Introduction

The word 'hype' is used to describe trends, things, fashions, and phenomena that receive massive attention at a given point in time. In the world of books and literature, the word 'hype' is often used to describe bestseller phenomena—the books that sell the most, that are read by large numbers of people, and that are talked about everywhere. It is frequently success itself that generates the interest—popularity begets popularity. Bestselling literature plays an important role in the lives of millions of readers, offering entertainment, social commentary, and alternate perspectives on life. Yet, there is a tendency among critics and others to look askance at bestsellers, complaining that their poor language, badly constructed plots, predictable storylines, and even the bestseller phenomenon itself is a threat to serious literature. This is not least due to the fact that 'hype' is by definition perceived as something hegemonically engineered and pushed by producers who are intent on selling more books, inevitably linking the concept of hype to mass production by conglomerates rather than an artistically and intellectually created work of literature.

This anthology is about bestsellers, hyped literature, and the texts that are read by many. On all levels, from the international right down to the local, the bestseller represents what a great number of readers find interesting, engaging, and recreational at a specific moment in time. From the perspective of academic research, the bestseller provides many openings for discussion about the intense marketing forces at work in the contemporary book industry, about the multitude of expressions in a culture centred on a complicated web of convergence, and about the impact of popular culture on everyday life. There is also the question of what makes a bestseller. No publisher can single-handedly 'produce' a bestseller, and even

if a large enough group of readers might be able to spread the word and create a bestseller, the breakthrough of a single bestselling title is often dependent on marketing strategies coupled with the word-of-mouth effect of enthusiastic readers. Being a phenomenon placed somewhere in between the power spheres of producers and consumers is one of the things that makes the bestseller particularly interesting.

A bestseller often seems to take on a life of its own and is regularly talked about as a 'phenomenon' rather than just a piece of fiction. As a phenomenon, it emphasizes the power of literature in the experience of everyday life. Since bestsellers reach such a vast audience, it is literature that has a greater impact than most fiction ever can aspire to. The effects of bestselling fiction such as the Harry Potter, the Twilight series, and the *Da Vinci Code* series spread like ripples on the water, influencing not only the personal taste of its readers or the literary genres they belong to (sometimes creating genres or market categories of their own), but also tourism, music, fashion, and other cultural industries. Bestselling literature has a profound impact in contemporary societies on a global scale and has to be analysed from a wide perspective and with the right tools for recognizing literature's role. Studies of bestsellers and market hype are important as a means of gaining a better understanding of the role of the consumer and of market forces and specific power brokers in the contemporary book trade. Bestsellers may also provide us with a deeper knowledge of literature and its place in today's mediatized culture, at a moment in time that has been called 'the late age of print'.[1] Research into the creation, reception, and meaning of bestsellers is still thin on the ground, however, and *Hype—Bestsellers and Literary Culture* is thus a contribution to the understanding of this as phenomenon.

John Sutherland has recognized the need to map the field: 'The bestseller/popular fiction awaits its Linneaus.'[2] This anthology can hardly propose to draw such a map, but will add to the research by providing a range of new and thought-provoking perspectives on the phenomenon of the bestseller and hyped literature.[3] In this anthology we argue that bestsellers must be both understood and analysed in context, and not only by focusing on the thematic, aesthetic, and formal structures. The impact of bestselling fiction is not simply felt on the level of general media consumption. Bestselling

fiction tells us something about the stories that people want to read, or believe they should read, and the issues it raises in terms of fears, dreams, and excitement, not to mention sexuality, gender, race, and socio-political structures.

A study focusing on bestsellers is by nature a study of popular fiction in the sense that it is a study of books that are popular and read by many. We do, however, propose a distinction between the concepts of bestseller and popular fiction. For one thing, a study of the bestseller does not encompass the study of popular fiction in general, as many bestselling novels are classics or even award-winning texts by well-established authors, Nobel Prize laureates, and the like—works and authors not traditionally classified as popular fiction. The titles covered in this anthology range from young adult fiction such as J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games trilogy to more traditional literary fiction such as Margret Atwood's, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). This volume brings together such diverse questions as the creation of hype, the role and the meaning of the author in the present-day media landscape, changes in the book trade, and the ways academic research is influenced by bestsellers. Other essays give an historical overview of post-apocalyptic stories, desert romances, and the role of the author, touching upon aspects that relate to the important question of why bestsellers become bestsellers and the specific function of blockbuster books.

Defining the bestseller

The term bestseller is here, as elsewhere, used in a metonymic sense as short for 'bestselling books'. In the widest sense, a bestseller can be anything from a book about how to knit to the latest novel by James Patterson. It is therefore necessary to start with certain basic terminological definitions. One early distinction was made by Robert Escarpit between the different ways books can achieve high sales figures. To differentiate them, Escarpit introduced the terms fast-sellers, steady sellers, and bestsellers.[4] Fast-sellers are books that very quickly reach high sales, but that sell for only a short period of time, are soon forgotten, and go out of print. Steady sellers, on the

other hand, never achieve high sales, and will therefore never end up in any bestseller list, but they sell in medium quantities over a long period of time. In publishing terms, these books will be regarded as bestsellers, but in the eyes of the public they will rarely be visible. Many steady sellers are non-fiction works on cooking, gardening, or other hobbies, but there is some fiction included in this category, notably J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) and Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939). Classics such as Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) also fall into this category. Thirdly, a bestseller in Escarpit's terminology is a title that will combine both of the above. It will start out as a fast-seller but end up a steady seller. The combination of spectacular sales and a sales over a long period of time gives a bestseller an impact on the market, on culture, and on reading that cannot be compared with any other kind of book. Escarpit's terms are useful, but they do not conform to the usage in the book industry, where a bestseller is often, as John Sutherland puts it, 'a fast-selling book which never achieves the respectable middle-age of steady demand'.[5] Others have suggested that a bestseller simply refers to newly published books whose sales are recorded in lists that are publicly published. This pragmatic definition is, for instance, used by John Feather and Hazel Woodbridge in their study of bestsellers in the UK in 1985–2005. By defining the bestseller as a concept singularly 'concerned with new publications' they exclude the steady seller.[6]

Furthermore, it should be noted that 'bestseller' is often used as a generic term for books which everyone is reading or which are displayed in every bookshop or heavily advertised. In many instances, the concept is also used in a pejorative way to talk about literature written to be read by many—easy to read, thrilling, and without an aesthetically advanced style. On the other hand, a more precise and analytical definition of the term bestseller has proved elusive. It is clear that there is no consensus in the major works on bestsellers: John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s* (1981); Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction since the 1900* (2nd edn. 2008); and Frédéric Rouvillois, *Une histoire des best-sellers* (2011).[7] Clive Bloom has outlined some of the problems concerning the term, explaining why a clear-cut definition is difficult to formulate:

