Origins of the U.S. Genre-Fiction System, 1890–1956
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How did genre fiction arise? “Genre fiction” is a familiar phrase today, widely used to designate certain kinds of fiction: crime stories, romance novels, Westerns, science fiction, and so on. For Mark McGurl, genre fiction has now become so ubiquitous as to be “the heart of the matter of literature in the Age of Amazon.”¹ Yet the origins of genre fiction remain only vaguely understood. Some of its constituent genres could, on some accounts, be traced back centuries—by treating, say, *Frankenstein* as science fiction or *Pride and Prejudice* as an archetypal romance—but the idea of genre fiction comes much later. The term “genre fiction” has little currency before the 1970s, and no earlier equivalent is to be found.² The phrase is fifty years old or so; here I mean to show that the thing itself is not more than fifty years older. Genre may be perennial, but genre fiction was a new institution of early-to-mid-twentieth-century U.S. print culture that significantly reshaped the production and circulation of fiction.

Genre fiction should be understood as the result of the institutionalization of popular fiction categories as a system that came to be persistently and self-consciously used by writers, readers, publishers, and libraries. The history of this system is entangled with, but not reducible to, the histories of individual genres. In this essay, drawing on the sociology of culture, the history of the book, and the history and theory of literary genre, I analyze evidence from a range of print sources, including book-trade periodicals, pulp magazines, and book advertising, in order to trace how the genre-fiction system took hold in the U.S. literary field. Though genre fiction is now taken for granted, its emergence and diffusion across the hierarchy of publishing formats, from pulp magazines to paperbacks to hardcover books, was distinctively shaped by the conditions of early-twentieth-century print culture.

In emphasizing the significance of institutions, especially publishing institutions, the present essay builds on the substantial body of work combining book-historical and literary-critical approaches to popular genres: for example Janice Radway’s fundamental study of the romance novel; Sean McCann and
Erin Smith’s work on hard-boiled detective fiction; and John Rieder and John Cheng’s studies of science fiction. My understanding of genre as fundamentally a social phenomenon, not a feature of texts alone, also aligns this inquiry with the “genre worlds” approach of Lisa Fletcher, Beth Driscoll, and Kim Wilkins in their work on the collective production of contemporary romance. But whereas studies of individual genres are numerous, historical studies of the system itself have been rare. This neglect is not only due to the long-standing and still widespread critical prejudice against mass-cultural writing, assumed to be uninteresting because it is generic or formulaic. Even scholars who take popular fiction seriously often assume that this fiction must inevitably be what we now call genre fiction. “Popular fiction,” contends Ken Gelder in his valuable survey, “is, essentially, genre fiction.”

John Rieder’s persuasive account of science fiction’s emergence within a new “mass-cultural genre system” organized by cheap periodicals and advertising assumes that the mass-cultural system was a system of genres. But this assumption conflates the theoretical notion of a genre system with the historically specific development of the genre-fiction system. Any literary system might be interpreted as a genre system, but American cheap fiction is distinctive in the ways its genres become institutionalized in the U.S. in the 1900–1950 period. Though some scholars of popular fiction, including Michael Denning, David Glover, and Clive Bloom, have recognized in passing that such an institutionalization process was underway in this period, these writers do not aim to provide an account of that process itself. As I show below, we can observe the way actors in the literary field—publishers, writers, readers, and others—gradually adopted fiction genre labels and increasingly understood them as a distinctive system. Only when this process was complete did it become usual to speak of “genre fiction” and to take this system and its categories for granted as part of print culture.

Following the formation of genre fiction sheds light on both the contingency of its emergence and the reasons for its subsequent durability.

From the point of view of publishing, the institutionalization process, summarized in table 1, appears to move in stages through a sequence of print formats. Initial attempts at genre-marked fiction lines emerged in cheap book series in the late nineteenth century; as this format waned, one cheap-series publisher, Street & Smith, revived the genre-marking strategy in the new mass format of the pulp magazine. Other pulp publishers imitated the strategy, and genre classification came to organize most cheap fiction magazines. As the pulp magazine format receded in the 1940s, the mass-market paperback book took hold of a large-scale audience, picking up the principle of subgenre-
categorization from the pulps, often because magazine publishers and editors became paperback publishers. With the postwar “paperback revolution,” installing paperback publishing at the heart of the book trade as a whole, the trade accepted the genre-fiction system as a classified, distinctive, and distinctively low-status dimension of fiction production. Thus established, the system remained flexible enough to accommodate new genres while preserving the idea of a distinctive universe of generic fiction, differentiated both from big commercial bestsellers and literary fiction.

Table 1: How fiction-genre categorization appears across publishing types over time. Reading down the right column indicates how the genre-fiction system was adopted by a sequence of print formats of increasing literary legitimacy. But the table as a whole shows the gradual movement of the whole field towards acknowledging this system, while maintaining distinctions as to status.

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The condensed survey I offer here focuses on key developments in U.S. book and magazine publishing for genre fiction. I treat publishers as participants in a field, in the sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu and elaborated for late twentieth-century Anglo-American publishing by John B. Thompson. This essay adopts a similar perspective on early-twentieth-century fiction publishing in the U.S. Of course U.S. genre fiction had many connections to developments abroad. But though individual genres invariably have transnational histories, the formalized genre-fiction system apparently emerged first in the U.S., a product of its distinctive industrial and social contexts for widespread cheap fiction production, especially in magazines. In any case, I hope that the approach taken here, situating the development and institutionalization of
publishing categories within a literary field, could be fruitfully used to study the systematization of genre fiction (or lack thereof) in other contexts.

To study a literary field is to attend to relations among actors of many types: individual and institutional producers, consumers, intermediaries. The present essay concentrates on publishers but situates publishers’ choices in relation to those of ordinary readers, book critics, and librarians. I will have less to say here about fiction authors; strategically sideling these habitual stars of literary history allows me to foreground the other actors who shape the circulation and reception of texts, including the genre labels texts circulate under. Though authors’ choices shaped and were shaped by the genre-fiction system, they alone could not institute it; indeed, no single agent was responsible. The system was a contingent outgrowth of experiments by cheap magazine publishers, and it persisted through technical, organizational, and social change, not by the wishes of publishers or any other group, but because it furnished a stable compromise among the divergent interests of many participants in print culture. As I will show by considering some of the new modes of readerly participation the system enabled, genre fiction articulated an expanded fiction-reading public to an expansive print culture industry, making new readers and new fiction—and new kinds of fiction—regularly available to each other.

