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Consumption, Class, and Taste: The Construction of the
Market for Popular Literature

by
Don Wallace

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
Department of Sociology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
April 20, 1992
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the Market for Popular Literature

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

The emergence of the modern mass market for popular literature was part of a deeper change in the nature of capitalism and class relationships. Of specific interest is the role of taste and its relationship to class in the consumption of cultural commodities. The analysis is further located within the growth of consumerism in general in the Fordist era and the establishment of markets sufficient in scope to support the growing productive capacity of industrial capitalism. It is argued that the expansion of the market for popular literature was brought about by the mobilization of taste and class within the context of the emerging consumer discourse. This was centred around the mass market paperbound book, a commodity which drew upon the appeal of both the 'lower class' pulp magazine and the more 'refined' hard cover book format. The paperback book represented a middlebrow taste option which effectively legitimized reading as a leisure practice, bringing together previously separate audiences which led to the rapid expansion of this industry in the post WWII years.

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Introduction

There has never been any shortage of interest in popular literature. As well as the vast audience that reads it on a regular basis, there has been a growing body of critical work on this form of mass culture. Although the tendency in scholarly research has been to focus on textual analysis, there has been an increasing interest in recent years in both the audience for popular fiction as well as the industry itself, following the lead of work done in connection with other cultural industries, especially film and popular music (1). This paper has grown out of my interest over a number of years in the historical development of popular fiction in American culture, the industrial context in which it is produced, and its relationship to broader aspects of social process.

Of special interest to me has been the construction of the modern mass market for popular fiction that was brought about by the so-called 'paperback revolution' of the 1940s. The ubiquity of popular fiction in contemporary culture is taken for granted but before the advent of the modern paperback book, the publishing industry was unable to achieve markets on the scale of other cultural industries. It is generally acknowledged that the book publishing

industry in the United States was transformed radically in a relatively short time, largely through the success of mass market paperback publishers, beginning with Pocket Books Incorporated in 1939. At the same time, it is important to point out that there was a large readership for popular literature before this point: the dime novels and pulp magazines of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are two important examples of mass market fiction; and there had already been a brief period in the late 19th century when the paperback book format was quite popular. Nonetheless, I am not interested in merely documenting the emergence of a new form of popular culture or in demonstrating that the modern mass market paperback is some sort of natural heir to these earlier forms, as if cultural history were an unbroken continuity. As Stuart Hall has pointed out,

The study of popular culture has been somewhat bedeviled by this descriptive approach, tracing the internal evolution of popular pastimes, from hunting wild boar to collecting garden gnomes, strung together by an evolutionary chain of 'things' slowly 'becoming' other things (Hall: 1986, 23).

Hall argues instead for an analysis of the discontinuities in popular culture, the moments of rupture that point to deeper changes in social formations: "we need to identify the turning points, when relations are qualitatively restructured and transformed - the moments of transition"

(ibid). The emergence of the paperback book format and the subsequent restructuring of the audience for popular literature must be read within the context of one of these 'moments of transition'. This shift in cultural practice was part of a much larger transformation from an earlier form of industrial capitalism in which daily life was for the most part oriented around production to a form in which consumption began to play an equally significant role; and most importantly, this moment of transition is also marked by deep changes in class relations and in the ways in which class power is reproduced. The purpose of this paper is to examine the emergence of this cultural form as symptomatic of a broader and deeper shift within culture and social relations in general which were part of the growth and consolidation of consumer capitalism in the United States.

My analysis of this transitional moment in popular culture will focus on two fundamental and very much related factors. Firstly, the social and cultural changes that led to the rapid expansion of the market for popular literature must be understood within the rise of consumerism in general. I will show briefly that the relationship to consumption in modern consumer capitalism (since roughly the 1920s) differs fundamentally from earlier periods. Unlike consumer goods before the era of mass production, commodities could now be

produced on an unprecedented scale and it was necessary for capital to create markets of a corresponding size. A balance between production and consumption was essential for the continuation of the process of capital accumulation. It is out of this necessity to create consumers that grew the discourse of 'industrial democracy' which held the promise of a society in which all citizens would have access not only to goods that satisfied material needs but also to leisure time in which to pursue learning and culture. The publishing industry in the 1930s was essentially underdeveloped in terms of the emerging consumer culture and it was faced with problems very similar to those that had been solved earlier by most other cultural industries. That is, the difficulty was not in the ability to manufacture commodities on a large scale but rather, to secure markets sufficient in size to make profitable the huge potential of mass production. The success of the paperback book in the late 1930s lies in the way in which this commodity was located within the discourse of industrial democracy and access to culture.

Secondly, and most importantly, I will examine the role of taste and its relationship to class in the context of mass consumption in general. I will demonstrate how the discourse of taste, centred around the commodity of the mass market

paperback, was mobilized in the construction of reading as a leisure practice. Although the consumption of popular literature did not begin with the mass market paperback in the 1930s, these earlier forms were usually considered as 'lower class' and therefore an illegitimate form of leisure by both the mainstream book buying public, largely a middle class elite, and the traditionally conservative book publishers. Thus these earlier forms of popular literature were unable to draw on the large middle class audience as had other cultural industries such as film and music. It is equally important to point out that the first mass market paperbacks were not original works of fiction (as were earlier forms of popular literature such as dime novels or pulp magazines) but were instead virtually all reprints of previously successful literature. The term 'paperback novel' which usually refers, quite derisively, to a poorly written, quickly produced book of 'escapist' fiction, finds its origin in a slightly later period (mainly the post war years). The importance of the paperback book then does not lie so much in its content as in its context, i.e., the stories contained between the covers were not as important as the way in which this format was able to reach a much larger audience than before. The increased readership, which cut across class lines, was based on the creation of the discursive formation in which reading became a legitimate

leisure practice. This legitimation of popular literature depended upon the mass market paperback which represented a new taste option for a number of previously separate markets or taste groups. The paperback format appealed to a middlebrow sensibility that in popular literature lay between and drew upon the appeal of both the 'lower class' pulp magazine and the more 'refined' hard cover book format whose audience consisted mainly of a fairly literate section of the middle class. This combination effectively legitimized the paperbound book as the medium for popular literature which led to the tremendous expansion of this industry in the post war years.

The ideology of taste was an extremely important component in this process. Taste, or the ability to distinguish between a range of cultural goods, is a particular manifestation of status that plays a significant role in stratification in consumer culture. But status cannot be reduced to some simplified form of economic class. That is, it is not merely determined by economic class but exists relatively autonomously as symbolic power, forming part of the complex of mutually influencing factors that determine overall power. Taste and its relationship to status plays a particularly important role in social formations in which the role of consumption has come to occupy a central

position in the construction of meaning in daily life. A theoretical account of current western (and in particular, North American) cultures needs to include a more complete examination of the relationship of status and consumption and the role that this plays in the reproduction of class.

Problems

One of the most difficult problems in the sociological analysis of audiences for cultural commodities is the lack of data and this is only exacerbated when dealing with earlier historical periods. Those industries which do not rely directly on advertising, such as the record or film industries, have been less likely to utilize market research in the promotion of their product than have, for example, radio and television for whom advertising revenues are the principal source of income. As Hirsch (1972) argues, for industries that are not dependent on advertising, it is simply more cost effective to overproduce and absorb the cost of failures than it is to collect and maintain extensive audience data. In addition, it is usually quite difficult to get access to data that do exist since many cultural industries are not eager to share information that may compromise their competitive position. In the case of the publishing industry, there is very little detailed information on audiences and sales prior to the modern era.

Indeed, the lack of this kind of information was one of the primary criticisms directed at the book industry by the first major economic study, the Cheney survey of 1931, which is discussed in detail in chapter 2. All modern writers concerned with this period in the publishing trade, such as Tebbel (1978, 1981), Bonn (1982) have had to rely on a limited number of resources, such as the trade publication **Publishers' Weekly**, and this research is no exception. Consequently, my overall approach has been interpretative and I have attempted to infer reasonable explanations regarding audiences for popular literature, based on the information available and the analysis of class and status that I present in chapter 2.

The term 'popular fiction' also presents some difficulties. With an emphasis on text, the study of popular literature has tended to focus on fiction rather than simply reading material in general, including such genres as biography, history, or self-help books, all of which have been popular with a broad reading public. It is important to recognize, however, that these other forms have frequently had as much resonance in peoples' lives and have been as influential as generic fiction in the formation of popular consciousness and ideologies. Such titles Willem Hendrik Van Loon's **The Story of Mankind** and Will Durant's **The Story of Philosophy**

rank as significant bestsellers in the United States in the early part of this century, alongside novels by Jack London, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Zane Grey. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I have used the term 'popular literature' to refer to all manner of books that sold in large numbers and were part of the formation of not only popular taste but 'common sense' in the way that Gramsci used this term: not a transcendent view of the world but one rooted in historical and social process, "the 'folklore' of philosophy" (Gramsci: 1971, 419).

Chapter 1 provides an historical, social, and cultural background by examining the discourse of consumption that emerged in the early years of the Depression and which organized consumption around notions of citizenship and participation in the industrial democracy. Chapter 2 theorizes the role of taste in class structure in an era of mass consumption. Briefly, I argue that in Fordist and post-Fordist social formations, direct class confrontation becomes progressively displaced but at the same time, the practice of consumption gains increasing importance as a symbolic power and therefore in the definition of class. Chapter 3 is a political economic overview of the publishing industry of the 1930s, examining the fundamental problems that kept it from achieving audiences on the scale of other

cultural industries. This chapter will make extensive reference to an economic survey of the book industry commissioned by the National Association of Book Publishers in 1931 (Cheney, 1960). The Cheney survey provides valuable insights into the structural problems within the book publishing industry, problems which were addressed in many ways by the commodity form of the paperback book. Chapter 4 is a detailed analysis of Pocket Books Incorporated which was the most important firm in this transitional moment. I examine the ways in which Pocket Books was able to overcome the structural problems that had prevented previous publishers from achieving mass markets. Although this chapter provides a detailed account of the industrial and economic factors involved, emphasis will be placed on the cultural aspects and the ways in which the paperback format was able to mobilize taste and class in the creation of mass markets for popular literature. This chapter also documents briefly the subsequent rapid growth of the popular literature industry as a consequence of the legitimation of reading as a middle class leisure activity. The final chapter will contain a discussion of the implications of this approach for the study of cultural commodities in general.

I

Mass Consumption and Industrial Democracy

There are no doubt some things available to the modern workman that Louis XIV would have been delighted to have...On the whole, however, a budget on that level had little...to gain from capitalist achievement. It is the cheap cloth, the cheap cotton and rayon fabric, boots, motorcars and so on that are the typical achievements of capitalist production, and not as a rule improvements that would mean much to the rich man. Queen Elizabeth owned silk stockings. The capitalist achievement does not typically consist in providing more silk stockings for queens but in bringing them within the reach of factory girls in return for steadily decreasing amounts of effort (Schumpeter: 1987 [1943], 67)

Modern consumerism has to be clearly differentiated from the practice of consumption in earlier historical periods. The rise of modern consumer culture in the early part of this century was not merely the consequence of the development of mass production. Mass consumption did not occur simply because industry, through technological development and innovation, was able to produce goods on an unprecedented scale. To be sure, the development of mass production was obviously a necessary precondition for the rise of modern mass consumption but it alone is not a sufficient explanation for the scale of consumerism that obtains in advanced capitalist societies. Nor did modern consumerism grow naturally or easily out of existing patterns of consumption, out of some latent demand that existed before

mass production. On the contrary, it was essential for the continuation of the process of capital accumulation that business cultivate and encourage consumerism and it is important to recognize that there was a fundamental shift from a social formation defined primarily through production to one in which the purpose and meaning of daily life was increasingly oriented around practices of consumption.

A common argument concerning the origins of modern consumer culture is that mass markets arose quite unproblematically out of the demand for luxury goods that previously had been available only to the upper classes. In an early analysis of the rise of mass production, Weber argues that the *primum mobile* for the development of the capitalist forces of production was

mass market demand, which could arise only in a small proportion of the luxury industries through the democratization of the demand, especially along the line of production of substitutes for the luxury goods of the upper classes (Weber: 1950 [1927], 310).

Following a similar argument, Mukerji (1983) places the beginnings of mass consumption in the 15th century; McKendrick (1982) traces its roots to 18th century England; and McCracken (1988) locates it in Elizabethan England; and each of these writers trace the historical development of consumerism largely as a 'trickle down' phenomenon in which

the practice of the consumption of luxury goods by the nobility is eventually imitated by greater and greater masses of people. For McCracken, there was no 'consumer boom' in the nineteenth century, the basis for modern consumerism having already been established as part of the fabric of social life: "The vigorous dialectic that bound consumer change and social change was now a structural reality." (McCracken: 1988, 29). While there are, of course, important continuities between the consumptive patterns of earlier periods and those of the modern era, the search for the 'origins' of modern consumerism misses the profound transformation of capitalist society as it moved from a simple industrial age, one defined primarily by production, into the age of Fordism in which the *relationship* between production and consumption becomes fundamental.

The term 'Fordism' derives, of course, from the innovations in industry attributed to Henry Ford: the large scale production of assembly line manufacture and the increase in wages to workers. More generally, however, it describes important changes in the nature of and the relationship between production and consumption, the outcome of tendencies in American capitalism that had been developing for some time, and which brought about a period of intensive capital accumulation lasting from about the late 1920s until

the crisis of the late 1970s. In the case of production, industrial technology had developed at a tremendous rate in the latter part of the 19th century and with the intensification and rationalization of labour that was brought about through the application of Taylorist philosophy, mass production was possible on a heretofore unimagined scale. Gramsci saw this rapid growth in the output of labour as a necessary increase in the rate of exploitation if the process of capital accumulation were to continue. In terms of classic Marxist economics, Gramsci claimed that Fordism was "the ultimate stage in the process of progressive attempts by industry to overcome the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" (Gramsci: 1985, 280). Demand, however, did not grow simply out of increased supply and the consumption side of the Fordist equation, according to Lipietz, is "the *continual adjustment of mass consumption* to the historically unprecedented rise in productivity generated by intensive accumulation" (Lipietz: 1982: 35, *emphasis in original*). That is, in order to avoid crises of either overproduction or underproduction, it was necessary for both production and consumption to grow as synchronously as possible. There were certainly consumer goods available to groups other than the upper classes since at least the rise of the textile industries (at the dawn of capitalism) and as production on a large scale became a

reality, a wide range of goods could now be produced in seemingly limitless quantity. But at the same time, the growth of markets of a commensurate size was not a *fait accompli* and increased demand for mass produced goods did not flow naturally out of the previous patterns of consumption. The consumers of fashion, for example, had largely been from the moneyed classes and although it was increasingly clear that industry could no longer rely on only an elite and therefore limited market, the 'democratization of demand' was not an inevitable consequence of mass production. Indeed, as Stuart Ewen argues, the problem for producers of mass manufactured goods in the early part of this century was, in fact, quite the reverse: there had been a crisis of overproduction which had made urgent the need for an expansion of markets to support the increased potential of industry (Ewen, 1976). The continued existence of capital accumulation depended on a mutual and necessary embrace between production and consumption since it is only on the basis of an extensive and constant demand that capitalism can benefit from the economies of scale possible with mass production. Therefore the task at hand for industrialists was the creation of new and larger markets and what was significant about Fordism, as David Harvey explains, was the explicit recognition

that mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society (Harvey: 1989, 126).

The Growth of Consumption

The industrialization of American society in the 19th century had already brought about profound change in the nature of daily life. The advance of industrial capitalism and the concomitant increase in urbanization had already begun to regulate work in accordance with its own peculiar rhythms, unrelated to the kind of seasonal ebb and flow characteristic of rural life; the division between home and work became more distinct and the extended family became less relevant as the central economic unit, ultimately fragmenting and leaving only a remnant, its nuclear form, as the basis for a home life entirely separate from production. For the immigrants from Europe who came to the United States in increasing numbers by the end of the 19th century, long hours and repetitive work in factories fostered considerable resistance (often in the form of peasant parades, rituals, and so on) to the demands of capitalist industry and its intrusion into traditional ways of life:

Group traditions supplied not only the means to struggle against degradation and injustice, but also to retain a foothold in a remembered world via an elemental coherence fashioned out of custom, venerated

objects, ancient loyalties, and intergenerational memory (Leiss et al: 1990, 54)

But at the same time as the rationalization of the factory was extended over society in general: "Business and industry had awakened...to the need for a greatly intensified selling effort in order to 'move the goods' cascading off their assembly lines" (Leiss et al: 1990, 58). By the 1920s, almost in direct contradiction to the aims of capitalism during the earlier period of intense industrialization, concessions made to labour in terms of shorter hours and higher wages were seen by the most progressive elements of business as a necessary step in the consumerization of society. From both sides of the debate, much was made of the higher wages paid by Henry Ford to his workers but in the final analysis, time and money were as important to consumption, in the form of greater leisure time and disposable income, as they were to production:

The juncture of working-class resentment and the expansion of productivity called for a vision of social order in which the two might operate integrally rather than at odds with one another. (Ewen: 1976, 18).

Modern consumer capitalism was thus quite different from earlier forms in which luxury goods were made increasingly more available to a rising middle class. The essentials of modern consumerism lay not only in the technical capacity to

produce goods but more importantly, in the ability to create markets and distribute goods to them effectively. It was also necessary to educate society in practices of consumption and it was out of this context that emerged the modern advertising industry, the principal means through which society was drawn into the cycle of production and consumption (1). "Mass production demands the education of the masses...the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world." (Filene: 1931, 231) (2) It was also clear that these new masses would have to consist of groups that transcended the narrow, elite markets that were the consumers of luxury commodities before the age of mass production. If the level of production and consumption that was the motor of the new industrial machine was to be fueled, then markets would have to be established at the national level and they would have to cross traditional barriers of class and race (3). In short, the merchant of the industrial age would have to recognize the social implications of this transformation. Stuart Ewen makes the point most eloquently:

Beyond standing at the helm of the industrial machines, businessmen understood the social nature of their hegemony. They looked to move beyond their nineteenth-century characterization as captains of industry toward a position in which they could control the entire social realm. They aspired to become captains of consciousness (Ewen: 1976, 19).

The Discourse of Mass Production: The Right to Consume

One of the most important features of the growth of consumerism was the discourse of consumption that grew out of the new relationship between business and the public: on one hand was the real and pressing need of capital to find markets for goods in order to make profitable the economies of scale that were now possible; on the other, was the desire of consumers, who were becoming more aware of their status as consumers, to participate more fully in the new era of production. In this discourse 'mass production' did not only mean the production of goods on a large scale; it meant, quite literally, 'production for the masses'. That is, mass production and consumption were associated increasingly with liberal democracy and individual freedom of choice. Class was to be transformed into 'mass' and traditional social antagonisms would disappear amidst the material wealth delivered by mass production. The acquisition of goods produced by this new industrial culture was seen not merely as a privilege, but as the right of a citizen living in an industrial democracy. The freedom of the individual to select among a wide range of goods in a marketplace amounted to a form of plebiscite and constituted a relationship in which all consumers, by virtue of their purchase, were participants in a public forum on consumption (4). The citizen of the liberal democracy, with inalienable

rights and responsibilities, was being dismantled and reformed as a consumer with the power of individual choice over a range of commodities.

By buying the goods of large industries, and by participating in the economic solvency of these industrial giants, people were electing a government which would constantly be satisfying their needs and desires; the democratic process was becoming one which was turning the political realm away from its traditional governmental concerns and solidifying it within the economic processes of modern industrial capitalism (Ewen: 1976, 91).

The promise of the new industrial democracy, however, was thrown into serious doubt in the Great Depression and along with sudden and deep economic deprivation came a serious legitimization crisis in American capitalism. Rather than seeing the Depression as only a temporary economic problem that could be remedied by adjustment to the existing system, a growing political and social voice was demanding fundamental change in the system itself. The transformation of social relations that had been promised by the industrial democracy did not include the relationship to the means of production and the traditional leaders of business and capital were quick to point this out. Edward Filene, wealthy Boston retailer and spokesman for the new consumerism through such books as **Successful Living in This Machine Age**, claimed: "The industrial democracy I am discussing has nothing to do with the Cubist politics of class revolution"

(Filene: 1931, 137). Nonetheless, sentiment of the kind feared by Filene and other industrialists had coalesced into a number of organizations that were gaining considerable popularity, and in some cases genuine political power, throughout the United States. Many of these groups shared a distrust of 'Big Business' and felt that the power of modern industry had been seriously mismanaged. They believed that the solution to the economic crisis lay in the harnessing of the forces of mass production not for profit but for the benefit of society in general. The decade of the Depression saw a proliferation of such movements, ranging from the more serious challenges to industrial hegemony (such as the various labour organizations, trade unions, communist and socialist groups, and so on) to more radical and fringe voices that engaged in a variety of populist, quasi-socialist, and even fascist politics. The growing stridency of public opinion is best illustrated, I think, by these fringe groups, some of which gained considerable influence if not actual political power, causing great concern and much public debate over the course that the industrial democracy should now take. These movements, such as EPIC, Technocracy, the Payroll Guarantee Association, Social Credit, and many others (5), grew out of the desire to participate more fully in the industrial democracy and although these organizations represented a diversity of

approach, they agreed upon many common ideals that were an essential component of the emergent discourse of consumption. They shared a general belief in the failure of the capitalist system to fulfill its promises of abundance. They were openly hostile to business and many laid the blame for economic hard times clearly at the feet of bankers. For this reason, some were quite anti-semitic, believing the banks to be controlled by Jews (6). While slogans like 'Production for Use', on the surface at least, spoke to a mistrust of banks and profits, these movements also shared a fundamental belief that the Great Depression was the result of the unequal distribution, not merely of wealth, but more importantly, of *purchasing power*. Their critique of capitalism, therefore, was not that industry failed to provide goods but that the economic system failed to promote the circulation of wealth in such a way that the masses would benefit from the "uncontestable fruits of the industrial cornucopia" (Ewen: 1976, 27). For many politicians, businessmen, industrialists, and so on, the multiplicity of movements such as these amounted to nothing less than an anticapitalist revolution and it was out of this juncture of diverse political and social threats that emerged the politics of the New Deal. The hegemony of American capitalism was re-established by adapting to its own project the growing demands of the public that found a

voice in groups like these and in other, more mainstream political arenas. In doing so, American culture was propelled further in the direction of a totalizing consumerism.

The desire to increase the spending power of the public in order to drive mass production was found not only within fringe groups. Those forces that wished to save capitalism by adjusting it to meet the demands of the new social order recognized the important relationship between production and consumption. Indeed, there was an awareness that the new era of consumption was essential to economic growth. In addressing the economic problems of the early 30s, *Forum* magazine pointed out that in the previous decade, "We did not buy these 'luxuries' because we prospered...we prospered because we bought these 'luxuries'" (Foster and Catchings in Beard: 1932, 52). Both government and business recognized the importance of the new relationship between production and consumption and both sought to move the economy more rapidly in the direction of increasing mass consumption. The criticism that business had failed to provide secure and sustained growth led to the establishment of further state control over the economy which was a fundamental component of the New Deal and later Keynesian economics. A vital part of the strategy used by business to promote mass consumption

(and thereby fuel mass production) was credit, albeit of a different form than that promoted by fringe groups such as Social Credit. The growth of consumer credit, along with the rise of the advertising industry, was undoubtedly one of the most significant factors in increasing the spending power of consumers and therefore was an important step toward the formation of a consumer culture. Charles Wood, at one time associate editor of **Forbes Magazine** (and who contributed to Edward Filene's **Successful Living In This Machine Age**) produced a number of widely read books in the 1920s and 1930s, written in an almost Will Rogers folksy style, that helped to promote the idea of consumption as a democratic right. In **The Passing of Normalcy**, an examination of the effect of chain stores on a 'typical' American town (7), Wood makes the case for credit, not merely as an economic strategy, but as a human right, part of the natural order of things in any civilized society:

If there is to be any human order, if there is to be any human life, people must be granted the right to procure things, whether they have equally valuable things to exchange or not. If they have things to exchange, well and good. If they have not, they must be granted credit until such time as, it is hoped, they may be able to make their contribution to society.
(Wood: 1929: 276) (8)

This appeal to the right to consume was in direct contradiction to traditional conservative American ethics

which had encouraged thrift and sacrifice. In this era of consumption, "The restraint on worldly desires preached for so long made less and less sense as the factory system's astonishing productive capacities became apparent" (Leiss et al: 1990, 57). Up to this point, saving was a virtue and the goal of many households was to be able to purchase eventually products of sufficient quality that they would not have to be replaced. A family would acquire a 'good' set of china, furniture, etc., and their consumption of these items would then reach a sense of closure. The ethic of the new consumerism differed fundamentally from this: consumption slowly became a continuous, open-ended process, encouraged by advertising and driven by innovation that obviated the usefulness or desirability of most products in shorter and shorter periods of time. The term 'planned obsolescence' is frequently used to describe this process but it smacks far too much of a conspiracy and does not get at the subtleties of consumerism. The interdependency of production and consumption was taken to a new order of magnitude by the enormous technical capacity of industrial capitalism and it was out of this relationship that the two major strategies of consumer capitalism emerged: advertising (the creation of the desire to consume) and constant innovation (a means of survival in a competitive market).