> In theory the answer is simple: the work of fiction sold in the most units (books in a given price range) to the most people over a set period of time. In practice the answer is extremely complex, running into difficulties as to the definition of units (hardback; paperback; serialization) and the period of time (month of publication; a year; the twentieth century), the importance of the price at which it is sold (significance of cost of hardback or paperback) and the definition of fiction itself (whether the work is literary, popular, pulp).[8]

Bloom's observation on the complex nature of the bestseller and how it has to be studied from a number of different angles, yet again highlights Sutherland's call for research to map bestsellers and the need to understand bestseller culture structurally and in a more diversified way. Furthermore, Bloom makes three important points. First of all, how do we count units sold and over which period of time does a book have to be sold to be included? Second, there are the issues of price and profits, both of which have to do with the organization of publishing and the overall structure of print, binding, distribution, franchises, and media convergence. The third point, in Bloom's words, is the defining and dividing of bestsellers into categories, and although we do not necessarily agree with the rather derogatory term 'pulp', it is at the same time necessary to discuss the qualities of the texts that become bestsellers. More importantly, this third point shows that the term 'bestseller' denotes not merely a retrospectively quantifiable success in the book market, but also has to be understood in the terms of a text's characteristics. Bloom places the bestseller at the centre of his enquiry as 'it provides a unique insight into the imaginative history of a nation over a one-hundred-year period'.[9] This suggests that, despite a plethora of empirical, quantitative material, he argues that there is an underlying ideological understanding of the concept of the bestseller. In this interpretation, the ideologies that people live by and their understanding of themselves are both affected and shaped by bestselling stories filtering into the general consciousness.

Understanding bestsellers ideologically is linked to an understanding in terms of functionality. Bestsellers, according to Fred Botting, have two functions. The one is commercial: they exist to

make money. The other is 'ideological' reinforcement: a bestseller reasserts prevailing attitudes and assumptions as well as existing norms and values.[10] Occasionally, as Botting also points out, and as illustrated by Malin Alkestrand's essay here, bestsellers can seemingly subvert those norms and values. The ideological aspects of bestsellers explain, according to Botting, part of the success of bestselling fictions, namely 'their ability to tap a specific cultural nerve and thereby serve as exercises in the management of social anxieties.'[11] The relation between bestselling fiction and the cultural climate is complex. Botting argues that it is a symbiotic relationship 'in which both remain irreducible', and although he probably is right in most cases, bestsellers, in some cases, do have the power to change cultural climate.[12] Bestselling fiction is not simply a sponge that absorbs ideological, cultural, and aesthetic ideas that the reader can then wring from it, but it also has an impact on those ideas.

One of John Sutherland's main points in *Bestsellers* is that they tell us something about the book trade, the marketplace, the reading public, and society in general. One example of how this has been done is offered by the American sociologist Elizabeth Long, who has tracked the changes in American culture through bestsellers after the Second World War in *The American Dream and the Popular Novel* (1985). She linked the novels' ideals to a shift in American society and culture and particularly to the dream of success:

> Bestselling novels are particularly important cultural artefacts because they are primarily a social rather than a literary phenomenon. Although they are books, their status as 'bestsellers' is socially constituted. … bestsellers become bestsellers because they have found resonance with large segments of the reading public.[13]

For Long, bestsellers are cultural evidence by dint of their link to large numbers of readers. Although it can be questioned whether readers always align with their reading, she argues that bestsellers are interesting source material because they are grounded in everyday life. A similar investigation is Imelda Whelehan's *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005), a study of feminist bestselling fiction in the 1970s and 1990s.[14] By analysing the most widespread novels that address

women's issues, she is able to outline a story that differs from earlier political and social accounts of feminism. Both Long and Whelehan are examples of how bestselling fiction can be studied as a way to tap into existing ideologies.

A different approach to bestsellers is found in Frédéric Rouvillois's *Une histoire des best-sellers* (2011). In order to pin down the variables that lie behind bestsellers he employs the analytical categories 'the book', 'the author', and 'the reading public'. His emphasis is on literary classics, the 'masterpieces' that have sold well either as fast-sellers or steady sellers, or, in some cases, only many years after publication have achieved the status of bestsellers. He argues that throughout history several works that are now part of the canon were also bestsellers in their own day. Rouvillois's cases in point are Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1534) and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), while his modern examples include the French author Michel Houellebecq, who has managed to combine commercial success with critical recognition.[15] Rouvillois's conclusion is that the success of a literary work is always something of a miracle, consisting as it does of the fortunate convergence of author, publisher, book, and readers.[16]

One of the most recent contributions to the study of bestsellers is Marc Keuschnigg's sociological dissertation, *Das Bestseller-Phänomen* (2012), which is of a very different ilk. Keuschnigg looks at bestseller phenomena from the perspective of economic sociology, his primary interest being how the market functions, not the cultural status of the consumer's choice. He considers large sections of the book market to be characterized by a lack of consumer transparency. Potential buyers tend to follow the lead of other readers. This means that the 'value' of a bestseller is partially defined by a kind of circular logic: the more people buy a particular book, the higher its assumed quality is judged to be.[17] A similar case is made by John Sutherland in *Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction* (2007), an updated and condensed version of his earlier study, where he argues that bestseller lists not only record previous sales but also 'exists to *create* sales'.[18]

A number of both qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted on internal variables such as language and style as well as content characteristics—plot, characters, action, and genre.[19] Some studies even claim to reveal the precise methodology or stylistic

features of bestselling novels in the process. An article published in 2013 reported on the results of one of the largest empirical studies conducted so far; it examined some 800 books in multiple genres in terms of stylistic and linguistic variables. Using 'statistical stylometry', Ganjigunte Ashok, Feng, and Choi make an attempt at an analytical method that can discriminate highly successful literature from the less successful. For example, according to their study the stylistic features that characterize bestselling literature are a heavy use of conjunctions such as 'and' and 'but' and favoured verbs to describe thought processes such as 'recognized' or 'remembered'.[20] Be that as it may, what this brief survey of research on bestselling literature shows is that there is no consensus on the definition of a bestseller, while the attempts made so far indicate that the bestseller phenomenon can be studied from a variety of scholarly perspectives, ranging from writing style and textual analysis to ideology and sale figures.

The diversity of possible perspectives is reflected in this anthology. In the individual contributions, bestsellers are the focal point of a large variety of viewpoints on popular literature that sells well, is read by many, and consequently has a major cultural impact. We define the bestseller as a title that sells in high numbers for a short period of time, but we also include many steady sellers that have stayed in print for longer periods of time. The bestseller, furthermore, is a title that receives extensive media attention, is hyped by the publisher (and possibly by other agents), has an author who becomes, or already is, a brand name. Usually, the book has also been adapted for other media (e-book, audiobook, television programme or film, game, app, and so on) and, finally, has the kind of vast readership that creates a public 'buzz' about the title. The essays in this volume concern standard bestsellers as well as the titles that have much higher sales figures, sometimes referred to as megasellers, supersellers, or hypersellers. Bestsellers such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* or Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy belong to this category, while a book such as *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett is a typical bestseller of the standard kind, having reportedly sold approximately ten million copies.[21] A standard bestseller may become the talk of the season because of its engaging subject matter; the megaseller's success can become the reason for the talk in the first place.