At the same time, the system also articulated cheap periodical fiction to other parts of the wider cultural field by establishing forms of recognition and further circulation for that fiction and its producers and readers. These forms provided the aegis under which such fiction eventually became part of the legitimate book trade—at the price of fixing its lower status in relation to consecrated or “literary” fiction. The compromise that assured genre fiction’s durability also assured that arbiters of literary culture would continue to regard it as a predictable waste of time. But the summary judgments of high-status publishers and literary critics do not tell the whole story of the conflicted worlds created within the changing social forms of the genre-fiction system.

FICTION BELOW CLASSIFICATION

At the end of the nineteenth century, publishing in general and fiction production in particular were expanding rapidly. Yet it did not immediately follow that fiction was segmented into well-defined categories. The idea that large-scale fiction production is necessarily generic was (and still is) characteristic of high-prestige position-takings in the field, like Henry James’s signal essay “The Art of Fiction” (1884): “It might easily seem,” says James, “that there could be
no great character in a commodity so quickly and easily produced.”

James suggests, anticipating the terms of literary modernism, that only the discipline of taste and craft can rescue the novel from commodity status; the alternative is the merely generic. But though by the late nineteenth century fiction production was a genuinely massified affair, fiction categories remained weakly institutionalized. This weak institutionalization is attested in early versions of Melvil Dewey’s decimal classification system for libraries, which subdivided fiction only by nations, periods, and authors, notwithstanding his recognition that “in popular libraries half of the circulation is often in fiction.”

To impose a generic code developed later onto the late nineteenth century would be to miss the fluidity of now-familiar categories. Consider how Publishers’ Weekly reflected on the U.S. success of Conan Doyle’s Adventures of Sherlock Holmes in an 1893 overview of the previous year in the trade:

A. Conan Doyle was weird and sad in “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes” and “The Great Shadow,” the first a study of crime, the second dealing with Napoleon and his wars.

Labeling one of the great inaugural bestsellers of the detective story a “study of crime” seems, in present-day terms, like an absurd category error. The term “detective story” was certainly available—Publishers’ Weekly was using it in 1890—but the genre was a contingent, informal shorthand in book-talk; Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories did not yet have an obligatory subcategory label. Indeed, the genre label in the title of the book is “Adventures.” For the Publishers’ Weekly reader, the author function dominates, uniting Conan Doyle’s two titles across genres. Just as Conan Doyle’s detective stories gained their first large-scale success in the Strand, a miscellaneous general-audience magazine, so too his stories’ American fame initially muted rather than amplified their generic quality. Indeed, as an author of global celebrity who ranged across multiple genres, he had a notably ambivalent relationships to genre labels, which eventually seemed to him like barriers to serious recognition.

The U.S. book trade at the time broadly shared the same ambivalence, not least because it remained ambivalent about fiction itself. Fiction remained a low genre for books. In an overview of the books published in 1891, a Publishers’ Weekly editorial sighs over the proliferation of fiction titles, more numerous than any other category:

Little that is new can be said of the books of 1891... Year after year fiction has led the list, all the higher class of books growing
beautifully less by degrees, until science proper, near the bottom of the table, scarcely finds a representative.18

The tally discussed here (fig. 1), which the magazine compiled from its “Weekly Record” of new book publications, makes no differentiations within fiction. The editor’s gentle misgivings over the fiction tally suggest that the low status of fiction discourages systematic subcategorization, whereas in the “higher class of books,” the taxonomy ramifies into something resembling the academic system of disciplines—theology, law, history, and so on—with residual categories for leisure activities. By contrast to this more honored system, fiction titles come in a mass; the category is, in its sheer numerosness, a figure for the mass readership itself. After the turn of the century, fiction remained both the most numerous category and an object of some distaste. Surveying 1902, Publishers’ Weekly described fiction as “the favorite mental pabulum of the majority.”19 Overviews of the rest of the decade strike the same note, from the “low average” quality of 1903 “especially noticeable in fiction”; to the “appalling number of publications,” chiefly “plays, plays transformed into novels, and novels transformed into plays” in 1909.20 Fiction remained too homogenous and bulky a substance to bear any systematic subdivision. Indeed, the American Library Association considered preparing a subject-index for fiction in 1906, only to reject the idea for lack of interest.21

![Figure 1: “The Books of 1891,” PW, January 30, 1892, 187.](image)

Nonetheless, book publishers did intermittently market some fiction under the sign of subgenre in the first two decades of the century. Mystery or de-
Detective fiction stands out as an early example, after Sherlock Holmes’s transatlantic success spawned many imitators in the 1890s and after. Even so, U.S. publishers did not make consistent use of the “mystery” and “detective story” labels in their publicity until the 1910s. Though it is possible to isolate a genre like mystery retrospectively and retrace its evolution—as Franco Moretti does in his pioneering “distant reading” of Conan Doyle and his rivals—such an analysis cannot explain how a genre comes to be regarded as a distinctive kind of text in the first place. This process, which Rick Altman terms “genrification,” instead occurs when publishers and other intermediaries concertedly use genre labels to direct their products at readers with a particular taste for the genre as such, not simply for particular authors or characters. A charmingly egregious example is Dodd, Mead’s 1914 advertisement of Anna Katherine Green’s Dark Hollow (fig. 2). Though Green had been an established seller for decades, in the ad, her name yields pride of place to the genre, named five times over. The publisher aims to match “readers of detective fiction” to their chosen genre. Though such uses of genre are not systematic, publishers’ and booksellers’ pursuit of market niches was an important precondition for a genre-fiction system.

Newer publishing houses with more adventurous editorial and publicity strategies made particular use of the genre label in their marketing. Knopf, founded 1915, explicitly differentiated its detective offerings. In a typical 1920 list in the Atlantic Monthly, “Three New Detective Stories” are set apart, notably from an imposing catalogue of “The Works of Joseph Hergesheimer.” Another recently-founded, culturally advanced house, Boni & Liveright, marketed its wide-ranging lists similarly. The firm was the American publisher of Dorothy Sayers’s first Lord Peter Wimsey mystery, Whose Body? (1923). In Publishers’ Weekly, it advertised the title as “the only detective story that was chosen for publication, for our Spring list, from fifty-odd manuscripts. It is a corker!” This choice is framed within the firm’s pursuit of “individuality” in books, each with a “market, and an appeal of its own.” Liveright’s general-press advertising balanced this strategy of differentiation with the firm’s consistent “good books” branding, as two of its New York Times Book Review advertisements show (fig. 3). Whereas Sayers’s novel is triply labeled a “mystery,” and all its blurbs refer to its quality as a detective story, Anderson’s Dark Laughter is promoted through references to his Dial award and his recognition by “discriminating critics and readers.” By contrast, Sayers is offered as entertainment for those with a taste for the genre as such. Publishers like Knopf and Liveright pioneered a strategy of publishing genre-labeled books alongside pres-
tige titles, differentiating them so as not to sacrifice the house’s overall claim to status.

