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Chapter 13 - The Genre

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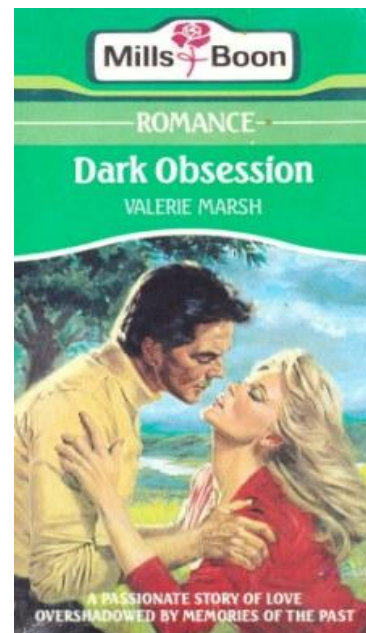
The Genre

-Keelie Daquilanto-

The rise of paperback and Penguin books paved the way for authors to begin aiming their writing toward a specific audience. In turn, this led to the rise of the genre. The genre quickly became important to the reading audience for a variety of reasons. It not only gave readers an easier way to access the kinds of books they enjoyed, but it also gave them the comfort in knowing what to expect from their books¹. The creation of genres allowed for publishing companies to disseminate their material with ease to the people they knew were going to buy them¹. A few of the genres that came about, such as romance novels, children's books, and illustrated books, caused book audiences to begin changing. These different types of books appealed to those who did not otherwise have access to material that was tailored toward them, such as women and children. This allowed for a new audience of readers to feel like they finally had a place in the world of literature.

Romance Novels

Many authors and publishers had a hand in making the romance novel industry what it is today. Two of the biggest contributors to the genre were Gerard Mills and Charles Boon, who created the publishing company Mills & Boon². Mills and Boon started their company in 1930, and began publishing books for lending libraries, expanding the number of readers who could come into contact with their books². As a result, Mills & Boon decided to make romance the genre of choice for their company, as they noticed that it was a popular choice among their



Mills & Boon romance novel book cover¹

readers. When Mills & Boon began publishing their romance novels, class and wealth were prevalent themes. The hero of the story was often a member of the upper class, and the heroine was younger and a member of the lower social class². As society as a whole began changing, so too did the content of these novels. In the 1930s and 40s, the women in these books tended to live in England and were dealing with life during war and domestic situations. In the 50's, this focus shifted to motherhood and being a widow². By the 1960s the heroine of these stories began displaying interests in starting her own career, oftentimes as a nurse³. Their novels then became popular among working class women. In 1971, Mills & Boon was purchased by the business Harlequin, which furthered the company's overwhelming success³.

Mills & Boon focused on publishing romance novels by women authors, something that had not been attempted before².

The romance novel was disruptive for book loving audiences in multiple ways. Throughout its evolution, the romance novel appealed to a wide variety of different women. In most cases the content of books was aimed more toward educated men. However, with this new genre, women now had material that was specifically designed for them. This provided an opportunity for women to become more literate, educated, and feel included within the literacy world. As Mills & Boon became a more established publishing company, they focused on keeping their prices low so that as many women as possible could have access to their material. This allowed for a wide range of dispersal. By 1998, the company had global sales of 160 million copies published in 24 different languages³. With their overwhelming success among the women of the time, Mills & Boon helped influence how the world still approaches the genre of romance today.

Children's Books

With the rise of genre fiction and books for specialized populations came the creation of children's books. Before the 18th century, material aimed at children was simply in the form of spoken stories, songs, and poems that were used to educate⁴. Books slowly began to be created for children. However, they were still mostly educational in nature and aimed toward teaching subjects

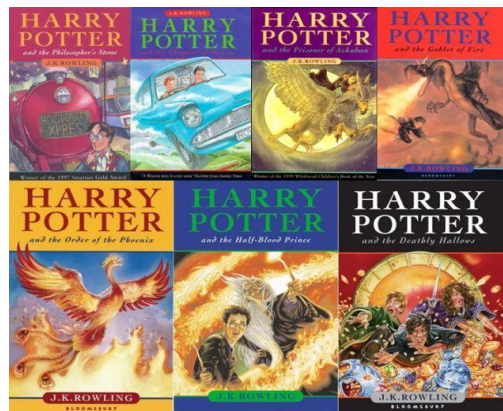
such as the alphabet³. Until the 19th century, children were usually taught to read within the home using horn-books, which were flat pieces of wood that held a sheet of paper containing things like the alphabet or The Lord's Prayer³. With the turn of the 19th century came collections of fairy tales such as Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales* that included *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Little Mermaid*³. As the century progressed, children's literature began shifting from magical plot lines to those centered on young main characters with more realistic stories such as *Anne of Green Gables* and *Treasure Island*³. Children's books were becoming an essential piece of the book market as the number of children reading for pleasure began to rise. In England around 1940, children's paperback books were released and sold at lower prices, making book buying finally possible for children⁴.



