues that all things are to be judged equal in the library world, and fails to distinguish between the good and the bad (2007, p.126).

It is clear from his respondents, though, that many do not claim to lack expertise or willingness to pass judgements but display a critical engagement with the legitimateness of their own judgements and the politics of their acting upon them. For example, as a response to the statement "Public libraries should provide equality of access to the best", Usherwood received the following response:

> We have a duty to provide a service to all. Everybody's "best" will be different, we are not wise enough to objectively state one "best" (nor should we be), and our collections must reflect that (p.159).

Similarly, his, "The public library is a place where the egalitarian principles of democracy meet the elite claims of high culture" evoked the response:

> A public library should be a place where the claims of high culture are challenged and where the cultural needs of the whole community are met... (p.184),

while the statement, "Promoting and prioritising high aesthetic standards would make public libraries culturally exclusive" was answered with:

> What are high aesthetic standards? IE do they only apply to opera and classical literature? Or can they apply to graphic novels, popular culture etc? I think so (p.176-177).

It appears then that it is Usherwood who is unwilling or unable to recognise that such critical engagement is 'pro-intellectual' in its politics. Instead he re-mobilises Hoggart's charge that such 'practices', in the name of " 'democratic' art and culture ", amount to a form of "aggressive philistinism" (cited by Usherwood, 2009, p.195), and suggests that a relativist response to a question like "What is the best?" amounts to a "dereliction of professional duty" (2007, p.66). As Wilson suggests though, it is a mistake to construe such critical engagement with, or deconstruction of, notions of 'high' culture as a "dismantling of the ['high' culture] concept" proper, when the project is in fact crucially and intimately

> interested in the notion of culture in the evaluative sense, it simply wants the category to be all inclusive, and for qualitative differences to be consensually understood within the terms laid out by the particular laws governing various 'subcultural' practices (p.24).

For Eagleton too, since "there is no question that the installment of the 'value-question' at the heart of critical enquiry is a rampantly ideological gesture", a productive critical engagement with literary evaluation must first recognise that its codes are geared towards a dominant critical mode which seeks to detach the text from its historical conditions as if it might be

legitimately reduced "to some single privileged significance intuitable across history" (1980, pp.164-168).

Usherwood's position is problematic, then, because unlike materialist critics who value the literary canon for its radical potential to both illuminate and decry the conditions of its production (but not despite its aesthetic achievements), and are actively interested in widening the terms of critical interrogation of the non-canonical, in expressing his support for 'quality-based' fiction collecting on the basis of 'good' texts' inherent value, Usherwood implicitly subscribes to an ideologically-determined, traditional mode of criticism able to efface radical potential through dehistoricization and prone "to the oppression of out-groups" through the false universalisation of meaning, interpretation and value.

3.2.2. Murray C. Bob's *Case for Quality Book Selection*

Murray C. Bob makes his *Case for Quality Book Selection* (1982) in response not only to the implementation of private-sector practices in the public library, but some library professionals' extolling of the virtues of those practices in their writing. Bob responds specifically to Nora Rawlinson's 1981 article *Give 'Em What They Want!* (which, as the title might suggest, makes the case for the provision of fiction based on user demand), which he identifies as emblematic of a kind of intra-professional complicity in "the current movement to turn libraries into fast-food chains of the mind" (p.1708). Like Usherwood, he suggests that the assumption that expressions of consumer demand can articulate a sovereign and authentic representation of mass cultural interests

> overlooks the fact that tastes are easily manipulated, influenced by suggestion, custom, example, and constantly changed, being modified by factors such as price and relative availability, not to mention advertising (p.1707).

Interestingly, Bob also suggests that the reader-development capacities of popular or genre fictions are overstated, or perhaps more accurately, that the texts are under-utilised to reader-development ends, and the area generally under-investigated. Specifically, he suggests that

public libraries with high levels of popular fiction lending tend to circulate "ever more books to the same number and kind of people", functioning only to provide a leisure lending service to the highly literate and neglecting outreach processes (p.1710). For Bob, then, the reader-development argument is a false attempt to legitimate the practice of pandering to popular demand by providing popular and genre fiction en masse to ensure high levels of lending and, ultimately, to secure a continued existence. His view of the literary capacities of genre fiction emerges (not least in his ironizing use of inverted commas) when he asks: "With light romance, formula fiction, pornography, westerns, mysteries, science fiction, and comic "books," we can always raise our circulation – but to what end?" (p.1709). Not only is it antithetical to his conception of the institution's traditional mission, but echoing E. A. Baker, Bob asserts that "just as the increased sale of junk food weakens us physically, the increased circulation of schlock diminishes us intellectually" (p.1708). In this sense, for Bob, the public library becomes complicit in the importation (both practical and ideological) of socio-economic practices which, through manufacturing tastes around economies of scale and profitability, actively discriminate against "more educated taste and pulls down the average level of public taste" (p.1707), and subvert the institution's democratic purpose, since, "in the book world, the lowest common denominator is very often the best seller" (p.1708).

Analysis

However, Bob calls for popular fiction texts to remain in fiction collections but, crucially, as ballast for texts of the "higher ground" to which the public library has a responsibility to favour and promote. While "many (not all) best sellers are mediocre at best", for Bob, "the question is solely as to the limits that should be observed" in integrating those texts into a balanced collection (p.1709). While the criteria assumed by Bob to determine best sellers' literary qualities are unclear, it may be inferred that they are the same as those that might be applied to evaluate the literary or canonical (especially since Bob disavows any exceptional capacity of the popular to aid reader-development) and that, therefore, he too looks to the common sense or naturalising capacities of traditional-formalist criticism and, in the process, reinforces the ahistoric and apolitical hierarchy of that mode of critical discourse, effacing readers and their diversity as figures in the transactional production of meaning and conceptualisation of value.

This, in turn, will serve to reproduce the naturalised status of the canon, while allowing only those popular texts able to emulate immanent critical forms and concerns to be valorised.

3.2.3. Ed D'Angelo: public librarianship as postmodern practice

In her 2005 study of professional attitudes towards commercialisation, Fox identifies a "strongly perceived pragmatic need, on the part of some participants, for the library to compete in the marketplace in order to survive in a consumer world." (Fox, 2005, p.99; cited by Usherwood, 2007, p.49). Like Usherwood and Bob, Ed D'Angelo appears to have witnessed such a perceived need manifest in public library practice. Describing collection development policies determined by neoliberal ideology, and service performance again evaluated through inappropriate criteria derived from the private-sector, D'Angelo contends:

> today the trend is moving away from selecting books on the basis of reviews or critical standards. More and more books are selected only because they have high projected sales figures or they are in high demand. At the far end of this trend librarians no longer select books for their collections. At the far end of this trend we find automated book ordering systems (2006, p.119).

However, he rejects the notion that such simplistic markers of consumer demand articulate an authentic "democratic will of the people", positing instead that they are impositions of the market, constructed and self-legitimating expressions of consumer desire which have resulted in fiction collections, developed by automated systems, bearing "no resemblance to high culture" (p.119). Significantly for D'Angelo, for such automated selection systems to function as "new gatekeepers" is to enact a process of late-capitalist logic, furthering the ideological and literal consumerisation of a public-sector institution while undermining what he views as having historically been a fundamental responsibility of the public librarian – the turning away of low, non-purposive culture from the gate. McCabe articulates a similar indictment of professional practice in suggesting that when "public librarians move away from providing education to providing access" – that is, when they neglect quality-based discrimination as a pedagogical

principal in favour, ultimately, of promoting high levels of lending as a means of sustaining services –

> they move from the high professional calling of improving people's lives to the technical, material process of distributing materials and services without regard for the impact these materials and services might have (2001; cited by Usherwood, 2007, p.89).