PUTTING THE SYSTEM ON THE NEWSSTAND: THE PULPS

Liveright and Knopf’s marketing strategies reinforced the institutionalization of a relatively stable “mystery” category in American book publishing. But though this prepared the ground for an eventual genre-fiction system in books, it did not create such a system. Genre-fiction systematization was instead first carried out by cheap fiction magazines. These magazines were not initially
genre-specialized; the earliest fiction pulps, like Frank Munsey's *Argosy* (started 1896), were typically genre miscellanies. In the years around 1900, some firms, notably Street & Smith, offered cheap series of reprints organized loosely by genre (e.g., the Magnet Detective Series, the Bertha Clay Library), but this last gasp of the dime novel did not persist.26 Only in 1915 did the first genre-specialized all-fiction magazine appear: Street & Smith's *Detective Story*, which began as a continuation of a foundering dime-novel holdover, *Nick Carter Weekly*.27 Until the end of the 1910s, the only other subgenre-marking in magazine titles was for the mildly provocative *Snappy Stories* (1912) and its copycats.28 Some other fiction magazines of the decade carried very broad fiction-category labels, like Ridgway's *Adventure* (1909) and *Romance* (1919), but the latter initially denoted adventure or fantasy in the broad sense, rather than the love story. *Detective Story* was the exception rather than the rule in its first decade.

This exceptional status is evident in a survey of all-fiction magazines made by the highbrow bibliographer Frederick W. Faxon in 1916. Faxon revels in disgust at “a flood of stories cheap, and many worse than cheap, fed to a public that is not reached by the public library.” Faxon enumerates forty titles, dividing them into “Ginger Type,” “Story Class,” and “Movie.” *Detective Story* is found.
among the “Story Class,” but no other title clearly specializes in a fiction sub-genre. In 1924, when he repeated his horrified survey, Faxon notes *Sea Stories, Sport Story,* and *Western Story* as well as *Detective Story,* but the other forty-odd titles in his list remain largely unspecialized. Only at the end of the decade did this “flood” present itself to Faxon as emphatically genre-specialized:

> The stories are usually classified, so that he who wishes a certain kind may not have to purchase other varieties of tale. This idea of stories in groups by subject is quite a modern development.

Faxon now enumerates 123 titles, from *Airplane Stories* to *Zeppelin Stories* by way of *Black Mask,* *Love Romances,* and *Two Gun Western Stories.* Though Faxon’s condescending assumption that each genre-labeled magazine was uniform in content was not, of course, always borne out, genre-labeling now dominated fiction magazine titles. This development, rather than any specific array of labels—many were as ephemeral as the Zeppelin story—was the crucial step in the institutionalization of a genre-fiction system in the 1920s. In the cheap magazine format, a significant body of fiction was regularly framed by its genre, not merely by highbrows who wanted to stigmatize its formulaic qualities but by the producers and audiences for that fiction themselves. By 1930 an equivalence was widely implied among multiple genres: the detective story was no longer idiosyncratic but rather typical of a whole family of genres.

The publisher Street & Smith led the way: Just as *Nick Carter Weekly* was converted into *Detective Story* (edited by “Nicholas Carter”), in 1919 Street & Smith rebranded the *New Buffalo Bill Weekly* as *Western Story.* These two, it appears, set the precedent for the firm’s next genre-classified pulp, *Love Story,* (1921). Shifting from character-based cycles to genre-based periodicals allowed the firm to sell even more material aimed at the same audience. The *Nick Carter Weekly* was a nickel weekly, with each issue holding a single 32-page Nick Carter story; *Detective Story* was also a weekly after 1917, but like the existing all-fiction pulps (*Popular, Argosy*), it cost more (ten cents) and was heftier and more varied at 132 pages combining serial novels and short stories.

The process of genre-systematization initiated by Street & Smith subsequently spread to other publishers. In his 1937 behind-the-scenes book about the pulps, the editor Harold Hersey recalls increased competition among magazines in the 1920s, when an “amoeba-like division” gave rise to “more and more specific” titles. Hersey indirectly recognizes Street & Smith’s influence
when he notes that his own love-Western hybrid, *Ranch Romances* (Clayton Magazines, 1924), was initially to be called *Western Love Stories*, until his distributors objected to it as “too close an imitation of the Street & Smith titles” (170). Hersey mentions his tutelage under Frank Blackwell, editor at Street & Smith of both *Western Story* and *Detective Story*. When Hersey moved to Clayton and started *Ace-High Magazine*, he helped transmit this particular title-production strategy among pulp publishing firms. Similarly, the founding editor of Street & Smith’s *Love Story*, Amita Fairgrieve, moved to Dell Publishing to edit *Cupid’s Diary* in 1923.35

Genre-classified fiction magazines met favorable social circumstances in the 1920s. The audience was simply larger: the population had grown; the growing economy gave that population more buying power; and public education created more readers, children and adults, than ever before.36 Overall, printing and publishing were growing on pace, with overall output of magazines, newspapers, and books tripling in nominal dollars from 1910 to 1930; newspaper and periodical circulations also climbed to a peak at the same time.37 Furthermore, the pursuit of genre niches resonated with new ways of selling other commodities in the consumer society of the 1920s. In 1923, the pioneering “public relations counsel,” Edward Bernays, suggested that the public really consisted of individuals with varied and “interlapping” group affiliations, and the art of marketing consisted in “subdividing” and stitching together appeals to particular groups.38 Bernays projects a society in which people seek to express and define themselves by buying commodities. Certainly this was a crucial part of the appeal of the widest-circulation magazines, the “big slicks” whose low prices (lower than the pulps’) were supported by enormous quantities of advertising.39