As is the case with most previous studies of bestsellers, this anthology primarily concerns fiction. Feather and Woodbridge have remarked on the lack of research about non-fiction bestsellers, despite the fact that for most publishers this category is equally important.[22] Many of the titles that sell in large quantities are not fiction but biographies, cookery books, current affairs, and children's books; and while some have a very short life span—current affairs and biographies of politicians or contemporary celebrities—others will sell well for twenty years. The clear differences between the markets for fiction and non-fiction call for serious consideration in an in-depth study, but that is an investigation that will have to be undertaken elsewhere.

By using the word 'hype' in the title of the book, we mean to suggest an understanding of the bestseller phenomenon that embraces industrial relations, marketing, and paratextual material, where 'hype' also frames many of the interactions we have with texts. In *Show Sold Separately* (2010), Jonathan Gray suggests that the promotional material included in book hype serves as a 'first outpost of interpretation', one that continues to influence throughout the reading of a text.[23] Our suggestion is that the hype surrounding a bestseller can be studied in great many contexts, and that these contexts in turn provide each bestseller with new interpretative frameworks.

According to the original *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, 'hype' is mainly used pejoratively for 'deception, cheating; a confidence trick, a racket, a swindle, a publicity stunt', for something that is getting too much attention that is not worthy of the interest; more recently, *Oxford Dictionaries* has it as 'extravagant or intensive publicity or promotion'. For media hype, particularly in the book market, the context is generated by producers—publishers, agents, authors, booksellers, newspapers, magazines, and television and radio—and suggests exaggeration, excess, and commercialism. Hype is thus in a first instance a marketing campaign, but in the later stages the media in general generate further interest. What we mean by the term 'hype' is the branding of a single product, filling the semiotic sign of the title (or series title) with a promised reading experience. However, much of this branding will be business-to-business oriented, with publishers marketing the book to booksellers, newspaper critics, or suitable television shows.[24]

Linked to hype, but still a very different concept, is buzz. John B. Thompson describes hype as occurring when those who have a vested interest in a title promote it by generating excitement of all sorts (the new…, the best…, the next title by…, etc.). Hype is when agents, publishers, and sale representatives push for a book in different contexts. Buzz, on the other hand, occurs when the recipients respond positively to a book (whether it was hyped or not) by talking about it, writing positive reviews, posting blogs and so on.[25] Hype can thus be described as being connected to sales, marketing, and media logic, while buzz is linked to reception and audience response. Word of mouth is a key ingredient in the making of a bestseller, of course, and it should be noted that 'buzz marketing' is a concept that has come to stay in the book industry. There are various techniques for creating a buzz by using early adopters or other influential readers, such as bloggers, Amazon reviewers, and other active readers online.[26] In this sense, both hype and buzz may be needed if a book is to become a bestseller. Once a large group of readers has enjoyed reading the book and spread the word to others, the publisher or agent may note its popularity and boost the title with an intensified marketing campaign, attracting even greater reader interest and creating a spiral of ever increasing sales for the title.

Contributing to the hype and buzz are various non-commercial agents. Examples of venues and events that can be important in this context are the book fairs, literary festivals, and author readings, which can attract large audiences, and many of which are covered in the media.[27] A growing buzz around a title is a sure means of boosting reader interest. When everyone is talking about something, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay out of the conversation by not knowing the subject. This is also true of academic literary research, as Sara Kärrholm discusses in this anthology.

The bestseller list

Another way to approach the concept of the bestseller, albeit a problematic one, is through bestseller lists. Even though these lists are notoriously difficult to trust, let alone compare, there is no other more reliable source of information on sales numbers.[28] Without

going into particular detail about the problems related to the scientific study of bestseller lists, it should be noted that in many countries there are competing lists created by different companies based on different sources.[29] Some of these, such as lists produced by chains of bookshops and in the Internet bookstores, are used as marketing tools. Some separate different formats (hardback, paperback, e-books), while others do not. In most cases there are basic genre distinctions—fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature. A well-known problem is where to place young adult titles such as Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games or Stephenie Meyer's Twilight series, as these sell equally well to adults as to the under 18s. Many of these complications are discussed by Rasmus Grøn in defining and delimiting Danish bestsellers. Apart from illuminating the constructedness of bestseller lists, he argues for a self-perpetuating promotional quality as 'presence on a bestseller list also serves to reinforce the title's bestseller status'.[30] Grøn points to two important aspects of bestseller lists—the identification of the bestseller and bestseller lists as marketing tool—although a third, the bestseller list as a selection tool for readers, might reasonably be added. These are interrelated, of course; however, the meaning and function of the bestseller list varies depending on the purpose, and all three aspects need to be understood from their corresponding vantage points.

A bestseller is hyped both by publishers directly promoting it in different contexts—on the cover of paperback editions, on their website, in press material—and indirectly through bestseller lists. The complexity of identifying bestsellers is thoroughly discussed in Jerry Määttä's contribution to this volume in the context of post-apocalyptic fiction.[31] A bestseller list might appear to be more objective and reliable than other sources, but whether this really is the case is a matter of debate. Nevertheless, the bestseller list is an important tool for identifying bestsellers, even if the compilation of such lists is not an innocent or objective procedure, but one that includes choices, reductions, and comparisons, transforming heterogeneity to homogeneity.[32] For instance, bestseller lists are based on relative figures that can fluctuate over the course of the year. A certain number of copies sold will not by itself guarantee a position on the list as it always depends on how well other titles have been selling.

This will mean that during a month with higher sales, for example December, to make it onto the list a book would have to sell more copies than it would in other months.

