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?

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Morning Post
26 April 1864

Space for methodological debate
Informational exchange

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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Relation of the individual to (popular fiction) industries?
- “the people” here = specific market segments
Media planning for Henry Dunbar "by the author of Lady Audley's Secret"

Advertising concentrated in:

- two liberal London papers:
  - 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:

- 82 ads in April
- 128 ads in May
- 91 ads in June
- 24 ads in July

- 27 April 1863: 1 volume of "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

2. Signification practices

- how do we in VPFA assume meaning is generated?

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

Quantitative methodologies

- analysis of individual texts

War of the Worlds (volume text

- https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=760e0503f03139462e929ad6321ae60f&panel=reader&mode=summary

- https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=760e0503f03139462e929ad6321ae60f&query=red&query=paper&query=black&query=tv&query=mono&query=movies&query=documents&query=tw

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 focused 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

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

What is “Victorian popular fiction”? Why do we need the VPF? What does the association mean? What could it do better?