The advertising in the pulps was much less significant and strikingly further down-market: every scholarly reader of the pulps remarks on the ubiquity of self-help tracts, correspondence courses, and quack cures in their ads.40 Indeed, pulp advertising was legally constrained: as John Cheng points out, new postal codes enacted in 1917 raised the mailing costs of magazines with a large volume of advertising; only after this development did pulp advertising take on its conspicuously cheap character.41 While the largest-circulation “slick” magazines absorbed the cost, the pulps reduced advertising. Instead, what the pulps advertised above all was themselves, and, paradoxically, the generic label, together with the magazine cover, itself functioned as a powerful brand name on the newsstand. Hersey’s *Pulpwood Editor* attests to this possibility in its casual psychology of the pulp reader:
If there is one trait that the pulpwood reader has it is his predilection for sameness. If he subscribes to a smooth-paper sheet he may find one story on the theme he prefers; the pulpwood magazine, on the other hand, offers him nothing else. If he purchases a Western pulp he does so because he wants to read only fast-ridin’, quick-trigger cowboy yarns. . . . The love-fiction magazine supplies the romantic thrills that the girl wants, to the exclusion of everything else. . . . Detective, Sea, Sport, Adventure, Aviation, Pseudo-science—each has its own devotees. 42

Though Hersey (like Frederick Faxon) assumes pulp readers are naturally monotonous in their tastes, we might suppose that the emergence of an array of genre-specialized pulps allowed some readers to make themselves into genre fans. Though the mere existence of the genre-classified pulps does not prove that their readers wanted only “their favorites” over and over, it does mean pulp buyers saw the fiction genre system objectified on the newsstands.

The principle of genre-specificity exerted a powerful force on the field of pulp magazines once the prototypes of Detective Story, Western Story, and Love Story established themselves and began to spawn imitators. This force was most evident when new entrants to the field followed it. The early 1920s saw the initial publications of, for example, Detective Tales (Rural, 1922) and Clues (Clayton, 1926); Ace-High Magazine (Clayton, 1921) and North-West Stories (Fiction House, 1925); Cupid’s Diary (Dell, 1923), Sweetheart Stories (Dell, 1925), Love Romances (Fiction House, 1926); and the difference-splitting but enduringly successful Ranch Romances (Clayton, 1924). 43 The “classification” of each title was by no means stable from the start; Ace-High’s first numbers included non-Western adventure stories, and North-West Stories began in 1924 as Novelets: A Magazine of Action. 44 In the 1930s publishers still sought to exploit a genre-spread, but did so across a line of magazines—no one more forthrightly than the publisher Ned Pines with the Thrilling group: Thrilling Adventures (1931), Thrilling Detective (1931), Thrilling Love (1932), Thrilling Mystery (1935), Thrilling Ranch Stories (1933), Thrilling Sports (1936), Thrilling Western (1934), and Thrilling Wonder Stories (1936). 45 This newsstand-filling approach may well have been encouraged by conflicts between Street & Smith and the dominant newsstand distributor, the American News Company; the publishing firm started its own distribution company in 1926, and in retaliation the distributor encouraged other publishers to supply more titles. 46
The shared understanding of the available fiction genres for magazines marked the first appearance of science-fiction magazines. When Hugo Gernsback inaugurated *Amazing Stories*, his new magazine of “scientifiction,” in 1926, his introductory editorial situates it within a system organized by genre:

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type and so on, but a magazine of “Scientifiction” is a pioneer in its field in America.

By “scientifiction” I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.47

Gernsback forges a place for “scientifiction” as a genre among other magazine fiction subgenres. A few decades earlier, authorial names like Wells or Conan Doyle, appearing in magazines like the *Strand*, were more significant than their (multiple) genres; here, author names define a genre. This definition operates in a *system* in which SF was competing with other magazine categories. *Amazing* and its genre introduced new readers and texts to that system in exchange for that system’s channels of distribution and its protocols of intelligibility.

John Rieder analyzes Gernsback’s introductory gesture in similar terms, emphasizing scientifiction’s “‘organic’ status” to a system of “niche market genres.”48 But the articulation of cheap fiction as an explicit system of genres was quite novel. Only a few years earlier a magazine called *Amazing Stories* would have been less likely to contain a particular kind of story than a broad miscellany of (say) adventure tales. In fact, Street & Smith had brought out a magazine specializing in fantastic fiction in 1919, *Thrill Book*, edited by Hersey. This title’s first issue, a hodge-podge of supernatural tales, indicates that genre specialization was not a default position; its editorials promised “weird, fantastic” stories on one page but “every kind of fiction . . . provided it is clean, interesting, and really tells a story” on another.49 The publisher gave up on the title within the year as a “dismal financial flop.”50

Even once *Amazing* was under way, its single-genre identification was still in process as writers, editors, and readers negotiated over the frames for interpreting it. In the sixth issue of *Amazing*, Gernsback’s editorial explains that he could not have used “Scientifiction” for the title of the magazine, lest he “frighten” readers:

After mature thought, the publishers decided that the name which is now used was after all the best one to influence the masses, be-
cause anything that smacks of science seems to be too “deep” for the average type of reader.\textsuperscript{51}

Gernsback claims to condescend to “the average type of reader” while hinting that, of course, you have the brains for the real demands of the genre. More likely, however, even Gernsback recognized the hopelessness of marketing an as-yet-inchoate genre under an ungainly neologism. Several years and a number of magazine titles would pass by before “science fiction” became a recognizable label: Gernsback used the term in 1929 in \textit{Science Wonder Stories}, renamed \textit{Wonder Stories} the next year; \textit{Astounding Stories} became \textit{Astounding Science-Fiction} only in 1938, by which point it was finally possible for the editor, John W. Campbell, to say that “the new title explains to the unfamiliar something of what our material is.”\textsuperscript{52}

In fact, this protracted genrification process required the collaboration of readers. Genres became institutionalized especially when they became a medium for association among readers. This tendency was visible in the reader departments or “backyards” of the pulp magazines—like \textit{Weird Tales}’s “The Eyrie,” \textit{Astounding Science-Fiction}’s “Science Discussions and Brass Tacks,” \textit{Love Story}’s “Friend in Need”, or \textit{Western Story}’s “The Round-Up”—which allowed readers to be identified to one another through a shared investment in the genre. Harold Hersey remarks irritably about these departments: “No matter what subject a pulpwood magazine specializes in, there are those who know just a bit more about it than any one else and they do not hesitate to speak out—and often.”\textsuperscript{53} Tellingly, Hersey understands the letter-writers as would-be experts, a “militant minority” who rival the editor for authority.\textsuperscript{54} The participation of such “militants” in fact helped to solidify the genres they militated over. They made the genre into a public property, a shared space for discussion rather than the brand-name of an individual magazine.\textsuperscript{55} From there, some genre readerships developed into proliferating social worlds. As John Cheng shows, science fiction in particular, building on the magazine backyards, was institutionalized not only by commercial publishers but by fanzines, amateur clubs, and, by the late 1930s, conventions.\textsuperscript{56} The frequent struggles in these venues over the nature of the genre in fact entrenched the category of science fiction as meaningful and useful not only to publishers but to readers as well.