The Pursuit of Culture

The egalitarianism of the consumer discourse went far beyond the simple satisfaction of basic material needs such as clothing, household appliances, prepared foods, etc. One of the most important elements of this rhetoric of mass production and consumption was access to culture, in the sense of 'higher learning' or 'personal cultivation'. This impulse was not new to consumer capitalism. Utopian socialist writers such as Carlyle and Ruskin spoke of uplifting the working classes by bringing art and beauty within their grasp. The Arts and Crafts movement of the mid 19th century, whose spokesman was the artist William Morris, was to a large extent a reaction to the misery brought about by the factories and industrial centres of early industrial capitalism. Morris and others such as Arthur MacMurdo and later even Charles Rennie MacIntosh and Margaret MacDonald, sought to implement the philosophy of art espoused by Ruskin and others: that art should not only be beautiful but should fulfil a utilitarian and social function as well (9). Ruskin argued that the working class could be uplifted in their aspirations by not only beautifying their surroundings but by bringing high art within their milieu. This could be achieved, at least in part, said Ruskin, by limiting the price of art which would have two important effects:

you will make the painters produce more pictures, two or three instead of one, if they wish to make money; and you will, by bringing good pictures within the reach of people of moderate income, excite the general interest of the nation in them, increase a thousandfold the demand for the commodity, and therefore its wholesome and natural production (Ruskin: 1876, 73).

Significantly, an important part of the political agenda of many radical political groups in the early years of the Depression, including those that preached the ethics of 'production for use', was the access to culture and leisure that would be possible in a society of plenty brought about by mass production (10). Similarly, Frank Lloyd Wright's plan for a revitalized North America, Usonianism (11), imagined settlements that were not unlike modern suburbs but with important differences. Wright's model settlement, Broadacre City, was to consist of

elegant, thriftily planned houses, each on its own acre of intensively cultivated land [with] families closely bound one to another in a diffuse cooperative community' (Furnas: 1977, 40).

But in the context of the discourse of consumerism, the most important feature of Usonianism was the attention given to the pursuit of art, culture and refinement in the leisure time that would be made available through the rational planning and control of modern industrial forces. Broadacre City was praised as a society of culture and leisure, as a kind of modern Garden of Eden but Wright's Usonianism was

not unique in its expectations. In spite of the severe economic hardship of the 30s, 'The depression failed to deflate the optimistic faith that more and greater technology produced a better world' (Akin: 1977, 150) and the discourse of consumption promised the Good Life in which leisure, art, personal cultivation and learning were the icing on the cake of industrial democracy.

Perhaps the epitome of this kind of Utopian philosophy in the interests of business and mass production were the large industrial fairs that were held in the 1930s. In these fairs, the growing demands of the public for participation in the industrial democracy are tightly and indistinguishably interwoven with the needs of capital through the discourse of consumption. The best known example is the New York World's Fair of 1939 and in retrospect, 'The World of Tomorrow' (its official title) was outrageously blatant in its promotion of industrial democracy through the equation of liberty and freedom with mass production and consumption. Most of the large fairs during this 1930s (e.g., Chicago, 1933; San Diego, 1935; Dallas, 1936; San Francisco, 1939) were characterized by an obsession with industry portrayed in the context of classical themes, as if mass production and consumption were the logical inheritors of the philosophy of Athenian democracy. Grover Whalen, a

New York businessman and president of the fair, claimed that the World of Tomorrow would exhibit "the best industrial techniques, social ideas and services, the most advanced scientific discoveries" while at the same time demonstrating "the picture of the interdependence of man on man, class on class, nation on nation" (Exposition Publications: 1939, 5).

The theme centre of the fair was Democracity, a scale model of the city of the future which was to demonstrate not merely the technological achievements of the age but much more importantly, the social and cultural world that would open up for a rationally planned society that had finally succeeded in "humanity's age-old quest for knowledge, increased leisure and happiness." (Exposition Publications: 1939, 45). The fairgrounds were liberally decorated with sculptures and murals, mostly in an art deco adaptation of classical or pseudo-classical themes, with titles like 'Textiles', 'The Spirit of the Wheel', 'Four Freedoms' (depicting freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly) and frequently depicting mythical figures locked in battle to harness the elements for humankind. The buildings and exhibits themselves were quite spectacular, displaying the same theme of freedom and democracy through industry. They were grouped into 'zones' of distinct themes that juxtaposed various aspects of American democracy and business; for

example, the Communications and Business Systems Zone that contained the pavilions of AT&T and RCA as well as the Masterpieces of Art building and a number of smaller exhibitors including several book and magazine publishers; the Transportation Zone which included the exhibits of the major automobile and tire manufactures, connected by streets with names like 'The Avenue of Transportation' or 'The Bridge of Wings'; the Community Interest Zone which featured, in the Home Furnishings Building, a kind of morality play, in sound and light, several times each day. The play was designed to demonstrate the progress of humanity from its enslavement to material necessity to the modern era in which science and technology, in the interests of American business, would free society from tedium and allow it to enjoy: "8 hours rest, 8 hours work, 8 hours leisure in 1939. Man is now comparatively free in time and space" (Exposition Publications: 1939, 86). But by far the most expressive of the theme of freedom through industrial plenitude was the Production and Distribution Zone which housed General Electric, U.S. Steel, and other major industries and manufacturers but also, significantly, the Consumers' Union and a number of banks and loan institutions such as Household Finance. The Official Guide Book of New York World's Fair 1939 (Exposition Publications: 1939) described this zone as follows:

Thus we see in the zone devoted to Production and Distribution the development of the idea that modern materials, tools and power can be made to accomplish two important things. They vastly increase the supply of goods in the world and lower their cost, so that the average man of today can enjoy standards of comfort and welfare that could not be attained by monarchs in the past. They also free men from the tyranny of endless muscular labor and thereby free his time for the enrichment of his life - for intellectual and spiritual development (Exposition Publications: 1939, 47).

This aspect of the discourse of consumption was an extremely significant determinant in the structuring of a great deal of advertising and marketing of the period. While products like Coca Cola appealed to the 'empty leisure' aspect of consumption - pure hedonistic pleasure free from responsibility - other industries spoke to the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship in the new industrial democracy; and one of the most important ways in which a citizen could participate in the new order was through the acquisition of knowledge, of the arts, of the great thought of the past, now available through any number of products with which the citizen could pursue self-education.

It was, to a very large extent, out of this discourse that the mass market paperback of the late 1930s emerged. For rather than simply publishing new fiction between their covers, a new content, they were creating a new context in

which a larger public could not only enjoy reading as a leisure pursuit but could, at the same time, participate in the modern industrial democracy through the pursuit of knowledge:

The great opportunity for the masses of mankind to rise above the struggle for existence and to partake of the life which the artists and poets and preachers are forever talking about, lies in the extension and perfection of mass production methods, and in an understanding of the truths upon which those methods are based (Filene: 1931, 15).

While the appeal to the ideology of industrial democracy was a fundamental factor in the establishment of mass markets for popular literature, this, by itself, is not a sufficient explanation. The marketing of home libraries consisting mainly of reprints of classics had been met with some success since the early part of the century. Series such as The Little Leather Library or Modern Library, started in 1914 and 1925 respectively (Tebbel: 1978, 6) clearly organized their appeal around the desire for the democratization of culture although, as I have suggested, this demand grew much stronger in the wake of the Depression and the apparent failure of industrial capitalism to 'deliver the goods'. Nonetheless, the very rapid development of the mass market for popular literature must also be understood through the ways in which taste and its

relationship to class were mobilized in the production of a broad consumer base for this particular cultural commodity.

Summary

The rise of mass consumption in this century was not merely the result of a 'trickle down' process in which successively lower economic classes imitated the consumption of the wealthy. Rather, this was part of a much larger process in which industrial capitalist industries sought to create markets large enough to make profitable the huge potential of mass production. As Gramsci observed, Fordism, the synchronization of production and consumption, was necessary for the continuation of capital accumulation. This process was consolidated through the politics of the New Deal in which both capital and the state, in response to the crisis of the Depression, pursued social and economic strategies, such as credit and unemployment insurance, that would provide a level of economic stability sufficient to strengthen and increase the relationship between production and consumption. Part of this process was the discourse of industrial democracy and consumerism in which social difference was to disappear through an overall rise in material wealth as well as leisure time in which to pursue culture and knowledge. The ideology of democratic consumption was an important factor in the establishment of

the mass market for popular literature and cultural commodities in general.

II

Social Location, Taste, and Middlebrow Culture

The argument that good books should not be published in big editions because the people who buy them can't appreciate them is as valid as would be the argument that good music should not be broadcast because most people won't listen to it, and those that do don't appreciate it. At the risk of being accused of the heinous crime of being American, the publishers must strengthen their faith that what is good enough for "the best" is not too good for everybody (Cheney: 1960, 90)

The Problem of Class versus Mass

The rise of consumption had important consequences for the nature of class antagonism and confrontation in North America. The dramatic increase in the productivity of industrial capitalism, combined with the rise of organized labour, brought with it the raising of the standard of living, at least in terms of material wealth, for a large portion of society. All manner of household goods such as furniture, washing machines, and so on, as well as clothing and other mass manufactured goods were not only increasingly available but also increasingly affordable due to the general rise in wages, especially for a growing central core of industrial workers; and with more leisure time and disposable income came greater access to a wide variety of entertainments such as films, music, magazines, and other cultural pursuits. To industrialists like Filene and Wood

(mentioned in chapter 1), this was clear evidence of the transformation of 'class into mass' and the beginning of a true capitalist democracy based on abundance and freedom of choice. But in spite of the anticipated *embourgeoisement* of American society, class did not disappear. Not only were traditional class differences, based on the relationship to the means of production, not eliminated by a rise in material wealth but they would return to the fore most acutely after the Crash of 1929.

In another sense, however, and in spite of the Depression, industrial capitalism in the United States was moving inexorably toward a period in which the perception if not the reality of class would disappear into a discourse of abundance through mass consumption. The rise of Fordism and its consolidation in the decade following WWII would further displace the discussion of class from public debate. Habermas argues that in state-regulated capitalism the source of class conflict does not disappear, but is suspended, rendered 'latent' (1):

For the power structure, aimed as it is at avoiding dangers to the system, precisely excludes "domination" (as immediate political or economically mediated social force) exercised in such a manner that one class subject confronts another as an identifiable group (Habermas: 1970, 109).

The exclusion of questions of class was an important aspect of liberal capitalism which, as Ross (1990) shows, took a particular direction in the United States, growing out of a political ideology that she labels American 'exceptionalism'. Briefly, she argues that the exceptionalist approach to political and social organization was founded on the notion that the American republic would "forestall the mass poverty and class conflict that modernity appeared to be creating in Britain" (Ross: 1990, 26). The principles of social mobility, capital accumulation, and property ownership would provide the ideological basis for the American republic and given the vastness of the unsettled west, the republic would thereby avoid the predictions of Malthus: "Drawing on the perpetually self-renewing dynamism of nature, they could develop in space rather than in time." (ibid, 25). In the American exceptionalist version of liberal capitalism, the concept of class was not a consideration. If social position was not caste, it was therefore fluid and there were opportunities for mobility. Wage work need only be a temporary state through which the industrious passed on the way to the property ownership and economic independence of the petty bourgeoisie (2).

Traditional ideas of class were progressively displaced, not only in popular political ideology but in the new social sciences as well, as Ross points out, by the concept of stratification in which social difference was based only on economic standing and the relative distribution of goods and services, void of any concept of a struggle between fundamentally opposed social positions and interests. As a corollary, social mobility was then perceived simply as the ability (if not actually the moral duty) to move upward through these economic strata. The belief that traditional class status and privilege could be transcended through the egalitarianism of the marketplace was essential to the logic of liberal capitalism and competitive individualism. An ideology of meritocracy formed around entrepreneurship and education which were regarded as the most important strategies of social mobility. The most progressive laws and institutions of the liberal capitalist state therefore sought merely to remove any impediments to the economic and social improvement of the individual while virtually ignoring the overwhelming tendency of class to reproduce itself. Class conflict, which can only occur where the unequal distribution of wealth is perceived as neither inevitable nor natural, was effectively marginalized as a category of social consciousness.

It was (and still is) in the middle class that the most important implications of the ideology of social mobility were worked out. The term itself, 'middle class', took on significant connotations in a context in which questions of class conflict were suppressed. The middle class became merely a group whose social and economic position was neutral: neither rich nor poor, neither deprived nor privileged. It was perceived as a socially fluid group whose members had the capacity for mobility in terms of the distribution of goods and services. But with regard to the relationship to production, the middle class occupied a contradictory position: in spite of its lack of ownership of the means of production, a position of economic power that was closer to that of the traditional working class, the interests of the middle class, through an increase in overall level of material wealth, were progressively defined by or joined to those of the bourgeoisie. Although consumption was already an important part of the American social landscape, in the Fordist era that began in the late 1920s it occupied an increasingly important position in the structure and reproduction of class power, especially in the large and growing middle class which was the largest consumer market and therefore essential to the continuation of capital accumulation. The desire for social mobility and the rewards that it promised were most operative within the

middle class and provided the fuel that drove the expansion of consumption.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the increase in consumption was not merely a 'trickling down' of the availability of goods and services with successively lower economic groups emulating the practices of the rich. This explanation is based on consumption as an indicator of status but makes no connection between status and class (not merely stratification). The term 'conspicuous consumption' which is often used to describe this process, was coined by Veblen (1934) to describe the leisure practices of the *nouveaux riches* of New York society around the turn of the century. But in a consumer culture, which was emerging in Veblen's time, all consumption becomes conspicuous. As goods become more available, the practice of consumption becomes more a part of everyday life and thus more conspicuous at all levels, and indicative of one's position in a social (and not merely economic) order. Consumption played an increasingly important role in the desire for social mobility but, and this is a subtle but important point, social mobility was not achieved merely through material wealth but also with the acquisition of the knowledge - the taste, worldliness, the *savoir faire*, the disposition - associated with the bourgeoisie. The mere display of wealth

would have been an empty marker of status for the middle class (hence the derogatory term *nouveaux riches*) since privilege and power (usually associated with the bourgeoisie) was not based only on economic position or coercion. Equally important was symbolic power which is effective because it is based on belief but which can nonetheless be wielded in political struggle. Symbolic power is the authority to set the terms of debate, to define the discourse, to impose a view of the world as legitimate, to establish hegemonic order. Education is a common example of symbolic power: legitimations and qualifications are acquired which allow the holder to impose meaning and exercise authority in various fields. Symbolic power does not flow directly from economic power; one cannot be read easily or directly from the other but they are nonetheless connected in important ways (3). The concept of class becomes more complex in a consumer capitalist society because of the increase in importance of certain kinds of symbolic power associated with consumption and an adequate explanation of class reproduction must therefore take into account the nature and the significance of mass consumption.

Class and Status: the work of Bourdieu

The most extensive theorization of the relationship between class and status has been in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (4)

and the use of his concepts has become common in the past several years. Nonetheless, his terminology, especially 'cultural capital', is often applied in a truncated or even cavalier fashion and since the implications of Bourdieu's theory of class are essential to my own arguments concerning consumption and social mobility, I want to go over those relevant aspects of his work in some detail.

At the heart of Bourdieu's work is a concern to resolve the contradiction between theories of structure and those of agency and it is thus not surprising that his ideas gained in currency (and his works translated into English) in the aftermath of Althusserian structural Marxism, a period in which similar debates flourished. The central issue in those debates was the apparent opposition between the determinacy of structure and the ability of actors to negotiate and change that structure. Bourdieu's approach, although quite sophisticated, seems, to me at least, to take seriously and to use as a starting point the familiar concept that "[People] make their own history,...but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves" (Marx: 1982, 96); or as Bourdieu rephrases it:

No doubt agents do have an active apprehension of the world. No doubt they do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints (Bourdieu: 1990, 130).

The problem with 'objectivism', as Bourdieu refers to various forms of structuralism and structural functionalism, lies in the ontological privileging of structure at the expense of the consciousness and perceptions of humans engaged in social practice. He observes that the tendency toward structuralist approaches is most common among anthropologists who are observing exotic cultures in which the overall structure is more apparent to them as outsiders than the detailed motivations of individual actors. Theories of agency, on the other hand, are generally more common in the sociological methodologies through which we observe our own culture since we have more insight into our own interaction at the personal level. The strength of each approach is clearly the weakness of the other. Structuralism has provided a model of the social world "which identifies the real not with substances but with relations" (Bourdieu: 1990, 127) but it has done so clearly at the expense of the perception of this structure by the agents involved. On the other hand, various phenomenologically based social theories and methodologies, such as symbolic interactionism or ethnomethodology, have provided detailed accounts of the experience of actors but in most cases have been unable to locate these within a broad social framework.

For Bourdieu, the task of sociology begins with an 'objectivist moment': the construction of the objective conditions which constrain and direct (but not entirely determine) human action. In order to do this, it is necessary to set aside the subjective representations of the world created by agents actively involved in it. Nonetheless, a second 'subjectivist moment' is equally necessary in order to reintroduce the actors' perceptions of this structure. In theorizing the relationship between the material conditions of actors and their symbolic interpretations of those conditions, sociology becomes

a science of the *dialectical* relations between the objective structures to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access and the structured dispositions within which those structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them (Bourdieu: 1977, 3)

The Social Space and Social Class

Bourdieu's theory of class flows out of this attempt to reconcile the apparent contradiction between structure and agency. Although he critiques the economic reductionism of the traditional Marxist view of class, he does not deny that the relation to the means of production is an important determinant of social class (as evident in the emphasis on occupation in his empirical work); but the Marxist theory of classes, he argues, reduces the social world to one dimension, that of the relations of production, and is

therefore unable to provide a reasonable account of difference in contemporary social formations:

The inadequacies of the Marxist theory of classes, in particular its inability to explain the set of objectively observed differences, stems from the fact that, in reducing the social world to the economic field alone, it is forced to define social position solely in terms of position in the relations of production and consequently ignores positions in the different fields..., particularly in the relations of cultural production...which are irreducible to the opposition between owners and non-owners of the means of economic production (Bourdieu: 1985, 736).

Bourdieu instead describes the social world as a set of relatively autonomous fields, not at all unlike the Althusserian conception of a decentred structure in which the economic sphere plays a final, determining role. The important difference, however, is that rather than reducing the various fields (cultural, political, and so on) to the force of the economic 'in the final instance', Bourdieu argues that there is a homological relationship between the various fields. While there are characteristics specific to each field, the logic of interest or of the maximization of profit, is operative within all fields in a capitalist social formation. This profit is purely economic only within the economic field while in other fields, such as the artistic, the struggle may be for distinction. Bourdieu's theory of class is quite elaborate and as Rogers Brubaker (1985) points out, although he retains the basic Marxist

assumptions, he does so only as part of a broader theory of class. Bourdieu's approach to class is clearly in the materialist tradition while at the same time, incorporating the Weberian concept of a status group. This has frequently led to criticism of his work as either too Marxist or too Weberian. But according to Brubaker,

the real significance of Bourdieu's relation to Marx lies less in his appropriation of significant themes and perspectives than in his attempt to round out the Marxian system by integrating, with the help of conceptual tools derived chiefly from Weber, the study of the symbolic and the material dimensions of life (Brubaker: 1985, 748).

Bourdieu uses a spatial metaphor to describe the social world and to explain the relationship between class, structure, and agency. A social formation is expressed as a space (or actually, a series of homologous spaces) which represents objective power relations. Actors occupy positions within the social space according to their relative power and they cannot occupy different positions simultaneously. The position of an agent within the space (and their ability to move within it, i.e., their social mobility) is defined by the different kinds of 'capital' that are operative within it. The term 'capital', as the source of power within the social space, is used in a number of different ways within Bourdieu's work. In general, it

refers to "actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu: 1984, 114) and exists in two principal forms:

- 1) economic capital, or actual material wealth
- 2) cultural capital, or other forms of non-material resources such as educational capital (e.g., higher degrees, certificates, and so on); social capital (important contacts, etc.); and others. Although he often uses cultural capital to indicate knowledge relating specifically to the field of culture, he also uses this in the general sense I have given here.

The position of an agent within the social space is defined by both the overall level of capital of both kinds (economic and cultural) and the relative amounts of each (their composition). Individuals are born into history and social struggle with differing levels of inherited capital and seek to either maintain or improve these levels by employing various strategies of investment or conversion. Agents compete in the various fields that comprise the entire social space by seeking control over limited resources, investing whatever capital they possess that is appropriate to that particular field (e.g., the field of education, culture, business, and so on). Capital can also be converted

under certain conditions, thereby changing the composition of capital or even increasing the overall level. For example, the wealth of parents can be converted into educational capital in their children, allowing them to maintain or improve their own economic levels. This capacity of conversion becomes increasingly important in regulated capitalism since the ability of the dominant classes to reproduce power directly becomes more limited, and, consequently, the reproduction of power in other forms, especially cultural capital, becomes more crucial in the maintenance of class difference. In the same way, the ability to convert newly acquired wealth into various forms of knowledge and not simply utilitarian objects became increasingly important to the middle classes of the rising consumer culture.

Bourdieu retains the categories of upper, middle and working classes as a general framework but this division is located on a continuum of power via his metaphor of the social space. That is, while the relations of production do not simply go away in advanced capitalist societies, individuals (and groups) are also differentiated in terms of their relative levels of economic and cultural capital. Agents with similar social power, and thus similarly located in terms of the traditional classes, are located in the same

region of the social space and possess similar levels of capital. Classes thus run from those amply endowed with both economic and cultural capital to those relatively deprived in both. Bourdieu's approach not only accounts for the 'blurring' of traditional class divisions that has occurred in advanced capitalist societies but also differentiates between different class fractions. For example (from Bourdieu's empirical work in France), some members of the dominant class (such as the owners of large firms) are able to reproduce their power and privilege largely through economic means alone, a capacity which Bourdieu describes as "one of the rarest privileges" (Bourdieu: 1984, 20) since this is accomplished without any regulation or mediation, and thus they have less need to pursue cultural capital. In contrast to this are members of the same dominant class but with less purely economic power, whose reproduction relies more on relatively high levels of cultural capital, usually achieved through the educational system and the home environment. As Miller (1987) points out, the relationship between the two basic forms of capital within any given class is an uneasy one. Those fractions of the bourgeoisie high in cultural capital (through inherited wealth, tradition, family name, and so on) may show disdain for mere material wealth, regarding its obvious display as pure vulgarity while at the same time, "the holders of money

capital regard the pretensions and esoteric forms of high cultural capital as parasitic and irrelevant" (p. 152) (5). The former group (high in cultural capital) is designated by Bourdieu as the dominated fraction of the dominant class. Both between and within the traditional classes is a struggle not only over control of the means of production but of meaning itself:

Society, then, is not to be understood in terms of a simple hierarchy, but as a continual struggle over the hierarchy of hierarchies; that is, whether, in this case, that of wealth should prevail over that of knowledge...Each group attempts to project its interests, its 'capital', as the proper source for social reputation and status (Miller: 1987, 152).

