Is the field of Victorian popular fiction in a good state of health? Are there reasons to be cheerful?

Has the teaching of Victorian popular fiction revised the nineteenth-century canon to our satisfaction? Do we continue to face practical difficulties or ideological resistance?

Does REF 2021 pose particular challenges for academics working in the field of Victorian popular fiction?

Is it easier or harder for young academics specialising in Victorian popular fiction to gain full-time employment in British universities?

Why do we need the VPFA? What does the association do well? What could it do better?

Prof Andrew King, University of Greenwich
a.king@gre.ac.uk
@andrewking2904  @BLT19
YouTube – search "Andrew King Greenwich"

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Why do we need the VPFA? What does the association do well? What could it do better?

Space for methodological debate
&
Informational exchange

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Why do we need the VPFA? What does the association do well? What could it do better?

**What *IS* "Victorian popular fiction"?**

Space for *methodological* debate
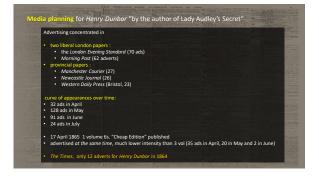
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## popular

- produced by 'the people'?
- produced for (an idea of) the 'the people' ?
- liked by large numbers of people?
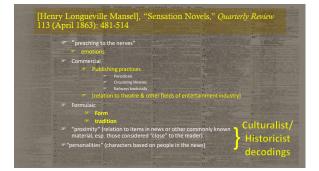- bought by large numbers of people?
- in original form or adapted?

Relation of the individual to (**popular fiction) industries**?
-- "the people" here = specific market segments

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*Morning Post* 26 April 1864

(NB "publication date" = when the 3 volume version is available for borrowing in the circulating libraries)

NEW NOVEL BY M. E. BRADDON.
On May 10, at all Libraries, in 3 vols., post 8vo.,
**HENRY DUNBAR.**
By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," &c.
Subscribers to circulating libraries should give immediate orders for this work to ensure early copies.
London: John Maxwell and Co., 122, Fleet-street.

**Media planning** for *Henry Dunbar* "by the author of Lady Audley's Secret"

Advertising concentrated in

- **two liberal London papers :**
  - the *London Evening Standard* (70 ads)
  - *Morning Post* (62 adverts)
- **provincial papers :**
  - *Manchester Courier* (27)
  - *Newcastle Journal* (26)
  - *Western Daily Press* (Bristol, 23)

**curve of appearances over time:**
- 32 ads in April
- 128 ads in May
- 91 ads in June
- 24 ads in July

- 17 April 1865 1 volume 6s. "Cheap Edition" published
- advertised *at the same time*, much lower intensity than 3 vol (35 ads in April, 20 in May and 2 in June)

- *The Times*, only 12 adverts for *Henry Dunbar* in 1864

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# 2. Signification practices

– how do we in VPFA assume meaning is generated?

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[Henry Longueville Mansel], "Sensation Novels," *Quarterly Review* 113 (April 1863): 481-514

- ☞ "preaching to the nerves"
- ☞ Commercial
  - ☞ Periodicals
  - Circulating libraries
  - Railways bookstalls
- ☞ Formulaic
- ☞ "proximity" (relation to items in news or other commonly known material, esp. those considered "close" to the reader)
  - ☞ "personalities" (characters based on people in the news)

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[Henry Longueville Mansel], "Sensation Novels," *Quarterly Review* 113 (April 1863): 481-514

- ☞ "preaching to the nerves"
  - ☞ emotions
- ☞ Commercial
  - ☞ Publishing practices
    - ☞ Periodicals
    - Circulating libraries
    - Railways bookstalls
  - ☞ [relation to theatre & other fields of entertainment industry]
- ☞ Formulaic
  - ☞ Form
  - ☞ tradition
- ☞ "proximity" (relation to items in news or other commonly known material, esp. those considered "close" to the reader)
  - ☞ "personalities" (characters based on people in the news)

} Culturalist/ Historicist decodings

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## Quantitative methodologies

- analysis of individual texts

*War **of the** Worlds* (volume form text)

https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=7fd0e0503f013194b6e929ad6c3ae60f&panels=cirrus,reader,trends,summary,contexts

https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=7fd0e0503f013194b6e929ad6c3ae60f&query=red*&query=paper*&query=black&withDistributions=raw&docIndex=0&mode=document&view=Trends

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## Quantitative methodologies

- analysis of a corpus

Archer, Jodie and Matthew L. Jockers. *The Bestseller Code*. Allan Lane 2016

Applies similar computational system to 5000 contemporary novels -- c. 80% accuracy in correlating a novel to *NYTimes* bestseller list

## The findings
## [US] Bestsellers …

1. Are focussed on just 3 or 4 topics for at least 30% of the time (i.e. use nouns in certain semantic fields)
2. Plotlines have a beating rhythm of highs and lows, with symmetrical 3 act structure
3. Style – everyday but grammatically correct language, few exclamation marks ("invisible style")
4. Character – currently active young women who are frightening, connecting the domestic to the public and global sphere

Archer, Jodie and Matthew L. Jockers. *The Bestseller Code*. Allan Lane 2016

## Their findings
## [US] Bestsellers …

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Archer, Jodie and Matthew L. Jockers. *The Bestseller Code*. Allan Lane 2016

**Can do we perform a similar analysis on a corpus of Victorian popular fiction?**

Why do we need the VPFA? What does the association do well? What could it do better?

## What *IS* "Victorian

Space for *methodological* debate
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popular fiction"?