Each single category of the genre-fiction system crystallized in tandem with a sense of the system itself. In a 1927 letter to \textit{Amazing Stories}, one A.B. Chandler proclaimed: “Your magazine puts before me my favorite class of fiction,” while criticizing the appearance of “scientific detective stories,” which “can
be found in almost any magazine.” A 1938 letter to Astounding sounded a now-familiar SF refrain in criticizing an adventure story by Norman L. Knight: “Stories like ‘Isle of the Golden Swarm’ have no place in Astounding. They are distinctly not science-fiction, fantasy, or otherwise—even conceding their merit.” The same activity took place on the other side of the boundary, as when a Weird Tales reader complained that a story “might pass—on a dark night—as science-fiction. But weird fiction—never!” Definition-by-negation is a fundamental move in any discussion of categories, but in the pulp genre system, what was negated were the other genres available in magazines. Such practices constituted those genres as comparable parts of the system. That such categories were never as crisply defined as the “militant” readers believed did not undermine this emerging shared understanding.

GENRE BOOKS BEFORE PAPERBACKS

It took two decades’ worth of attempts for the magazines’ fiction genre system to take hold in books. In 1921, Street & Smith attempted to enter the book trade, creating the Chelsea House imprint to reprint novels from the magazines as books. Chelsea House marked its titles generically, in the mode of the magazines they came from; but other book publishers did not follow this example, and Chelsea House itself faded into obscurity, finally ceasing operations in 1939. Another development, led by the large firm Doubleday, proved more enduring in fixing a single category, mystery, within the institutions of book publishing. Building on its earlier ventures in fiction pulps and inexpensive hardcover reprinting, Doubleday started a Crime Club imprint in 1928. This imprint was, I believe, the first fiction-genre-specialized English-language book imprint of a large trade house. The move was part of a boom in detective-novel publishing, occasioning Publishers’ Weekly to remark that the year 1929 had seen “undoubtedly a great number of mystery and detective stories.” Notably, the editorialist could only conjecture (“undoubtedly”) about the proportion of mystery and detective stories; there was still no question of counting such stories out. But a new willingness to adopt category publication, at least for mystery, was certainly evident: in 1928 Harper introduced a “Sealed Mystery” series, with a money-back guarantee for returns with unbroken seals, and E.P. Dutton marketed winners of a monthly “Dutton Mystery Prize.” By 1932 even relatively conservative trade publishers like Holt and Houghton Mifflin were using “Mystery Fiction” as a separate classification from fiction in their seasonal lists.
But it was only the one category, not a whole genre system, and there were still reputational costs to such gambits. A *New York Times* “Books and Authors” column scorned the Doubleday Crime Club as a ready supply of “mental pabulum.” Nonetheless, though the Crime Club’s subscription model was soon dropped, it endured as an imprint until 1991, publishing dozens of mystery titles every year. Thus Doubleday committed to a regularly-scheduled form of fiction category publishing in the book trade’s most legitimate format. The club form, even after it dispensed with actual members, affirmed the idea that the genre had a particularized audience as well as particularized norms of worth. This idea was consonant with the emerging middlebrow aesthetic of the Book-of-the-Month club, which the Crime Club’s jury selection clearly imitated. Even if the mystery boom receded in the following years, mystery now furnished a model for self-conscious genre-fiction publishing as an acceptable, if clearly unserious, dimension of book publication in general.

Building on mystery production, a system for hardcover novels like the one organizing the pulps might almost have emerged in 1929. Doubleday introduced parallel imprints alongside the Crime Club: Golden Arrow Romances, “the world’s finest literature of love,” and the “Ends of the Earth Club,” an imprint for adventures. In the same year, the “White House Book Club” of Chicago, offered a choice in the categories of love, mystery, or adventure at fifty cents a month. The next year, in 1930, Simon & Schuster announced a line of “Inner Sanctum Novels” with color-coded covers, blue for “serious” books, red for “lighter” books, and green for detective and mystery stories. But this brief convergence between cheap magazine fiction, cheap reprinting, and commercial hardcover fiction evaporated quickly in the Depression. By 1931 Doubleday had dropped its romance and adventure lines, and Simon & Schuster’s color-coded books were finished; the latter’s “Inner Sanctum Mysteries” were only reintroduced—again, mystery alone endures—in 1936. The White House reprint club was not heard of after the crash. Though other hardcover publishers continued to advertise individual Westerns and love stories under the sign of genre, the magazine genre-fiction system did not develop a stable counterpart in trade publishing’s lists in the Depression.

It appeared that the depressed economy could not sustain the full range of generic fiction production, so the book publishers retreated to their safest bets and left the fully categorized mode of production to the cheaper fiction magazines. The same years witnessed declines in the pulps themselves—reversed, temporarily, by 1935—and the failure of a paperback publisher with loftier aspirations, Boni Paper Books. Meanwhile other, less commercially aggressive
Publishers retained their sense that labeled fiction categories were unworthy of “the trade.” Negotiating the relation of those categories to the rest of book publication would be one of the tasks of the new paperback publishers when they definitively translated the system to book format in the 1940s and 1950s.

PAPERBACKS: GENRE FICTION COMES TO THE BOOK

Publishers’ sporadic attempts to marshal books by fiction categories in the 1920s and early 1930s signaled the increasing permeability of the boundary between cheap, generically-marked publishing and more legitimate, putatively non-generic publishing. But producing fiction categorically only became a field-wide practice with the new phase of paperback publishing that began with the founding of Penguin in London (1936) and Pocket Books in New York (1939) and continued with the establishment of other paperback imprints in the 1940s and 1950s. All paperback fiction publishers in this period practiced genre categorization, though to varying degrees. As the influence of paperback publishers grew and their formal ties with hardbound houses proliferated, genre categories were disseminated across all book formats. These genre categories resembled those of the cheap fiction magazines because many of the paperback publishers were magazine publishers. More generally, book publishers’ relations to magazine-style publishing and distribution strategies came to define new oppositions in the field.