From this basic definition of class as position within the social space, which is the objectivist moment of sociological description, Bourdieu moves to the subjectivist moment, that is, the various interpretations by actors of their position. Objective conditions, or structures, are not, for Bourdieu, determinant in any final sense. They do not lay down rules which agents are doomed to obey, like puppets, but rather they imply attitudes and approaches or tendencies toward different kinds of action, or to use another metaphor, structures are like well-worn paths, ruts in a road: the tendency is to follow their direction but they are not imperative. Indeed, Bourdieu's work is rife with references to the statistical probability, or

likelihood, of various courses of action stemming from the position of an actor within the social space. Structures produce attitudes, strategies, or dispositions to which Bourdieu refers collectively as a logic of practice, or *habitus*. The *habitus* is formed initially by an actor's original position in the social space and thus early childhood experience (in the family, school, and other institutions) is especially significant. Most importantly for Bourdieu's analysis of class, the *habitus* is not merely an individual phenomenon but extends over other social groups in such a way that, as Garnham and Williams point out, "individual practice as regulated by the logic of practice is always a structural variant of group and especially class practice" (Garnham and Williams: 1980: 213). In addition, Bourdieu does not reduce *habitus* to any one determinant but uses it to encompass the totality of an actor's material reality and therefore any social difference that is a mode of domination (such as gender, race, age) contributes to the formation of the *habitus*. The relations of production form only part of a constellation of social differences with each component in a state of mutual influence and which, as a totality, constitute an expanded and overdetermined definition of social class. Thus, for example, one's position in the relations of production is modified by and modifies the social meaning of gender.

Bourdieu's approach to social class, in the context of the metaphor of social space, is also not merely the objective conditions of social location but the world view generated by it:

On the basis of knowledge of the space of positions, one can separate out *classes*, in the logical sense of the word, i.e., sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances (Bourdieu: 1985, 725).

Perhaps the most succinct description of the habitus in the context of social struggle is a phrase that Bourdieu borrows from Goffman: a sense of one's place. That is, the logic of practice that is the habitus informs actors of their position in the social hierarchy. The world appears different to actors in different regions of the social space and the habitus is the strategy or principle by which that view is organized and maintained. As important as a sense of one's place is the sense of another's place: knowing not only your position in the social hierarchy but being aware of both the similarity to that of other actors in close proximity as well the important differences with those whose social location is much different. The habitus, more than anything else, is the internalization of difference, the relative made absolute.

Social Mobility

Social mobility is a complex phenomenon and its *primum mobile* is certainly this logic of difference. As actors seek to maintain or improve their position in the social space, it is this sense of place, of difference, that motivates as well as directs the various strategies through which they are able to rise in the hierarchy, to aspire to the positions of others. In this context, the trajectory of an actor through the social space is as important to the habitus as the overall level of capital. Trajectory is the third dimension of the social space as defined by Bourdieu: the change over time of the volume and composition of capital which is crucial to class practice. Actors do not move at random through the social space; the objective conditions under which the habitus is originally formed is important not only in terms of the starting levels of capital but also in the way that these conditions are internalized in the habitus and continue to influence the acquisition of further capital, both delimiting and directing social trajectory. Mobility is thus highly dependant on both original social location and the habitus that is the result of this. As Bourdieu explains, "position and individual trajectory are not statistically independent; all positions of arrival are not equally probable for all

starting points" (Bourdieu: 1984: 110). Trajectory is thus very important in explaining the practices of groups of agents occupying roughly the same position in the social space and it accounts for the often contradictory practices of members of the same social group or class. The more diverse the trajectories for agents of a group otherwise strongly related by volume and composition of capital, the less likelihood of their practices being cohesive. For example, a downwardly mobile member of the bourgeoisie who for various reasons has lost economic power may occupy the same position, with regard to volume and composition of capital, as a member of an upwardly mobile faction of the middle class; but it is unlikely that they will have the same worldview or engage in the same practices for the same reasons. As a corollary, the same practice can have entirely different meaning for members of different classes. As an example, Bourdieu cites sports:

It can easily be shown that the different classes do not agree on the profits expected from sport, be they specific physical profits, such as the effects on the external body, like slimness, elegance or visible muscles, and on the internal body, like health or relaxation; or extrinsic profits, such as the social relationships a sport may facilitate, or possible economic and social advantages. And, though there are cases in which the dominant function of the practice is reasonably clearly designated, one is practically never entitled to assume that the different classes might expect the same thing from the same practice (Bourdieu: 1984, 211).

Taste

In modern culture, consumption has played an increasingly important role in symbolic struggle and although Bourdieu's work is quite broad (from anthropological field studies to the sociology of education), it is in the area of consumption that his work is best known. Bourdieu attempts to theorize the relationship between social position and patterns of consumption and by examining the role of taste in the understanding of high culture, debunks the notion that taste is a transcendent ability to distinguish. Very briefly, he argues that the 'aesthetic gaze' required in the apprehension of high art is a product of a bourgeois culture since it "implies a break with the ordinary attitude toward the world" (Bourdieu: 1984, 4). The cultural practices that have come to be known as high art constitute an aesthetic realm in which there is a deliberate distantiation from the immediacies of daily life: "The pure aesthetic is rooted in an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world" (ibid, 5). In contrast to this, Bourdieu posits a 'popular aesthetic' which is an affirmation of the continuity between cultural practices and daily life. Bourdieu builds an elaborate hierarchical model (based on his research in French society) of the relative status of various cultural practices and tastes.

While this is probably Bourdieu's most well known analysis of the relationship between 'high' and 'low' culture, it is also the most frequently misunderstood, giving rise to accusations of essentialism. It is crucial to recognize, however, that Bourdieu is simply providing real examples from an actual context and not positing an essential relationship between social class and specific choices in the cultural field. What is important in his analysis is the emphasis placed on the relationship between habitus (dispositions, attitudes) and the cultural world. The difference between high and low culture is not simply an inherent difference between various cultural goods or practices; it is based on the difference in power between social groups and their relative ability to consecrate, to "confer on the objects, persons, and situations [they touch], a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation" (Bourdieu: 1984, 6). The struggle is not over the absolute meaning of various practices or their ostensibly inherent qualities, but over the ability of various groups to impose meaning that serves to differentiate, to make the relative appear absolute.

Bourdieu uses this particular example of the understanding of high art as simply an instance of the symbolic struggle

in the field of consumption in general. All fields of struggle, including the cultural, are structured by the logic of difference that is the habitus. The various practices of different social groups are perceived as behaviour appropriate to the lifestyle associated with that group; and they are perceived as such not only by members of that group (i.e., the sense of their own place) but by all other groups with whom they compete both economically and symbolically (i.e., the sense of the other's place). While there are obviously goods and practices that are reserved for only the wealthy, the important difference between products over a vast range of types is not price (movies and records, for example, are priced within a relatively narrow range); and we select, from this enormous range of goods, those which are positioned homologously to our own position within the social space. We order and rank goods and practices hierarchically and the way in which we do this orders and ranks us. As Bourdieu puts it: "nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies" (Bourdieu: 1990, 132). Furthermore, it is this sense of the natural order of goods that is essential to the functioning of taste as a marker of social difference. It is not through any obvious or stated desire for status that taste achieves its apparent transcendent quality; instead (and this is where Bourdieu differs fundamentally from Veblen (1934) and

the notion of conspicuous consumption), it is through the refusal of any such desire. This is precisely why the practice of conspicuous consumption is regarded by those high in cultural capital as a lack of taste: the intent to acquire status is obvious and is therefore illegitimate; "distinction...excludes any desire for distinction" (ibid, 133).

Taste, then, is not a natural capability but a social practice directed by interest. It is the power to confer distinction and it can be, therefore, highly volatile and mobile. Consider the concept of 'hip' which is perhaps the best illustration of the relational aspect of taste. Hip is, in essence, an empty category: there is no essential cultural practice that can confer hipness on its practitioners. Rather, hip is a type of disposition through which individuals high in certain kinds of cultural capital differentiate themselves from others at the same or even higher economic level. But it is also a particular form of this disposition which differentiates through the discovery of the exotic, through the legitimation of the illegitimate, and therefore its power is not in knowledge *per se* but in the ability to confer on the otherwise forbidden (6) the status of rarity and desirability (7). Most importantly, hip is a category that is always in motion: by increasing the

desirability of a practice, there is the risk that it will be popularized and therefore devalued. As Andrew Ross puts it, "Hip is the first on the block to know what's going on, but it wouldn't be caught dead at the block party" (Ross: 1989, 101). Thus, while taste is the manifestation of a logic of difference, it is never static (hip being an extreme case) but rather is a process whereby difference is continually maintained.

The Formation of Middlebrow Taste

The traditional division of cultural practices into high and low is of course quite archaic in a society of mass production and consumption. As I have pointed out, while there may be some cultural or leisure pursuits that are out of the reach of the vast majority of individuals, mass production has created a wide range of cultural goods and practices that are affordable for most members of the large middle class. For the most part, cultural goods in a consumer society are not strongly differentiated from each other in terms of price. Indeed, a traditionally 'low brow' cultural pursuit such as certain kinds of sports, can prove to be more expensive than visits to a current avant-garde exhibit at a museum or gallery. It is in the field of mass culture, especially in relation to the middle class (since it forms the largest consumer group), where the logic of

difference and the pursuit of cultural capital is the most evident and it is through the middle class identification with practices high in cultural capital that the concept of middlebrow culture emerged. It is important to stress that cultural differences are not reducible to the traditional classes but rather, cultural struggle takes place between and within these groups. Social mobility is not only the vertical movement from one traditional class to another (e.g., from a working class position to that of a middle class professional) but when understood in terms of the metaphor of the social space, mobility becomes a change in the overall level of capital. Agents may enhance their position in the social space, and therefore their status and privilege, by accumulating capital in any of the social fields. Upward mobility is therefore not only an increase in economic capital. Social position can be enhanced by a change in cultural capital alone. Agents can attempt to move from one of the traditional classes to a higher one, but also from the dominated fraction of a given class to the dominant fraction through the acquisition of cultural capital in the form of education, social connections, cultural knowledge, and so on.

This horizontal movement is essential to an understanding of the rise in importance of leisure and cultural industries

for it was not only the discourse of consumption as a democratic right (as discussed in the previous chapter) that led to the dramatic increase in mass consumption. It was also necessary for the cultural industries to make various practices legitimate to the large middle class in order to promote mass consumption and thereby benefit from the economies of scale. This was accomplished not only through the emulation of the cultural practices of the bourgeoisie. The film industry is a particularly important case not only because of the particular strategies involved but because, as Izod (1988) and May (1980) point out, the film industry played an important role in advancing the ideology of mass consumption. The earliest audiences for the new medium of film were primarily working class immigrants and because of this, motion pictures were considered an undesirable and unsavory form of leisure by middle class Victorian society. Early film producers and exhibitors recognized the importance of making films legitimate to this very large and increasingly affluent American middle class and there were a number of ways in which this shift was accomplished such as lavish theatres in downtown middle class areas; plots that spoke to Victorian morality; self censorship; and the cultivation of a link to the 'legitimate' middle class theatre. The latter involved not only the reproduction of the narrative structures and subjects of middle class

theatre but also the importation (and eventual domestic manufacture) of prestigious feature films based on classic themes (8).

It is important to recognize that this strategy of constructing audiences through reference to 'legitimate' culture was not merely an appeal to upper class or bourgeois tastes but, much more importantly, it also spoke to the sensibilities of those fractions of the middle class already high in cultural capital as well as those fractions desirous of greater cultural capital (9). Given that it is within the middle classes that social trajectories are the most scattered and class practices therefore the most diverse, it was precisely this kind of strategy that was required in order build the large audiences necessary to drive mass production. It was essential to transcend not only the traditional class divisions but also to cut across differences in social position within classes. While middlebrow texts are highly polysemic as a result of the diverse social trajectories of the middle class, they are nonetheless unified in terms of the mode of their apprehension: the middlebrow represents a strategy in which the investment of limited economic capital (in the form of money and time) is optimized to give the highest possible return in terms of cultural capital (10). Various forms of

entertainment emerged in the 19th century in response to the middle classes who were increasingly able to indulge in leisure pursuits but also wished to distinguish themselves in terms of status. Middle class theatre and the emerging popular music industry, for example, offered cultural practices which did not require the lengthy investment of money and time (as did classical music, opera, bourgeois theatre, and so on) but which were clearly differentiated from working class practices (such as music hall and various ethnic and folk musics). The pursuit of these cultural practices offered a taste option that was not simply an emulation or reproduction of upper class practices but represented a compromise in terms of the conversion of newly acquired wealth into status and distinction. It was essential that the emerging mass culture industries both exploit and expand this developing middlebrow taste formation in order to establish their cultural legitimacy with the potentially huge middle class audience; and as I will argue in the next chapter, it was the inability of the traditional book publishing industry to do so that contributed to its lack of success in the early part of this century in expanding its market beyond a comparatively small fraction of the middle class.

Summary

With the overall rise in material wealth in American capitalism, class as a category of social consciousness became increasingly displaced by an ideology of stratification in which social class was seen as merely the relative distribution of goods and services and not as a set of opposed interests. An important aspect of this concept of stratification was the belief in a meritocracy in which social mobility was not only eminently possible but almost a moral duty. As production and consumption became increasingly interdependent in Fordist state-regulated capitalism, consumption began to play a more significant role in the definition and reproduction of social class.

In consumer culture, class can no longer be defined only in terms of the relationship to the means of production. As Bourdieu argues, a social class is a group of agents occupying a similar position in the social space, a position defined by relative amounts of economic and cultural capital. As consumerism grew in the early part of this century, the acquisition of the cultural knowledge associated with social status became as significant as the accumulation of material wealth in the process of social mobility. Taste, especially in relation to the consumption of cultural goods, became an increasingly important

signifier of cultural capital and it was in the large and growing middle class that the most important implications of social mobility and the pursuit of cultural capital were worked out. The emergence of a middlebrow culture was a compromise between the two forms of capital, an optimization: the greatest profit in terms of cultural capital for the minimum possible investment of economic capital, in terms of money and time. Since the largest potential audiences for cultural producers were in the middle class, the strategy of mobility represented by middlebrow culture was therefore extremely important for the creation of mass markets for cultural commodities.

III

Mass Production and the Publishing Industry

The contradictory and antagonistic attitudes in the [publishing] industry on the question of increased buying publics and mass production arise from few facts and many prejudices. There is the feeling that a "popular" book must necessarily be a poor book; that a "drugstore book" is degrading whereas a "bookstore book" is uplifting, even though it may be the same title...It is difficult to understand why it would be such a calamity to sell as many copies of a serious book on science as of a puzzle book, no matter where they may be sold (Cheney: 1960, 18).

In comparison to other cultural industries, book publishing was relatively underdeveloped in the early part of this century. In an era of rapidly growing consumption that saw the rise of the chain store in virtually every town of any size in the United States, the book industry remained a relatively small trade and in spite of the rapid growth of markets for other cultural commodities, it remained a somewhat conservative business. At the turn of the century, the field was still dominated by a small number of older, established firms, which Tebbel describes as: "an inbred, tightly held, dignified society" (Tebbel: 1978, 4). While this would change with the emergence of many new firms, especially those that aggressively pursued mass audiences, the most traditional publishers still considered themselves to be the gatekeepers of a high culture tradition and therefore regarded publishing to be above or at least

removed from the exigencies of mass markets. The most significant attempts at modern mass marketing, such as the Book of the Month Club, only underlined the growing tensions along the divide between high and low culture (Radway: 1988, 1990, 1992). While many books over the years had sold in large numbers, the industry did not, on a consistent basis, reach markets of the size achieved by other industries, including most of those involved in the production of popular culture such as film, music, magazine publishing, etc. (1). Nonetheless, there was a growing feeling within the book trade that much larger markets, beyond the occasional best-seller and limited distribution of the past, were not only possible but perhaps even necessary for the long term survival of the industry. There was sufficient concern over the lack of growth within the book industry that the National Association of Book Publishers, which had for a decade financed promotion of the book trade, commissioned in 1930 the banker and trade analyst O.H. Cheney to undertake an economic survey of the book industry (2). Although publishing had not been hit as hard by the Depression as other businesses, existing problems had been exacerbated nonetheless and thus the need for such an investigation into the economics of the industry was more pressing. There was concern, for example, that with the onset of the Depression and declining markets, the perennial

problem of overproduction would be an increasing source of trouble. In the introduction to his report, Cheney points out that the survey was not undertaken simply to examine the impact of the Depression on book publishing and that a return to economic growth and stability was not the solution to these problems:

The real difficulties of the industry were growing in magnitude and complexity long before 1929 - and they will not be solved no matter how often prosperity returns unless the industry makes it its business to solve them (Cheney: 1960, 2).

Cheney, as Tebbel (1978) points out, knew virtually nothing about the publishing industry and its cultural history. His credentials for such a commission were entirely in the business realm: he was a banker, recently retired from the Irving Trust Company and in addition had been involved with a number of federal investigations into wholesaling, distribution, and various trade practices and associations (p. 429). Cheney's main interest was to examine the industry as he would any other, entirely from the standpoint of economic efficiency, and to outline a course of action that would bring about long term growth and stability. In this sense, Cheney was somewhat at odds with the cultural traditions that the more conservative publishers felt they had to uphold. In many ways, the Cheney survey of 1931 is not unlike the writing of Filene and Wood (discussed in

chapter 1) in its modernist tone and thus constitutes an important backdrop against which to examine the problems of the publishing industry and its transformation. Many of the more important recommendations, which anticipated the economic strategies taken by Pocket Books before the end of the decade, were expressive of the shift in industry toward the cultivation of mass markets. Although Cheney's data is quite interesting at points, the emphasis on his report in this chapter (3) has more to with its role in the cultural discourse of this period than it does with pure economic analysis. The Cheney survey demonstrates to a great extent the friction between high and low culture; between the aesthetic and the economic; between the traditional practice of publishing, which was regarded as a craft as much as a business by its practitioners (Tebbel: 1978, 3), and the new mass marketers with their eye on the bottom line (4).

Organization of the Publishing Industry

The overlap and connections between the various branches of many industries is much more subtle and complex than the simple model of production, distribution and consumption. The varying degrees of vertical integration, the distribution of functions and responsibilities, the relative importance of one branch versus another, the connections and cooperation between various industries, and so on, are all

important factors to consider and this is no less true of the cultural industries in the 1930s, including book publishing. Nonetheless, it is still useful to examine publishing from the standpoint of this rather simple model in order to understand some of the basic problems that the industry faced.

The publishing branch, which dominated the industry as a whole, was also the most contradictory component since it did not manufacture books nor did it sell them to the public; that is, most publishers did not own manufacturing facilities and sold books mainly to distributors. Indeed, it was somewhat isolated from its markets, consisting largely of professionals (who represented the cultural authority of the firm through selection and cultivation of authors) and their white collar employees. Cheney likened the publisher to an assembly producer, such as a food wholesaler who simply purchased canned goods and sold them under a private label. Although such a comparison must have raised the hackles of the more traditional elements within the trade, it was nonetheless appropriate since publishers took an active role in neither the manufacture nor sale of the book but instead organized and directed its 'assembly': a publisher secured the intellectual property by contracting authors to produce the work or by other arrangements such as

purchasing reprint rights or publishing new versions of material in the public domain. The publisher then arranged for the manufacture of the book, printing, binding, etc., and so on, which was the major cost of book production. Publishers were also responsible for maintaining a 'list' which was simply the range of titles that the firm made available at any one time. The size and the consistency of the list varied considerably with each firm. Some publishers kept quite an extensive list of several hundred titles while others might have only a small number of books in print at any time. Some lists had titles added and dropped frequently, others remaining more stable for longer periods. Whatever the case, the list represented the product available from the publisher at any given time and therefore was an important aspect of a firm's marketing strategy. The publisher also promoted the book through various kinds of advertising although this was quite limited in the 1930s, unlike the very large campaigns that might accompany a current mass market paperback.

Publishers either distributed to the bookstores themselves or, since not all publishers maintained their own distribution systems, at least placed the book in some form of distribution network. Cheney observed that about 1/3 of all sales in the industry were directly to general

bookstores but an equal number went to wholesalers or jobbers who bought books from the publisher and then dealt directly with bookstores. Slightly less volume, about 29% of the total, was to department stores which had become increasingly important (p.263-264). Publishers could also sell directly through the mail or to mail order houses, such as the book clubs, but this represented only a small percentage of total sales and publishers were very much dependent on either sales to bookstores or the wholesaler. The final point in this process was of course the retail book outlet, the most important of which were the traditional bookstores but which also included department stores, drug stores, gift shops, and so on. There was considerable discussion in the book trade concerning the possibilities of chain book stores but these were not common until much later: 'Only the Womrath stores, which numbered 30 by 1921, were making any real progress in that direction' (Tebbel: 1978, 313).

In spite of the overall state of underdevelopment in the industry, there were nonetheless many books that did achieve very high sales. Mott (1947) attempts to provide a list of bestsellers in the United States from the late 17th century to the 1940s, defining a best-seller as a book that has had sales equal to one percent of the population of the

continental United States in the decade in which it was published. While the term 'best-seller' has always been somewhat problematic, especially in earlier years when the collection of statistics of this type was much less organized and systematic, Mott's list is nonetheless quite useful and enlightening. In the first three decades of this century, during which there was a dramatic rise in the availability of manufactured goods, he lists only 42 books which sold in the required numbers and of these, only 8 were books published in the 1920s by which time the necessary figure, for Mott's purposes, was one million copies (5). Conspicuous by their absence from Mott's list are a number of well known series such as the juvenile books published by Street and Smith (such as the 'Hardy Boys' or 'Nancy Drew' series) and written by anonymous writers on contract, but as Mott points out, these series tended to sell consistently over long periods of time without specific titles actually selling in numbers sufficient for them to be considered as bestsellers according to his criteria. This was also true of writers like Zane Grey whose western stories were very well known to both the conservative book buying public and the pulp magazine market (discussed later). In addition to millions of copies of numerous short stories in pulp magazines, Grey sold probably more than 15 million copies of a total of 54 novels but only two titles (*The Spirit of the*

Border and The Riders of the Purple Sage) qualified as bestsellers according to Mott. In spite of the success of specific authors, titles, or series, it was not until the rise of the paperback publishers that the book industry was able to reach mass audiences on a consistent basis.

Structural Problems Within the Publishing Industry

The Cheney survey was completed in 1931 and was quite broad in its examination of virtually all aspects of the overall organization of the industry. Its recommendations were quite extensive but it is possible nonetheless to distill from the analysis a few fundamental problems that were similar to those that had been dealt with by other cultural industries:

- 1) the lack of an effective distribution network;
- 2) problems in the overall organization of the various branches (publishing, manufacturing, distribution, retail), including the relationships between them
- 3) difficulties in the development of consumption, the 'making' of readers and book buyers.

Because of the subtle and often complex relationships between the branches, these problems are themselves also

quite complex and very much interdependent, and Cheney did not see any possibility for change within the book industry unless these were dealt with systematically and as a whole. The survey recommended an incremental strategy and did not anticipate the dramatic growth in audience that would occur with the change in commodity form to the mass market paperback. Indeed, Cheney's expectations were quite modest concerning the immediate future of the book industry:

Buying publics to permit of mass production in the sense of million or even hundred thousand sales of every book are not involved in the present discussion. The essential question is, Are there any sound, economic methods for transforming the 1000 and 1500 sale into the 4000 and 5000 sale - and how can we increase the percentage of titles reaching the 10,000 and 25,000 sales? If this question can be answered, then the problem of 100,000 sales on more titles will also be answered. The first question is more difficult and less spectacular and involves more hard work for the industry, but it is a more immediately vital question (Cheney: 1960, 19).