This (alleged) professional regression recalls Snape's description of the Victorian public librarian before the days of Open Access, albeit even then there was a concern for the impact of the service, even if it was one, in the views of many, functioning (explicitly or implicitly) to reinforce the socio-politically and ideologically dominant.

Popular Fiction as 'Passive Consumption'

The upshot for D'Angelo is that postmodern capitalist ideology has been institutionalised in the public-sector, reproducing its dominance through infiltrated business models based on (measuring) consumption, and in doing so, destabilising the centrality of what he sees as the "three pillars supporting the public library": "democracy, civil education and the public good" (p.4). D'Angelo describes this neoliberal ideological imperative permeating the contemporary public library as

> a form of liberalism no longer tempered by moral restraints or the imperative to serve the public good, but in which the market becomes its own measure of what is good (p.39).

Implicit in this is the self-perpetuating and ideological demand to: "Pander to your public's every wish; flatter them; patronize them; but don't try to educate them" (D'Angelo, p.119). For D'Angelo, this has resulted in collections comprised in the majority of "generally formulaic" (p.29) popular fiction, which encourage not "reading as education", but those "passive act[s] of consumption" which constitutes "reading as entertainment" (p.28). In coming to this conclusion, he asserts that education and entertainment exist as polar forms of information consumption, the former for "improving understanding and aesthetic/moral choices" and the latter serving "pleasure only" (p.27). While education can be pleasurable though,

entertainment cannot educate (improve understanding and aesthetic/moral choices). Adversative reading processes are then characterised corresponding to the two forms of consumption, and comparable to the polarity inherent in the Victorian notion of 'systematic reading' which sought to rescue "utilitarian, improving and morally uplifting" recreation from the threat of the "aimless amusement" of insouciant reading (Snape, 1995, p.58). Firstly, D'Angelo defines educational reading as "part of a process of enquiry" in which the "reader brings questions to the text but is transformed in the process of reading to ask new questions which lead to yet other texts". In this sense, "reading as education is work in...that it requires active engagement on the part of the reader" (p.28). On the other hand

> readers of popular imaginative literature do not seek to enrich their understanding or to be edified or even enhance their capacity for enjoyment. They seek only to vicariously enjoy the thrills, sensations and pleasures of imagined characters and events (p.29).

At this point, while clearly having little regard for popular fiction and suggesting that such texts incite "passive consumption", in some sense through their form, it would appear that, ultimately, the form of reading practiced is dependent not upon the form of the text but upon the intentions of the reader. However, D'Angelo also contends that,

> when markets become mediums for the exchange of information, they do so in order to satisfy consumer demand and generate profits, not to edify or educate the public. Information traded in a market is entertainment (p.75).

Furthermore, information commoditised as entertainment cannot "invert the social order or threaten authority" but can act only as "the flip side of a capitalist economy that continues to require discipline and authority" (p.43), or, if read in Althusserian terms, form part of an apparatus for the diffusion and conservation of dominant ideology.

Analysis

While like Usherwood, D'Angelo may value the public library's educational role, by virtue of the limitations theoretically imposed upon the popular fiction reading act, he appears, like Bob, Baker and the Boston Public Library trustees of 1875, to deny or inhibit popular texts'

pedagogical capacities (or at least the capacities of their readers to apply “educational reading” practices to popular texts). By D’Angelo’s own model, then, it would appear that educational ‘information’, including that ‘contained’ inherently in the literary text, must somehow transcend the “postmodern information economy” (in which, he insists, any information traded is traded as entertainment), in which it is situated if it is to be read as anything other than entertainment. If this is to be the only means of exchanging, or perhaps more accurately, trading, information, further questions are raised as to how literary, or ‘educational’ texts (or rather, those able to be read in the ‘educational’ mode) can be produced, as well as the conditions necessary for their appropriate mode of reading. Indeed, it may be that D’Angelo does not believe that the literariness of literary or canonical texts can transcend their commoditisation, given the following description of the manipulation of the reader and the reading practice:

> Instead of operating as a carrier of symbolic meaning, language operates at the level of the signifier as a physical force that causes pleasurable sensations and emotions in consumers. We do not so much read or interpret language in a postmodern information economy as we plug into it or engage gears with it (p.83).

This is not unlike Adorno’s analysis of popular culture’s proliferation and appropriation of “all media of artistic expression”, in which he proposes that “the more the system of ‘merchandising’ culture is expanded, the more it tends also to assimilate the ‘serious’ art of the past by adapting it to the system’s own requirements” (2005, p.160). However, given D’Angelo’s support for the development of fiction collections based on “critical standards”, it would appear that he believes that literary art might achieve some form of ideological disassociation, though how this is achieved and how works with such potential are to be identified is obfuscated by the author.

At once then, D’Angelo outlines a conception of the social order in which literary texts appear to be conceived of as potential sources of ideological dissidence – in that they are framed as the antithesis of those popular texts, or entertainment products, serving to ingratiate ideological “discipline and authority” – while the means for the enactment of such political

potentials are not afforded. That is, if the commoditising and ideological work of the information economy is to be all-encompassing, then necessarily, literary and canonical texts must be both ideologically co-opted and traded as information commodities; and this is significant since, for D'Angelo, information traded is entertainment and, as we have seen, entertainment can neither provide education nor "invert the social order or threaten authority". In D'Angelo's conception then, if any fiction is to transcend its ideological subjugation, since he offers no route through which this might be achieved from within its socio-economic situation (since, by his model, to commoditise is to inexorably deny the potential both to be read as educational and to function in any way other than to sustain the dominant by supporting ideological assent), it must do so without reference to – and in a sense it must exist out with – an ideology and information economy described as inescapable. Similarly, while he outlines his conception of "reading as education", D'Angelo appears to deny the conditions necessary for its practice, since if "entertainment" is an ineluctable characteristic of an information resource imposed by its dominant mode of trading, regardless of the intentions of the reader, "reading as education" cannot be practiced upon those texts traded as entertainment.

Whether D'Angelo intends to sterilise his case for the educational and political potentials of literary and canonical novels is unclear, though his lack of productivity has been condemned by VanGundy as a failure

> to look forward, exhibiting [a] wistfulness for the "good old days" of librarianship without proposing viable ways to combat the erosion of postmodern consumer capitalism under the real conditions contemporary libraries face (2008, p.402).

To this end a materialist perspective offers some consolation by accounting for the capacity of both the social order and ideological environment to provide at least some means for its own subversion, as well as the fiction text to function as a delivery vehicle. As I have suggested, although he does not explicate a mechanism for its operation, one might infer that D'Angelo contends that forms of 'high' literature can be produced, traded, and consumed out with the boundaries of dominant ideology and logics and practices of information economy. Such a

notion – implicitly an idealist approach to the interpretation and criticism of literature given that it effaces socio-economic situation and (historical) production in suggesting that formal ‘qualities’ exist independently and timelessly – was opposed by Raymond Williams who asserted that “we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws” (1980, p.44). Taking up Williams’ contention, as well as Althusser’s proposition that what art allows us,

> in the form of ‘seeing’, ‘perceiving’ and ‘feeling’ (which is not the form of knowing) is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes* (2001b, p.152),

Dollimore and Sinfield insist:

> culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it (1985, p.viii,).