Another aspect of the bestseller list is the marketing impact of a good placement. Both publisher and retailers will immediately treat a book placed high on a bestseller list differently. The publisher will play on its bestseller status in its promotional material, but more importantly the book will be placed on different shelves in the bookshop, with more copies on display and possibly in the shop window. Furthermore, it is more likely to be discounted, as the price pressure on bestselling titles is fiercer than for any other type of book. Quite apart from a novel's position within the trade, general media attention will also be heightened, not always in terms of reviews but in general media coverage, features, and radio and television shows. However, the effect of the bestseller list can be overestimated, as Alan T. Sorensen has shown in an analysis of the impact of the *New York Times* bestseller list. He found that a book's listing caused a modest increase in sales, but that the effect was more noticeable for novels written by début authors. Sorensen's findings also indirectly suggest that the business-stealing effects of bestseller lists are almost insignificant, thus refuting a recurring point of criticism concerning their existence.[33]

Bestseller lists are compiled for a wide variety of consumer goods apart from books, including music, DVDs, films, computer games, electronic gadgets, and household appliances. This makes the purpose and function of such lists an interesting object of study within a variety of academic disciplines. The question of bestseller lists has been addressed in the fields of economics and sociology, primarily from the perspective of how consumers are affected by knowing or seeking out knowledge of what other consumers are buying. As source material, bestseller lists are a readily accessible way to investigate the popularity of genres, authors, languages, and so on. The academic interest can be explained not only by the lists' accessibility, but also by the fact that it has become increasingly common for consumers to learn about new products from consumers they do not know personally, often summarized in the form of bestseller lists, 'top choices', or the like. Studies of

various lists of consumer products provide insights that are applicable to the publishing industry. For example, an investigation of bestselling apps in Apple's App Store showed that consumers' willingness to pay decreased steeply with declining rank in the top 50, but nevertheless remained financially significant for the apps in the upper half of the top 100.[34] Other interesting studies concern how consumers are affected by obtaining knowledge of the behaviour of other consumers. Surveys of 'experience goods' such as music and food—goods that, like books, are to a varying extent uncertain choices for the consumer prior to purchase—are equally relevant. One example is a study of music that supports the theory that a participant's preferences are, in part, shaped by the download choices of others, demonstrating that success is by and large dictated by social influence.[35] A study of food produced similar results—high ratings improved the popularity of a particular dish—and concluded that individuals' behaviour is strongly influenced by their observation of other people's choices.[36] The literature suggests that, from a sociological and economic point of view, a bestseller's success can in part be interpreted as a tendency towards people wanting to join the crowd, and that individuals perceive an advantage in copying the actions of others.

The bestseller list is a matter of compilation and marketing, and for most readers it is also an easy way of finding the next good book to read. The fact that a great many other people have already chosen this particular piece of fiction is an argument in its favour in a world with an ever-increasing multitude of books. The comfort a bestseller list can provide should not be underestimated. The critique of such behaviour—herd mentality—is also the bestseller's constant companion. Even back in the 1970s, resistance towards bestseller lists was considerable as they were thought to distort 'customers' buying habits, creating a "stampede" mentality and inhibiting the range of bookshops' stock'.[37] According to Keuschnigg, a consumer may follow other consumers in the belief that others have superior information or as a form of 'herd behaviour', preferring to act like others as an alternative to self-reliant reasoning.[38] And although the function of many such lists is to create a sense of 'everybody's reading', they also mark a cultural shift towards what sociologists

have termed 'list culture'.[39] The list reflects taste, at the same time as it is a creator of taste.

National, international, and regional bestsellers

What constitutes a bestseller depends on the point in time, the particular context, and, above all, the country or region. There is no set number of copies a book has to sell to be rated a bestseller. One necessary distinction is between international, national, and regional bestsellers, which means that in one country or region a bestseller might sell 20,000 copies while in another context nothing below 100,000 copies would be sufficient to qualify as a bestseller.

In many countries, the titles that sell best are national. One explanation is, of course, that the novels by authors writing in the national language often deal with issues and contexts relevant to that particular area. Another explanation is that such authors are better established nationally and will appear more frequently in television, radio, and newspaper features. However, a study of bestseller lists in different countries shows that the proportion of domestic to international authors varies according to the success of particular authors or literary trends. Countries such as the US and the UK will only rarely have non-domestic literature on their lists, and the few international titles are mainly still originally written in English. In other cases, the composition of the lists will vary over time to a greater degree. In Sweden, for example, nationally produced crime fiction has dominated the bestseller lists for the last decade, but before then the top-selling titles were generally international (mostly English-language translations). In most countries, however, the bestseller lists consist of a mix of national and international books.[40]

When it comes to the world market for books, American and British publishers dominate. Their influence is felt on three levels: in-house publications distributed worldwide; the sale of subsidiary rights within a conglomerate or to other companies with international distribution; and the sale of translation rights and local publishing in other countries. The shift towards an increasingly global book market in terms of subsidiary rights, translations, sales in the original language, marketing campaigns, and also readers, fans, and

online activities has created two very different types of market. One is international, the other national. Each national market has its own set of bestsellers and cultural codes and its own market structure. Book markets are not the same around the world, and the publishing conglomerates do not control every part of the trade. Publishing is regionally specific. National, local, and regional bestsellers are created all the time without receiving the same kind of attention as the few works of fiction that circulate into the global loop of stardom. In many countries, such as France, Germany, and Sweden, most of the bestselling titles are domestic. As the number of J. K. Rowling, Dan Brown, and Stephenie Meyer are too few, it is deemed safer to invest in domestic publishing for the main proportion of the titles.[41]

The overall impression of a divided market is not conclusive, though. Other changes in the industry point towards a growing internationalization. Shifts in Internet use, the expansion of an e-book market, and the influence of a few large American corporations together appear to be transforming international publishing and retailing. One general trend is for the global book publishing industry to become more concentrated as a result of acquisitions and mergers. The distribution and payment systems that have evolved both for printed books and e-books have made it easy to find, buy, deliver, and pay. Corporations such as Amazon have been particularly successful, and there is a concern in many European countries that English-language publishing will expand and take over large parts of the national markets. With the rise of online booksellers, e-books, and other kinds of technologies to disseminate texts, the borders between countries and regions have dissolved. Alongside the transnational and international publishing houses, new types of media companies dominate the book trade—the likes of Google, Amazon, and Apple. Our present-day digital media landscape has brought increased awareness of the complex interplay of commercial, technological, legal, and political factors in modern literary culture. Various aspects of these questions are further illustrated in Karl Berglund's essay here on the rise of literary agents in the Swedish book market.

It should also briefly be noted that bestsellers cannot solely be divided into national and international, but must also include regional

and local bestsellers. A region can be a distinct area of one country, a transnational context, or a number of countries with a cultural, often linguistic, affinity. Examples of such regions are French-speaking Canada, Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, the German-speaking areas, and so on. Due to the cultural specificity of each of these areas, certain books will be successful and sell extremely well, but for various reasons will not be sold beyond their original context. While the number of copies sold in Scandinavia would hardly constitute a bestseller in a more general sense, it would still have significant cultural impact there. This is definitely the case when it comes to local bestsellers in a county or a town where an author might have a prominent position there but not on the national scene.

Popular fiction and bestsellers

As previously implied, the concepts 'bestsellers' and 'popular fiction' are sometimes used synonymously or occasionally with an intermingling of definitions. In this anthology we maintain that there is a difference, although many bestselling books could also be defined as popular fiction. Any useful definition of a bestseller has to differentiate between it and popular fiction, as the categories overlap only partially, and that 'at bestseller level the categorization of literature as highbrow or lowbrow, popular or serious, entertainment or instruction simply does not work'.[42] One argument is that any bestseller is by definition 'popular', thus making it popular fiction. The problem is that such a definition excludes bestselling classics or literary fiction that sells in large quantities, achieving bestseller status in many cases due to a major award or prize, examples being Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) or Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) which both won the Booker Prize. Other prizes such as the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, or national awards can be equally important.[43] Looking at three Canadian bestsellers, Danielle Fuller has suggested that cultural capital, in the Bourdieuian sense, is an essential component in 'a blockbuster culture' as well as in other areas of literary life.[44] Even though not every title on the receiving end of a prominent literary prize, or even glowing reviews, will reach bestseller status, it would be foolish not to incorporate the

importance of cultural capital in the concept, both for production and for consumption.