Problems in Distribution and Retail

By the early 1930s, the relatively small publishing industry of the 19th century had already undergone considerable change. Nonetheless, as pointed out earlier, it was still largely a very conservative trade with deep cultural and historical roots and it was centred around a small number of established firms located mainly in the northeastern United States, especially New York. As Tebbel (1978) points out, in 1939, the year that Pocket Books began, about 40% of all of

the publishing firms in the United States were located in one of three northeastern states (New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania) and of this number, 76% were in New York. There was a smaller concentration in the Midwest (especially Illinois) where about 17% of the total publishing houses were located. Not only was there a large number of firms in New York, these were also the most productive: in 1935, they were responsible for about 95% of the total number of titles. This concentration of large publishing firms in the northeast led to an equal concentration of manufacturing facilities in the same area.

This pattern of publishing and manufacture need not have been a problem (6) but there was a similar pattern in distribution. Outside of the northeast and the Chicago area, distribution, in terms of wholesaling, was entirely inadequate and throughout the Cheney survey, the distribution of commodities and its relationship to the expansion of readership were recognized as important factors in the growth of the book industry:

At this point - usually the binder's warehouse - the publisher has books; at that point is the book buyer. Between these two points is the tragedy of the book industry (Cheney: 1960, 224).

Since the retail sector was dependent on distribution, it was also seriously underdeveloped and even as late as the 1930s, there were no more than 2,000 retail book outlets in the United States (Tebbel: 1978, 313), quite an astonishingly low number by present standards, and of these book outlets, only a fraction would have been considered legitimate bookstores by the most conservative firms. The others ranged from the book sections of department stores, children's stores, and so on, to the table of cheap reprints in the local drugstore. For the purposes of the economic survey, Cheney used the definitions employed by the National Association of Book Publishers (NABP) in their own research in 1930 and divides book outlets into an 'A' list of the leading stores and a 'B' list of much smaller outlets. Although the NABP identified over 4000 outlets for books, the 'A' list totalled only 1557 and Cheney argued that less than 500 of these were considered 'best' stores, or worthwhile accounts, from the viewpoint of the sales force that called on them. The 'B' list totalled almost 2500 outlets but were of little significance to the book industry in terms of overall sales and included variety stores, gift shops, drugstores, and so on. Cheney was also concerned with the degree to which outlets actually exposed the community to books and reading as a leisure practice and argued that

this was an important consideration if the book trade were to expand:

The "A" and "B" lists combined number 4053 outlets which...goes far down toward the point at which an outlet should not be considered an outlet - and according to some views, perhaps, these lists go too far beyond that point. Balancing definitions, it might reasonably be said that a community without one of these stores is not getting "bookstore service" - and that an outlet not on these lists is not giving the book industry "real distribution" (Cheney: 1960, 234).

The serious lack of bookstores was certainly part of the reason for the strategy of mail order publishers, especially the book clubs such as the Book of the Month Club or the Literary Guild both of which began in the 1920s. These clubs were much the same as they are today, offering books at lower prices to members who agree to buy (or at least consider) a specified number of books in a given time period. They were quite successful in attracting members and many publishers were quite concerned, considering them to be a threat to the publishing tradition. Some elements of the book trade went so far as to embrace this approach as a solution to the serious problem of distribution and speculated that such practices would replace entirely the traditional methods of selling which were seen as increasingly less effective in the growing competitiveness of the new era of mass production:

I have come to feel that publishers as a whole have about decided that bookselling has reached, or at least is fast approaching a point where bookstores can just about be dispensed with. I am growing convinced that many publishers feel that the real future of bookselling lies in the department store outlets, the book clubs and their own retail mail order departments (Rosengren: 1937, 815).

The geographical distribution of bookstores followed the same pattern as the other branches of the industry and as with publishing, manufacture, and distribution, there was an overwhelming concentration in the northeast. As Cheney pointed out, there were huge areas of the United States with virtually no access to bookstores: approximately 2/3 of the counties in the United States and nearly one half of the urban places between 5000 and 100,000 had no book outlet whatsoever. For Cheney, this indicated audience potential while for publishers who may have considered themselves the gatekeepers of culture, this was not necessarily an issue of marketing but one of education and standards. Nonetheless, the paucity of outlets and their limited geographical distribution stood in marked contrast to the other cultural industries such as film which during the same period had over 20,000 theatres spread throughout United States (Film Daily: 1965, 101). Walters (1985) estimates that as late as 1939, about 40% of all American books were sold in the northeastern United States. Nonetheless, simply increasing the number of bookstores was not the answer since this would

do nothing to solve the primary problem of distribution to existing outlets.

Problems in Overall Organization

In terms of the relationship between the various branches of the industry, there were a number of serious problems that hindered the expansion of the industry beyond its current limits. Most importantly, because of the lack of organization in and between the branches, there was very little self-knowledge concerning the nature of its markets. Unlike most modern industries, the book trade did not systematically collect or analyze information about sales, demand, markets, and so on. Consequently, it was unable either to estimate or react to the sales of a given title. Indeed, the advance sales of a book were all too frequently the bulk of sales since a publisher without adequate market knowledge would be unable to make sensible sales estimates and therefore, in order to reduce risk, would order from the manufacturer only a limited stock of a title thus gaining no benefit from the potential economy of scale of large print runs. There was little relationship between supply and demand: a 'good stock' in a bookstore from the point of view of a consumer, that is, a wide range of titles in sufficient quantity, would be "a 'bad stock' from the distributor's view, because it means cost of space, carrying costs, slow

turnover and high hazards" (Cheney: 1960, 228). The survey also criticized the use of the term 'best-seller' arguing that it was applied haphazardly within the industry and had no basis in absolute sales statistics. It could refer to a book with high sales as well as a book that simply sold well for a given firm. In general, Cheney called for a systematic collection and analysis of data relating to all aspects of publishing, a recommendation that was hardly startling in an era of rapidly growing mass production and consumption but one that was essential for any business that wished to participate:

The evidence of this Survey is that the success or failure of a book is not an unanalyzable phenomenon - that the industry does very definite things which kill books and, in the wasteful and expensive process of promotion and distribution, it does certain things - generally "accidentally" - which make best-sellers. The evidence of this survey is that the industry need not be at the mercy of unpredictable and uncontrollable whims of an unknown consumer (Cheney: 1960, 84).

The survey also found a lack of cooperation and coordination between the branches that resulted in an unequal distribution of burdens and hazards. There was little consistency in these relationships across the industry: in some cases, publishers took no responsibility for books once they were delivered to the bookseller, simply dumping both product and financial responsibility onto the retail branch; elsewhere, a publisher might pass the same responsibility to

the manufacturer who also had to store overstock in its warehouse; in other cases, wholesalers might not assume any economic burden and the publisher, with no control over distribution, would have to carry the entire debt load. While the interchange between branches in any industry is always unbalanced to some degree, Cheney argued that this was particularly serious in the book trade resulting in "total confusion in the economic relations between branches, and ignorance of the industry's true profits and losses" (Cheney: 1960, 330). Among the recommendations of the survey was a call for joint operations between the branches as well as between various firms, especially in distribution where the survey thought the entire industry could benefit from common distribution and warehousing facilities. At the same time, Cheney was unconvinced that the publishing industry would benefit, as the film industry had, from vertical mergers. For example, he argued that publishers who owned their own printing facilities "might find themselves having to publish books in order to feed the presses or else support the plant in idleness" (Cheney: 1960, 166). This situation would be too great an economic burden for most publishers and again, Cheney pointed to the need for increased cooperation between branches in order to reach the kinds of markets that would support expansion. Whether or not Cheney was correct in this assessment is not as

important as the lack of confidence it expresses in the ability of the industry to cooperate effectively.

This general lack of cooperation combined with the economic threat of the Depression to produce a high level of destructive competition within the industry, the most common manifestations of this being price reduction, price cutting, and remaindering. Tebbel (1978) argues that in spite of continued sales even in the face of the Depression, there was a growing recognition in the industry that publishing was less successful than other media in reaching mass markets (one of the reasons for the Cheney survey). In order to increase their market share, or at least, to hang on to what they had, a few publishers announced reductions in the price ranging from modest to quite substantial: Dutton dropped \$2.50 books to \$2.35, \$3.00 books to \$2.85, and so on while the maverick firm of Simon and Schuster which was later part of the force behind Pocket Books, announced that its entire line of fall fiction in 1930 would be sold at \$1.00 instead of the expected \$2.00 to \$2.50. A number of other publishers also announced reductions to as low as a dollar and although low prices had been common among reprint publishers (firms who simply produced already popular books in more cheaply bound, relatively inexpensive editions), the trend toward price reduction in new books that continued

throughout the decade was quite controversial within the conservative book trade (Tebbel: 1978). Some argued that this practice would not attract the kind of reader who was not already a book buyer and obtained reading material through other sources:

it has to be remembered that the publisher in setting his retail price knows he is quoting the price to a public that can read the book at a public library for nothing or borrow it at the corner for a quarter, a fact which could hardly help making the publisher cautious about making any needless price advances. There are easy headlines in the call for lower book prices and certain headaches in the experiments (Frederic G. Melcher in *Publishers' Weekly*: May 27, 1939, editorial page).

The price debate certainly formed an important part of the strategy of the paperback publishers but as I will argue in the next chapter, the actual price of the book was not as significant to the success of the new commodity as was the ways in which it spoke to the emerging discourse of consumerism. The Cheney survey noted the trend toward price reduction but in light of its criticism of the general state of the industry, was quite skeptical that this would be of any real benefit. It pointed out that simply lowering the price of book would not necessarily result in increased sales since the industry was not sufficiently organized to respond:

These prices represent no change in the basic economics of the industry - they represent no benefits of "mass production," no greater efficiency, no reduction in hazards and no greater ability to make a reasonable net profit out of a lower gross margin.

Only if the hazards were materially reduced and the distribution system were so organized as to "deliver" adequately increased sales, could there be a slash in book prices - the prices would be the result of a more efficient industry and better sales - not the reverse (Cheney: 1960, 190).

One of the results of this trend was the continual search for ways to lower the relatively high cost of manufacture, which led to heightened interest in paperbound books. This will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter but in addition to the trend in price reduction, and with much more serious consequences, was the practice of price cutting (simply the lowering of the initial price of a product by a retailer in order to compete with other retailers). The tradition of price cutting in the book industry went back at least as far as the late 19th century when Macy's engaged in a price war with other department stores and book outlets by drastically lowering prices of books in special sales, sometimes actually losing money in order to draw customers into the store; but as the Depression deepened in the early 1930s, price maintenance in all industries became a political issue which many of the NRA codes of the New Deal administration attempted to address. In 1934, an NRA code dealing with the book industry declared that a publisher's announced price could not be cut within the first six months

after publication date. While the industry thought that this would lend some stability in a time of economic stress, Macy's department store in New York found a loophole and the intense price war, mainly with other New York department stores, began afresh. At one point, Macy's was selling the \$3 edition of *Gone With The Wind* for only 87 cents, which no doubt lost money for them but which probably attracted customers due to the extraordinary popularity of the book. The NRA codes were declared unconstitutional only a year after they were brought in, but in New York State, the major battlefield of the price wars, similar legislation was enacted (the Feld-Crawford Fair Trade Act of 1935). Booksellers pressured the publishers to abide by the new laws since they were seriously affected by the department store price wars but this act also was declared unconstitutional not long after, in 1936, and the debate over price cutting continued for much of the decade. This drastic lowering of price, mainly by department stores but also other outlets, had a number of negative effects, according to Cheney. They further strained the relationship between publisher and bookseller as well as undermining consumer confidence in the higher prices: "The ribbon telling the buyer that the dollar book 'was \$5' without explaining why at the same time is destructive of the buyer's idea of \$5 value in books" (Cheney: 1960, 103).

Cheney made the same argument against the practice of remaindering, of selling a publishers overstock at greatly reduced price, usually through special remainder stores and other small outlets; in the survey, remaindering was referred to as "excellent reverse promotion". (ibid, p. 102).

All of these steps - price reduction, price cutting, and remaindering - were symptomatic of a period defined by contradictory needs within the publishing industry. On the one hand, there was a general desire for greater stability, especially in terms of price and the relationship between bookseller and publisher. But at the same time, this was undermined by the equally strong drive to achieve larger sales and thereby benefit from the cost reductions of consistently larger print runs. None of these measures worked well in an industry that had not yet achieved the large sales of so many others and which was, to a very large extent, constrained by its own internal struggle over the apparent contradiction between culture and commerce.

Problems With Consumption

While the problems in distribution and overall organization of the industry were, of course, directly linked to the limits encountered in sales, there were further problems

within the industry that hindered the expansion of its consumer base. Publishing firms of the 1920s shared the perennial fear of declining literacy but this fear was (and frequently, still is) less of an observation based on a real problem than it was a reaction to the proliferation of non-print media and other forms of leisure. Publishers complained to Cheney that not only was the literacy rate in the United States falling (in comparison to a 'literate' Europe) but their readers were being lured away by the rise of other leisure pursuits. Whether or not this was the actual case is difficult to determine given the lack of data concerning this question but the evidence there is suggests that the reverse was the case. The first decades of this century saw the proliferation of print media on a mass basis. Although the number of newspapers had declined from their peak in 1909, their total circulation had increased dramatically as had that of general interest magazines which were well entrenched as a form of middle class entertainment by the teens and twenties (7) and libraries, both public and rental, were becoming more commonplace (8). The publishing industry was simply not organized in such a way that either the reading, never mind the purchase of books, was encouraged. Much of the Cheney survey was directed toward a market analysis of the continental United States, using a set of cultural and economic indicators (ranging from

population distribution, literate population, and so on to sales of luxuries). Cheney provides indices of actual and potential book markets by region and as might be expected, there were vast areas of the United States with a reasonably high potential market that had been grossly ignored by the publishing industry. But most importantly, whether or not the data (or the analysis given by Cheney) were accurate, it is significant that Cheney (and others) recognized the difference between readers and book buyers (i.e., between those who read newspapers, magazines and so on, or who patronized libraries, and those who actually bought books). For while factors such as literacy were clearly important to the book industry in terms of potential markets, it was equally clear that a large number of literate readers did not necessarily correspond to an equally high level of book buyers; and if any one single factor defined the underdevelopment of book publishing in the era of mass production, it was precisely the inability to transform potential into actual markets. In spite of the growth of other print media which also required a literate population, publishing was unable to convert readers into buyers. As with Schumpeter's famous observation that the manufacture of soap is insufficient unless people can be convinced to wash, so Cecil Palmer, a British publisher, pointed out in a statement that would not have been particularly perceptive

2

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had it been made in reference to any other industry already engaged in mass production, "Sooner or later, book propaganda must be directed towards a policy that will develop the possessive instinct for books" (Palmer in *Publishers' Weekly*: April 15, 1939, editorial page).

Cheney pointed out in his recommendations that the publishing industry was far too dependent on non-commercial institutions such as schools and libraries for the development of its markets and even these had only contributed to literacy, not consumption per se. As competition for the consumer's leisure grew, it would become necessary for the industry to take the initiative and actively pursue consumers since educational institutions and other forces had been insufficient in the past to bring publishing to the level of mass production. Without initiatives from the industry, these forces would simply continue to produce "magazine readers, public library readers, or just so many college graduates" (Cheney: 1960, 65); and even illiteracy was of less importance to the publishing industry than the "economic illiteracy of those in it" (ibid, p.167). The survey argued, in a style reminiscent of Filene in his praise of the machine age, that books and reading had to compete in the new consumer society like any other commodity or activity:

We have found no industry which is not affected by some sort of the new competition - even if it is limited to the competition for the consumer's dollar. From the moment we decide on prunes instead of grapefruit for breakfast to the moment we go to sleep in either a wooden bed or a steel bed, we engaged in the exciting, if unconscious activity of making or breaking industries (ibid, p.51).

It had been suggested within the book trade that a cooperative advertising campaign to promote books and reading in general might be effective. This approach had been used very successfully by a number of industries in the 1920s, such as various fruit growers, florists and so on (9). Cheney argued that in those industries where this had been successful, "the advertising has been incidental only to a highly and efficiently organized and controlled system of distribution" (Cheney: 1960, 67). In addition, there was a significant difference between advertising a generic product (books) and a specific brand (a specific publisher) and Cheney argued that the advertising of specific titles would be more profitable in the long run. The notion of a brand of books associated with specific approaches to culture and reading would, however, form an essential part of the strategy of the paperback publishers later in the decade.

Advertising, of course, was an indispensable tool in the 'new competition' but the publishing industry had not exploited this effectively as a means of promoting either reading in general or the consumption of books in particular. In addition, the industry was in a less advantageous position than other print media to benefit from advertising revenues since its principal source of income was the commodity itself, unlike newspapers and magazines which sold their readers for advertising. The promotion of books was very limited and consisted almost exclusively of either advertising and reviews in the book sections of newspapers or display material at the point of sale. The major exception to this was the use of books as a 'come-on' by department stores such as Macy's but in general, the publishing industry did not advertise as effectively as other industries. Most book advertising was found in magazines devoted to literature or the book sections of newspapers and these would have seemed rather exclusive for the most part, directed mainly at a 'bookish' readership, a highly literate section of the middle class, high in cultural capital, that was perceived as the principal market for the publishing trade. A typical book section would have included a list of current bestsellers, news about writers, forthcoming books, a critical review of a recently published book, and so on, not unlike the same section in a modern

newspaper. For Cheney, the problem with the promotion of books and reading in these columns was the inherent cultural conservatism and consequent appeal to a high culture ethos: "The whole principle of these sections, pages and columns seems to be to doom the book to a small circle of the elite" (Cheney: 1960, 49). There was a growing tension within the industry between 'high' and 'low' culture but this had as much to do with the perceived differences between 'old' and 'new' publishers with the former regarding the rise of mass consumption as an erosion of bourgeois culture and evidence of the serious erosion of 'good taste'. As Janice Radway suggests, the furious debates that surrounded the rise of the mail order book clubs only appeared to be about aesthetics; not far beneath the surface was a struggle over cultural authority. (Radway: 1988, 1990, and 1992).

While Cheney referred to this dichotomy as simply "mob appeal" versus "snob appeal" (Cheney: 1960, 83), it pointed to the deeper and central contradiction of the publishing industry during this period. On the one hand was the need for the industry to expand into mass markets in order to maintain its economic position and benefit from the economies of scale offered by mass production. On the other hand, there was a clear resistance to the cultivation of a mass audience that the gatekeepers of the publishing

tradition perceived as a serious threat to their cultural tradition, regarding publishing almost as a craft, and ideologically suppressing the economic necessities of their trade. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of the Cheney survey is the way in which it must have represented for many publishers a violation of their cultural authority in the ways in which it discussed art and commerce; John McRae of the publishing firm Dutton, for example, criticized the Cheney survey for judging the publishing industry by the same standards as a strictly commercial venture and thus ignoring the "spiritual influence in the book field" (quoted in Tebbel: 1978, 438); and although there was mixed reaction to the survey, statements such as the following were no doubt anathema to the more conservative elements of the trade and evidence to them of Cheney's obvious Philistine vulgarity:

"It's a matter of taste" seems to be the ultimate answer of most of those in the industry. As long as "taste" is deified so as to be sacred from pollution by analysis, so long will the book industry remain in the dark. The fact that one man's caviar may be another man's "tripe" is not a sufficient reason for conducting the industry on a gambling basis - even the caviar and tripe industries have learned facts about their markets on which to base their merchandising (Cheney: 1960, 74).

Unlike most cultural industries which had recognized the importance of transcending class boundaries in order to form

larger audiences, much of the book trade and its supporting literary critics resisted any impetus to move outside of a limited 'bookish' element relatively high in cultural capital, probably a fraction of the middle class or higher. The Cheney survey goes as far as including a section titled "Are Popular Books Bad?" (Cheney: 1960, 90) presumably to answer the genuine concerns of publishers that the popularity of a book would in some way undermine its cultural credibility; and as Q.D. Leavis remarked in a particularly vitriolic assault on popular fiction, "'Best seller' is an almost entirely derogatory epithet among the cultivated" (Leavis: 1932, 34). As with many popular entertainments earlier in the century, there was a clear division between what were considered legitimate cultural pursuits and those that were regarded as merely lower class entertainments. Movies, for example, were initially considered to be a working class form of leisure, often associated with various ethnic and immigrant groups, and therefore unworthy as a form of culture for the dominant white middle class who constituted the moral leadership of the period. As Larry May argues, only by transcending boundaries of class, ethnicity and gender, was the film industry transformed from "the once-crude peep show into a complex art form and a multi-million dollar business" (May: 1980, xii). It was a through a similar process that the

industry producing popular literature was able to move beyond the limited pulp fiction market and attract readers from the broad middle class.

Summary

Unlike other consumer industries, book publishing was still quite underdeveloped by the 1930s in terms of mass markets. While the Cheney survey of 1932 pointed out major structural problems in all aspects of the industry, it also underlined the fundamental friction between high and low culture as manifest in the book trade. Although there was the occasional title that sold in very large numbers, the main audience for books was probably the more literate section of the middle class, relatively high in cultural capital. Attempts to forge larger markets for books, such as the Book of the Month Club, met considerable resistance from within the trade and it was this cultural conservatism that inhibited the construction of mass markets for popular literature.

IV

**Pocket Books Incorporated and the Construction of the Market
for Popular Literature**

The public not only wants but begs you [the publishers] to supply informing and stimulating material that will sharpen the powers of observation, cultivate mental processes, develop intelligent conversation and discussion and help toward further reading and expanding mental horizons (Ferguson: 1937, 33)

In the past it has been maintained that Americans will not buy paperbound books the way cultured Europeans have been doing so for years. It has also been assumed that cheap books - for the 25-cent market - must be of a low common denominator-the sort that will compete with the 'pulp' and 'trash' market and magazines of vast circulation. I venture to question these traditional beliefs, and am prepared to make this conscientious and thoroughgoing experiment to prove my faith in the pent-up American demand for genuinely good and enduring books at irresistibly low prices, with almost literally universal distribution (Robert de Graaf, editor of Pocket Books Incorporated, in *Publishers' Weekly*: May 27, 1939, 1918)

Most histories of modern mass market literature usually date its beginning with the introduction of the now familiar small format, paperbound book by Pocket Books Incorporated in 1939 (1). By the early 1940s, there were at least four major firms (Pocket Books, Avon, Popular Library, and Dell) selling millions of these very colourfully packaged books in a wide range of outlets, from newsstands to bookstores, all over the United States and Canada. However, it should be emphasized that there was already a huge reading public in

North America for some time before this. In spite of the fears of book publishers of growing illiteracy, quite the reverse was happening, largely through increased access to education for a larger portion of the population. Newspapers had become a part of daily life and magazines had grown rapidly in circulation since the turn of the century. In fact, the dire prediction of publishers that readership was declining may have been, in part, a moral panic over the growing audience for mass market fiction.

Although there was indeed a 'paperback revolution' in the late 1930s, the new format did not merely satisfy some latent demand for popular literature or inexpensive books, as assumed by Bonn (1982) and Tebbel (1978, 1981). Davis (1984) also attributes the remarkable success of the first Pocket Books to untheorized consumer demand: "From day one of the experiment...Pocket Books practically sold themselves" (p. 41). As I have argued previously, this change in the nature of the market for popular literature was a part of a much deeper transitional moment in social relations in the United States: the establishment of consumer capitalism and the increasing importance of consumption in the nature of class. The audience for popular literature was transformed from a set of fragmented groups, ranging from the working class to a literate fraction of the

middle class, into a large middlebrow taste formation that served as the basis of the mass market fiction industry in the post-WWII years. The role of the paperback book in the construction of this market lay in the way it participated in the development of a middlebrow sensibility, located between the popular magazines of the day, especially the pulps, and the more traditional book format with its aura of knowledge and learning. In this way, the paperback format was one of the most important factors in the establishment of the reading of popular literature as a legitimate leisure practice and the creation of a discursive formation in which a broader range of consumers could participate. In this chapter, I want to examine in detail the construction of this discursive formation, using the example of Pocket Books Incorporated, the first successful mass market paperback firm, and through reference to the related discourses of consumption and taste, as outlined in the previous chapters.