In a materialist and Althusserian conception, then, the text is inescapably and unequivocally ideological in nature, a constitution determining that any form of subversion must be achieved within the confines of its own ideological construction as a language-based system, just as its readers’ co-creation of meaning through reading is an ideological practice. That is, as Sinfield articulates succinctly, “dissidence operates, necessarily, with reference to dominant structures. It has to invoke these structures to oppose them” (1992, p.47). This kind of contradiction – this invocation of that which is opposed – might reveal the ‘faultlines’ (Sinfield’s term, 1992) through which the reader can “brush history against the grain” (Benjamin, 1999, p.248) to reveal the ideology that the text ‘bathes in’ and ‘alludes to’. Indeed as Brannigan suggests, readers themselves must be understood as ‘faultlines’ through which incoherence might be multiplied as subversion:

> materialist criticism insists on the notion that all texts, events, ideologies, systems and representations of power must be mediated by, as they may participate in forming, the individual subject. If subjectivity is fractured, incoherent, rife with contradiction and a sense of difference, then power cannot be total, or fully effective...representations must

> also be 'read' or mediated by the subject, and...when individual subjectivity is understood to be a function of difference (gender, class, race, and so forth), then even individual acts of reading can destabilize power. Difference will be reproduced endlessly in the process of reading (Brannigan, p.123).

This phenomena is exemplified too by Andrew M. Butler in his reading of science fiction, a form he describes as "pre-eminently a fiction of the people", and one able to exploit its position as a satellite genre within the dominant mode of production to allow dissident politics to be read: "At times, being on the margins was useful – the pro-communist or anti-McCarthyite opinions of writers such as Philip K. Dick, Theodore Sturgeon and Isaac Asimov were expressed without apparent reprisals" (2005, p.146).

Whether or not D'Angelo believes in the potential of literary and canonical fiction to speak either from within or from without the dominant socio-economic conditions of our present, he calls for selection practices to pro-actively favour the 'higher ground' when it comes to fiction. Given the rigid distinctions he proposes between texts and between corresponding modes of reading, like Usherwood, Bob and others, D'Angelo clearly subscribes to notions of literary value indebted to the 'common sense' imperatives of traditional-formalist literary criticism in which the 'test of time' is taken as evidence enough of the 'objective' quality of the canon. Indeed, the rhetoric of his argument is reliant upon, and complicit in the reproduction of, the universalisation and naturalisation of formalist aesthetic values and prescribed evaluations of texts. This is evident when D'Angelo cites as "the most important function of public library", the responsibility "to promote and sustain the knowledge and values necessary for a democratic civilization" (p.1). Indeed, he continues, "the condition of public libraries may be taken as a litmus test for the state of democratic civilization", with "any threat to the core values of a democratic civilization" necessarily being "reflected in the state of its public libraries" (p.1). For D'Angelo, such a threat – to both the core values of civilization and the public library's promotion of them – is manifest in the actions of those *Barbarians* of his title complicit in the infiltration of neoliberalism and the propagation of the relativism employed to discredit notions of literary hierarchy. Implicitly, then, the rhetorical suggestion is that such a relativist stance – questioning the cultural position of the canon – is part of a barbaric challenge to the library's

promotion of “the knowledge and values necessary for a democratic civilization” and, therefore, represents a challenge to “democratic civilization”.

In these terms, the traditional-formalist perspective clearly naturalises itself as the proper bedfellow of our most essential democratic convictions, a rhetorical ploy of an “inert and unproductive criticism” which Catherine Belsey argues “ideology needs…as the text’s accomplice in ensuring the role of the reader as consumer” (2002, p.129), since to acknowledge and investigate the reader’s capacity for textual production is to begin to obliterate the notions of stable and objective literary meaning and value. Ironically, in this reading, despite D’Angelo’s distinct modes of reading – with the mode of entertainment consumption pitted against the active nature of “reading as education” (and putting aside, for a moment, whether or not such a mode of reading can be achieved in the conditions he describes) – “reading as education” is revealed to be an uncritical means of ‘consuming’ a dominant critical and ideological narrative. Ironically too, D’Angelo’s tacit complicity in the reader’s subjugation as ideological consumer is, for Walter Benjamin, a complicity in the valorisation of those canonical “documents of barbarism” which serve to validate the exploitative conditions of their production through their very cultural naturalisation as works of high aesthetic value:

> cultural treasures…owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as afar as possible (1999, p.248).

As Wilson suggests, though, given that it is the traditional critical mode’s effort to conceal cultural treasures’ processes of historical production that designates those treasures “documents of barbarism”, “the ‘cautious detachment’ of the ‘historical materialist’ is a very civilized gesture” (p.142).

3.2.4. John Buschman: consumer demand and public space

John Buschman too expresses concern over the perceived institutional need to "compete in the marketplace". Describing the significant factoring of books' lending potentials into purchasing decisions as "a near total denigration of the value of intelligent selection", like Usherwood – who proposes that public libraries' explicit attempts to compete with private commercial concerns have resulted "all too often [in]...poor replication of a commercial environment that is readily available" (2007, p.121), while ineffectively satisfying "quick fix demands for novelty and entertainment that can easily be satisfied elsewhere" (p.65) – he beseeches the profession to provide "alternative spaces in a culture dominated by information capitalism" (2003, p.114). Buschman specifically theorises the public library space as a (potential, at least) manifestation of Habermas's conception of the public sphere through its capacity to enact

> the principle of critique and rational argumentation through the commitment to balanced collections...and furthering inclusion through active attempts to make collections and resources reflect historical and current intellectual diversity (2005b, p.2).

However, he diagnoses the institutionalisation of the "New Public Philosophy" (effectively the marketisation of the public-sector) as an ideological tool functioning to "recast the purpose of the public library in economic instead of democratic terms" (2004, p.40), and through recruiting the librarian's accession to the philosophy or model, ensuring their active, if tacit, complicity in the "dismantling of the public sphere discourse that libraries enact and represent" (2004, p.41 and 2005b, p.10). Alstad and Curry come to an almost identical diagnosis, contextualising the public library alongside other public spaces, when they assert: "the purpose of public spaces, like the mission of the public library, has shifted from politics to entertainment and commerce" (2003, p.5). For Buschman, this is because the public sphere discourse, in the context of public libraries, is keenly invested in the democratic necessity of representing a "multiplicity of voices and perspectives" (2004, p.40), but assenting to neoliberal practice and building collections based on consumer demand will necessarily limit their range and modes of representation; he writes: "responding purely to popular demand forces us to abandon any notion of outreach to underserved populations or providing alternative resources on our shelves" (2004, pp.41-42).

Analysis

In this sense, Buschman suggests that popular culture items, such as works of fiction, despite their very popularity and hold with a large readership, necessarily form a narrow range of cultural modes. He may also be read to share Raymond Williams' pessimism when it comes to the political capacities of popular culture phenomena (or 'emergent forms' to use Williams' term), acknowledging their special predisposition for ideological determination and incorporation by the dominant, and, therefore, the 'manufactured' nature of the public's desire to consume them. However, given that Buschman values balanced cultural representation in collections as crucial to the democratic principles of the public sphere, popular culture, and fiction specifically, is implicitly valued for more than its educational capacities – it is valued for its assimilation of vivid and crucial cultural elements, elements perhaps able to voice radical politics since, in even Williams' conception,

> no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality excludes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention (1977, p.125).