The paperbound book had a long prior history, but until the late 1930s, dominant publishers considered paperback imprints marginal. The “paperback revolution” put those publishers into the field of book publishing as rivals or allies of established firms. By contrast to their paperback-publishing precursors, Allen Lane’s Penguin and Robert de Graff’s Pocket Books won rapid acceptance as legitimate participants in the book trade. In the annals of publishing, Lane and de Graff are celebrated for their commitment to literary and design quality and their caniness in securing new mass-market distribution channels for books. This flattering picture is incomplete, but both men were certainly embedded in book publishing by kinship and career: Lane through his uncle John Lane and the Bodley Head imprint, de Graff through his cousin F.N. Doubleday and his position as head of Doubleday’s Garden City reprints from 1925 to 1936. They possessed the social capital needed to legitimate a previously dubious book format. De Graff’s social capital was also crucial to the backing he secured for Pocket from Simon & Schuster, which initially owned
half the imprint; according to Kenneth Davis, this deal was struck between de Graff and Richard Simon “over lunch.”

The new imprints’ editorial selection complemented this social position, mixing artistically legitimate titles, bestsellers, and fiction marked by subgenre. Pocket’s first list in 1939 included Samuel Butler’s *Way of All Flesh*, a Shakespeare anthology, James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* (a recent bestseller), and Agatha Christie’s *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. In the *Publishers’ Weekly* announcement of Pocket Books, de Graff makes his self-conscious distinction clear:

“For years,” said Mr. de Graff, in explaining this new venture, “visitors returning from Europe have asked the publishers of America why good books could not be issued at lower prices. . . . In the past it has been maintained that Americans will not buy paperbound books the way cultured Europeans have been doing 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.”

For the benefit of the book trade, de Graff promises “genuinely good and enduring books,” like those favored by “cultured Europeans,” as opposed to “pulp,” “trash”—and most tellingly—“magazines of vast circulation.” This is a somewhat implausible characterization of an initial list that includes bestsellers like *Lost Horizon*; the main principle of de Graff’s selections was the pursuit of the largest sales. But de Graff knew that a tribute had to be paid to ideals of quality in order to escape the stigma of cheapness.

The “European” precedents invoked by de Graff did not indicate cultural legitimacy alone: they also entailed novel approaches to sorting books by genre for the marketplace. Albatross, a German-British paperback reprint venture founded in 1932, appears to have been the first to color-code paperbacks by genre, using red for crime stories, blue for love stories, and so on. Penguin, too, color-coded by genre, perhaps in direct imitation of Albatross, with which Allen Lane had explored a collaboration. Within fiction, Penguin mysteries (green) were distinguished from the rest (the iconic orange). This practice constituted a list that explicitly sorted fiction into multiple categories and conceived both mystery and general fiction titles as elements of parallel branded series. The enduring prestige of Penguin testifies to this strategy’s success in ensuring the imprint would not be understood as merely a low-quality reprinter.
Pocket Books were not color-coded, but Pocket lists were also organized by genre. Mystery was once again the most readily adopted fiction genre. It occupied one third of Pocket’s output from 1940 on, as part of a deliberate project of publishing and selling by categories. A 1941 poster supplied by Pocket to vendors showed a woman on the phone saying “No Thanks—I’m reading a swell new Pocket Book tonight!”; below her, what the brand offers is emblazoned in terms of genre: “Humor,” “Poetry,” “Mysteries,” “Adventure,” “Romance.” Advertising itself as a reliable source of generic pleasures, and not above selling books with a suggestive image of a woman, Pocket approached the marketing position of the pulps and “trash” de Graff denigrated when he announced the imprint. On the other hand, the inclusion of poetry—a potentially worthy genre—among the suggested nighttime offerings shows the publisher’s continuing sense of itself as spanning a wider literary hierarchy.

After the Second World War, another large paperback venture followed the Pocket model. When Bantam Books announced itself in Publishers’ Weekly in 1945, it proclaimed itself “an independent neutral channel for the mass publishing and distribution of reprints of novels, detective, mystery and western stories, non-fiction, humor, short stories, poetry, anthologies; in short, books appealing to every reading taste and within the reach of every buyer.” Its initial list used these same labels, explicitly assigning every title to a category, including “mystery,” “Western,” “spy,” and, for books like Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* and Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*, “novel.” Like Pocket, Bantam sought to span the cultural hierarchy, mixing fiction genres with the non-generic “novel” and serious non-fiction. This use of the term “novel” shows that fiction, for paperback publishing, had been definitively segmented by genericity. At the same time, Bantam and Pocket managed to use genre categories systematically without coming to be seen as publishers of nothing but category fiction.

At the same time, paperback publishing at midcentury was characterized by the emergence of firms that embraced the fiction-magazine categories even more thoroughly than Bantam: Dell Books (1942), Avon Books (1943), Popular Library (1943), and then, in a second wave, Pyramid (1950), Fawcett (Gold Medal Books, 1950), Ace (1952), and Berkley (1955). Most of these firms were directly linked to magazine publishing, many to the fiction pulps in particular. Dell was a pulp-magazine publisher from the early 1920s on; in 1942 it was still bringing out hundreds of thousands of copies of pulps like *Sweetheart Stories* and *Five Detective Mysteries*. Popular Library was founded by the pulp publisher Ned Pines (of the *Thrilling* group) and edited by the Western writer Charles Heckelmann. Fawcett, pioneer of the paperback original,
was a magazine publisher; though its biggest prewar title was *True Confessions*, it also published fiction pulps like *Romantic Story* and *Triple-X*.91 Ace Books, crucial in the development of paperback science fiction, was founded by A. A. Wyn, a pulp publisher whose Ace Fiction Group included magazines like *Love Fiction Magazine*, *10-Story Detective*, and *Western Trails*.92 Entrepreneurs like Wyn, Pines, Fawcett, and Dell’s George Delacorte were disposed to treat paperback publishing like magazine publishing; they conceptualized fiction production in terms of the magazine genre system. These continuities explain why Popular Library initially published exclusively mysteries and why Delacorte described the Dell Books program in 1945 as “stick[ing] to mysteries and light romances.”93