Mass Market Literature and the Magazine Industry

The initial acceptance of the paperback book by a broad public was due in very large measure to its relationship to the image and role of the magazine within American culture (2). Aside from newspapers, the largest readership in the United States was undoubtedly reached by the magazine industry which served, on a regular and consistent basis, a

huge constituency. Peterson (1964), while pointing out that estimates of magazine readership are often "highly speculative", uses census data to claim that the total circulation of all magazines published in the United States was more than 175 million by the early 1930s (p. 59). The magazine industry was, however, quite different from book publishing in almost all respects, from production to distribution and retail. Furthermore, unlike current publishing conglomerates, there was very little overlap between books and magazines at the time. The magazine industry was also based on an entirely different principle: whereas the book trade depended on revenues from the sale of the commodity itself, a magazine was sold for less than its cost of production. As with newspapers, profits came from the sale of advertising and not from the difference between cost (of manufacture and distribution) and sale price. Thus, while large production runs were important to overall cost, it was not as crucial as in the book trade. A magazine with a high circulation was simply more of an attraction to advertisers. Magazine publishers, it could be argued, sold readers to advertisers; the actual commodity of the magazine was merely the vehicle through which this exchange was achieved.

As might be expected, a large and efficient network of distribution was absolutely vital in an industry that had to refresh its product on a periodic basis, whether daily, weekly, or monthly, as well as deliver it more or less simultaneously to nationwide outlets. Until the late 19th century, most magazine publishers relied largely on subscription sales and were helped by cheaper postal rates that had been established by Congress in 1879 in order to promote the dissemination of knowledge and information. But for a number of reasons, there was a shift toward newsstand sales in the first decades of this century: the dramatic increase in urbanization and concentration of population made single copy sales more profitable, in spite of the special postal rates; and Peterson (1964) argues that the increased use of advertising further encouraged magazine publishers to focus on newsstand sales since this was considered by advertisers to be a more reliable measure of consumer intent:

Many advertisers were more impressed by newsstand sales, which they regarded as an indication that the reader bought the magazine because he really wanted it, not because he had been inveigled by high-pressure sales talks, premium offers, or bargain rates (p. 99).

In any case, by the mid 1920s single copy sales constituted roughly one third of all magazine sales and by the end of

WWII, more than 60% of magazines were sold in retail outlets rather than by subscription (Peterson: 1964, 98)

The largest distribution company for magazines was undoubtedly the American News Corporation (ANC), founded in 1864, which had a virtual monopoly over the market by the turn of the century. Through its subsidiary, the Union News Company, it also had concessions in hotels, train and bus terminals, office buildings, and so on. A number of other prominent distribution networks grew up in opposition to the ANC, some of which were established by magazine publishers who wanted to circumvent the ANC and control their own cost of distribution (3). But the ANC remained by far the dominant firm in the field of distribution. Magazine circulation grew rapidly from the turn of the century and by 1915, there were more than 50,000 retail outlets in the United States that were selling magazines as part of their overall stock. When grocery stores, drugstores, and department stores were added to this in the 1930s, the total increased to more than 80,000 (Peterson: 1964).

Of the various types of magazines published, the most important, in connection with popular fiction and the emergence of the paperback book, were the pulps. The pulps were comic book size magazines, priced at 10 cents, and

printed on the cheapest paper available since they were not intended to have any kind of permanence (hence the term 'pulp' in contrast to the more legitimate general circulation magazines, known as 'slicks' because of the glossier finish possible on higher grade paper). They always had a very brightly illustrated cover, often quite sensational and exploitative, but had only a few line drawing illustrations inside to accompany the text. Pulp publishers usually had several lines, each devoted to a specific genre, such as adventure, mystery, romance, science fiction, and so on, and which were sold monthly (some weekly) on newsstands throughout North America. There were literally hundreds of different pulp titles published every week and Peterson (1964) estimates the total readership of all pulps to have been about 10 million. Many of the magazines that were to be found on the newsstands used a great deal of fiction, including serialized novels, as part of their content but the pulps used fiction exclusively (4). In spite of very wide circulation, the pulps were generally considered to be a working class and therefore lower class entertainment because of their emphasis on the emotional, sensational, and even lurid (5). Although it would be difficult now to demonstrate empirically that pulps were read mainly by the working class, it was clear that they were regarded as a trivial and debased form of leisure by

both the traditional publishing industry and that fraction of the middle class that consumed hardcover fiction (6). As a result of this perception, publishers of pulps were unable to attract the very lucrative advertising revenues which maintained the more general interest magazines. The pulps, in general, used very little advertising and therefore the profit margin on the actual sale of the product was much more crucial.

Although it was quite easy to break into the pulp industry, the very tight profit margins made survival much more difficult and magazines came and went quickly (7). The rate of experimentation was also quite high and if response on any new title was not sufficient, it would never make it to the second issue. The profit on any one pulp could be extremely low and publishers hedged their bets by producing several titles monthly, balancing profits on one against losses on the other. Street and Smith, one of the earliest of the pulp publishers and one of the largest, put out 17 titles in 1937 with a monthly distribution of probably more than 1 million (*Writers' Digest*: 1936).

Art and Culture for the Masses

Given the very large readership for magazines, many of which included fiction, and in particular the pulps, it is clear

that the so-called paperback revolution did more than simply make cheap literature more easily available to the reading public. To be sure, both the very low price and wide distribution were undeniably important (especially the latter, as Cheney recognized) and as I pointed out in the last chapter, many publishers had already made great efforts to lower their price in order to attract a larger market. There was also that part of the publishing trade based on securing the reprint rights to previously successful books and some of these editions were sold as low as 39 cents. But the pulps, of course, were only 10 or 15 cents and in terms of distribution, were already available in a huge number of outlets across North America. The success of Pocket Books Incorporated and the mass market paperback in general was thus not simply because of price and distribution but, as I will demonstrate, in the ways that this commodity was able to transcend previous barriers of taste.

There were a number of attempts in the 1920s and 30s at producing inexpensive paperbound editions and these are often cited as important precedents for Pocket Books, the argument being that these were unsuccessful only because they lacked the necessary distribution. But regarding these simply as earlier, failed examples of mass market paperbound books misses the point. Most of these endeavours, such as

Boni's Paper Books, Modern Age Books, Little Blue Books, have to be read in the context of the discourse of industrial democracy and the promise of access to culture through mass production. Each of these firms can be seen as an attempt not merely to produce cheap reading material but to bring culture to the masses, for their spiritual, moral, and intellectual benefit. Each published a range of titles that could only be regarded as traditionally 'highbrow' (accepted classics of literature, history, social theory, and so on) and were therefore appealing inadvertently to the same literate fraction of the middle class that was already reached by the mainstream hardcover publishers. In this way, these firms were actually much closer to the European model of Tauchnitz and Reclam, companies which had since the middle of the 19th century published inexpensive paperbound editions of British and American authors for consumption by non-English speaking countries only (8). Although these are also often mentioned as precursors to the mass market paperback, it is obvious that books in English in a European market would by necessity be directed at a highly literate and therefore limited audience. The failure of Modern Age and others was, therefore, not so much in distribution as it was in their inability to recognize the contradiction between their very limited conception of culture and the quite different disposition of their intended audience.

Because these companies are so frequently mentioned in the literature on this period of popular literature, it is worthwhile taking a brief look at them, but from a somewhat different standpoint. Rather than examining their similarities to the later mass market paperback, it is important to emphasize their very fundamental differences.

Paper Books, produced by Charles and Albert Boni from 1929 to 1931, were very much part of the desire to bring high culture to the American public. Clearly directed at a highbrow market and quite unlike pulp magazines, they were printed on high quality paper with stitched bindings and featured cover and interior drawings (from woodcuts) by the well known illustrator, Rockwell Kent. The titles selected were also in the same taste bracket, such as Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* or *Frederick the Great* by Margaret Goldsmith and the obvious intent, as proclaimed in the initial advertising, was to produce inexpensive yet respectable editions of quality literature. Paper Books was started originally as a book club, selling a dozen titles a year through the mail to clients who subscribed to the series. It is not surprising that the Bonis had actually been at one time a partner of Harry Scherman, the founder of the Book of the Month Club. With Scherman, the Bonis had published in 1915 a set of pocket sized reprints of classics

known as The Little Leather Library and although these were not as inexpensive as Paper Books, the goal was very much the same: to supply legitimate culture to a wider audience. Like the Book of the Month Club, Paper Books further sought to establish legitimacy by enlisting (and publicizing) the advice of cultural experts in making their title selection. Literary luminaries such Louis Untermeyer, Padraic Colum, and Lincoln Colcord gave their names to the project and as with the other book clubs that employed the same strategy, Paper Books was met with considerable disdain by the publishing establishment. As Radway (1990) argues in connection with the book clubs, the established publishers criticized this practice as a form of massification or standardization, protesting that this was a threat to democratic freedom of choice: true individuals did not have their decisions made for them, especially those concerning matters of taste and culture. But as Radway points out, this response was actually prompted by the threat to their traditional cultural authority. Given the discussion in the last chapter concerning the relationship between taste, class, and power, the objections of these publishers, whose position in the cultural elite of American society was dependent upon their role in the maintenance of taste difference, is entirely understandable. The popularity of the Book of the Month Club and Paper Books was seen as an

assault on the bulwarks of culture and tradition (the literary establishment) by the crude profiteers of mass society (the upstart book clubs). Nonetheless, in spite of the relatively low price (42 cents on subscription, 50 cents in bookstores), Paper Books was unable to sell in sufficient numbers and disappeared in the early years of the Depression. Unlike the later Pocket Books, however, Paper Books very clearly appealed to precisely the same audience as many other publishers, i.e., the literate fraction of the middle class (and perhaps higher) and it is for this reason and not simply poor distribution that it was unable to achieve the large readership necessary to make it profitable.

Another firm often quoted as an example of the precursor to the mass market paperback is Little Blue Books, owned by Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius. This small company was quite different from Boni's Paper Books and was, more or less, a personal crusade to bring political and particularly socialist awareness to the masses. The books were also quite unlike Paper Books in format: they were very inexpensively bound with a stapled rather than stitched binding and a simple dark blue cover. They were priced very cheaply, from as low as 3 cents to 25 cents and were much smaller than the average book (only 3.5 by 5 inches). Haldeman-Julius

published a wide variety of titles, from the classics such as Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Strindberg, to more political tracts on socialism, sexuality, labour, psychoanalysis, and so on. Like Paper Books, the emphasis was on high culture but in addition, these inexpensive books were very much a product of the desire for education and self-improvement that was an essential component of the discourse of mass consumption. In the Little Blue Books of Haldeman-Julius was a clear attempt to participate in the establishment of an intellectual and cultural democracy through the use of mass production. While both Paper Books and Little Blue books (and of course, others) sought to bring culture to the American public, Little Blue Books was clearly closer to the grass roots than most and the obvious proletarian bent of these little tracts brought considerable wrath from a number of conservative elements, particularly the clergy. They were very popular books and as Tebbel (1978) points out:

By the time he died in 1951, Haldeman-Julius had sold more than 300 million of his Little Blue Books...at mostly a nickel a copy, and his full pages of advertising in newspapers across the country, listing thousands of titles in fine print with numbers to be circled in an accompanying coupon, were an American institution. Millions of Americans living in small towns and rural areas far from adequate libraries...were able to sample the world's masterpieces for the first time, while they were also learning about socialism, psychoanalysis, and sex, if they liked (p.205).

Modern Age Books was perhaps closer to the later Pocket Books than any of the other attempts to mass market paperbound editions. Modern Age, which began in 1937, had an ambitious publication agenda and produced books ranging from contemporary fiction, including mysteries and children's books, to classic literature and, like Little Blue Books, it also sought to inform the public on current social and political issues from a progressive standpoint. The books were divided into three series: Blue Seal Books, priced at 25 cents, were originals, and included current authors, juvenile literature, and books on topics of general interest, such as cooking; Gold Seal Books, priced at 35 cents or 50 cents, dealt with current social and political issues, and included titles such as *From the Spanish Trenches* by Marcel Aciér, *The Labor Spy Racket* by Leo Huberman, and *How Socialism Works* by John Strachey; finally, Red Seal Books, also priced at 35 or 50 cents, were reprints of standard literary works, ranging from E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* or *They Shall Inherit the Earth* by Morely Callaghan. Most importantly, in connection with the mass market paperback, they were sold on newsstands and similar outlets as well as in traditional bookstores. However, in spite of this very conscious and deliberate attempt to market culture and progressive politics to the masses through newsstands, Modern Age found that its largest sales

were still with traditional bookstores and in a very short time, the firm changed its strategy to focus only on the latter (*Publishers' Weekly*: December 11 and 18, 1937). There had been considerable optimism within the industry concerning Modern Age and this retreat into the mainstream bookstores was considered contrary to what "the publishers had expected and as, perhaps, most students of book distribution would have thought" (*Publishers' Weekly*: December 18, 1937). Nonetheless, Modern Age was unable to maintain the level of sales necessary for mass production and by 1942, had moved out of the paperback business altogether and into a more traditional publishing role with a correspondingly limited market.

What is significant about these publishers, and many others in the 1930s, is not the way in which they anticipated the mass market paperback, as Tebbel (1978 and 1981), Davis (1984), and others claim, but rather, the ways in which they did not. As mentioned earlier, they were in large measure attempting to reproduce the European model of Tauchnitz and others, not mass market books at all but books intended for a literate and literary elite (9). Most importantly, as Bonn (1982) observes in connection with Modern Age, "The publisher failed to recognize that the mass market it wanted to attract was made up of people who were not regular book

buyers" (p.33). The case of Modern Age is particularly instructive given that the firm clearly understood, through its initial experiments with newsstands, the necessity of appealing to a mass audience in order to profit from economies of scale. Inside the back cover, Modern Age Books claimed:

It would cost several thousand dollars to publish a single book. When the cost is spread over two or three thousand books, the cost per book is reduced but still remains high enough to put it beyond the reach of the average reader. To overcome this difficulty, Modern Age Books are printed in editions of fifty to a hundred thousand copies, which so reduces the cost per book that it is possible to sell them at a price well adapted to the average pocketbook (advertising, end pages of Modern Age Books, number 8: *The Labor Spy Racket*, printed 1937).

But as Bonn further points out, not only did Modern Age misunderstand the reading tastes of the mass market, as evidenced by its editorial policy that clearly leaned toward high culture and intellectual topics, but Modern Age Books simply could not compete with the visual appeal of material beside it on the racks. This could be said easily of most of the firms attempting to mass market paper books at this time. While speaking to a discourse of mass consumption, of the edification of the masses through literature and study, they nonetheless tried to distance their product from the appearance of mass market (and therefore lower class) literature by eschewing the sort of decoration that might

lead to such associations. Unlike the later Pocket Books which, as we shall see, embraced brightly coloured cover illustration, Boni's Paper Books and Modern Age both carried covers that were clearly oriented toward a more 'cultured' audience. Boni Books had the prestigious art of Rockwell Kent and the earlier attempt of the Bonis to popularize high culture, The Little Leather Library of reprints of classics, spoke to the same high culture discourse by alluding to the mystique of the leather bound volume (10); Modern Age used generic design (i.e., a standardized cover) for many books and when it did use cover illustration, it was very restrained, consisting mostly of simple graphic design with a limited number of colours (see Appendix A for reproductions of a number of covers from these books). The standard cover format was the rule for the European models from which these drew inspiration (e.g, Tauchnitz) and the British version of the literate paperback, Penguin, almost duplicated exactly the cover format of Tauchnitz' rival, Albatross. In addition, some of these publishers, including both Penguin and Modern Age, occasionally added dust jackets, implying that the book was worthy of protection and not merely a paper reproduction that could be discarded, thereby associating it with the prestige and distinction of a hardcover edition. In this way, these firms were thus little more than traditional publishers trying to expand

their market by lowering price and experimenting with different kinds of distribution but unable to completely dissociate themselves from a cultured taste position. Indeed, the logic behind most of these endeavours was a very conscious and deliberate appeal to a cultured taste, but accompanied by a belief that the mass of readers would respond favourably if presented with alternatives to pulp literature. The rapid retreat of Modern Age into the mainstream bookstore (and bookstores mainly in New York, appropriately enough) is further demonstration that its product, in spite of its paperbound format, was simply a book like any other in terms of its cultural location, appealing to exactly the same literate fraction of the middle class as its hardcover counterpart (11).

Nonetheless, while differing in approach, publishers like Paper Books and Modern Age were clearly organized around the same ideology of culture and leisure as any number of political and cultural movements of the period: the fruits of modern industrial society were not to be limited to material wealth alone, but were to provide the masses with the opportunity to cultivate mind and spirit and the inexpensive mass-produced book was to be one of the vehicles through which this very modernist project could be realized. Their failure was not merely in economics (12) but in their

inability to recognize the potential mass audience that existed in fragmented form, ranging from readers of magazines to those who already bought books. Commenting on the withdrawal of Modern Age Books from the experiment in mass distribution, *Publishers' Weekly* was correct in pointing to the very fundamental connection between price and distribution but it grossly oversimplified the solution, simply reiterating in rudimentary form what Cheney had argued five years earlier:

The possibility of low-priced distribution depends on quantity production in the area of 20,000 to 50,000 copies...The problem of Modern Age is to find some smooth running distribution channel that will let them build for quantity sales and find out just what type of book people will buy in very large numbers (*Publishers' Weekly*: December 18, 1937, 2273).

Although Davis (1984) argues that the tremendous success of Pocket Books was in its ability to reduce cost and increase volume and thereby overcome the "fatal flaws in the economics of Modern Age and other paperback predecessors" (p.39), the problem, as I have emphasized, was not simply in price or distribution. Pocket Books, priced more or less the same as Modern Age and with similar distribution, hit the same newsstands in New York City only a few years after Modern Age Books but with an overwhelming response. The fundamental difference was that the new 'pocket books' were not simply cheaper editions of highbrow literature or

political and social philosophy, titles that lay beyond the reach of the mass market. The cultural level of such books required an already substantial amount of cultural capital, of literary, political, and social knowledge, as well as the appropriate class habitus that gave a sense of engagement with these categories; and members of the class fraction possessing the requisite amount of cultural capital were, most likely, already book buyers, acquiring their serious reading material in clothbound editions in bookstores, not on newsstands. On the other hand, for consumers whose class habitus did not include the cultured disposition, a considerable investment of economic capital (especially in terms of time, a valuable commodity) would have been required in order to acquire the cultural capital represented by these kinds of books; and thus the low price would not have been a great incentive in and of itself. What was radically different about Pocket Books and later imitators was that these new books, through their overall appearance, the list of titles and other factors which I will discuss shortly, implied a new taste position that could be occupied by both those with higher levels of cultural capital as well as those aspiring to this position. The new 'pocket book' represented a cultural text that was located between the traditionally lowbrow pulp magazine and the more legitimate hardcover book, giving it a particular

polysemic quality that brought together diverse audiences into a discursive formation centred around reading as a middlebrow leisure practice. As Freeman Lewis observed, referring specifically to Pocket Books Incorporated, paperback books "were neither books nor magazines but a hybrid product, a sort of 'bookazine'" (Lewis, quoted in Furnas: 1977, 594). The 'pocket book' was simultaneously the attempted proletarianization of literature and learning (in the spirit of Little Blue Books or Modern Age) as well as the exaltation of the mass market pulp magazine.

Pocket Books Incorporated

It must be stressed that all of these books - Modern Age, Boni's Paper Books, Little Blue Books, and many others, not only paperbacks - were representative of the desire on the part of their publishers for the democratization of culture through mass production. They were convinced that there was a large public for the kinds of texts which they felt were important. That they were unsuccessful, as I have argued, was due only in part to the basic economics of the industry. The principal problem was the paradoxical disposition of these publishers: a concern for legitimacy and cultural authority that effectively constrained their experiments with the mass market. The rather remarkable success of

Pocket Books Incorporated was due to the ways in which its product was able to transcend this apparent opposition (13).

The firm was founded by Robert de Graaf who already had considerable experience in the publishing trade, particularly the reprint industry. De Graaf had worked for Doubleday, Page and Company, in charge of their subsidiary Garden City Publishing, which had been set up in 1923 as a budget line, producing cheap reprints as well as children's books. Garden City's first books had been paperbound reprints of current novels (selling at 15 cents) but later, more ambitious titles were added, such as F.W. Ruckstall's **Great Works of Art** (which sold for \$1.89) and by 1936, Garden City was selling about 1.3 million books a year (Dzwonkoski: 1986, 141). Under De Graaf, the company also began a line of dollar reprints, Star Dollar Books, which eventually sold over 15 million copies (Tebbel: 1981, 366) but after leaving Doubleday and serving briefly (1936 to 1938) as president of another major reprint company, Blue Ribbon Books (14), De Graaf began research for his own line of cheap paperbound books. He was able to interest the firm of Simon and Schuster, considered within the trade as something of a radical, which had been considering an inexpensive reprint product. It had been founded in 1924 by Richard Simon and Max Schuster, both of whom were only in

their mid-twenties at the time and had already worked in the publishing business for several years (Simon with the mainstream firm of Boni & Liveright, Schuster with the magazine industry). They were joined quite early on by Leon Shimkin, a business school student who, at only 17, was even younger than the two founders. From the start, the firm aggressively pursued mass markets and grew extremely rapidly after the success of its first publication, a crossword puzzle book. Unlike most of its contemporaries, Simon and Schuster was almost a model of Cheney's recommendations put into practice. It promoted its product extensively through advertising and although it was a relatively small firm, its account with the **New York Times** for 100,000 lines of advertising copy, was greater than any other publisher of the period. As Dzwonkoski (1986) points out, "The firm was the first to use opinion poll techniques to pretest books and was constantly probing and testing new merchandising methods"(p.340). At the same time, Simon and Schuster was not unaware of the need to establish cultural credibility and included in its list, along with popular titles, more traditional literary or philosophical works. Among the bestsellers produced by the firm in its earliest years were such diverse titles as Robert Ripley's **Believe It or Not!** and Will Durant's **The Story of Philosophy**, the latter having been published originally as a series of Little Blue Books.

However, the most important aspect of the young firm was in the way it redefined the relationship between the publisher, the material, and the audience. Rather than simply pursuing authors and potential books, Simon and Schuster sought markets and attempted to fill them. As Tebbel (1978) puts it:

Starting a publishing house had meant, traditionally, that the new publisher began with books or authors already available to him. The house-generated book idea, on which so much of late twentieth-century publishing was to rest, had not yet come into anything but infrequent use, although it had existed for a long time. But if they did not invent it, Simon and Schuster were the first to base their publishing on thinking of ideas and getting authors to write about them (p.154).

The new partnership of Pocket Books and Simon and Schuster was particularly propitious: both De Graaf, with a background in the inexpensive reprint industry, and Simon and Schuster, somewhat of a radical firm, simply had less of an investment than the publishing establishment in maintaining any kind of traditional cultural authority. Simon and Schuster already had a reputation of experimentation and risk that was quite unconventional at the time although not atypical of new firms with relatively less capital than established companies and who therefore attempt to gain entrance into a particular market through product differentiation. In addition, the fact that the founders of Simon and Schuster (and their partner, Leon

Shimkin) were young Jews did not go unnoticed in the conservative, mainly WASP publishing trade (15). Consequently, they had less to lose in terms of a position of status within the industry and it was largely this lack of a need for cultural legitimacy that allowed the sort of experimentation which had eluded other publishers attempting to break into the mass market. Simon, Schuster and Shimkin were to function mainly as silent partners with 49% ownership in Pocket Books and their association with the new company was played down partly because De Graaf thought that if it were well known, it might be more difficult to secure reprint rights from other publishers. In fact, the books themselves bore no indication of the partnership other than the address on the back cover (386 Fourth Avenue, New York) which was the headquarters of the Simon and Schuster at the time. But the arrangement was more than purely financial and in spite of the mythology that the success of Pocket Books was largely due to the individual genius of De Graaf, many of the market strategies developed by Simon and Schuster, such as market testing, reader polls through mail, and so on, were used to great advantage even before Pocket Books began publication in June, 1939.