In essence then, while Buschman appears to share the concerns of the authors already discussed when it comes to the potential of popular fiction to dominate public library collections through its exploitation by selectors concerned with lending figures, in calling for balance in collections as the absolute democratic imperative (that is, as an imperative not explicitly linked to notions of literary value) he may be read also to transcend traditional-formalist concerns for the preservation of literary hierarchies to a greater extent, since, in the materialist view, the hierarchical concept sustains the high at the expense of the low, necessarily limiting the aesthetic range of texts.

3.3. Contemporary Positions: in defence of the popular

3.3.1. A Professional 'Responsibility Towards Entertainment': promoting critical engagement with popular culture

Addressing public librarians in 1972, Richard Dyer came to a brief but ardent and explicit defence of the popular text and leisure lending service. He encouraged a view of the entertainment experience not merely and not irrevocably as D'Angelo's acts of "passive consumption", but as a "distinctive, vital and authentic part of our culture" through which "escape to a better world" might be facilitated. He then implored the profession to "take responsibility for", and "feel a responsibility towards entertainment", the provision of which, he argued, could not "be left to commercial concerns alone" (1975, pp.39-41). Significantly, Dyer couched this defence in the proposition that the provision of leisure resources is a communitarian and inclusive practice, serving to narrow inequality of access to "vital" popular culture phenomena. However, this is not to suggest that an uncritical or 'anti-intellectual' celebration of popular culture is projected as an alternative ethos and, indeed, Dyer's position is perhaps not as relativist in its politics as it might appear, since the very responsibility that he calls for the institution to accept in its engagement with popular culture is the responsibility to "encourage the best in entertainment", and to "encourage people…to be critical of what they are offered as entertainment" (p.49).

From a more singularly pragmatic perspective, John Dixon has expressed similar sentiments. At once suspicious of a marketised approach to selecting popular and niche fictions and highly critical of a pervasive lack of professional expertise when it comes handling the 'non-literary', he frames purchasing "as if one title were indistinguishable from the next" (1986, p.56) as both failing the texts and failing the library, and he casts those uncritical champions of the popular as, in fact, the "greatest enemies" of the cultural forms (p.58). For Dixon then, as a pragmatic enthusiast of popular fiction, "the time of unquestioning enthusiasm has passed" and the time for a critical engagement with the materials' "most effective acquisition and exploitation" has arrived (p.58).

Couched within a larger case for the public library's provision of fiction of all kinds, Greenhalgh et al explicate a compatible defence of popular fiction lending based on their conviction "that the emotional and psychological benefits of genre fiction reading…are very much at the centre of the benefits that the public library offers" (p.136). Citing O'Rourke's 1993 study *Unpopular Readers: the case for genre fiction* as a work of some importance and some inspiration to them, the authors articulate a significance of the fiction-lending service in terms of the myriad potential benefits of the reading act. They suggest that, among other capacities, the habit and act can encourage intellectual and cultural citizenship as well as educational development, that it can provide contact with notions of 'otherness', and can provide therapeutic services such as the acquisition of personal time and space, and the mental escape from the mundane into the stimulating (pp.132-135). In doing so, Greenhlagh et al suggest that too little consideration has been given to the experiences of readers by librarians making, when it comes to stock selection, "covert judgements" based on established assumptions regarding literary aesthetics, the nature of the reading act and the production of meaning. This is evident in the authors' suggestion that "the "death of the author" and the discovery of the creative reader…is not fully acknowledged in library debates" (p.134), a statement recalling Roland Barthes' famous essay and his influential conviction in *S/Z* that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (1992, p.4). Greenhalgh et al then pursue, in the context of library provision and textual evaluation, the implications of Barthes' theory, or perhaps more accurately, the implications of a general deconstructionist demand to "appreciate what *plural* constitutes" the text (Barthes, 1992, p.5) when they propose:

> There are all kinds of novels – science fiction, crime, historical, utopian, war, romantic, instructional, philosophical – many of which explore areas of human experience in ways that "factual" books cannot, and which have multiple meanings and multiple effects. Any attempt to divide fiction into "serious" and "escapist"…to inform stock-holding policy would be intellectually impossible (pp.133-134).

Analysis

Evidently then, these authors must be understood to be broadly familiar with, and interested in, theories of literary meaning production that emphasise the agency of the reader and seek to challenge the objectivism of traditional-formalist criticism. In this sense, they appear to echo the most fundamental theoretical tenets of reader response theory's challenge to traditional-formalist criticism – what Davis and Womack summarise as the contention that:

> not all humans are acculturated in the same manner, nor do they live within the same socioeconomic structures or the same geographical locations or historical periods. Building upon this contention, the reader-response critic argues that the formalist has chosen an arbitrary set of aesthetic values that do not apply to all art forms or all cultures (2002, p.9).

In these terms, the position of Greenhalgh et al might be said to decry, in the public library context, the naturalisation and "covert" enactment of these exclusive and arbitrary aesthetic values for collection development, in the process casting such an enactment as an ideological practice reproducing this very exclusivity and arbitrariness in the collection and in the institutional mission.

Similarly, Dixon's criticism of an uncritical and populist professional enthusiasm for popular texts resists the ideological reduction of the form to a set of non-literary material characteristics. However, Dyer takes the political implications of this resistance further: while acknowledging that quality distinctions can exist in relation to popular entertainment forms, his suggestion that providing access to the popular and entertaining should be considered an inclusive practice indicates that he recognises the potential for exclusivity in both the traditional-formalist view of literary evaluation and the prerogative of the public librarian to sustain the dominance of this critical discourse, either by giving preferential treatment to literary and canonical texts, or more obliquely by sustaining its ideological division of texts and conceptualisation of the very nature of evaluation. In this view, in gesturing towards a more inclusive view of what it means to be "best", Dyer may be read to call for the public, including public librarians, to reclaim the entertainment experience from ideological domination and

suppression, and to value, appraise and exploit the escapist experience and its potentials in an actively-engaged, self-aware and self-reflexive practice. In doing so, he calls for resistance both from the passive consumption of products complicit in the manufacturing of consumer demand, and from the exclusive decrees of traditional literary criticism. That is, the critical reading and politicisation of the popular text is not cast as an interaction necessarily exclusive from one's 'passive' enjoyment, rather, it is viewed as a simultaneous critical engagement with one's own practices of consumption, evaluation and enjoyment.

3.3.2. The Community Priority

John Pateman: the community as 'co-producer'

A distinct form of resistance to literary exclusivity has been offered by John Pateman whose answer to The Great Fiction Question is inherent in his communitarian call for "public libraries…to be given back to local communities by actively engaging them in the planning, design, delivery, and assessment of library services" (2010, p.2) – a process requiring the strategic reorganisation of services and their power structures to create the conditions in which such community engagement can be achieved and can amount to the 'co-production' of service priorities. In part, Pateman's position can be read as an acerbic and intentional refutation of Usherwood's commitment to notions of 'equity' and 'excellence' as complementary and equally significant considerations of a public library politics. Indeed, while Usherwood determines that a misconstrued commitment to equity has factored in the lowering of professional standards, Pateman counters that a professional devotion to excellence has amounted to inequitable and exclusive practice, and has been "used as an excuse or smokescreen for not pursuing social justice objectives or outcomes" (2010, p.2). He writes:

> excellence, in the form of outdated professional practices, attitudes and behavior has contributed to the steady decline of the use of public libraries, and a new approach based on equity is needed to halt and reverse this decline. Being excellent for a dwindling number of traditional library users will not safeguard our future. Instead, libraries need to develop new audiences, widen access and participation, and become

> more relevant and, dare we say it, more popular, by which we mean more relevant to the lives of local communities (2010, p.9).