Cover illustration of a set of fairy tales written in the 19th century²

Charlotte's Web was said to be one of the only children's books of its time that faced the subject of death⁴.

As it became clear that children were a source of demand in the book industry, publishers began getting creative. They released items such as pop-up books and stories with multiple endings³. All of these things led to books now being a continuous part of children's lives. The market for children's books stayed steady through the 1900s. However, in 1997 the book industry showed just how high the demand for children's books could get with the publication of the *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling⁴. The *Harry Potter* series has

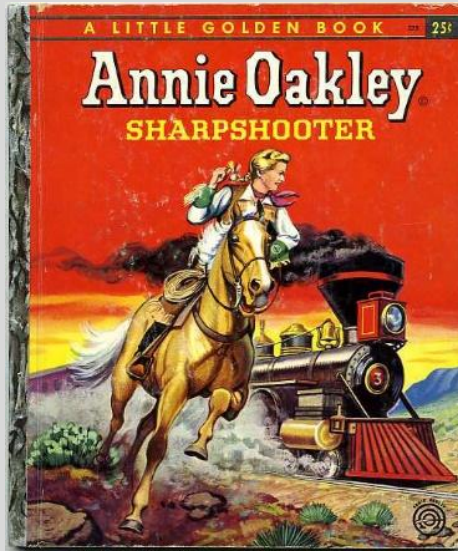


Original British Harry Potter series cover art³

sold over 400 million copies and has been translated into countless different languages in order to be accessible for children all over the world³. Publications such as *Harry Potter* brought about a new culture of book lovers. As the industry for children's books continued growing, a new type of reader emerged, creating a demand for these certain types of books.

The formation of the children's book was disruptive in many of the same ways that the romance novel was disruptive. Children's books allowed for kids to have their own material, tailored toward them, that was not purely educational. Before this industry was brought about, the only access children regularly had to books was for education or religion. The introduction of books specifically for children allowed them to begin reading for pleasure and entertainment, an activity that they were not included in before. This allowed for children younger than ever to begin picking up books due to the fact that they now had access, in addition to the idea that children started to want to learn how to read⁴. The industry has since helped to establish a culture that involves both children and young adults, that lets them feel as if they have their own genre separate from those aimed at adults.

Little Golden Books



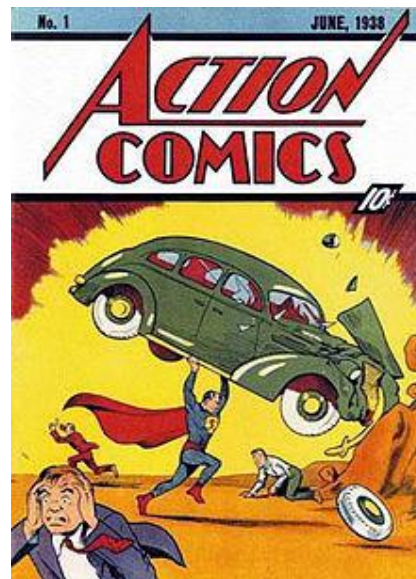
Little Golden Book⁴

In 1942, three different publishing companies joined together to form a new series of children's books geared toward beginning readers between the ages of 3 and 8⁵. They decided to call this series *Little Golden Books*, characterized by the gold binding. *Little Golden Books* were inexpensive, selling for only 25 cents, and sturdy enough to hold up to the wear and tear a young child may inflict⁵. These books were brightly colored and appealing to children, making them want to read. Soon *Little Golden Books* were being sold in many different places from grocery stores to drug stores. These books were easily accessible to all children, regardless of socioeconomic status or level of reading ability⁵. *Little Golden Books* as an industry were disruptive in and of themselves due to the fact that they changed how, when, and why children read. They not only became a popular publishing company, but a beloved staple in the homes of many children.

Illustrated Books

During the 20th century, the world began to see the rise of illustrated books³. The developments happening in technology during this time period helped to improve the quality and affordability of color photographs³. These advances led different types of illustrated books to become more widely accessible and desirable to the general population. Different cultures began to adapt different forms of illustrated books, such as comic books and manga.

Before comic books became popular, the world had “pulp.” “Pulps” were sold for 10 cents on newsstands and focused on the adventures of action heroes⁶. Comic books as we know them today came about in 1938 when *Action Comics* launched their first issue featuring Superman⁷. This began what is known as the Golden Age of Comic Books due to the high volume of sales⁷. These sales then died down, however the Silver Age of Comic Books sprang up in the late 60’s and early 70’s. This era was marked by Marvel Comics, which introduced naturalistic superheroes, such as Spider-Man⁷. The world of comic books



First issue of Action Comics featuring Superman⁵

The Justice Society of America was the first fictional superhero team to appear in a comic book, founded in 1940⁶.

became disruptive for a variety of reasons. Comic books were not only appealing to children, but to young adults and even older adults. These types of books were able to capture people’s attention not just by their illustrations, but by their riveting stories as well. As most comic books stayed inexpensive, they were accessible to the wide variety of people that read them, and today are still collected by millions of people.