However, as the line between bestseller and popular fiction often is blurred, there are reasons to delve a bit further into the issue. According to Bloom, popular literature 'defines a perceptual arena, a field out of which the bestseller emerges'; a field in which many books are published that are intended to become bestsellers but never succeed, but also where books are published without large sales in mind, but by chance become widely popular.[45] At the same time we must note that bestsellers in general discussions are often labelled popular, mass, low-quality, or even pulp fiction. An example of this stance is how John Sutherland upholds a critical, but never overtly articulated, difference between an academic mode of reading and reading modes propelled by popular fiction. Inherent in his general argument about readers of popular fiction is that they are passive, overly emotional, and uncritical. This is, of course, in stark contrast to an academic mode of reading, which is discerning, objective, and analytical.[46]

Popular literature is often described as literature to be consumed, and as Janice Radway has shown this is a troublesome metaphor as it presupposes the reading process as one of destruction, eating, and vanishing.[47] In this representation, bestsellers are contrasted with classics, which are ever-lasting books that are not consumed while reading. In this sense, as Fred Botting has argued, 'In part, the bestseller operates according to a logic of consumer culture' and these are books to be consumed in all senses. Looking at bestsellers as part of a media-driven book market with the industry at one end and the reader at the other might conjure up such images. There are two important aspects of bestselling fiction that can provide counter arguments to this view. First, many bestselling books are steady sellers, in Escarpit's term, and will not be quickly consumed or have a brief shelf life; instead, they remain in print for a long time. Second, the idea of the reader as a consumer who simply devours books does not fit into the contemporary reading cultures of book club discussions, fan activities online, book blogs, and other aspects of convergence culture where the reader has turned into a prosumer. For instance, Henry Jenkins has shown how 'organized fandom is,

perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated.'[48] In this context, bestselling literature is not an ephemeral consumer item, but has a much deeper meaning for its readers.

In spite of a necessary distinction between bestsellers and popular literature, there is common ground. Many bestsellers make use of popular generic patterns in ways that serve to attract many readers. Bestselling fiction may also often share the functions that John G. Cawelti has identified in what he calls formulaic literature. According to Cawelti, literary formulas have two general, somewhat opposing functions that attract its readers: one is that the formula is based on archaic narrative plot structures that have always been popular; the other that the formula is filled with thematic content that is highly contemporary and corresponds to specific interests in its specific time. As Cawelti puts it: 'formulas are ways in which specific cultural themes and stereotypes become embodied in more universal archetypes … But in order for these patterns, to work, they must be embodied in figures, settings, and situations that have appropriate meanings for the culture which produces them.'[49] This combination of a specific cultural content and archaic narrative pattern seems to be at work in many of the bestsellers as well as in popular literature. It may, however, be important to stress here that it is precisely this pairing of a specific cultural content and archaic structure that is interesting in the comparison, although the cultural content may or may not include the stereotypes often associated with popular literature. The question of bestselling fiction and how it relates to literary and popular fiction is further developed in Ann Steiner's contribution to this anthology.

One complication when trying to separate the two categories is that popular literature is in itself a notoriously troublesome category to define.[50] Is it the literature read by many people, the literature that is judged per definition as bad literature, or is it the literature read by certain people in a certain way? Since the advent of postmodernism, these types of claim have become increasingly problematic to make. There are also reasons for keeping bestseller culture and popular culture apart, although in some cases they overlap. The fact

that bestsellers are conflated with popular culture in a generalizing way often leaves bestsellers the target of the type of critique usually reserved for popular fiction.

Beyond the book

Bestsellers are above all novels printed as books, but as the evolution of the present-day media market tells us, most popular stories will also be adapted for other media formats. Not only is the bestseller made into a film, game, or graphic novel, but there is often a whole franchise surrounding a successful title. Encompassed in the term 'franchise' are also adaptations, spin-offs, tie-ins, and merchandise. Each of these aspects is important in the world of the bestseller, beyond the printed book and deserves specific consideration.

Kristin Thompson has described franchise in relation to the film industry in *The Frodo Franchise: 'The Lord of the Rings' and Modern Hollywood* (2007):

> Essentially it means a movie that spawns additional revenue streams beyond what it earns from its various forms of distribution, primarily theatrical, video, and television. These streams may come from sequels and series or from the production company licensing other firms to make ancillary products: action figures, video games, coffee mugs, T-shirts, and the hundreds of other items that licensees conceive of. In the ideal franchise, they come from both.[51]

The Lord of the Rings was of course first adapted from the novels by J. R. R. Tolkien, and the huge success of the films created a renewed interest in the books, which were reprinted with covers inspired by the films. In this case, the books can be said to be included in the overall franchise that was constructed around the films. This is often the case when classics, such as Tolkien's trilogy or Jane Austen's novels, are adapted for a new medium. When it comes to Jane Austen, however, the constant flow of remakes and adaptations may be a reason for looking to the original books when talking about franchise. In this franchise, the author herself is also included in products such as the film *Becoming Jane* from

2007, but also in the fan activities where the readers have gone from consuming Austen's novels to 'the *consumption* of Austen'.[52] Allison Thompson notes the irony of the paradoxical fascination with Austen dolls, films about her life, objects from her home, and objects similar to those she *might* have owned, while in all her novels Austen made fun of people obsessed with worldly goods and particularly with silly fashionable trinkets. Nevertheless, the fascination with Jane Austen and her novels has a long history. The name for them, 'Janeites', was coined in 1894 and indicates that fan consumption is not a twenty-first-century invention.[53] What has changed is that the media is now much quicker to capitalize on this interest, although, as the example of Jane Austen shows, this is not necessarily a top-down process. The strong interest in the person behind the text is also an effect of fan culture. There are many examples of fan fiction based on the lives of the authors of bestsellers, where the boundaries are blurred between life and fiction. The reader's interest in the author can be explained as another means of extending the fictional universe, but there are other sides to it that will be developed further below.[54]

The overall attention surrounding a bestseller also helps build a franchise out of a title, with the story spread to other media formats, whether as film adaptations, graphic novels, television series, video games, or other products. A natural effect of the successful adaptation of a bestseller as, say, a blockbuster film is even larger sales figures for the printed book. The franchise surrounding a literary work can also encompass tourism, as shown by Kristin Thompson when she discusses the wave of tourism caused by the production of *The Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand.[55] The small American town of Forks, Washington, is another example, providing tourists with guided Twilight tours with plenty of opportunities to buy mugs with the name Forks on them coupled with a vampire theme inspired by the Twilight series.[56] In the case of Twilight, the films and the books were not produced that many years apart, making it difficult to decide which of them is more important as the vehicle of the Twilight franchise.