Advocating holistic, collaborative and community-led collection development practices which prioritise the meeting of specific, community-articulated library-related needs, Pateman resists the "enduring belief that only qualified staff should select stock, as they alone know best what the 'deserving poor' want and need", submitting instead that in these conditions, both historically and contemporarily, the insistence bestowed upon notions of excellence amounts to an insitutionalised elitism effecting public libraries' operation as "agents of social control" (2013, pp.125-126).

For Pateman then, the position, responsibilities and skills of the librarian are not sacred but, quite the opposite, their very sanctification forms an aspect of the public library's inequitable power structure through which the ideology of excellence is disseminated and inequitable provision produced. As a result, he insists that "library users must not be treated as mere consumers of 'choices' provided from above by professional standards" but instead "power and resources must be shared with local communities" (2010, p.3), "staffing structures…made…less hierarchical and less professionalised" and "professional skills sets…replaced with more people – and community – focused skills" (2010, p.11).

Analysis

In terms of the politics of fiction provision, then, while not necessarily repudiating inflexible, traditional notions of literary quality and value, or that aesthetic information held 'innately' by canonical or critically acclaimed literary texts, Pateman is concerned primarily to refute what he sees as those textual value judgements which result in librarians uncritically assuming texts to be both relevant to, and necessary to be made available for, their libraries' communities. He notes that

> it quickly becomes apparent when working with socially excluded and other underserved communities that the perceptions of librarians and community members can differ significantly with regard to the selection of relevant materials (2013, p.138),

and feels that consequently “there is no point in a librarian selecting ‘good’ materials if they are irrelevant or exclude a large segment of the community” (ibid.). The ‘outdated attitude’ that Pateman decries, then, is not the one which subscribes to traditional aesthetic markers of literary legitimation but the one which views the utilisation of such markers as a relevant principle of fiction selection in public libraries (if what is sought is the provision of fiction of ‘relevance’ to users’ lives). In this sense, he may yet be read to tacitly reaffirm fundamental traditional-formalist critical commitments in that apparently ‘natural’ aesthetic value judgements of the text are characterised not as illegitimate or ideological, but as merely irrelevant for collection development.

Pateman’s position in relation to fiction provision is curious too in that as he is explicitly attuned to, and concerned by, the capacities of public libraries to act as “agents of social control” (or apparatuses of ideological reproduction), his commitment to community co-production is a commitment to negating this capacity or function of the institution. However, it must be understood that any reading of the public library as such an ideological apparatus necessitates a view of the material selected and lent as crucially bound-up in that function (otherwise, in what sense could it ‘act’ as an agent?), while the implication of Pateman’s proposals is that fiction texts’ incorporation into and exploitation by the dominant is determined by the spirit in which they are provided to the public. That is, in simple terms, Pateman implies that to induce community co-production is to disavow the capacity of the institution to regulate ideology and “social control”, or, to transfer power over the service to the community is to prevent that community from being ‘controlled’. This would appear a simplistic and naïve view of power production and its dynamics, and in stark contrast to Althusser’s assertion that dominant ideology, reproduced and transmitted, “interpellates individuals as subjects” (2001a, p.119). The significance here being that the ideological conditioning of the individual within the social formation is so all-encompassing that part of individuals’ ideological subjugation is the creation within themselves of the illusion of a condition of subjectivity. This illusion then enforces an already imposed ideological subscription to be understood as an act of singular and individualised consent. Thus, the illusory nature of this ideological subjectivity works to conceal, in reality, the exact opposite condition in the

individual – that of complete, ideologically-determined subordination. The exploited, therefore, actively maintain the conditions of their exploitation through their 'free' subscription to the ideology that legitimates it:

> The individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection,* i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself' (Althusser, 2001a, p.123).

Ultimately, in the Althusserian view, there certainly remains potential for the text to escape subjugation through the reading act, and for the individual to 'view' their own ideological situation, but in this context, for the public library to invert its power structure is not necessarily for the community to avoid '(re)co-producing' an apparatus of dominant ideology, since the public library is not a discrete institution but, as Pateman is at pains to emphasise, is itself situated in prevailing socio-economic conditions.

Anne Goulding: reader-development and the 'quality of use'

Like Pateman, Anne Goulding contends that "selection decisions must meet the needs of the community, first and foremost…because they are a public service" (p.306) – an imperative necessitating some involvement of the public in the development of services. However, she emphasises the need for the development of sophisticated mechanisms to engage such involvement, since, in her analysis of the consumerisation of the public-sector she argues that the recasting (to use Buschman's term) of the service as a site of consumer transaction, and the resultant empowerment of the user as 'customer', has ideologically accentuated the individual at the expense of (her conception of) the institution's communitarian mission – a process which might distort collections in favour of the "sectional interests" of the most active user groups or common forms of activity (pp.126-128). Crucially, she proposes that the institution must "shift from a focus on the quantity of books issued to a focus on the quality of the use of public library books" (p.332) if it so to develop more sophisticated means of evaluating the lending services it provides, engaging and *balancing* users' feedback. While diagnosing a historical reluctance of the public librarian to intervene in the private act of reading (as opposed to the provision of

reading materials), Goulding suggests that contemporary developments in reader-development practice and theory have provided such a shift to an interest in “quality of use”:

> Although there might still be some concerns over the provision of light, recreational fiction in public libraries today, few would question the presence of large stocks of fiction books in libraries and the reader development movement has legitimized the reading of a whole range of different materials, stressing the benefits that individuals can gain from books which speak personally to them (p.308).

Analysis

One implication of this statement is that among the “range of different materials” that the “reader development movement” has “legitimized” the reading of are those popular and genre fiction texts disregarded by traditional-formalist critical imperatives. That the only capacity, other than to be passively consumed as entertainment, that is rescued for these texts is that of a literacy tool might be read as a comment on the extent of the entrenchment of traditional literary-critical assumptions within the public library profession, and equally seen to act as a buttress, witting or otherwise, with which those assumptions are shored-up.

While Goulding brings the active reader into the discussion, she describes a one-way transaction in which the text “speaks” to the reader, as if imparting its inherent and objective information and meaning. In this sense, while valorising the reader-development movement’s apparent liberation of popular literary forms, she appears to tacitly subscribe to, and reaffirm, traditional fiction hierarchies in her terminology and rhetoric – since the raising of ‘lowly’ literary forms is really a process that transforms the work of literature into the educational utility – thus, leaving uncontested the ideological (re)production of the detached and exclusive critical imperatives upon which they are founded. Similarly, she implies a quality-based hierarchy of the use of texts but does not specify its prescriptions of notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ use, nor whether it is to be applicable to all textual forms. This is particularly problematic given the distinctions made between texts’ social (literary) and educational capacities, since an unpleasurable experience of reading a work of fiction from which the reader happened also to

have learned the meaning of a new word would presumably constitute both a 'good' and 'bad' use of the text.

3.3.3. Cultural, Literary and Reader Response Theory in LIS

In 2000 de la Pena McCook and Jasper diagnosed a deficiency of LIS literature in theorising reading practices. Characterising the profession's critical relationship with reading as a "long heritage of reverence for an act much written of, but not fully understood" (p.53), they engage the reader response theory of Louise M. Rosenblatt and promote a professional commitment to the consideration of the reader-text relationship for the fiction selection context. However, like many of the authors discussed on both sides of the debate, de la Pena McCook and Jasper deride the 'give 'em what they want' mentality as a conflation of user demand and user need, suggesting too that it denigrates "the art of librarianship-the acquisition of the right materials" and, by extension, the significance of the public librarian (p.55). For de la Pena McCook and Jasper, then, and in contrast to the positions of Pateman and his co-authors, the process of "building a solid collection of real value to a community" will always require "the informed expertise of a librarian regardless of format or means of access"; but it is an enhanced critical consideration of the reader's interaction with the text that must come to account for such "expertise" (p.58).