This continuity with the pulp magazines marked a major change in the field of publishing. The opposition between magazine publishers and trade book publishers had become an opposition within paperback publishing. After the expansion of paperback publishing, firms like Pocket, New American Library, and Penguin continued to trade on literary quality; they may have produced some fiction in categories, but only as part of a mixture with putatively non-generic titles. By contrast, firms like Dell, Avon, and Popular brought the pre-World War II magazine model of genre-labeled fiction production to most or all of their paperback lists. Bantam, whose emphatic use of genre categories was, as we have seen, mixed with a selection of “quality” titles, was an intermediary case. This is to be expected given its dual lineage: it was a joint venture between several established houses of the book trade and the mass-magazine publisher Curtis, which instructed Bantam’s editor Walter Pitkin Jr. in terms of category: “‘Do more Westerns.’ ‘Try romances.’ ‘Mysteries aren’t so hot.’”94 No longer distinguishing formats, the uses of genre fiction categories defined rivalries within the paperback market. The rivals followed distinct publicity strategies, one seeking to synthesize a broad market success with legitimating literary appeal, the other recognizably following the market appeals used by pulps.

The new legitimacy of genre fiction in book production received a backhanded tribute in the form of traditionalist protests against it. In 1949, Frederic Melcher, the editor of *Publishers’ Weekly*, sounded a warning:

> The present era [of paperbacks] . . . bases its wide acceptance on the popular appetite for mysteries, westerns and romance. . . . This reaching out for more readers by following the earlier lead of the pulps as to covers and text is as unfortunate as would be a trend
toward copying the comics in their experiments with the themes of crime and passion. . . . It is important that quality be kept up.\textsuperscript{95}

Melcher’s fears for the quality of trade publishing were a mid-century version of earlier decades’ dismay at the popularity of fiction as such and the “vulgarity” of catering to wider audiences. In the late 1940s, however, this unease was articulated in relation to genre fiction, regarded as a threatening importation from “the pulps.” Yet by addressing his warning to publishing at large, Melcher concedes that a pulp-like fiction genre system had already established itself in trade publishing, using the paperback format—and the mass market it represented—as the thin end of the wedge.

This acknowledgment was formalized the next year, when the Publishers’ \textit{Weekly} annual summary number provided a tally of the past year’s new fiction by genre for the first time:

Within the 1949 fiction total, the number of mystery and detective titles is 405 (216 new books, 189 new editions), about 25 per cent of the fiction total. The number of western novels, the pure, or riding-and-shooting western, is 171 (69 new books, 102 new editions). A fiction category which has greatly intrigued the public imagination in the past year or so, science fiction, is represented by 33 titles, 29 new books and 4 new editions.\textsuperscript{96}

It is no accident that the same editorial comments on the increasing number of titles from paperback publishers.\textsuperscript{97} The codification of mystery and detective, Western, and science fiction was inextricable from the growing quantitative and symbolic heft of the paperback imprints. As a sign of this heft, the genre counts are not limited to paperback reprints but include new books as well. Counting genre fiction in itself enhanced the field-wide significance of genre fiction’s dominant format, the paperback, reorienting the categories through which all book publishing was understood.

Bantam Books created a whimsical vision of the changed field in 1952, reprinted in Publishers’ \textit{Weekly} alongside the magazine’s own surveys of 1951 (figure 4). Whereas the magazine’s longstanding book classification had pitted fiction alone against a wide range of “serious” non-fiction categories, in Bantam’s graphic, fiction categories dominate numerically and visually: paperback publishing becomes a contest among murderers, six-gun-shooters and kissing couples, utterly dwarfing the spectacle-wearing, pretentious avatars of “non-fiction” and “miscellaneous.” More seriously, Bantam’s figures counted not new
Figure 4: Bantam's insurgent reconfiguration of the field. “Newsstand Book Production Increased Moderately, 1951,” *PW*, January 19, 1952, 196.
titles but *copies* issued, offered as a proxy for sales. *Publishers’ Weekly*’s yearly summaries regularly lamented the impossibility of giving such figures for all books; Bantam was implicitly claiming a more comprehensive understanding of the book marketplace, established by articulating sales through fiction genres.

Publishers’ Weekly established its own soberer tabulation of fiction-genre categories in 1956. In these tables, the significance of the paperback is decisively indicated by the two tabulations, one for “mass-market paperbound books” alone, another for the same genres across all book formats (see figure 5). With the appearance of such tables, the institutionalization of genre fiction for the American book trade was complete, with categories that organized formal tabulation until 1979. The tables inscribe an idea of fiction knowably and countably organized in genres, while simultaneously concretizing the longstanding notion that *only some* fiction can be classified in this way.

**CONCLUSION**

Though *Publishers’ Weekly* made these changes in its bibliographic apparatus without fanfare, some advocates of popular genre recognized the new epoch in book publishing. Donald Wollheim, the pioneering SF editor and publisher, marked the moment in an article for the *New York Times Book Review* in 1949:

Doubleday, for instance, announces that they are readying a title to head off their new science-fiction classification. Frederick
Fell, Inc., announces a half-dozen such titles . . . Many book stores, among which are counted Scribner’s and Brentano’s, have pushed clear corners of their detective novel counters to make way for a host of strangely titled and fantastically jacketed volumes . . . Now that the old-line publishers have finally noticed what they were missing, it is safe to predict that science-fiction is to become as firmly established a part of standard publishing as the detective, Western, and light romance novels have been for years.99

Though Wollheim’s main aim is to herald SF’s arrival in hardcover book form, he implicitly acknowledges that the genre takes its new place as part of system (“detective, Western, and light romance”), as though echoing Gernsback’s inaugural gesture in Amazing Stories in 1926. Wollheim understates the changes to “standard publishing” that the double arrival of SF and genre fiction entail; however familiar the other categories he mentions might be, he can only cite them as a stable system because of the postwar transformation of paperback publishing. In fact Wollheim himself, during the interwar period a pioneer in SF fandom, had entered into book publishing via the paperback revolution; he edited The Pocket Book of Science Fiction (1943) and the Avon Fantasy Reader (a digest-sized SF series begun in 1947). Wollheim’s career traced in little the transmission of the genre system across formats that I have described.100 In the article, Wollheim points explicitly to the pulps as the source of science fiction, suggesting that readers who have “grown up with these magazines” are “now prepared to buy science-fiction in book form.”101