Adaptations are, of course, crucial to the creation of a franchise. In conglomerate publishing, adaptations for the screen are factored

in at an early stage of book production, and in many cases the adaptation rights are sold pre-publication.[57] Even though adaptation does not necessarily guarantee the making of a franchise, a film based on a book can increase the book's sales substantially and sometimes be the effective reason for the book becoming a bestseller. In some examples—such as the novel *The Hours* (1998) by Michael Cunningham, which was adapted into a film starring Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman in 2002—the boosted sales effect only lasts for the period that the film adaptation stays in the loop of the audience's interest. For film series such as The Lord of the Rings, Twilight, and Harry Potter, the effect naturally lasted longer, helping make the books the megaselling phenomena they are. It is also important to recognize that adaptations have a long history. A number of Dickens's novels were serialized for television as early as the 1950s and the adventures of Sherlock Holmes were already adapted for film around 1900.[58]

As Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, adaptations are works of art that overtly refer to their source, which is another work of art. To adapt is 'to adjust, to alter, to make suitable'.[59] An adaptation often involves making the source suitable for another medium, even though there are also plenty of examples of same-media adaptations. The reason for adapting a text may vary: it might be a wish to pay tribute to the source, but equally well to question or criticize it—a subject discussed in Ellen Turner's contribution to this anthology about the many adaptations of E. M. Hull's novel *The Sheik*. Adaptations are frequently thought inferior to their source texts, although they may be considered works of art on their own terms, which normally differ from the original in the sense that they are mediated differently and make use of other techniques. Adaptation, according to Hutcheon, involves transpositioning or 'transcoding', the reception of the source, and the creative process.[60] Where a film adaptation is the reason for a book's success, it is often known to the audience first, a situation that reverses the normal relationship between a text and its adaptation; in other cases, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the book is already well known, but is rediscovered or introduced to a wider audience as a result of the adaptation's success. By the same token, a bestselling book can be sufficient reason for an

adaptation, and thus a contributing factor in any success the latter enjoys. Although the film adaptations of the Twilight series all had the potential to become blockbusters in their own right, the fact that the books were already a bestselling phenomenon in all likelihood drew in an even wider audience. The same can be said of the film adaptations of Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy. As suggested by these examples, publishing's relationship with the television and film industries is stronger in some key categories of the fiction market, notably crime, thrillers, fantasy, and science fiction.

Hutcheon places merchandise, spin-offs, and tie-ins in a reception continuum of texts focused on reproduction: 'At the one end, we find those forms in which fidelity to the prior work is a theoretical ideal, even if a practical impossibility.'[61] This is where translations have their place, while retellings and revisions, including adaptations and even parodies, are a bit further along the continuum. At the other end, she places 'expansion', with products such as films that comment on other films or action figures based on fictional characters.[62] When it comes to economics, a tie-in sale has traditionally been defined as what happens when 'the seller of the "tying" good requires that one or more other goods *used with* the tying good also be purchased from him'.[63] In today's book market, tie-ins are abundant. Many bookshops display bestselling titles alongside various tie-in products that can be used along with the book. A cookbook with recipes for macarons or cupcakes, for example, might be displayed together with baking kits or customized kitchen aprons, while a children's book about a popular character such as Pippi Longstocking might be sold together with a doll, a card game, or a puzzle with a similar design to the book. The tie-in is typically intended to somehow heighten the experience for the consumer while purchasing the item in question, the idea being that playing with a Pippi doll will add to the experience of reading the book and vice versa.

But a tie-in can also be an additional narrative to a bestselling phenomenon. In Sweden, the literary universe of the bestselling The Circle trilogy, written by Mats Strandberg and Sara Bergmark Elfgren, was enriched with a graphic novel published in between two of the titles. The graphic novel expanded the setting presented

in the trilogy, but was not formally included in the series. In a similar manner, Stephenie Meyer released *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010), featuring one of the characters from the Twilight series as the protagonist. Other examples of tie-ins are the many guidebooks to the fictional worlds, often marketed along with the original titles or series. This has been the case with original works by such authors as Tolkien, Meyer, Collins, and Terry Pratchett, to name just a few.

Merchandise includes non-narrative products sold by licensed producers, be it jewellery, clothing, mugs, and other household items, dolls, arts and crafts materials, posters, decorations, and so on. Although some merchandise is deliberately ironic or marks its distance from the books and any related films or games, most is what Allison Thompson calls 'evocative'—it is sold as objects intended to evoke the feeling of the book, the actors, the emotions, the author, or the setting.[64] This is merchandise that is emotionally and symbolically linked to the valorized object. Even if the two concepts of tie-in and merchandise sometimes overlap, the elaborated tie-in product can be separated from the phenomenon of other merchandise in the overall franchise or branding campaign for a particular title. While the tie-in is to be used along with the 'tying' product, other merchandise such as a pens, mugs, or T-shirts do not necessarily have the same immediate connection to the book.

Both varieties of tie-in, like the merchandise, could be labelled as spin-off products, in the sense that they are products that are inspired by bestselling fiction. Spin-offs can also be linked to adaptation as phenomenon. But the spin-off also has a more narrow use as a concept for a narrative that takes some of its ingredients from an existing narrative, but that is not—like the adaptation—a transposition or a repetition of the original, but one that tells its own story. Unlike the tie-in, it is not necessarily produced to be used along with the original. The ingredient borrowed from another text may be a character, a storyline, or a fictional world. An illuminating example of this is Cassandra Clare's usage and re-usage of her fictional characters from the Mortal Instruments series, originally published as a trilogy (2007–2009). In the wake of its success, Clare expanded the story arc with a sequel trilogy (2011–2014)

and prequel trilogy, The Infernal Devices (2010–2013). One of her current projects is The Bane Chronicles, featuring a character from the previous series, published mainly in e-book format. A different, yet relevant example, is E. L. James's Fifty Shades series, which was originally written as fan fiction about the Twilight series. Spin-offs are perhaps best known within the world of television series, where a secondary character from a successful series can often be provided with the leading role of a spin-off. In the context of literary bestsellers, spin-offs are often connected with fan culture—as was the case with E. L. James—since some of the most dedicated fan sites and communities set out to inspire fans to create fiction of their own, based on their most loved characters.