Similarly, responding to what he sees as public libraries' uncritical interrogation of the capacities of popular texts and readers' uses of them, Robert Wagers suggests that "librarians might enrich selection plans by comprehending the methods and findings of [popular culture] theorists", with a view to

> abolish[ing] the conflict between high values and "low" tastes by formulating selection plans in which value is instrumental – conditional upon the degree to which a work of fiction meets or fails to meet identified needs (1981, p.343).

Drawing heavily on the theories of Herbert Gans, Janice Radway and John Cawelti, among others, Wagers proposes that analysis is turned towards the "deep-structural", formulaic and

thematic commonalities of genre works, as well as readers' complex interactions with, and generation of, these characteristics and their constituent texts, as a means of "selecting works that reflect the patterns most favored by their publics" (p.345). This, in turn, determines that "the fiction selector must know…what characteristics account for popularity" (p.348), must be able to devise a means of gaining such knowledge and must be able to refashion the criteria used in fiction selecting to account for what is learned.

Developing Inclusive Selection Practices: Van Fleet's 'guiding principles' for popular fiction selection

However, neither Wagers' nor de la Pena McCook and Jasper's project is to propose specific sets of criteria with which to transform fiction-selecting practices. Rather, given Wagers' delineation of the various complementary and adversarial positions of the popular culture and reader response theorists he discusses, he appears primarily concerned to evidence a problematisation of the practice, within the public library profession, of discriminating against popular fiction texts on the basis of assumptions uncritically received from traditional modes of literary criticism. In doing so, he calls on public librarians to "avoid this value-laden approach to criticism" and engage with cultural and literary theory directly to consider the complexities of library readers' interactions with popular texts, with the aim of developing selection practices which enable "collections of popular fiction [to be] formed on…principles of audience reaction and enhanced theories of popular culture" (p.351). Similarly, for de la Pena McCook and Jasper, engaging specifically with reader response theory provides a means of theorising the reading-related needs and practices of public library users in the hope of providing insights that might inform the development of more critically-engaged and sophisticated selection processes.

Connie Van Fleet has, however, worked more explicitly towards an 'alternative' selection practice. Arguing against the perception that the selection and provision of popular fiction[2] cannot be reconciled with the traditional mission of the public library, she reasons that the pervasive and inappropriate application of 'literary' critical standards to popular fiction texts has served to obscure those texts' distinct capacities to

[2] Van Fleet defines the "popular" as comprising the "mainstream" and "genre" novel.

> entertain and amuse, excite the imagination, reduce mental and physical stress, give a sense of order or control, validate ideas or emotions, or meet social needs of belonging and understanding (2003, p.68).

Furthermore, Van Fleet suggests that the fact that "most [librarians] have not been educated in either the basic nature and structure of [popular] literature or the manner in which users interact with these texts" (p.72) has served to sustain both the obfuscation of these texts' facilities, as well as the profession's "rather insular and judgmental approach to collecting genre fiction" (p.70). Van Fleet contends that popular texts should not be held "to standards of literary quality such as unique style, social impact, or lasting significance" but rather, consideration of "mainstream" novels should emphasise "characterization, plot development, thematic relevance, narrative style and, to some extent, originality", while "genre" works should be "judged on the basis of appeal to the reader" (p.65). All popular fiction texts, Van Fleet suggests, should "move the reader along in a fairly straightforward manner", with the style of the author neither "intruding on the reader's consciousness" nor "provok[ing] comment, either critical or laudatory" (p.76). Condensing these commitments, Van Fleet sets out the following "guiding principles" for the fair acquisition of the popular fiction form:

> Selection Policies Must Be Grounded in a Clearly Articulated Link to the Library and Organizational Mission
>
> Selection of Popular Fiction Requires Selectors Who Are Well-Read and Knowledgeable About All Forms of Popular Fiction
>
> Popular Fiction Should Be Judged by Its Own Set of Reader-Centered Rules and Standards
>
> Popular Fiction Collections Should Have Something for Everyone (pp.74-75)

Analysis

Van Fleet's principles appear to some extent based on an appropriation and development of Barthes'[3] (1992) conceptions of "readerly" and "writerly" texts. Significantly, Van Fleet invokes the "readerly" to describe the 'closed' text of, for instance, the newspaper, and the "writerly" to designate any "text of great literature that demands unwavering attention to the writer's purpose" (p.68). Between the two, she says, exist those "producerly" popular texts which "invite readers to impose meaning relevant to their own lives" (p.68).

However, this would seem a simplistic reduction of Barthes' concepts, and one that would appear, through the intervention of the concept of the "producerly" for the sake of describing the popular text, to inadvertently conjoin the "readerly" and "writerly", with both ultimately described as processes by which the 'information' that the author wishes to convey is simply extracted by the reader. This is quite at odds with Barthes' own position – he "call[s] any readerly text a classic text" (1992, p.4), while suggesting that the "writerly" is such an abstract conception and unusual literary occurrence that "we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore", never mind in *every* "great" work of literature available (p.5) – and is problematic because it appears to allow (whether consciously or otherwise) only the popular text to transcend the author's 'purpose'; and Barthes, after all, diagnosed the death of the author's purpose along with the death of the author. The significance of this is that the traditional-formalist demand for the literary text's stable, universal meaning is inexplicably retained throughout this process of literary distinction and despite the popular being afforded the fluidity of the "producerly" conception. Indeed, a traditional hierarchical distinction between texts may be understood to predetermine the extent to which any text is conceived to be able to be "produced" by the reader, with what is preconceived by traditional aesthetic criteria to amount to the "text of great literature" coming pre-codified with literary meaning, value and status. That is, by Van Fleet's implication, it is not the "writerly" capacity that determines a text's greatness, but a text's greatness that determines its "writerly" capacity.

Van Fleet postulates too that the

[3] Barthes is not actually cited but these are the common translations of his terms.

> undemanding nature of popular fiction is a key element in its appeal. The beneficial physical and mental changes that come from being "lost in a book" occur only when reading is an easy, almost automatic activity (p.68).

This further demands the literary's, existence in very different conditions from the popular. It resists the reader's production to a greater extent, as well as the reader's ability to access the 'physical and mental' benefits of becoming 'lost' in it, since "unwavering attention" to its authors' purposes is required.

The implications for popular fiction are equally awkward. While quite rightly not viewing formal innovation as a necessarily meritorious aesthetic characteristic, given the nature of the formal characteristics sought by Van Fleet, the library's selection of any popular text displaying elements of formal invention (in plotting or narrative device, for instance) will be discouraged since it is explicitly characterised as a textual 'failing' likely to alienate the reader's productive engagement. This also continues to imply that the traditional mode of aesthetic criticism is both the 'correct' one for the evaluation of the literary text (since the mode conserves hierarchical distinction and, therefore, the presence of the literary as a distinct form) and that it can be estranged from those popular texts to which it would be erroneously applied. This is made more problematic still when Van Fleet determines that "popular literature…is valuable for its effect on the reader", despite proposing simultaneously that the popular text induces the reader's production (p.64). That is, despite the reader's effect on the text through the act of production, the value of that text is said to lie in its effect on the reader, even though the reader is evidently responsible for 'producing' those very effects. This serves to depoliticise the reader's agency as the source of interpretation, sanitising the reading act in a theoretical subscription that may be viewed as a residue of the dominant critical mode (and characteristic of what Dollimore calls the "strategies and flexible complexity of domination", 1985, p.14), in that while allowing the popular text some resistance to traditional aesthetic imperatives, it denies the capacity for dissident or subversive reading, offering instead only some form of self-activated passivity to the reading act.