The economic strategy of the new firm was quite straightforward and De Graaf's experience in the reprint

industry was no doubt of great advantage in lowering costs. For example, he eliminated one of the most expensive stages in publishing by borrowing the original plates whenever possible and in some cases, the titles were already the property of Simon and Schuster. Instead of the standard 10% subsidiary rights paid by Modern Age (Birk: 1939), De Graaf was able to convince many publishers to accept smaller payments. Publishers agreed to this either because they assumed that this venture would not be successful (as Davis (1984) suggests) or because the sale price of Pocket Books was to be much lower than other reprints. In any case, the arrangement secured by De Graaf was for only 4% (which amounted to one cent per copy), to be split between the original publisher and the author (Dzwonkoski: 1986, 293). Davis (1984) also points out that De Graaf further saved by reducing discounts to dealers and wholesalers to 36% and 20% respectively from an average of 40% to 50%. Most importantly, De Graaf realized, as did Modern Age Books, that the greatest savings would come with increased production runs and Pocket Books hoped to increase these to 100,000 per title.

But as I have already argued, cost and volume were only part of the picture. These two factors are, of course, inextricably linked and the problem was not simply in

keeping costs down while increasing production runs but in attracting audiences that made these runs profitable. The profit margins in the paperback industry, although not as narrow as in the pulp business, were probably only about half a cent a book (Davis: 1984, 40) and the perennial problem of all publishers - the inability to reach a mass market - was not going to go away simply because of increased production, as Modern Age had already discovered. The important difference between Pocket Books and the many other attempts to mass market books was in the way in which the new commodity related mass consumption and taste. In the rest of this chapter, I want focus on the ways in which Pocket Books articulated a middlebrow taste position, forming a discourse of reading as leisure that combined book and magazine audiences, thereby drawing on a wide range of consumers. There were three principal components in this discourse: the list of titles published; the actual physical commodity itself (i.e., the book); and the mode of distribution and consumption.

The List

The list, or simply the books published by a firm at any one time, served different publishers in different ways. Some wished to demonstrate a certain diversity; for others it was an indication of the consistency of their product; and for

the most traditional and conservative firms, the list was evidence of their cultural capital and authority. Firms attempting to bring culture to the masses probably overstated the case in their lists in order to establish legitimacy from the outset and quell any suspicion that may have arisen from the association of paperbound books with lower class fiction. Unlike these publishers who had attempted to reach a mass market with 'serious' writing, Pocket Books clearly attempted to build a list of titles that would appeal to a very broad range of tastes, including those who might not already be book buyers. In 1938, the year before large scale production began, Pocket Books tested the market through a number of surveys which were mailed to potential customers, including names from lists of cancellations from the Book of the Month Club and *Readers' Digest* (16). One of these mailings included a list of potential titles which respondents were asked to rate in order of preference (these titles are listed in Appendix B). Also included in this mailing were endorsements from a number of well known authors and intellectuals, lending their cultural authority to the project in much the same way as others had done for the mail order book clubs. While Pocket Books included some titles that might have suited a publisher like Modern Age, the list was based primarily on material that had already sold in large numbers or was well

known to the public through other means, such as motion pictures or the reputation of an author. Although only 29 of these titles were eventually released by Pocket Books, the overall strategy as well as the fundamental categories published by the firm in its first years of operation are represented in this list. Like so many other attempts to edify the masses through the mass production of culture and knowledge, Pocket Books made a similar appeal in their advertising:

Imagine getting the most famous, best-selling books of our time - the books you have been wanting to read, and promised yourself you would read - for only 25 cents each! (in Bonn: 1983, 6)

Following the model of others, such as the Book of the Month Club, Pocket Books also sought the voice of cultural authority in its advertising through the use of intellectuals such as Nicholas Murray Butler whose endorsement of the project was, however, somewhat turgid: "A marked contribution to our educational instrumentalities" (*New York Times*, June 19, 1939, 34). There were also more popular figures included, such as Lowell Thomas or Dale Carnegie who said, in the first Pocket Books advertising in the *New York Times*: "I endorse this new way of selling fine books for the price of a couple of ice cream sodas. It is a four star idea; I am for it with enthusiasm" (ibid). The

inclusion of apparently contradictory figures such as intellectuals and popular figures did not merely represent a range of opinion but was crucial to the positioning of Pocket Books within a middlebrow taste formation. These extremes interacted discursively so that the familiar, the popular, and even the mundane were rendered legitimate through association with bourgeois intellectualism while at the same time, the cultural capital associated with high or at least higher culture became less formidable and more accessible to a broader range of tastes and dispositions.

But quite unlike Modern Age, or any of the 'leisure libraries' that offered classic literature, 'serious' writing, or political theory, this list was purely middlebrow in the sense that I have defined that term. That is, the list offered to consumers the privilege of pursuing culture and knowledge (as well as entertainment, of course) while making relatively low demands in terms of money and especially time. This was accomplished in the list in a number of ways. Most importantly, there was a minimal amount of risk involved, with regard to the investment of capital of various kinds. Almost half of the titles had sold well (17) and were therefore known to the public. This was also true of authors included in the list who were perennially popular, as were Earl Stanley Gardner and Earl Derr Biggers

(respectively, authors of the Perry Mason and Charlie Chan series). These books (and authors) would also be known, by reputation at least, to many who were not members of the literate fraction of the middle class but perhaps desirous of the cultural capital represented by books (as opposed to other forms of lighter reading such as magazines or newspapers). These popular titles were also juxtaposed with clearly more legitimate works, such as those by Huxley, Wilder, and Butler. This was a strategy that had been exploited by Simon and Schuster in its own list, and was, no doubt, not lost on book buyers who may have been reluctant to consider acquiring inexpensive paperbound editions because of the association with magazines, digests, or worse, pulps. The serious non-fiction of the highbrow publishers was replaced in the Pocket Books list by more populist philosophy: *Wake Up and Live!*, *The Art of Thinking*, *Life Begins at Forty*, books that were not unlike modern self-help or pop psychology and appealed to the desire for the knowledge and opportunity for self-improvement that was encouraged in the discourse of democratic consumption. Finally, quite a few of these titles had been made into films, in some cases very successful ones, and thereby profited not only from their popularity in another medium but through their association with a legitimate middle class leisure pursuit (18). The association with films, in terms

of taste, was as wide as the list itself, ranging from those perceived as serious films, such as *The Good Earth* (MGM, 1937) or *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Universal, 1930) to popular light entertainments, especially those series based on the Charlie Chan novels, or the mysteries of Earl Stanley Gardner.

The Good Earth, the highest ranked book in the survey, is a particularly good example of the kind of book that Pocket Books would seek to reprint (19) and it represents simultaneously a number of the categories that I have discussed. First published in 1931, it was an immediate best-seller and remained so for most of the decade. The story of a poor rural Chinese family struggling to survive in the greatest of adversity, it must have had a certain resonance in the years of the Depression. In 1937, it was filmed at MGM, the swansong of Irving Thalberg who had built his reputation on prestige productions with literary associations, such as *The Barrets of Wimpole Street* (1934), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1936). It was widely acclaimed, both critically and at the box office, and was nominated for the best picture Academy Award (20). On the list proposed by Pocket Books, then, it was the quintessential middlebrow text: not only was it a best-seller, but it concerned what was felt to be a serious

topic; it was also regarded as a literary achievement and therefore, of considerable cultural legitimacy (in fact, it won the Nobel Prize just before the Pocket Books version was released in 1939); at the same time, however, it was not viewed as a 'difficult' book, as were many contemporary novels published by the literary press, and was therefore much more accessible to a broad public, in much the same way as *Gone With The Wind*, published in 1936; and, as with *Gone With The Wind* and middlebrow culture in general, the claim to cultural legitimacy of *The Good Earth* was based less in a high literary style than in its grandiose scope and its exotic location, very much like that of an historical novel.

After *The Good Earth* had topped the list of preferred titles, Pocket Books printed a limited run of 2,300 copies in November 1938, most of which were given away as promotional copies to important figures who could provide comments for later advertising (21). In addition, over 900 copies were included in the mailing of a questionnaire (Appendix C) designed to analyze a number of factors including reaction to the book itself, preferred authors and categories, as well as information to assist in distribution. The responses to this survey confirmed the basic pattern suggested by the ranking of titles in the earlier mailing. Bonn (1983) reports that at the head of the

list of preferred categories was the historical novel, followed by biography/autobiography, great literature of the past, travel, character novels, romance, short stories, history, humour, adventure, and mysteries. Although westerns were the least preferred of all, it is significant that the bottom half of the list consists mainly of those categories which had been the staple of so many previous attempts to reach a mass market with paperback editions: problem novels (presumably current 'serious' fiction), economics, politics, philosophy, psychology, social problems, and so on.

All of the surveys carried out by Pocket Books met with favourable response and assisted in the planning of the first list issued by Pocket Books in June, 1939. This list consisted of only ten titles in limited printing of 10,000 copies each which was considerably less than their ultimate goal of 100,000 copies per printing. These were to be sold in New York City only as a market test but the response was so overwhelming that Pocket Books very quickly moved to large scale production and expanded distribution outside of New York. Both the production and consumption of Pocket Books will be discussed shortly but for now I want to focus on the actual list produced in roughly the first year of production, from June 1939 to June 1940 (these titles are listed in Appendix D).

It is clear from the list that the reader surveys were taken very seriously. Quite a few of the most preferred titles from the first survey appear on this list, presumably those for which reprint rights could be obtained, since many publishers were still quite leery of the effect that a paperback reprint might have on their own sales. The list has a number of good sellers, both contemporary and from earlier years. For example, **The Good Earth** and **Lost Horizon** were both currently popular books; **Topper** was a best-seller in the 1920s and its author, Thorne Smith, was one of the most popular of the authors on the proposed list of Pocket Books; and **Mother** was a best selling family melodrama from earlier in the century. There were also classics, of course: Pocket Books had packaged together **Romeo and Juliet**, **Julius Caesar**, **Hamlet**, **King Lear**, and **Macbeth**, with an introduction by John Masefield, a clear statement of the cultural aspirations of the firm (22); but also on the list were **The Way of All Flesh**, **A Tale of Two Cities**, **The Hunchback of Notre Dame**, and **Wuthering Heights** as well as classics by American authors such as Poe, Hawthorne, and Wilder. **Mysteries**, in spite of the lack of response in the survey, also figured quite prominently although these were far from the standard pulp variety. They were either previous bestsellers, such as **The Lodger** or they were from very well

known and proven authors, like Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Earl Derr Biggers, Earle Stanley Gardner, and Ellery Queen. Along with biography, such as **Abraham Lincoln**, children's literature, most notably **Bambi** and **Pinocchio**, populist philosophy and the classic self-help books **Wake Up and Live!** and **How To Win Friends and Influence People**, the titles from this first year of production would have been known in the industry as a 'balanced list'.

One of the most interesting aspects of this early list is the very high number of titles that were associated with films. On one level, the relationship to films was simply another instance of market experimentation on the part of Pocket Books (23). Advertising was an extremely important part of the market strategy of Simon and Schuster who no doubt recognized the enormous amount of free publicity available through publishing simultaneously with the film, in a movie edition wherever possible; and even if the film were several years old, a book linked to it would already be market tested in one sense and the firm hoped that familiarity with the title would lead to purchase. In a few cases, the link to the film is obvious and direct. Both **Gulliver's Travels** and **Dr. Erlich's Magic Bullet** were movie editions of the books, published to coincide with the release of the film and advertised as such. **Dr. Erlich's**

Magic Bullet (see Appendix E) had a cover photograph of Edward G. Robinson as Dr. Erlich, as well as text both inside and on the back cover clearly linking it to the Warner Bros. film. After the popularity of the film had waned, later printings of the book reverted to its original title, **Microbe Hunters**. In other instances, the relationship to the film was less obvious, with perhaps only a line or two making any connection. The back cover of **Wuthering Heights**, for example, states that "The unforgettable motion picture, starring Merle Oberon, Laurence Olivier, and David Niven, was universally acclaimed by press and public, and will live forever". In any case, in this first year of production, there were 30 Pocket Book titles that in one way or another were related to popular films of the period, and in some cases, very prestigious films. **The Good Earth** has already been mentioned. Examples of other films associated with Pocket Books are: **Lost Horizon** (Columbia, 1936), an extremely popular film, nominated for the best picture Academy Award; **Topper** (MGM, 1937); **Showboat** (Universal, 1936), based on the novel by the very popular author, Edna Ferber, and which had been made into a successful musical; and **Beau Geste**, filmed twice by Paramount, in 1926 and 1939. Other books are less obviously connected to the films. At least a dozen of the novels by Earl Derr Biggers and Earl Stanley Gardner had been made into popular films by the late

1930s, obviating the need for any explicit link to the books. **Pinocchio** and **Bambi** actually appeared in Pocket Books before the release of the film but the production phase of feature length animation was often several years and in the case of Disney, was accompanied by much publicity which would have connected the film and book in the public mind.

As I have argued, the appeal of the middlebrow text lies in the ratio of cultural return on investment and one of the most common ways in which the cultural industries have attempted to appeal to this taste position is, of course, through the marketing of 'classic' culture (especially music and literature) in ways that are both affordable and accessible (24). The list offered by Pocket Books in its first year is a particularly good example of this practice. Not only were classics included but those selected by Pocket Books are clearly organized around a middlebrow taste which equates the grand scale and upper class milieu of the historical novel with cultural legitimacy. Thus, titles such as **A Tale of Two Cities**, **The Three Musketeers**, **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** are representative not only of great literature of the past but also of the historical novel, although they are not, strictly speaking, of that genre. The same is true of the biographies offered by Pocket Books, for example, **The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini**, **Abraham**

Lincoln, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. In fact, the generic categories of these books are much less significant to this list than the way in which they represent middlebrow aspirations to cultural legitimacy. All of these titles promise romance, adventure, intrigue, and so on, but safely confine these pleasures within the context of actual history, thereby successfully grafting lowbrow taste onto the more legitimate pursuit of culture and knowledge. The appeal of these titles is further reinforced by their association with the film industry which had for some time cultivated the cultural legitimacy of the historical in precisely the same way. In fact, during the 1930s, there was a flood of films that were historical dramas (or texts which could be read as such) and biographies of famous figures from history. Most of these were considered to be prestigious productions on the basis of their association with 'great men' (either the protagonist or the actual author) or 'great moments' in history. They were usually expensive productions, with lavishly decorated sets and spectacular costumes. The appeal to historical tradition and the culture of the European upper classes was implicit in the topic and its treatment in these films (25). Of the titles published by Pocket Books in their first year, a surprising number were also well known films of this type: **Wuthering Heights** (Goldwyn, 1939) was a currently popular

film; MGM had released a number of these productions in the 1930s including **Treasure Island** (1934), **A Tale of Two Cities** (1936), **A Christmas Carol** (1938) and their production of **Pride and Prejudice** in 1940 coincided with the Pocket Books version; Warner Bros. had been responsible for a number of prestigious 'biopics' in the 1930s including **The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex** in 1939 which was published by Pocket Books in the same year; **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** had been a very important Lon Chaney film for Universal in the 1920s and was enjoying renewed popularity in 1939 in an RKO version with Charles Laughton in the leading role; **The Affairs of Cellini** (20th Century Fox, 1934), intended as a mildly ribald historical romance, was probably the reason for the Pocket Books title, **The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini**. While the majority of these titles appealed to the association with European history and culture for their legitimacy, even the Pocket Books biography of Abraham Lincoln was no doubt released to coincide with two film versions: **Young Mr. Lincoln** was released by 20th Century Fox in 1940 after they failed to secure the rights for the Broadway play, **Abe Lincoln in Illinois**, which had been filmed by RKO the year before.

The fact that so many of these titles would have been in the public domain and therefore not require royalty payments

might have been part of the reason for their selection by Pocket Books but this would have been true of any number of classic novels. More importantly, all of these titles appealed to a broad middlebrow sensibility. On the one hand, they were, for the most part, recognized as legitimate culture of the past and therefore stable. At the same time, particularly through their association with the film industry, they became accessible to a broad public but with only a minimum amount of cultural investment. They required neither economic capital (in terms of either money or time) nor a highbrow taste disposition for their apprehension and consumption. They represented the great classics, the great men of history, and the legacy of European culture but at the same time, as the advertising for many of these classics indicates, they offered adventure and romance (26) and their inclusion in the list adds a legitimacy to what might have otherwise been considered simply another lowbrow mass market venture.

The Bookazine

The physical aspects of the book were as important but perhaps more obvious than the list in cultivating a middlebrow audience. Since virtually all of the early Pocket Books were not originals but reprints, the content of the books was less important than the discursive formation into

which they were placed. A very large part of this was the package, the book itself, and the overall design of the new Pocket Books was different from its predecessors in a number of very important ways. Although trade paperbacks are now very common, cloth bound books (i.e., hard covered) still possess, for a great many consumers desirous of certain kinds of cultural capital, a certain aura of prestige that is associated with knowledge and learning. This was, of course, even more true before the emergence of paperback books and was part of the reason for the resistance on the part of the mainstream publishers to the idea of soft covers. The physical format of Pocket Books represented a specifically middlebrow compromise between the very sensual appeal of the glossy magazines of the period and the more traditional and legitimate book (27).

The first Pocket Books were slightly smaller than a modern paperback, measuring only 6.5 x 4.25 inches (1.5 x 10.5 cm) and were designed, as their name implies, to be quite portable, unlike, for example, Modern Age Books, which were considerably larger (5.5 x c 7.75 inches or 13.9 x 19.5 cm). The earliest advertising copy played up this feature, presenting the books as a sophisticated product of modern industrial society:

These new Pocket Books are designed to fit the tempo of our times and the needs of New Yorkers. They're as handy as a pencil, as modern and convenient as a radio - and as good looking. They were designed specially for busy people - people who are continually on the go, yet who want to make the most of every minute...Thinner paper and a smaller page make them so compact they'll snuggle into your pocket or handbag without a bulge (*New York Times*, June 19, 1939, 34).

Pocket Books were also quite different visually from any other paperbound book but while the covers of these early books were quite colourful, they were similar to those of many mainstream popular books in hardcover which used illustrations on dust jackets. They were quite different, however, from other publishers attempting to reach a mass market with paperbound books. The covers of Boni's Paper Books, for example, were mostly monotone and those Modern Age books that did have cover illustrations were usually only two colours at best and usually only graphics. Pocket Books had full colour cover illustrations that were not merely graphics but based on paintings like those used by many mainstream publishers on their dust jackets and while some of these seem primitive by modern standards, they must have been quite striking when first seen on the newsstands (see Appendix E). In addition, the covers were very bright and glossy, an effect achieved through a transparent plastic lamination (known as Dura-Gloss). This did not last very long, usually peeling off, but initially gave the books a distinctive lustre that was lacking in the dust jackets of

hardcover books and the covers of the 'slicks' and in this way, they more closely resembled modern paperbacks. The binding was of high quality, pages stitched rather than stapled, and then glued into the cover which was made of fairly heavy cardboard. The pages, although quite thin to minimize the thickness of the book, were printed on comparatively high grade paper, very white, with the edges as well as the end papers stained a dark, rich red. The books actually weighed more than their size might suggest and all of these factors contributed to an overall effect of rather high quality construction when compared to magazines or even some of the cheaper reprint books of the period (28).

The layout of the covers was very similar for most of the early Pocket Books. Each had a full cover illustration that was overlaid by the title in roughly the top one third with the Pocket Books colophon (the reading kangaroo) along the bottom. In addition, it was clearly stated on the cover that the book was a "complete and unabridged" edition and this was repeated more forcefully on the inside end pages :

"IMPORTANT NOTE - This book is not a condensation or a digest of the original. It is the complete book". This was not a trivial claim and was essential in order to distinguish Pocket Books from other mass market reprints,

such as Readers' Digest, which were condensed and therefore culturally illegitimate. Pocket Books, through the assertion of completeness, could therefore lay claim to cultural authenticity in spite of its appeal to a mass market audience.

In the same vein, the printing history of the book was indicated on an end page, quite an unusual practice for reprints which usually gave only copyright acknowledgement. In the case of the reprints of classics, this page indicated merely 'Pocket Books Edition', followed by a list of the printings and their dates. In either case, this page acted as a pedigree, further establishing the cultural legitimacy of the books by forging a link to the more traditional edition. The covers and endpapers also occasionally displayed comments about the book from some cultural authority. A particularly good example is the text on the cover of *The Good Earth* since it illustrates the appeal to a broad range of taste positions (see Appendix E). Although this was the title used initially as a promotional giveaway, it was also republished as Pocket Books 11 and by that time, it had won the Nobel Prize for literature, which was announced on the cover as a declaration of its cultural significance. It also carried words of praise from Will Rogers: 'Not only the greatest book about a people ever

written, but the best book of our generation'. Any doubts that some readers may have had about the accessibility of *The Good Earth* (after receiving such a prestigious award) would have been dispelled no doubt by this recommendation from Will Rogers, a very popular figure at the time, noted for a folksy, populist wit and wisdom, and hardly a highbrow. As with the range of figures who endorsed these books in the advertising copy, such combinations interacted to produce a highly polysemic text that was essential to the middlebrow discourse of broad appeal and accessibility.

The Story of Mankind, Pocket Books 15, is also an interesting example of this polysemic quality of the early Pocket Books. The title itself, of course, is extremely ambitious and not the kind of book that would be found normally on a newsstand. The name of the author, Willem Hendrik van Loon, rings of cultural authority: used in its four word entirety and very European, including the aristocratic 'van'. The cover illustration (see Appendix E) of the pyramids is quite simple graphically but expresses the somewhat pretentious claims of the book as a serious history of the world. But rather than a scholarly work, as the cover might suggest, the book was originally intended for children and written in a very simple, accessible style. As the quote from Lewis Mumford in the endpapers states,

"The Story of Mankind belongs to that noble department of literature in which the words are for children and the meanings are for men". While it is clear that Pocket Books was not denying the role of the book as a child's introduction to world history, it is equally clear, I think, that the inclusion of this text in the list was for the didactic purposes of those interested in self-improvement and education and the overall appearance of the books was designed also to increase the cultural capital of the home library by lending it a learned and sophisticated air.

Pocket Books therefore possessed at least some of the aura of a book in the sense of a bound volume and not merely a cheap paper reprint: they felt sturdy and durable and gave a sense of permanence; the light pages and the rich red that stained the edges and endpapers looked not unlike a Bible or a more expensive and exclusive book, intended for a literary elite (29). In this way, Pocket Books commanded at least some of the respect given to a traditional clothbound book with hard covers and stitched binding while at the same time, through the very colourful and glossy covers, they had the visual appeal of a mainstream magazine. Most importantly, they invited and encouraged an attitude toward consumption that was quite unlike that of the simple graphic or generic covers of other paperbound publishers. Pocket

Books combined both the tactile appeal of the clothbound book with the visual sensuousness of the magazine and thereby offered a taste position that perfectly balanced the desire for cultural capital with the accessibility of the popular.

Production, Distribution, and Consumption

In terms of its overall organization, Pocket Books also combined various aspects of the book and magazine industry in ways that allowed consumers from these different markets to participate in a discourse of reading as leisure. Most mainstream publishers including those in the reprint business, produced only limited runs of books unless the first printings were very successful in which case subsequent printings would be ordered until demand faded. Titles would then become part of the list and available on a more or less continuous basis. The book itself, in comparison to magazines and newspapers, displayed the aura of knowledge and learning in varying degrees, depending on a wide range of factors from the title to the habitus of the specific consumer. But in general, the book would be considered a permanent possession, regardless of its price. Magazines on the other hand, were always printed in very high runs but virtually never reprinted, available only once per issue. Production and consumption were continuous,

spaced at regular intervals and the commodity was available for a relatively brief period after which it would disappear from the shelves, replaced by the next issue. Unlike most books, magazines were considered to be both timely and disposable.