The importance of merchandise, tie-ins, adaptations, and spin-offs serves to illustrate the structure of the book trade itself. It is international and dominated by global corporations, for whom publishing often comprises only a small, if important, part of their business, important because it gives them access to intellectual property rights that can be exploited in a variety of formats. Books, however, are still profitable in their own right and, as Rouvillois underscores, while the success of a book is often accredited to television and film adaptations, in the case of the Harry Potter and Twilight series it is safe to argue that the success of the adaptations was due to the immense success of the book series.[65] The general usefulness of a franchise is twofold: marketing and sales. By having external companies producing games, films, and other related products, the license generates a profit both for the author and the original publisher. It also works as marketing in itself—what is generally termed cross-media marketing. The impact of a story that appears in many different shapes and forms of media and merchandise is exponentially increased.

A special aspect of bestseller culture is that the authors of best-selling fiction often become celebrities. In the process they sometimes become a part of the franchise, including the branding of the author, as seen in the case of Jane Austen, but even more clearly in today's personality-focused media world. A range of authors such as Stephenie Meyer, J. K. Rowling, and Suzanne Collins have become stars because of their high sales. In the industry, the author

as celebrity is plainly linked to the franchise and 'saleability' of a novel. As Simone Murray notes, 'the celebrity author's presence is ubiquitous, whether bundled into the paratext of the book itself … circulating in person … or virtually, via the media industries'.[66] As commodities, celebrities embody an abstract capital, or 'attention', meaning 'high public *visibility* and *recognition*'.[67] A successful author has what is termed by van Krieken a 'celebrity function'.[68] As in other cultural fields, the commodities to be sold—books—are marketed using the 'personalities' directly connected to them, which in the process turns age, looks, and appearance into assets within a celebrity-driven, market-oriented literature.[69] The hard currency of bestseller culture is an author's visibility in media, often participating in television programmes and talk shows. The documented, direct correlation between a substantial rise in sales and appearances on nationwide television shows, whether the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in the US or the *Richard & Judy Book Club* in the UK, has made this fact quite clear to everyone in the business.

However, as argued by Joe Moran in *Star Authors*, there is a difference between a celebrity and a 'star author'.[70] Unlike the A- and B-listers of the typical celebrity-factory system, a 'star author' retains a level of 'agency' since their celebrity image is negotiated in the interplay between the author's own texts, the author's public persona, and the media coverage. What constitutes a star author, Moran argues, is that he or she manages to combine commercial success and mainstream media penetration while being culturally 'authoritative'.[71] Unlike a celebrity who is famous for being famous, star authors manage to actively negotiate their own celebrity.[72] Although Moran has been criticized for being too focused on 'high literature', his work undoubtedly underlines an important aspect of bestseller culture—that the author as celebrity is at a great advantage when it comes to the complicated process of writing and creating bestsellers.[73]

Another intersection between celebrity culture and bestsellers is the celebrity-cum-author, where pre-existing celebrity status is utilized in the promotion of a (sometimes ghost-written and often derided) literary or non-fiction work. But by proxy this also includes works whose subject matter is a celebrity, for instance biographies

of famous people such as Nelson Mandela or Zlatan Ibrahimović, often creating an immediate bestseller simply because of the pre-existing interest in the subject at hand, something which is addressed in Cristine Sarrimo's contribution to this anthology.

Critique of bestsellers

The hype, buzz, marketing, reading, and fan activities surrounding bestsellers are often the focus of criticism. Even scholars interested in these phenomena tend to give them deprecatory descriptions such as 'a global spectacle'.[74] The critique may, however, be directed at very different parts of bestseller culture. While some target the bestselling texts, accusing them of being badly written, containing too many clichés and stereotypes, or morally dubious ideological content, others criticize the effects of bestsellers on the book market, bestseller lists, or readers.

The critique of bestsellers belongs to a spectrum of persistent theories that date back to the nineteenth century, put forward by both conservative and liberal intellectuals, concerning the interpretation of mass culture as a symptom or a cause of social decay. According to these beliefs, the emergence of a mass audience of consumers caused a breakdown of the institutional mechanisms that defined the economic value of a cultural artefact. Also, with the arrival of a mass public, 'high culture' continually perceived a threat from the more profitable 'mass culture', fearing that it would make it redundant or force it to make compromises, ultimately leading to vulgarization and a cultural degradation of society.[75]

Criticism of popular, 'mass' culture thus has a history stretching back at least two hundred years. During the twentieth century, its main proponents were to be found in the Frankfurt School, notably in works such as Adorno's and Horkheimer's 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (1944). Adorno and Horkheimer famously compared popular culture to a factory producing standardized goods. The mass media, films, radio, and magazines, they argued, are used to manipulate people into passivity; they saw mass-produced culture as something that cultivated false psychological needs that can only be met by the products of capitalism. The

easy pleasures of popular culture, made available for consumption by the mass media, renders people docile and content. This was in contrast to the more challenging high arts, which they conceived of as being withheld from 'the people'.[76]

This heritage in part explains why criticism of bestsellers tends to be interlaced with criticism of popular fiction and genre fiction in general. Botting sees the bestseller as a distinct genre, given that it 'follows a formulaic and mechanical set of conventions', its reader is marked by class in the sense that he or she is probably working class, and it is a book where cover and surface is all and where quantity counts more than quality.[77] From a historical point of view, this type of criticism also stems from the low status of the novel in the literary hierarchy, one of the topics in Jon Helgason's article in this anthology. It is also interesting to observe that the arguments made against dominant, popular modes of expression have basically echoed the same early criticisms. The consumption of poor literature, film, and computer games, it is still said, pacifies its consumers, even though recent works, for instance Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad Is Good for You* (2005), have advocated the complexity of contemporary popular culture. It is sometimes possible to discern a tendency towards the criticism becoming less severe once the first flush of excitement about a new bestselling phenomenon has died down. After a certain point, harsh remarks about the bestselling author's language and writing style tend to offend a vast number of readers. It is not least for this reason that bestsellers are sometimes left in a form of critical limbo, not reviewed in the same manner and to the same extent as literary fiction.

The critique of bestsellers as literature is connected to the impact they have because of their many readers. A widely read novel is perceived as affecting people's way of thinking. Indeed, there are grounds for talking about a fear of the bestseller. Anxiety about the influence of bestsellers is generally ideological, but can take all kinds of forms. For example, as shown by Stephen Mexal, the Catholic Church felt threatened by Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* as it was seen as distorting history and facts. The debate about Brown's novel, according to Mexal, tells us things 'about the relationship between bestsellerdom and historicity, and about the way in which

bright-line divisions between true and not-true, between histories and novels, are easily blurred.'[78] Similarly, Christian groups balked at Philip Pullman's bestselling His Dark Materials trilogy, as well as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, even though none of them were presented as factual in any way.[79] It seems as if bestselling literature often creates these types of tensions between different ideological interpretations of both the past and the present, as well as about fact and fiction.