Ultimately, while both Van Fleet's call for public librarians to "understand and demonstrate the role of popular fiction in fulfilling the [library's] mission" (p.74) and her case for a wider and less discriminatory approach to the appraisal of popular literature show a keen engagement with the political problematic of fiction selection, her own imposition of 'updated' formal criteria for the evaluation of popular texts does not challenge (as arbitrary, of no inherent value, or ideologically determined, for instance) the aesthetic imperatives of traditional literary criticism, but appears to suggest that they are simply too 'high' to be applied to popular texts if the "reader-centered" qualities of those texts are to be allowed to emerge. In failing to repudiate the universalising ideological function of traditional literary criticism then, Van Fleet does not engage with the notion that texts might be "appropriated and co-opted to speak for one or more political ideologies" or that there is "more at stake than insular aesthetic or artistic principles" (Brannigan, p.111).

3.4. Implications of Analysis

It is clear from these readings that critics on both sides of this debate, with some exceptions and to differing degrees, are committed to broad traditional-formalist prescriptions of literary evaluation. In relation to those authors articulating a shared disdain for the creeping neoliberal marketisation of public libraries, of which the mass selection and lending of popular fictions is seen to be a signifier under certain conditions, with the exception perhaps of Buschman, the concern has been to posit the 'inherent qualities' and 'timeless values' of literary works as imperative concerns with which to negate the institution's postmodern capitalist mutation. In doing so, as I have suggested, Usherwood, Bob and D'Angelo all ostensibly retain the provision of popular fictions as a valid public library service. However, it is their ideological insistence on the objectivity and validity of the tenets of traditional-formalist aesthetic evaluation that functions to disavow any specifically literary qualities of popular texts, setting them apart as innately literarily inferior.

Interestingly, however, the traditional-formalist commitments retained by some of those writing, broadly speaking, in defence of popular literature may be read to continue to impose

exclusivity and hierarchical distinction but crucially this time, at the expense of the 'high' cultural products that the mode is 'designed' to acclaim. In attempting to liberate popular fiction from the traditional critical "standards imposed by an elitist minority" (Van Fleet, p.65), of the authors discussed here, Van Fleet, Pateman, Goulding, de la Pena McCook and Jasper may all be read to tacitly sustain the "standards" that they decry. Furthermore, these authors neglect to challenge the application of these same standards to literary texts, making complicit those texts in the "elitist" ideological imposition of the aesthetic value system by which they (the texts) have gained their status. Indeed, the true implication of Van Fleet's statement is a legitimation of the 'objectivity' of hierarchical literary distinction by aesthetic criteria, since it is only the act of imposing those standards upon the popular that is said to be "elitist". This is clearly problematic in that it supports the ideological naturalisation of the aesthetic imperatives of traditional-formalist literary criticism and, in so doing, restricts the capacities of the literary or canonical (to be enjoyed, for one thing), while reinforcing their detachment from their conditions of production as well as other literary forms. Pateman's radical homogenising of literature as matter entirely subservient to user demand aside, it is ultimately unclear what scope these authors afford for the provision of the 'literary' by the public library, given the extent to which hierarchical literary distinction is marked out. In a sense then, both sets of authors, in the main, detail similar conceptions of popular literature – as a distinct and at best pseudo-literary phenomenon, the capacities of which reside in its social or educational utility – but appraise its characteristics quite differently, depending on their politics.

4. CONCLUSIONS: objectives reconsidered

4.1. *To Investigate Contemporary LIS literature's Engagement with 'Post-War Literary Criticism' in Relation to Fiction Provision*

As Alstad and Curry have noted through their examination of public library mission statements, "few agree on the precise purpose of the public library" (p.2). As I have suggested, this disagreement may be understood to have derived from the socio-political ambiguities of our earliest public libraries and to have crucially informed the formulation and perpetual (re)articulation of The Great Fiction Question. It is clear from this examination of LIS writing that contemporary commentators' answers to the Question remain inexorably, and consciously or otherwise, underpinned and informed by their conceptions of the construction, production and capacities of fictive texts, as well as those texts' complex productive relationships with their readers. However, it is also clear that, in the context of the public library as an institution concerned with the collection and lending of works of fiction as perhaps its primary service (in practice at least), Greenhalgh et al's 1995 diagnosis of the profession's self-exclusion from "post-war literary criticism" is complicated by the fact that many of the commentators discussed here have engaged with various aspects of modern literary, cultural and economic theory without wholly releasing themselves from a dependence upon, or belief in the 'truth' of, traditional-formalist critical precepts. This has not been necessarily to inherently devalue particular arguments but has offered an obvious means of destabilising them. Jesson has implied something to this effect when noting D'Angelo's "willingness to blame academics - specifically those in cultural studies - for helping to discredit hierarchies of taste" and his simultaneous negligence in actually addressing "opposing arguments raised by postcolonial and feminist theorists, among others, who have questioned the high/low cultural divide" (2008, p.233). In D'Angelo's case it is as if a skeptical gesture towards the adversative and an implied derision for its terms is thought to nullify its potential to effectively oppose him. On the contrary, however, as VanGundy has insisted, D'Angelo's immanent hierarchy remains "vulnerable to all of the arguments that postmodern literary theory has made against this false

hegemony" (2008, p.402). This fractional approach is equally evident in the work of 'pro-popular' critics such as Van Fleet and de la Pena McCook and Jasper who respectively mobilise aspects of the work of Roland Barthes and Louise M. Rosenblatt as means of considering the reader's interaction with the popular text, but without consideration for the implications of these theories for traditional textual distinction, thus, leaving the 'literary' marked apart as an aesthetic other and oddly devaluing it in the process.

Where politics of fiction provision play into larger philosophies of the public library then, they appear often to do so as uncritical, 'common sense' assumptions regarding literary issues that are enormously complex and heatedly debated within literary studies, with these assumptions serving as unstable adjuncts to more fundamental notions of the institution's value and essential values. For LIS work in the area to efface such complex theories would appear an incongruous deficiency of the discipline.

4.2. *To Locate and Explode 'Theories of Literature' in Contemporary Answers to 'The Great Fiction Question'*

4.2.1. Proponents of the 'High Ground'

While the energy dedicated by critics such as Usherwood, Bob, D'Angelo and Buschman to exposing the manipulative mechanisms of consumer demand as a socio-economic construction, and to decrying the explicit importation of private-sector practices and creeping neoliberalisation within the public library is both admirable and productive (as too is their appreciation for the myriad socio-political potentials of the institution), as I have suggested (though perhaps not in the case of Buschman), the 'alternative' fiction selection politics submitted by these critics are based fundamentally upon traditional-formalist notions of universal literary-aesthetic value and, ultimately, are able only to reproduce those terms for a selection practice. In this sense, the ideology of traditional criticism might be said to be serving itself in these critics' subscription to it and tacit dissemination of it, since the illusion of its

complete objectivity crucially underpins their politics of fiction provision and their larger philosophies of public librarianship, as if such a natural absolute as to be both unchallengeable and unchallenged.