Japanese comics, different from American comics, are often referred to as manga. Manga utilizes a wide variety of themes to appeal to its readers such as school life, action and adventure, and romance³. The term “manga” was first

coined by artist Katsushika Hokusai, who used it to describe spontaneous drawings that excite the imagination³. Manga is traditionally read from top to bottom and right to left, and utilizes caricature type illustrations³. Manga is said to have originated from scrolls created by Buddhist monks in the 6th and 7th centuries⁸. These scrolls featured images such as cherry blossoms and red leaves outlining the passage of time, a common theme in many manga today⁸. Modern manga began after World War II when Japan was rebuilding its infrastructure⁹. In 1951, the launch of a manga series known as Astro Boy helped to shape the history of manga⁹. Astro Boy was a super powered robot, as well as a little boy⁹. Many of the subjects introduced in Astro Boy had much to do with the Japanese society at the time such as the need for world peace after the war⁹. Between 1950 and 1969, Manga appealed to audiences due to the fact that they specialized in two main marketing genres, shōnen (meaning period of youth) manga for boys and shōjo (meaning little girl) manga for girls⁹. Today, manga continues to specialize in topics that appeal to many different types of readers. This idea in itself makes the world of manga disruptive. These types of books are accessible to a variety of different people young and old, and continue to be in demand all around the world today.



Astro Boy⁶

The Popularity of the Genre

Aside from those discussed in this chapter, there are a variety of other genres that have become popular over the years. These genres include science fiction, mystery, self-help, and many others. The genre has led people to feel as if they have



Bookstore separated by genre⁷

a place in the book world. People are free to pick and choose which genres of books they want and do not want to read. This has led to more accessibility, and tailoring of books by publishers to their readers. The rise in popularity of the genre not only provided a new variety of entertainment for readers, but it also gave way to new cultures of book loving audiences everywhere.

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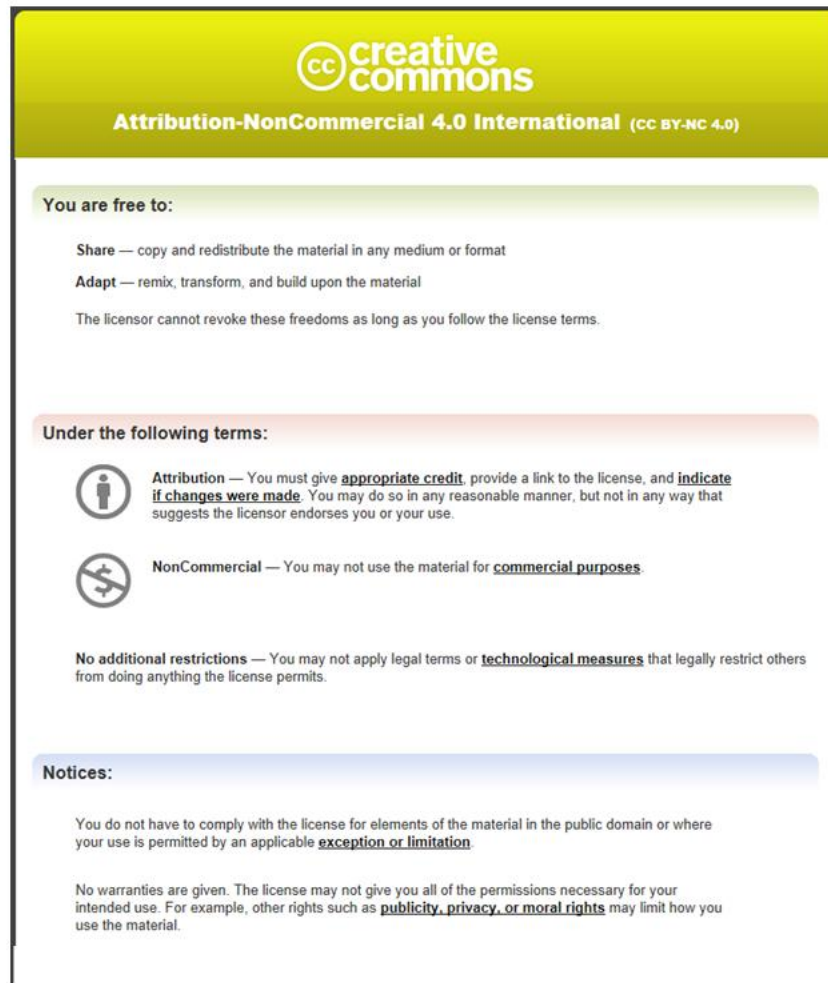
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