A frequently used term in the critique of bestsellers is 'bestsellerism', meaning that the book market and the media in general have become so focused on a few successful titles that little else has a chance to get noticed. Midlist authors, poets, and niche authors alike complain about the small number of titles that receive marketing and media attention. The critique of bestsellerism is also generally connected to ideas about consumerism and its downside in contemporary society, where market forces seem to take over the will of individual consumers. The development of one part of the market has the industry obsess about a few successful titles while other books have small hope of being noticed or even displayed in bookshops. This has led to concerns, especially among smaller publishers, about over-concentration in the book publishing industry, an anxiety illustrated by a series of prolonged antitrust lawsuits brought by the American Booksellers Association against, among others, Barnes & Noble and Borders Books (1998–2001).[80] One of the accusations was that the major publishers favoured large book-selling chains by adopting unfair practices. Allegedly, Barnes & Noble and Borders received secret discounts and other favourable terms from publishers and distributors that were not available to independent bookshops. Furthermore, the large publishers paid 'co-op' money to have their bestsellers prominently displayed and advertised in the shops in something approaching a payola scheme.[81] This was a system that disproportionally benefitted the chains and superstores while undermining the products of small publishers who did not have the means to compete in such a system.

Thus criticism of bestsellers has been extensive, but it has also been fragmented and inconclusive, in the sense that it is directed

at many different phenomena, mixing high and low, sometimes generalizing large-scale debates and sometimes narrowing in on a distinct focus of interest. The points of departure differ according to whether ideology or economics are the focus. The tendency has often been to highlight one of the aspects of bestseller culture while ignoring others, thus failing to recognize it for the complex phenomenon it is.

Concluding remarks

Regardless of any critique that might be directed at bestsellers, it is essential to understand their nature, culture, and market, not least given their impact on reading, literature, and culture in general. If nothing else, the research conducted on bestsellers outlined in this introduction shows that bestsellers provide a multitude of interesting perspectives, first and foremost on the question of what makes a bestseller.

What we wish to emphasize is the essentially dialectic relationship between the two suggested spheres of power—producers and consumers—which are necessary to the making of a bestseller. This anthology is designed to develop this perspective and to increase our knowledge of bestseller phenomena as well as the creation of literary hype. The variety of perspectives on offer range from the bestselling text itself to the great many contexts surrounding it. The contributors explore such topics as market forces, media strategies, genre, literary agents, publishers, and authors, as well as the effects of bestselling culture on research, literary trends, and popular taste. Many articles use specific examples, such as sheik novels, autofiction, Harry Potter, Stieg Larsson, and apocalyptic fiction as points of entry to bestseller phenomena.

We believe that our understanding of the dialectics of hype can explain how the impact of the bestseller and its associated franchises reach further than the marketing of products directly associated with bestselling fiction. As phenomena, bestsellers clearly are not merely the result of a top-down production and marketing process. After all, a bestseller often seems to take on a life of its own. The huge impact of the Harry Potter books is said to have boosted applications

to boarding schools as well as the popularity of owls as household pets.[82] Sideeffects as such can hardly have been expected by either J. K. Rowling or her publisher Bloomsbury when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) was published. Although effects like these might be regarded peripheral, they do suggest the immense, avalanche-like power of bestseller phenomena, the dynamics of which we are only beginning to grasp.

Notes

1 Ted Striphas, *The Late Age of Print. Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
2 John Sutherland, *Bestsellers. Popular Fiction of the 1970s* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 33.
3 Another recent mapping was done for the 2013 conference *Bestseller and Blockbuster Culture: Books, Cinema and Television*; see Gunhild Agger, Rasmus Grøn, Hans Jørn Nielsen and Anne Marit Waade, 'Bestseller and Blockbuster Culture: Introduction', *Academic Quarter*, 7 (2013), 5–6.
4 Robert Escarpit, *The Book Revolution* (London: Harrap, 1966), 116–117.
5 Sutherland 1981, 8.
6 John Feather and Hazel Woodbridge, 'Bestsellers in the British Book Industry 1985–2005', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 23 (2007), 201–223, quote at 210. This definition is also found in the works of Alice P. Hackett on the American bestseller, for example, *70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895–1965* (New York: Bowker, 1967).
7 It should be noted that there are a number of articles on the subject as well, many of which will be referred to in due course.
8 Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers. Popular Fiction since 1900* (2nd edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 28.
9 Bloom 2008, 5.
10 Fred Botting, 'Bestselling Fiction: Machinery, Economy, Excess', in *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, ed. David Glover and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 159–74, quote at 163.
11 Botting 2012, 163.
12 Botting 2012, 165.
13 Elizabeth Long, *The American Dream and the Popular Novel* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 5.
14 Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller. From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (Houndsmill & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
15 Frédéric Rouvillois, *Une histoire des best-sellers* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 195–6.
16 Rouvillois 2011, 290.
17 Marc Keuschnigg, *Das Bestseller-Phänomen: Die Entstehung von Nachfragekonzentration im Buchmarkt* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012), esp. 261–2.
18 John Sutherland, *Bestsellers. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 34.
19 See, for example, John Harvey, 'The Content Characteristics of Best-Selling Novels', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 17/1 (1953), 91–114; and James W. Hall, *Hit Lit: Cracking*

the Code of the Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers (New York: Random House, 2012).

20 Vikas Ganjigunte Ashok, Song Feng and Yejin Choi, 'Success with Style: Using Writing Style to Predict the Success of Novels', *Proceedings of the 2013 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, 1753–64, Seattle, Washington, USA, 18–21 October, 2013.

21 *The Help*, Penguin, www.us.penguingroup.com/static/packages/us/thehelp [accessed 28 March 2014].

22 Feather and Woodbridge 2007, 211. Notably, there is one article on non-fiction bestsellers in the special issue of *Academic Quarter*, viz. Rune Eriksson, 'Characters and Topical Diversity. A Trend in Nonfiction Bestsellers', *Academic Quarter*, 7 (2013), 202–214.

23 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately. Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYUP, 2010), 48.

24 Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, 'The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit', *Book 2.0*, 3/1 (2013), 3–23, quote at 10.

25 John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 193.

26 Renee Dye, 'The Buzz on Buzz', *Harvard Business Review* (November–December 2000), 139–46; Panos Mourdoukoutas and George J. Siomkos, *The Seven Principles of WOM and Buzz Marketing* (London: Springer, 2009).

27 Agger et al. 2013, 6.

28 See, for instance, Laura J. Miller, 'The Best-Seller List as Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction', *Book History*, 3 (2000), 286–304; Rebekah Fitzsimmons, 'Testing the Tastemakers: Children's Literature, Bestseller Lists, and the "Harry Potter Effect"', *Children's Literature*, 40 (2012), 78–107.

29 Some of the problems of bestseller lists as source material are addressed in Miller 2000.

30 Rasmus Grøn, 'The Bestseller List and its (Dis)contents. The Construction of the "the Bestseller"', *Academic Quarter*, 7 (2013), 19–33, quote at 19.

31 Another example of identification of bestsellers is Michael Korda, *Making the List. A Cultural History of the American Bestseller 1900–1999* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2001).

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