Given their shared sensitivity to the potentials of popular cultural items for co-option and capitalistic determination, as well as, obviously, the power of the capitalist mode to co-opt and determine the construction of popular cultural items, Usherwood, Bob and D'Angelo further problematise their own positions by displaying unsubstantiated commitments to, or assumptions of, the autonomy of the literary. This is perhaps emblematic of a lack of consistent theoretical commitment, since the 'common sense' requirement of traditional-formalist literary criticism appears to be applied to their cultural critiques, necessitating its manufacture of a means for the literary, and only the literary, to mark itself out from the conditions described and, thus, escape the persecution suffered by the popular. While the consideration of the manner and extent of the ideological and economic 'manufacture' of popular cultural tastes and products would seem a crucial and responsible engagement of the public librarian, these critics in the main ignore those critical strategies usefully employed to investigate the ideological nature of 'high' literary culture, as well as those able to politicise (popular) texts and theorise readers' transactions with them. Yet they propose, in general manners, practices of selection ready to discriminate between texts as if objective and fixed understandings of their value have been reached, in the process serving the conservation of the very established notions of literary-aesthetic value upon which they are based, since functionally, such practices are only able to locate and select as valuable, that which cooperates with what the edicts of the dominant critical mode determines to signify literary value. In this sense it would appear inconsistent for these critics, so invested in maximising the public library's dissent from determination by dominant market logics and ideology, to wish to engage in the depoliticisation of popular texts through the effacing of critical strategies which seek to reveal those 'faultlines' of the text through which the material reality of its production might be disclosed in a kind of ideological self-reflexivity. The irony here is that while these critics might largely support an Adornoian view of popular culture as an ideological Linus-blanket which functions to distract 'consumers' from their own oppression, the traditional literary-critical

notions they rely upon may be said to be complicit in the same process, serving as they do to ideologically construct conceptions of, and then reveal, texts' convenient 'truths' and "imaginary coherence" (Brannigan, p.98) – in the process characterising existing conditions as entirely and inexorably natural (Belsey, p.129).

4.2.2. Proponents of 'Popular Culture'

As I have suggested, the proposals of some proponents of popular fiction fall foul of this same complicity in the reproduction of the dominant literary-critical mode. However, this distinct commitment to traditional notions of literary hierarchy may be read to come at the expense of the very (literary) texts forming the hierarchy's summit, since the ideology is sustained as a means of decrying its imposition upon the library service and its users. This then, would appear to provide limited critical scope for the critical selection and provision of literary and canonical texts within the public library service.

Alistair Black has warned that if the public library intends "to become more self-conscious of its social responsibilities and more aware of the complexities of modern society", it "must surely relinquish the conservatism that has plagued its past", from the "Victorian-style moralising and control to the censoring of 'inappropriate' literature" (2000, p.170). However, an irony of the theory and practice of many of those writing from 'pro-popular' perspectives, is that while in many cases as sensitive to the perils of creeping marketisation as their opponents, their tacit subscriptions to a dominant literary-critical mode endangers their reader-centered practices and theories of being wholly conservatised as politics of fiction selection, with the 'literary' being recast as the "inappropriate" literature which requires "censoring".

4.3. ***To Compare and Contrast Author's 'Theories of Literature' in the Context of Their Views on Fiction Provision:*** **a conclusion on the enduring notion of literary hierarchy as a common determinant of competing selection politics and practices**

As I have suggested, a materialist reading of the contemporary debate regarding fiction selection politics reveals a measure of unconscious and, therefore, unwritten agreement between adversaries when it comes to the hierarchical nature of distinctions between varieties and genres of fictive texts. In a sense then, given this evident tacit agreement regarding the nature of literary value, it can be said that it is how value distinctions are mechanised to inform a selection practice that is really being debated by these critics.

This is evident in the fact that many of the commentators discussed here articulate their priorities as a means of redressing imbalances that they see as pervasive in professional practices and principles. For instance, Usherwood promotes heeding standards of 'excellence' because he see popularisation taking precedence, while Pateman promotes heeding the community's wishes since he sees elitist imposition of 'excellence' as rife. However, as I have shown in relation to both poles of the contemporary debate, remedial politics which conserve traditional-formalist hierarchical distinctions are ultimately able only to (re)produce cases which reflect their political approach to the hierarchy, functioning essentially to include what they favour and exclude what they oppose. For instance, because Van Fleet holds firm to a hierarchical literary commitment but finds the imposition of the 'high' to be an elitist act in the public library setting, she cannot articulate a case for the 'literary' or canonical. Similarly, because Usherwood re-poses traditional markers of aesthetic-literary quality as apparently 'new' and inclusive means of identifying value across *all* literary types, he in reality, only makes a case for that which can be called 'excellent' by the traditional, exclusive rules of the hierarchy. This ultimately ideological commitment then resists true inclusivity, and its endurance in these divergent political positions necessitates that they are mutually skewed towards their own respective politics, thus undermining any founding commitments to redressing imbalance.

4.4. Recommendations

That a materialist reading of this debate is able to undermine critics' disparate projects using their shared and residual traditional-formalist commitments is not necessarily to argue against, for instance, Usherwood's commitment to "excellence", Pateman's case for "co-production", or

D'Angelo's diagnosis of the threat posed to the public library by "postmodern consumer capitalism", but to evidence the ways in which their reproduction of literary exclusivity will ultimately problematise their analyses of popular culture and fiction through its attempt to use subjective aesthetic criteria at the level of material production to make the 'literary' "subject to quite special and distinct laws". Put another way, it is, for instance, Buschman's avoidance of hierarchical aesthetic-literary distinction that allows his primary interest – a critique of the regrettable transformation of public libraries through their "aping" of "business rhetoric and models" (2005a, p.6) – to fare better, because it is less vulnerable to the collapsing of an assumption which functions as a critical support.

It is not within the scope of the present work to systematise and prescribe a materialist model for fiction selection, but briefly, it stands to reason that the public library, as an institution which prides itself on its capacity to represent the needs of the underserved, must not design fiction collection policies around assumptions received from, or transmitted by, dominant, ideologically-determined modes of literary criticism designed to identify and conserve the position of a select canon as well as its own critical imperatives. At the very least, such notions must not be allowed to survive and inform practice as mere assumptions of a universal and objective 'science' of literary value, since, in Terry Eagleton's words,

> there is no 'immanent' value – no value which is not *transitive*. Literary value is a phenomenon which is *produced* in that ideological appropriation of the text, that 'consumptional production' of the work, which is the act of reading (1978, p.166).

That canonical and 'literary' fiction should be available in public libraries is not in question, to this author at least, but to make it available through the internalisation of what Raymond Williams calls "abstract and pseudo-universal definitions of high culture and popular culture" is to enact an exclusive and uncritical practice, "restricting meaning and value to a single tradition and contemplating the meanings and values of the majority of people and peoples as inferior" (1974). The public librarian, then, lest he or she come to

> function as 'the man [or woman] of culture' judging and evaluating the great works of a national tradition, the traditional scholar and critic exposed by Marxist theory as an

> institutional 'state functionary', the Capitalist lackey of an ideological state apparatus ensuring the uneventful reproduction of an exploitative mode of production for the ruling class (Wilson, p.15),

must eschew the necessarily exclusive practices which Williams warns will "lead us to evade true cultural values and contemporary reality" (1974), and begin instead to consider how best to mechanise as a fiction selection practice, any of the multifarious contemporary critical strategies with which those texts which do not stand common sense criticism's 'test of time' or pass its aesthetic scrutiny might be evaluated and politicised without being 'immanently', or 'objectively' subordinated to their 'literary' 'superiors'.

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