Pocket Books were produced and consumed in a mode that was somewhere between these two poles, combining the permanence and cultural legitimacy of the book with the popularity and accessibility of the magazine. This was not merely convenience but, as with the physical commodity, represented a middlebrow option for a wider range of class tastes and dispositions, allowing more traditional book buyers as well as the broad magazine reading public to enter the discourse of reading as leisure. Compared to book publishers, Pocket Books were printed in very high runs like magazines but could also be reprinted and kept in stock if successful and most Pocket Books went through at least several printings. Some remained in print literally for decades, changing the cover only to stay in step with current styles. *Lost Horizon*, the first book on the list, is a typical example, going through 37 printings by 1945. The high printing runs were possible only because Pocket Books had also taken steps to improve the method of distribution which had been identified by Cheney as the biggest problem with the book

trade. As Cheney had shown, most publishers simply delivered shipments to bookstores, jobbers, or distributors and absolved themselves of any further responsibility. While nothing like the vertical integration of the movie industry, Pocket Books nonetheless greatly increased the efficiency of distribution and thus the ability to use sales data in planning both the list and reprint schedules. This was accomplished by moving beyond the traditional bookstores and department stores into the domain of magazines: drug and cigar stores, hotel and railway stands, and so on. This had been tried by Modern Age of course, but as I have argued, its product was entirely unsuited to these venues. Pocket Books did not experience the same difficulty with these kinds of outlets and in fact quite early on, found these to be its main source of sales. After the first month of operation, Pocket Books received its highest reorder from newsstands, drugstores, and cigar stores, a trend that would continue for some time. These early sales figures are as follows:

<u>type of outlet</u>	<u>initial</u>	<u>reorder</u>
newsstands	8,150	15,285
drug and cigar stores	2,980	10,500
bookstores	6,245	8,658
jobbers	6,730	5,450
department stores	15,050	4,705
special book stores	1,910	1,735
rental libraries	3,350	5,150
5- and 10-cent stores	1,000	100

(*Publishers' Weekly*: July 29, 1939, 286)

In the first year of operation, the bulk of distribution to the magazine outlets was through the American News Corporation but it was found that the ANC was unable to return unsold titles efficiently since that was not part of its normal operation. Davis (1984) argues that since independent magazine distributors were in a heated battle with the very large, almost monopolistic ANC at that time, they were able to meet the needs of Pocket Books in terms of both distribution and return. Whatever the case, Pocket Books moved in 1941 from the ANC to a network of more than 600 independent distributors:

a pipeline that eventually reached more than a hundred thousand outlets in newsstands; cigar, stationery, and food stores; and just about anywhere else one of the racks could be squeezed in (Davis: 1984, 47).

Although Pocket Books were still sold in traditional bookstores, the magazine outlets proved to be much more efficient than the practices of the publishing industry at large in terms of responding quickly to feedback on the sales of specific titles, etc., and these sorts of outlets became the main source of sales not only for Pocket Books but for the paperback industry in general by the postwar years.

In addition to distribution through a magazine network, Pocket Books were produced on a periodic basis, not entirely unlike magazines. Commenting on the difficulties experienced by Modern Age a few years earlier, **Publishers' Weekly** noted that "paper books do not have the advantage of that recurrence of which newsdealers can take the best advantage" (December 18, 1937). Pocket Books did take advantage of this and released new titles in monthly groups but like the book industry, these would also be added to the list and thus made permanently available. In addition, although Pocket Books were released on a regular basis, they were not dated like most magazines but numbered in consecutive order. This was the case with most of the pulps which used numbers instead of dates so that excess product could be sold in other regions, outside of a narrow time frame. The novelty of the physical format combined with periodic release also meant that Pocket Books could be marketed on a brand name basis and not by title only. Within a few months of operation, Pocket Books began to supply dealers with special display racks that had a lacquered metal back in bright yellow with the name of the firm prominently displayed in black letters (**Publishers' Weekly**: August 26, 1939). The brand became in many ways as important as the individual item in much the same way as with magazines where the monthly release and not necessarily the content was a

significant factor in purchase (e.g., a regular audience would consume each issue of **Popular Science**). In this way, Pocket Books was able to organize subsequent sales along the lines of the magazine which promoted continuous, open-ended consumption rather than the book trade which focused on the marketing and purchase of individual titles. As I argued in the first chapter, the structuring of consumption in this way was fundamental to the interdependence of production and consumption and thus was an important step in the establishment of a mass market for popular literature. So successful was the association between the brand name and the mass market paperback that even after other firms entered the field in the early 1940s, all early paperbacks were known generically as 'pocket books'.

At the same time, however, Pocket Books tried to encourage an air of exclusivity in terms of availability. Quoted in **Publishers' Weekly**, De Graaf stressed that since the firm depended on high volume sales, the titles which sold the least would be dropped. Using the example of **Life**, a weekly magazine, De Graaf pointed out that each copy sold out quickly and consumers were unable to get it by the end of the week:

Part of the idea in dropping Pocket Book titles is to stress the fact that these editions are temporary. If you want a copy of any title, you have to do a

reasonable amount of hustling to get it (*Publishers' Weekly*: March 2, 1940).

This was only partially true, of course, since most titles could be ordered from Pocket Books through the mail using the order information contained in every copy; but on the racks, at least, product was continually changing. Even this simple turnover of stock generated the sense of permanent novelty which was attractive in itself in terms of the emerging consumer culture, but in addition, a few titles, regardless of initial sales, were made available for only a short time and then withdrawn (although usually only temporarily) in order to create the illusion of exclusivity. *A Christmas Carol*, for example, was first printed in December, 1939, with endpapers resembling a Christmas card, and sales were quite successful. But unlike other Pocket Books which would have been reprinted shortly after, it was not available again until the following Christmas. Although the illusion of rarity was in some ways in contradiction with the primary goal of accessibility, this strategy served two purposes: in the first case, dropping the least popular titles was simply good sense in a high volume business; in addition, the cultural legitimacy of Pocket Books would benefit from the association with the limited runs of more traditional or prestigious publishers.

Pocket Books did not merely sell inexpensive books, nor was it only the price and wide distribution that led to the unprecedented demand for popular literature. As I argued in the introduction, this particular moment in the development of popular literature has to be located first within the context of the relationship between mass production and consumption in the early Fordist era. Although the industrial capacity to produce books in virtually limitless numbers had been developed in the 19th century, the problem of creating markets of sufficient size to support large scale production had not yet been solved within the book trade. There were, of course, many individual titles that had sold in huge quantities but this was not consistent. Production could not therefore be planned in the same way as in other industries, including those that manufactured cultural commodities. Hollywood, for example, had developed a relatively stable mass market partly through vertical integration and oligopolistic trade practices but it also depended very heavily for consistent profits on the largely predictable cost/profit relationship in the production of second features, or 'B' movies (30). The book trade simply did not have such a large and stable market on which to base mass production. The occasional best-seller was considered to be 'gravy' but it was virtually impossible to plan this kind of production in advance. Titles that were successful

were simply reprinted until the demand decreased but each printing run itself was not particularly large. As Cheney had pointed out in the economic survey of the industry, not only was the life of the average book rather short, but very few titles reached sales of greater than 20,000 (31). Many Pocket Books titles began their life in the market with printings of 50,000 copies or more and after years, in some cases decades, were still in production (32). After only six months in business, Pocket Books had sold many titles in quantities that would have been unimaginable only a few years previous. *Wuthering Heights*, for example, had sold in excess of 300,000 copies; *The Good Earth*, 154,000 copies; *The Philadelphia Story*, in only six weeks, had topped 72,000; and even the collection of Shakespearean tragedies had exceeded sales of 140,000 (Davis: 1984, 43).

This was accomplished not simply through the marketing of books that had wide appeal (e.g., blockbuster titles such as *Gone With The Wind*) but through the creation of a discursive space around the concept of reading as a leisure practice in which actors from a wider range of social locations and class habitus could participate. The mass market paperback as produced by Pocket Books promised to fulfill for its readers the goal of the industrial democracy by making knowledge and learning available in "almost literally

universal distribution" (as anticipated by De Graaf in the opening quote to this chapter). The pocket book offered participation in the accumulation of cultural capital through a decidedly middlebrow discourse, providing a relatively high return for a minimum entry level investment. Participants in this discourse could therefore distinguish themselves, through the pretense of a cultured disposition, from the readership of magazines or digests; but through the articulation of the paperback to the market for magazines, this position of distinction could be achieved without a drastic alteration in the patterns of consumption of the participants.

By creating this taste option between the book and magazine, the cultured and the popular, consumers could approach these mass market paperback books from either direction and it was clear to many observers quite early on that an entirely new market for books was being forged. As Mildred Smith observed on the editorial page of *Publishers' Weekly* only 5 days after Pocket Books released the first ten titles in New York City,

The *Publishers' Weekly* has always been interested in the new and experimental. But the time was when it looked upon its field as a much narrower one than it does today. Trade books sold in regular bookstores are, as they always have been, our chief concern, but books at all prices wherever they are sold interest us, and all efforts to broaden the market for books we take it

are of interest to our readers. We shall all watch the progress of Bob de Graaf's new experiment with his Pocket Books as another well-thought-out effort in this direction (Smith in **Publishers' Weekly**: June 24, 1939).

The sales of Pocket Books from the first release day in June, 1939 were quite spectacular and seemed to have caught the industry by surprise. After the initial success in New York City, Pocket Books was able to expand distribution very rapidly across the United States and Canada and by the end of the year, after only six months in operation, Pocket Books had sold more than 1.5 million copies; by 1943, this figure had soared to 33 million (Pocket Books Inc: 1989). It is important to point out that this new audience did not detract from the sales of hardcover editions of the same titles, one of the greatest fears of many publishers in the early years of mass market paperbacks. This new market was constructed not primarily of those who had previously been involved in the consumption of books, although certainly some of these readers would participate; rather, the vast majority of the new consumers would come from that large fraction of the middle class or working class whose members had previously considered the book market to be elitist, beyond their grasp both culturally and financially. As **Publishers' Weekly** reported early in 1940, a number of book sellers found the new paperback "to make a natural transition from magazines to books" (**Publishers' Weekly**:

March 2, 1940, 987) and that it brought to the book market a large number of new consumers. For example, a bookseller from the Midwest commented on the effect of Pocket Books on business, in particular, the sales of other titles; and whether or not his observation was accurate with regard to the occupations of the new buyers, it was evident that a different element had been drawn into the consumption of these books:

Bennet Schneider, of Kansas City, for example, says, "I am crazy about *Pocket Books*. They are making book customers for us out of magazine readers, bringing people in who never bought books before - chauffeurs, beauty shop operators, office girls, etc., etc. We display them right out near our front door, and think they are wonderful, both for plus sales and for the way they sell themselves. They are business builders, and are a step in the right direction of providing cheaper reading for people through bookshops. We push them all the time. People love them. They don't cut into our regular business at all. They might someday kill the rental libraries for which we should be happy." (*Publishers' Weekly*: March 2, 1940, 987).

Nonetheless, there was considerable concern in the traditional book trade over the potential effect of cheap paperbacks on the sales of more expensive hardcover books, and as Davis (1984) points out, a number of important firms would not grant reprint rights to Pocket Books. In order to defuse this anxiety, Simon and Schuster and Pocket Books tested the market by issuing a paperback version of the very successful Dale Carnegie self-help book, *How To Win Friends*

and Influence People, a Simon and Schuster title, which had sold more than one million copies not long after its release in 1936. Pocket Books issued the paperback edition at first only in Texas which was not a strong book market and it sold more than 34,000 copies in the first two months, without interfering in any obvious way with sales of the Simon and Schuster edition:

Convinced that De Graaf was correct about the coexistence of hardcover and paperback markets, Simon and Schuster allowed Pocket Books to go ahead with national release, and **How To Win Friends and Influence People** sold 700,000 paperback copies in six months. By April 1941, the sales had reached 1.3 million copies (Davis: 1984, 42).

In fact, the impact that Pocket Books was to have on other reading practices was at the lower end of the market, in pulp magazines, which by the end of the 1940s, had declined in sales to the point of collapse. While it has been argued that this was in large measure due to the increase in production costs (33), this, of course, would have also had an effect on paperbacks. A more probable explanation is that the growth of the paperback market and the dramatic rise of the comic book in the same period fragmented the audience for pulps; some readers would migrate to the paperback market while the more juvenile or adolescent would gravitate toward the comic book which in thematic content more closely resembled the pulps (34). As I have already argued, the

paperback book was not merely the heir to the pulp magazine, in some sort of evolutionary model of popular culture, but rather, it represents a more fundamental restructuring of popular culture brought about by the consolidation of consumer capitalism. It is also important to point out that virtually all of the early competitors to Pocket Books were not traditional book publishers but came out of the magazine industry. The first major entry into the field after Pocket Books was Avon Books, founded by Joseph Meyers in 1941 with the financial backing of the American News Corporation. Recognizing the huge potential in paperbacks, the ANC engaged Meyers after Pocket Books had left to form its own independent distribution network. Meyers had in 1929 founded the Illustrated Editions Company which published inexpensive hardcover editions of classics and the first Avon Books were in the same spirit, appealing to precisely the same audience as Pocket Books. The early Avon titles used as a colophon a bust of Shakespeare and the endpapers were a reproduction of an early map of the world, complete with Latin text. However, within a very short time, Avon Books began to cultivate a more pulp-oriented audience and it is many of these paperbacks that gave the format its early reputation for prurient appeal. The next two major paperback firms also emerged from the magazine industry: Popular Library, which began in 1942, was founded by the publisher and the editor

of the 'Thrilling' group of pulp magazines (**Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective**, and so on); and the Dell Publishing Company, which had produced confession magazines since the 1920s and had more recently branched into comic books. Like the later Avon titles, the titles published by both Popular Library and Dell were much closer to the pulp model and by the postwar years, the paperback market began to fragment. The audience first established by Pocket Books remained and expanded with the addition of a number of firms that continued to publish more traditionally legitimate literature and by the late 1950s, the modern trade paperback emerged from this milieu. At the same time, those publishers more oriented to the pulp style also grew at a phenomenal rate forming, by the early 1950s, the modern mass market for popular literature usually associated with generic fiction.

Indeed, the market opened up by Pocket Books in the prewar years was populated rapidly by any number of paperback firms, some lasting only a few years, others still in operation: Ace which specialized in science fiction was founded in 1952; Fawcett Gold Medal started in 1950 to produce the first original paperback fiction, no longer requiring a hardcover version for its legitimation; New American Library, famous for its series of "high literary

merit" (Crider: 1982, 183) was founded by former executives of the American branch of Penguin Books. One of the most spectacular and well known examples is that of Harlequin Enterprises, a Canadian firm that had begun in the 1940s as a paperback publisher of mostly general fiction. Within a few years, Harlequin began concentrating on women's romance novels and by the early 1980s, had become one of the world's largest publishing conglomerates with film and television interests.

But regardless of the fragmentation of the market in the postwar years, it is clear that the creation of this market in the first place was based on the establishment of reading popular literature as a legitimate leisure practice for a large section of the middle class that had been previously ignored by the mainstream publishing industry. The format and overall approach taken by Pocket Books and others in the late 1930s was the catalyst for the emergence of a taste formation that brought together a wide readership and allowed for the entrance of the publishing industry into the era of mass production and its eventual growth into a modern cultural industry.

Summary

The construction of a broad audience for popular literature was centred around the mass market paperback format and the way in which this commodity form was able to legitimate reading as a significant leisure practice. While there had been a large reading public before the late 1930s, the book trade had been unable to reach a mass market as had the magazine industry. Various attempts by publishers to establish larger audiences for books had been unsuccessful for the most part since these were directed at a limited readership consisting mainly of the literate fraction of the middle class that was relatively high in cultural capital. The discursive formation represented by the paperback format of Pocket Books drew on the appeal of the traditional book, an icon of learning and culture, as well as the accessibility of the magazine. This brought together previously separate readerships into a new middlebrow taste formation that offered a relatively high return in cultural capital for a minimum investment of economic capital. This served to establish reading popular literature as a legitimate leisure practice for a broad middle class audience.

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Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to argue that the emergence of the modern mass market for popular literature was symptomatic of a much deeper shift in social relations in capitalist society. This was part of the change from a capitalism oriented around production to one in which consumption became an increasingly important aspect of social life. In addition, I have suggested that this transition from a period of extensive accumulation to one of intensive accumulation brought with it an important transformation in the nature of class and class power in capitalist societies.

In the first chapter, I outlined the rise of consumption in American culture, pointing out that modern consumerism was not merely the result of the emulation of the practices of the wealthy by successively lower economic strata. On the contrary, I argued that the increase in consumption in the Fordist era was a necessary step for the continuation of the process of capital accumulation. In order to make profitable the enormous productive capacity of industrial capitalism, it was necessary to create markets of sufficient size, bringing consumption into synchronization with production.

This also required that markets transcend previous boundaries, especially class, and in this period, issues of class were increasingly obscured by an ideology of industrial democracy: social difference was to be eradicated through both the overall rise in material wealth and the increased leisure time in which to pursue higher learning and culture. The ability to consume was regarded not only as a privilege but as a right; social mobility was seen as not merely possible, but almost as an obligation; and this ideology of democratic consumption and mobility were fundamental to the establishment and growth of consumerism.

As production and consumption grew increasingly interdependent, the latter played a more important role in the nature of social class. As I argued in chapter 2, the acquisition of the cultural knowledge associated with social status became as important as the accumulation of material wealth in the establishment and maintenance of social position. Using Bourdieu's theory of class and the habitus, I examined the relationship between the pursuit of cultural capital and social mobility within the middle class. I have argued that taste, or the apparently natural ability to distinguish between various cultural goods and practices, became especially important within the large middle class in consumer cultures as an indicator of social position. In the

cultural field, the emergence of a middlebrow taste represented an option that promised the highest return in terms of cultural capital for a minimum investment of both cultural and economic capital. Middlebrow culture promised the aura of higher culture without the difficulty and time usually associated with its acquisition. Given that the largest potential audience for cultural products in consumer society was the huge and very diverse middle class, the middlebrow taste position was extremely important in the creation of mass markets for cultural commodities.

In chapter 3, I demonstrated that the publishing industry was quite underdeveloped in comparison to others industries in terms of mass markets. I have suggested that this was due in part to the inability of conservative publishers to transcend their own taste position and that the mass market paperback emerged out of these tensions between high and low culture. I argued in chapter 4 that the creation of the mass market for popular literature was achieved through the ways in which taste and its relationship to class power was mobilized. The mass market paperback was a highly polysemic commodity, combining the aura of learning and culture with the accessibility of the magazine, and brought together previously separate audiences into a middlebrow taste formation. In this way, it participated in the establishment of the reading of popular literature as a legitimate leisure

practice for a broad middle class audience. It was not the text that was significant but the context: a cultural discourse in which consumers with a wide range of habitus could participate. The construction of the mass market for popular literature is a specific manifestation of an important period of transition in capitalist society; and the mass market paperback book, the commodity at the centre of this moment of transition, was not only a crystallization of the forces involved, but was also implicated in the reproduction of social relationships and in the changing nature of class and class power.

This research has a number of implications for sociological knowledge and for further research. As an analysis of the relationship between culture and broader areas of social process at a specific historical moment, this study represents, I think, a contribution to cultural studies. But more importantly, following the lead of Bourdieu, I have argued for a reconsideration of the concept of class in both cultural studies and sociology in general. In order to escape the trap of economistic reductionism, there has been an increasing tendency to avoid entirely the issue of class in cultural studies, the work of Stuart Hall and a few others being important exceptions. This is not a call for a resuscitation of the traditional Marxist notion of class but

neither is it an argument for jettisoning entirely this approach. It is clear, I think, that traditional class power has been modified considerably in consumer capitalism through the increasing penetration of commodity relationships into all aspects of daily life. The need to theorize adequately from a materialist standpoint the nature of social difference in contemporary capitalism has not disappeared but, I would argue, is even more pressing given the tendency of consumer culture to obfuscate power relationships. The analysis presented in this paper of the fundamental connection between consumption, class, and status, and the role that this plays in the reproduction of power is, I hope, a step toward a more full understanding of the nature of class in consumer capitalism.

Notes to Introduction

1. Cawelti (1976) deals with most genres of popular fiction such as mystery, science fiction and so on; Denning (1987) examines the dime novel of the late 19th century. Work on the audiences for popular fiction include Radway (1984) and Thurston (1987) both of which provide much insight into the audience for the romance novel. Research into the popular fiction industry specifically includes Davis (1984), parts of Bennet et al (1990), Bonn (1982, 1990) and Jensen (1984).

Notes to Chapter I

1. The growth of the advertising industry has been dealt with extensively and I will not go into detail here. For example, Ewen (1976, 1988) and Leiss et al (1990).
2. While this quote addresses the masses in a call for a new social order, the power of advertising lay in its ability to address the consumer as an individual. As Raymond Williams points out so insightfully, 'mass' is actually somewhat of a misnomer since the purpose of mass production (in the case of Williams argument, mass communication), at least within the context of a liberal capitalist social formation, was to make commodities available to individuals, not necessarily groups:

Sound radio and television were developed for transmission to *individual* homes...but then this new form of social communication - broadcasting - was obscured by its definition as 'mass communication': an abstraction to its most general characteristic, that it went to many people, 'the masses', which obscured the fact that the means chosen was the offer of individual sets...(Williams in Bennet: 1990, 17, emphasis in original)

3. This was true to a lesser extent for gender. One of the major divisions for advertisers was (and still is) gender.
4. I found it very interesting that during the rapid transformation of Eastern Europe over the past few years, major news programs conflated potential political freedom with the availability of western consumer products; one of the main components of liberation was assumed to be accessibility to a wide

range of consumer goods within which one could exercise freedom of choice.

5. For a brief but entertaining survey of these political movements, see the appropriate chapters in Furnas (1977); a detailed account of Technocracy is given in Akin (1977).
6. Social Credit, for example, recommended that their members read **The Protocols of the Elders of Zion** (see Furnas: 1977, 225).
7. In some ways, Wood no doubt saw this book as a rebuttal to **Middletown** (1929), the Lynd's famous study of Muncie, Indiana. Wood defends and applauds the economic transformation of small town America from a largely autonomous realm to part of a national economy.
8. In the continuing anthropological debate on the fundamental difference between animals and humans, Wood makes this astounding contribution:

There are no families, in the human sense of the word, among the lower animals. There is mother love and father love and, in some cases, monogamy. There are also the pack and the herd - the instinctive grouping of animals for mutual safety - and there is the wonderful system of the ants and the bees in which labor is divided and life is guaranteed not by what the individual does but by the collective achievement of the swarm...But there is no credit system as humans know it (Wood: 1929, 277).
9. Examples of this range from the furniture and wallpaper of William Morris and Arthur MacMurdo to the later tea rooms in Glasgow designed by Charles Rennie MacIntosh and Margaret MacDonald.
10. An exception to this was Technocracy. Although the Technocrats also sought shorter working hours and therefore increased leisure, they were less interested in the pursuit of culture (in the sense of high culture) which they felt to be a form of status that was symptomatic of an earlier period and representative of the non-productive activity of artists and intellectuals:

If individuals really wanted useless art forms, [Technocrats] supposed it would be possible to produce them - by machine. Elitist culture, like

politics, individualism, and morality, would fall before the demands of the machine function. (Akin: 1977, 146).

11. 'Usonia' was an abbreviation of 'The United States of North America', intended to include both Canada and Latin America. See Furnas (1977).

Notes to Chapter II

1. Such 'latent' relationships can easily surface under the right conditions. In this connection, my friend, Rob Ryan, has observed the contradictory position of business executives who are highly placed in terms of salary, benefits, and status, but can join the unemployed very quickly in times of economic crisis.
2. Indeed, as Dorothy Ross (1990) argues, part of the history of the development of sociology in the United States involved, until only recently, the suppression of any consideration of class in terms of opposing social positions. Similarly, Goran Therborn (in an unpublished paper) observed that in the years between the publication of the first encyclopaedia of social science and the second appearance of such a work, class as a category had been rendered obsolete. Referring to the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, 1930, and *The International Encyclopedia of Social Science*, 1968, he comments:

In 1930, social science, as defined by Western academia, was occupied with, among many other things, Class, Class Consciousness, and Class Struggle. [Thirty eight] years later, after a massive American colonization of the field, however, the reader interested in such topics was referred to "Stratification, Social" (Therborn, unpublished, used without permission or knowledge of the author).

3. This, I think, is one of the shortcomings of Weber's conception of a status group. Status is an important form of symbolic power and Weber does not theorize (in fact, he denies) a connection between status (or the possession of certain kinds of symbolic power) and class (in the sense of the relations of production).
4. See especially *Distinction* (1984), *The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups* (1985) and a recent collection of interviews and essays, *In Other Words* (1990). The

latter contains an important defense of Bourdieu's position as well as a very concise and brief outline of his basic theoretical positions.