The history of genre fiction is strewn with moments where one genre or another is said to have matured or attained legitimacy, as Wollheim implies SF has done. But what looks like an organic process of development to readers of individual genres should be contextualized in a changing literary field which established both opportunities and limitations for such genres. Thus, the low status of fiction as such limited the systematization of genres at the start of the century. The first crystallization of fiction genres took place after the emergence of a novel medium, the pulp magazine, with its distinctive readership; but the association of categorized fiction with the pulps also ensured that systematic categorization would be largely spurned by higher-status publishers. Only another rupture in publishing, the technical-social breakthrough of the mass-market paperback, allowed genre categorization practice to take hold in the world of books. One surprising aspect of the history of genre fiction is therefore that it tracks the changing relationship between magazine publishing and the book
trade. The postwar expansion of paperback publishing created new ties—of personnel, practice, and attitude—between book publishers and cheap-fiction magazine publishers. But these ties did not signify a dissolution of boundaries, only a redrawing of them: a new, value-laden distinction emerged within book publishing between the kinds of publishers who embraced the genre-fiction system and those whose flirtations with it were more sporadic. Nonetheless, this reconfiguration of the field signalled the arrival of genre fiction as something that could be acknowledged as such.

But even this moment of arrival should not be reified. The system of genres, despite the steadiness of Publishers’ Weekly’s tabulation after mid-century, was not altogether consensual. Wollheim’s invocation of “light romance,” absent from the official tabulations, makes this clear. Genre fiction was too much a product of contending forces to remain fully fixed. It was a production practice, a market strategy, an epiphenomenon of changing readership; it was also a structural trade-off, granting publishers, writers, and readers access to circulation and visibility even as it applied the stigma of lower status. Even once the genre-fiction system had been institutionalized, its potential uses remained as contingent, and as contested, as its origins.

NOTES

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2. The phrase “genre fiction” was used from the late nineteenth century onwards to refer to regional or local-color fiction (cf. genre painting). The earliest use of the phrase “genre fiction” to mean unambiguously “commercial fiction that comes in subgenre categories” that I have been able to locate in full-text database searches is from 1966, when Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest speak of science fiction and “other kinds of genre fiction, the detective story, perhaps the espionage thriller.” Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest, eds. Spectrum V: A Science Fiction Anthology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 10–11. “Genre fiction” and a now-rarer synonym, “category fiction,” are found in wider use (e.g. in Publishers’ Weekly) from the 1970s on.


6. Jeremy Rosen makes the parallel distinction between genre fiction and genre in general; he argues that contemporary literary novelists “embrace the genres of genre fiction, not genre fiction as such.” “Literary Fiction and the Genres of Genre Fiction,” Post45: Peer Reviewed, August 7, 2018, John Frow elucidates the theoretical concept of genre system in Genre, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), chap. 6.


9. My approach thus emphasizes emic or actors’ categories rather than etic labels drawn from a separate critical tradition. I follow Altman’s work on film genre in analyzing genre through actors’ uses of categorizing terms: Rick Altman, Film/Genre (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

10. I use “format,” without strict bibliographic rigor, to cover distinctions between hardcover or clothbound books and paperbacks, and between pulp-paper magazines and other periodicals. For a recent theorization of the term, see Meredith L. McGill, “Format,” Early American Studies 16, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 674.


12. Genre fiction appears to have been systematized somewhat later in the UK; for David Glover, “it is far from clear whether systematic genre classification was fully in place until after World War II.” David Glover, “‘Speed, violence, women, America: Popular Fictions,’” in The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter


23. On genreification in film, see Altman, *Film/Genre*, chap. 4.

24. “Alfred A. Knopf,” *Atlantic Monthly* 125, no. 6 (June 1920), supplement, [4].


34. Harold Brainerd Hersey, *Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of the Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1937), 162.

35. Powers, *Queen of the Pulps*, 44.


40. On the working-class audience hailed by such ads, see Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, chap. 2.


44. *Novelets* 1, no. 1 (December 1923), http://www.philsp.com/homeville/GFI/k00553.htm#A23.


52. “Science-Fiction,” *Amazing Science-Fiction* 21, no. 1 (March 1938): 37. Gernsback coined “science fiction” to contrast his magazine to “‘sexy’ literature . . . the self confession
type as well as the avalanche of modern detective stories.” “Science Wonder Stories,” *Science Wonder Stories* 1, no. 1 (June 1929): 5.
54. Hersey, 89.
61. I refer to the firm as “Doubleday,” though its full name changed as it expanded in this period. Its pulp magazines included *Short Stories* (1910) and *West* (1926).
64. *PW*, September 17, 1932, 962, 964.

75. Kenneth Davis exemplifies this view: Two-Bit Culture, 50.
77. Davis, Two-Bit Culture, 31.
78. Davis, 13, 26–27. Davis also gives the first Penguin list, which had a similar range.
80. De Graff regularly sought the rights to titles on the bestseller list; see Davis, Two-Bit Culture, 40.
82. The venture founded on copyright problems; see Alistair McCleery, “The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allen Lane,” Book History 5, no. 1 (2002): 166.
87. One wartime development may have contributed to the changing status of genre categories: the Armed Services Editions, the massive book-distribution program undertaken by the Army and Navy from 1943–1947 with the publishers’ advocacy group, the Council on Books in Wartime. The project, managed by Pocket Books editor Philip Van Doren Stern, selected and distributed its 1,324 titles in generic categories, among which the most numerous were “Contemporary Fiction” (246 titles), Westerns (160), mysteries (122), and “Historical Novels” (113). Thus the federal government distributed unprecedented amounts of money, logistical reach, and patriotic prestige to genre-coded paperbacks. But whether this really shaped postwar paperback consumption is uncertain. On the Editions, see Trish Travis, “Books as Weapons and ‘The Smart Man’s Peace’: The Work of the Council on Books in Wartime,” Princeton University Library Chronicle 60, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 353–99.
88. Sean McCann remarks on this pattern, but suggests that the paperbacks “lacked the sharpened sense of hierarchy and segregation that had underwritten the pulp ideology.” Gumshoe America, 174. This suggestion may apply more to the crime story than to paperback genre fiction in general.
ace_books. For Wyn’s magazine titles, I have used Hefner and Timke, “Circulating American Magazines.”


94. Davis, Two-Bit Culture, 106.


97. PW, 221.