5. An excellent example of this was the furor a few years ago over the appointment of Felix Holtmann, a western pig farmer and member of the Conservative Party, to the position of Chairman to the Standing Committee on Culture and Communications. His comments on high culture and in particular, his scathing criticisms of the purchase of avant-garde art by the National Gallery, were met with outrage and derision by the arts community who considered him nothing more than a hick and a Philistine.
6. The mundane as well as the forbidden can be exalted in the same way. My favourite example is the notorious pink flamingo, whose history is quite revealing in terms of the ability of various social groups to confer status. Originally an exotic decorative motif in the luxury resort hotels of Miami in the 1930s, it made its way into mainstream culture through tourist memorabilia as the middle class began to vacation more frequently in the postwar years when it finally appeared in its best known form as the plastic lawn ornament, a universal symbol of bad taste to the culturally informed. However, after declining in popularity during the 1960s, it began to acquire the status of 'camp' with various hip fringe groups. In the famous underground film of John Waters, *Pink Flamingoes*, there are not, in fact, any pink flamingoes, but the title itself was understood as emblematic of kitsch and its status as esoteric. In this form, as an ironic comment on tackiness, the pink flamingo made its way back into mainstream culture, appearing in insulation advertising and elsewhere, and thereby once again losing its cultural status.
7. It is not surprising that the concept of hip, which originated in African American subcultures as a means of undermining white domination, was taken up by white middle class bohemian intellectuals (hipsters) as an oppositional form of cultural capital that allowed them to identify with the exotica of black culture and thereby differentiate their taste from that of the mainstream.
8. As late as 1914, until Adolf Zukor imported from Europe films such as *Queen Elizabeth*, *Camille*, *Cleopatra*, and *Quo Vadis*, feature length films were not a part of the American film industry. Such an approach was not

isolated to the film industry. As early as the turn of the century, the new medium of recorded music appealed to the same tastes in forming links with the established musical theatre. RCA, for example, issued recordings by Enrico Caruso on its prestigious Red Seal that were more expensive (up to \$5, an extremely high price for the time) and regarded as more legitimate than the recordings of ethnic and regional music.

9. This particular taste can be seen as the obverse of the 'hip' (in which the illegitimate is embraced). In this case, only those cultural practices which are already legitimate or those which can be made legitimate through association, are considered desirable.
10. The new musical that has emerged in the last decade or so is an important illustration of this. Often referred to by critics as 'McTheatre', musical spectaculars such as *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera* give the experience of a high culture event without requiring previous knowledge of high culture music, theatre, or opera. This experience (or illusion) is produced in a variety of ways: the lavish production which evokes 'a night at the opera'; the expense and difficulty in obtaining entrance, and hence, rarity; the references to high culture (T.S. Eliot); and so on. *Les Misérables* is perhaps the epitome of this kind of association of the musical with high culture bringing together theatrical, operatic, historical, and literary associations.

Notes to Chapter III

1. The film industry, for example, was by the 1930s, as Tino Balio puts it "a mature oligopoly" (Balio: 1985, 253) with extensive audiences in all parts of the country; popular magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* had been an important part of American culture since the late 19th century; and the music industry, while quite extensive even earlier, had made an important transition in its commodity form from printed sheet music to the phonograph record by about 1920.
2. This concern had been growing since at least the early 1920s. A leading figure in publishing, B.W. Houses, discussed the problem of distribution in an article in *Publishers' Weekly* in 1924 (Houses: 1924) which as Tebbel points out, "may well have been the initial inspiration for the celebrated Cheney Report". (Tebbel: 1978, 313).

3. Most of the basic information about the structure of the publishing industry is derived from Tebbel (1978, 1981) which is an extensive history of publishing in the United States, and from trade papers such as **Publishers' Weekly** and **Editor and Publisher**. I use the Cheney Survey of 1931 mainly to illustrate the relationship between the emergent trend toward mass markets and the residual position of the publishers in opposition to this. The actual data published in the survey I have used less.
4. Cheney's critiques of the more conservative publishers did not go unnoticed and there was considerable debate and furor in both the mainstream newspapers and the trade journals, such as **Editor and Publisher** and **Publishers' Weekly**. See Tebbel (1978, 435-436).
5. Mott's compilation of bestsellers is quite intriguing from the standpoint of canon formation. Of all the titles he lists in the period I have mentioned, only a small number would be considered 'serious' literature or historically important by contemporary critics and with notable exceptions such as Conan Doyle's 'Sherlock Holmes' stories, novels such as **Anne of Green Gables**, **Huckleberry Finn** (and other Twain novels), or some of the children's literature such as **Black Beauty**, the majority of these books would not be recognized today. Writers such as Gene Stratton Porter, Harold Bell Wright, or even Zane Grey, who were remarkably successful in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are virtually unread by contemporary audiences. At the same time, the authors that one might encounter in a literature course dealing with the same period are almost entirely absent from the list.
6. There was a similar concentration within both the film and music publishing industries which were located respectively in Hollywood and New York, but the method and means of distribution in both industries was far more organized and extensive than that of publishing.
7. The circulation of the **Saturday Evening Post**, for example, increased a thousandfold from 1897 to 1922, from slightly over 2,000 to more than 2,000,000 (Peterson: 1964).
8. In a follow-up to their famous study **Middletown** (1929), the Lynds found that even in the early years of the Depression, and perhaps even because of it, library usage was increasing.

9. Current examples of this strategy are generic advertising for milk and eggs in Ontario, the well known 'cold beautiful milk' and 'get cracking' ads.

Notes to Chapter IV

1. See, for example, Bonn (1982), Davis (1984), Schreuders (1981), and Tebbel (1978, 1981).
2. It is significant that the major competitors to Pocket Books all had some connection to the magazine industry. This is discussed later in this chapter.
3. For example, after breaking with the American News Company in 1919, Popular Science Monthly and McCall's founded the S-M News Company.
4. The terms 'pulp nove.' and 'paperback novel' are often used interchangeably to describe mass market fiction but although they were related in many ways, they represent distinct historical periods and it is largely through the success of the latter that the pulp magazine virtually disappeared by the 1950s.
5. This was not true of all of the pulps and quite early on, there were a number of them, such as the well known **Black Mask**, that attempted to distinguish their product by appealing to a particular literary taste. The **Writers' 1936 Yearbook** argued:

The pulp detective magazine is often maligned by people who don't know what they are talking about. They condemn them with one word, "trash". You can find on occasion as fine writing in the pulp detective book as you can find in the best novel and in the most discriminating slick or literary magazine (p.64)
6. Indeed, the word 'pulp' has entered into common usage as a derogatory term for generic popular fiction.
7. This was true of magazines in general and, according to Peterson (1964), the rate of failure was very high.
8. I found recently an early 20th century copy of a Tauchnitz edition (**The Initials** by The Baroness Tautphoeus, volume 280 of Tauchnitz' Collection of British Authors) states on the cover:

This Collection is published with copyright for Continental circulation, but all purchasers are earnestly requested not to introduce the volumes into England or into any British Colony.

Nonetheless, inscribed on the inside cover in pen is "Constance Weisenburg, London, England, 1909".

9. A Tauchnitz imitator, Albatross, became quite popular in the 1930s and spawned its own imitator, Penguin, in Britain. Penguin met with considerable success but was also much more like those paperback editions that appealed to an already literate fraction of the middle class.
10. I have known a number of dealers in used books (mainly antiquarian) who have been asked for leather bound volumes in certain colours (titles not important) for decoration purposes, to lend an air of prestige and quality to a room.
11. Modern Age also drew on a very high culture audience as well and occasionally combined the literary titles with current progressive political sentiments. For example, in 1939, they issued **All the Brave**, a collection of 60 drawings by the Spanish artist Luis Quintanilla with an introduction by Ernest Hemingway, in both paperbound and regular editions. The latter was a limited printing of 442 copies, priced at \$10, and with a special cover plate by the artist (**Publishers' Weekly**: January 28, 1939, 371)
12. Little Blue Books did not fail at all, surviving into the 50s as a modest producer of inexpensive books, almost pamphlets in some cases, on serious subjects.
13. I want to point out that arguments about 'firsts' are not particularly useful and although Pocket Books was no doubt the first publisher to achieve success in the mass market, it is clear that this firm has to be located within the conjuncture that I have described. At the same time, the firm was no doubt inventive in its approach to mass marketing and credit must be given to the ingenuity of those involved and their ability to exploit the specific contradictions of the moment.
14. Blue Ribbon Books was actually formed by four major publishers: Harper; Little, Brown; Harcourt, Brace; and Dodd, Mead. These four publishers use Blue Ribbon to profit from the reprinting of successful nonfiction titles (Tebbel: 1978, 495).

15. Both Davis (1984) and Tebbel (1978) make note of this. As Tebbel points out, an informal publishers' lunch club, The Book Table, founded by Alfred Knopf, was "distinct from the Publishers' Lunch Club, which was not notable in those days for the number of its Jewish members" (p.130). One is reminded of a similar, although more extreme, situation that existed in the early days of the film industry with a kind of cultural opposition between the mainly Protestant Motion Picture Patents Association, headed by Thomas Edison, and the independent producers who were mainly eastern European Jewish immigrants.
16. Bonn (1983) provides much detail on these early solicitations by Pocket Books and it is from this article that I draw most of this information.
17. They were either bestsellers or 'better sellers', a term used by Mott to describe those books that do not meet his criteria of a best-seller (i.e., purchased by 1% of the population) but nonetheless, sold well (Mott: 1960, 315)
18. Although it is often argued that advertising capitalizes on the association of films with well-known books (i.e., read the book, see the movie), the reverse is equally true (see the movie, read the book). In fact, currently, it is not unusual for a book to be written from the screenplay, after the success of the film.
19. Bonn (1983, claims that at this time **The Good Earth** was the only title for which Pocket Books had secured reprint rights but this seems unlikely. Several books on the proposed list of titles, including the popular self-improvement books **The Art of Thinking** and **Wake Up and Live!**, had been published by Simon and Schuster.
20. It was edged out by **The Life of Emile Zola**, a Warner Brothers 'biopic', another classic middlebrow historical romance.
21. According to Bonn (1983), "A total of 4,866 letters were sent to people in New York, Illinois, Indiana, Georgia, California, Colorado, New Hampshire, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Louisiana" (p.9) Copies of **The Good Earth** accompanied only 929 of these.
22. Whether or not it was intended, these books quickly became the inexpensive choice for innumerable high

school students and went through many printings. In 1941 Pocket Books added to the list **Five Great Comedies** and copies of both the tragedies and comedies that I come across in second hand stores almost always have the name and class number of their owner on the inside cover.

23. The idea did not originate with Pocket Books. Doubleday, for example, had published a series of 'photoplay editions' (clothbound, not paperback) based on prestigious films, such as **The Phantom of the Opera**.
24. Typical examples include the symphonic record collections, such as that offered by the Longines Symphonette Society (whose very name is a striking example of the middlebrow appeal) or the various collections of 'important' literary works still offered by any number of publishers but especially the book clubs.
25. Among the nominations for Academy Awards during this decade was a rather surprising number of such films: **The Private Life of Henry VIII** (London Films/Korda, 1933), **The Barrets of Wimpole Street** (MGM, 1934), **The House of Rothschild** (20th Century, 1934), **The Affairs of Cellini** (20th Century, 1934), **David Copperfield** (MGM, 1934), **Les Miserables** (20th Century Fox, 1935), **Mutiny on the Bounty** (MGM, 1935), **Anthony Adverse** (Warner, 1936), **The Story of Louis Pasteur** (Warner, 1936), **A Tale of Two Cities** (MGM, 1935), **Captains Courageous** (MGM, 1937), **The Life of Emile Zola** (Warner, 1937), **Gone With The Wind** (MGM, 1939), **Wuthering Heights** (Goldwyn, 1939), **Rebecca** (Selznick, 1940). It is also notable that many of these had been popular books in the same period
26. The early advertising for **The Three Musketeers** is a particularly good example of this: "(NOTE: In 2 vols. because of its exceptional length.) One of the world's most stirring, dramatic, adventure tales - escapades of four lovable rascals." (Pocket Books: 1989). From the same advertisement is the following description of **The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini**, carefully pointing out that the most ribald parts have not been omitted: "Lover, swordsman, artist, genius! His mistresses were the favorites of Renaissance courts - his patrons were Popes. 547 pages. Unexpurgated" (Pocket Books: 1989).
27. Inscriptions on the endpapers of Pocket Books from this period indicate that they were close enough to

traditional books to be considered as presents for birthdays and Christmas.

28. It is not unusual to find early printings of Pocket Books in remarkable condition after 50 years. Although the plastic lamination is usually gone, the covers are often intact, the binding and spine still tight, and the pages virtually white.
29. Nonetheless, Pocket Books actually encouraged disposability to some extent in very early advertising. The buyer could return the book to the company as a premium on a higher priced hardcover edition. This was probably to allay the fears of publishers who felt that their sales might be compromised by cheaper editions but it was not a very popular practice and Pocket Books dropped this offer quite early.
30. The 'B' movie is admittedly a somewhat problematic concept and can refer to a wide range of production practices but in general, I am referring to those films which were produced on strict low budgets and marketed to exhibitors on a flat fee basis. These films represented the most predictable of Hollywood product in terms of return on investment and gave the industry a certain stability that could not be achieved with only high risk blockbusters.
31. Cheney discovered that the sales of most books declined very rapidly and died within a year of publication. In addition, only 1 in 10 fiction titles sold more than 20,000 copies while only 1 in 200 sold more than 50,000 (Cheney: 1960, 203-205).
32. Both **The Good Earth** and **Lost Horizon**, for example, were still in production in 1991 under the Pocket Books imprint.
33. For example, Petersen (1964) argues "after World War II, publishers of pulps were hit especially hard by rising production costs, which increased 72 per cent between the end of 1944 and mid-1947" (p. 309).
34. I am indebted to Will Straw for this important insight.

Appendix A

Cover Art from Modern Age Books, late 1930s

On the following page are reproductions of covers of Modern Age Books from the late 1930s. **Lightship** is an example of a fairly straightforward generic design for reprint fiction. **Babies Without Tails** (printed in 1937) is one of the more colourfully illustrated editions and is a collection of short stories about the Soviet Union. This edition has a dust jacket that is exactly the same as the cover. Because of the considerable expense involved, these covers have not been reproduced in their actual size (5 5/8" x 7 5/8" or 14.2 cm x 19.5 cm).

Appendix B

List of Titles Proposed by Pocket Books in Reader Survey, 1938

Below is the list of proposed titles sent out to potential readers by Pocket Books in 1938. The list, from Bonn (1983), has been rearranged according to the ranking of the titles by the respondents. Titles in boldface are those eventually published by Pocket Books.

- 1 **The Good Earth - Pearl S. Buck**
- 2 **Enough Rope - Dorothy Parker**
- 3 **Life With Father - Clarence Day**
- 4 **The Art of Thinking - Abe Ernest Dimmet**
- 5 **Wake Up and Live! - Dorothea Brande**
- 6 **Life Begins At Forty - Walter B. Pitkin**
- 7 **The Bridge of San Luis Rey - Thornton Wilder**
- 8 **Personal History - Vincent Sheean**
- 9 **The Fountain - Charles Morgan**
- 10 **Green Mansions - W.H. Hudson**
- 11 **The Way of All Flesh - Samuel Butler**
- 12 **The Postman Always Rings Twice - James M. Cain**
- 13 **The Man Nobody Knows - Bruce Barton**
- 14 **The Thin Man - Dashiell Hammett**
- 15 **The Circular Staircase - Mary Roberts Rhinehart**
- 16 **The Stray Lamb - Thorne Smith**
- 17 **An American Tragedy - Theodore Dreiser**
- 18 **Trent's Last Case - E.C. Bentley**
- 19 **The Private Life of Helen of Troy - John Erskine**
- 20 **The Murder of Roger Ackroyd - Agatha Christie**
- 21 **Cakes and Ale - Somerset Maugham**
- 22 **The Moon and Sixpence - Somerset Maugham**
- 23 **The Maltese Falcon - Dashiell Hammett**
- 24 **The Royal Road To Romance - Richard Halliburton**
- 25 **The Great Impersonation - E. Phillips Oppenheim**
- 26 **Point Counter Point - Aldous Huxley**
- 27 **The Enchanted April - 'Elizabeth'**
- 28 **The Crime Wave at Blandings - P.G. Wodehouse**
- 29 **Bring 'Em Back Alive - Frank Buck**
- 30 **The Bishop Murder Case - S.S. Van Dine**
- 31 **If Winter Comes - A.S.M. Hutchinson**
- 32 **The Case of the Lucky Legs - Earle Stanley Gardner**
- 23 **Scaramouche - Rafael Sabatini**
- 34 **All Quiet On The Western Front - Erich Maria Remarque**
- 35 **A High Wind in Jamaica - Richard Hughes**
- 36 **Porgy - DuBose Heyward**
- 37 **Education of a Princess - Grand Duchess Marie**
- 38 **The Old Wives' Tale - Arnold Bennet**
- 39 **Captain Blood - Rafael Sabatini**
- 40 **Power - Leon Feuchtwanger**

- 41 Saint Overboard - Leslie Charteris
- 42 Magnolia Street - Louis Golding
- 43 Sorrel and Son - Warwick Deeping
- 44 Dracula - Bram Stoker
- 45 National Velvet - Enid Bagnold
- 46 Charlie Chan Carries On - Earl Derr Biggers
- 47 Private Worlds - Phyllis Bottome
- 48 Behind That Curtain - Earl Derr Biggers
- 49 Casuals of the Sea - William McFee
- 50 Grand Hotel - Vicki Baum
- 51 The Constant Nymph - Margaret Kennedy
- 52 The Bellamy Trail - Frances Noyes Hart

Appendix C

Questionnaire Used in Reader Survey, Pocket Books, 1938

Below is a reproduction (from Pocket Books: 1989) of the questionnaire sent out by Pocket Books in 1938.

A PARTIAL REPRODUCTION

The publishers of **Pocket-BOOKS** will sincerely appreciate your courtesy in checking the few questions below, and returning this sheet in the accompanying postage-free envelope. You need not sign your name unless you care to.

1. After examining the **Pocket-BOOK** edition of **THE GOOD EARTH**, do you like:

- a. The size? ☐ Yes ☐ No b. The paper? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 c. The print? ☐ Yes ☐ No d. The cover? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 e. The notes about the author, and other books? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 (see page 377)
 f. The privilege of "trading in" the copy for a clothbound edition?
 (See page 378) ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Do you like the opportunity to purchase, at only 25¢ each, good-books that you missed reading when they were first published? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 a. Would you prefer a "digest" version to the complete book? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Where do you now get most of your reading? --

- ☐ Books you BUY? ☐ Books you RENT? ☐ Books you BORROW?
☐ From a BOOK CLUB? ☐ From the Public Library? ☐ From Magazines?

4. How many of the books listed in the accompanying circular have you read? _____

5. Where would it be most convenient for you to get **Pocket-BOOKS**? --

- ☐ Bookstore? ☐ Drug Store? ☐ Department Store?
☐ Chain Store? ☐ News-stand? ☐ By Mail?

6. What types of books do you prefer? (please check as many as you regularly read)--

☐ Romance	☐ Short Stories	☐ Economics
☐ Western	☐ Character Novels	☐ Politics
☐ Mystery	☐ Great Literature	☐ Current History
☐ Detective	☐ From the Past	☐ Self-Improvement
☐ Humorous	☐ Problem Novels	☐ Psychology
☐ Adventure	☐ Biography, Autobiography	☐ Philosophy
☐ Historical Novels	☐ History	☐ Medicine, Health
☐ Poetry	☐ Science	☐ Social Problems
	☐ Travel	

7. Who are your favorite authors? _____

8. About how many books do you read each year? _____

9. Have you any criticisms or suggestions for the improvement of **Pocket-BOOKS**?

Thank you!

Appendix D

Title Published by Pocket Books, June 1939-June 1940

Below is a list of the titles published by Pocket Books in its first year (June 1939 to June 1940).

1. Lost Horizon - James Hilton
2. Wake Up and Live - Dorothea Brande
3. Five Great Tragedies - William Shakespeare
4. Topper - Thorne Smith
5. The Murder of Roger Ackroyd - Agatha Christie
6. Enough Rope- Dorothy Parker
7. Wuthering Heights- Emily Bronte
8. The Way of All Flesh - Samuel Butler
9. The Bridge of San Luis Rey - Thornton Wilder
10. Bambi - Felix Salten
11. The Good Earth - Pearl Buck
12. Great Short Stories - Guy De Maupassant
13. Showboat - Edna Ferber
14. A Tale of Two Cities - Charles Dickens
15. The Story of Mankind - Hendrik Willem Van Loon
16. Green Mansions - W.H. Hudson
17. The Chinese Orange Mystery - Ellery Queen
18. Pinnocchio - Carlo Collodi
19. Abraham Lincoln - Lord Charnwood
20. The Return of the Native - Thomas Hardy
21. Murder Must Advertise - Dorothy L. Sayers
22. The Swiss Family Robinson - Johann Wyss
23. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin - Benjamin Franklin
24. The Corpse With the Floating Foot - R.A.J. Wailing
25. Treasure Island - Robert Louis Stevenson
26. Elizabeth and Essex - Lytton Strachey
27. Appointment in Samarra - John O'Hara
28. Jeeves - P.G. Wodehouse
29. A Christmas Carol - Charles Dickens
30. The Little French Girl - Anne Douglas Sedgewick
31. The Hunchback of Notre Dame - Volume I - Victor Hugo
32. The Hunchback of Notre Dame - Volume II - Victor Hugo
33. The Watchman's Clock - Leslie Ford
34. Gulliver's Travels - Jonathan Swift
35. Beau Geste - P.C. Wren
36. The Three Musketeers - Volume I - Alexandre Dumas
37. The Three Musketeers - Volume II - Alexandre Dumas
38. The Mystery of the Blue Train - Agatha Christie
39. Great Tales and Poems - Edgar Allen Poe
40. The Man Nobody Knows - Bruce Barton
41. The Constant Nymph - Margaret Kennedy
42. Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini - Benvenuto Cellini
43. The Lodger - Marie Belloc Lowndes

44. Mother - Kathleen Norris
45. The Light That Failed - Rudyard Kipling
46. The Bowstring Murders - Carter Dickson
47. Bring 'Em Back Alive - Frank Buck
48. Scarlet Sister Mary - Julia Peterkin
49. Dr. Erlich's Magic Bullet - Paul de Kruiff
50. The House Without a Key - Earl Derr Biggers
51. Thunder on the Left - Christopher Morely
52. The House of the Seven Gables - Nathaniel Hawthorne
53. The Best of Damon Runyon - Damon Runyon
54. The Great Prince Shan - E. Phillips Oppenheim
55. Out Town - Thornton Wilder
56. The Green Bay Tree - Louis Bromfield
57. After Such Pleasures - Dorothy Parker
58. Tom Brown's School Days - Thomas Hughes
59. Think Fast, Mr. Moto - John P. Marquand
60. The Scandal of Father Brown
61. Bob, Son of Battle - Alfred Olivant
62. The Pocket Book of Verse - M.E. Speare
63. Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen
64. While the Patient Slept - Mignon G. Eberhart
65. The Four Million - O. Henry
66. National Velvet - Enid Bagnold
67. Heidi - Johanna Spyri
68. How To Win Friends and Influence People - Dale Carnegie
69. The Thirty-nine Steps - John Buchan
70. The Mystery of the Dead Police - Philip MacDonald
71. The French Powder Mystery - Ellery Queen
72. Anne of Windy Poplars - L.M. Montgomery

Appendix E**Cover Art from Pocket Books, 1939-1940**

On the following pages are reproductions of covers of Pocket Books from the first few years of production. **The Good Earth**, Pocket Books 11, is very similar to the promotional copy sent out by the firm in 1938 but some background art as well as the comments on the cover were added for this edition. Because of the considerable expense involved, these covers have not been reproduced in their actual size (4 3/4" x 6 1/2" or 11 cm x 16.5 cm).

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