

**THE RELEVANCE OF POPULAR ENGLISH LANGUAGE FICTION TO BLACK
ADULT READERS IN LIBRARIES AFFILIATED TO THE KWAZULU-NATAL
PROVINCIAL LIBRARY SERVICES**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Lindy Beacham and my colleagues in the Acquisitions Section, KZNPLS, with love and gratitude for their care, support and forbearance.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

The author hereby declares that the contents of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, are her own work and that the thesis has not been submitted simultaneously or, at any other time, for another degree.

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ABSTRACT

The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Library Services (KZNPLS) is attempting to address the reading needs of black adult users neglected during the apartheid era. The provision of popular adult English fiction, which consumes a considerable portion of the KZNPLS book budget, has catered for the recreational reading tastes of a small, educated, predominantly white group. This study explores whether popular adult English fiction has a role to play in the reading needs of black adult users in libraries affiliated to KZNPLS.

An exploratory survey using the semi-structured interview was conducted in black libraries affiliated to KZNPLS to investigate whether there was an interest in popular English fiction and whether it was assisting readers to develop English language reading skills. The findings of the survey suggested that needs were very broad. However, basic literacy material was the most needed, and popular English fiction was playing a significant role in improving English language reading skills and fluency.

The study suggests that if transformation and development is to take place in South Africa, the country's inhabitants must cultivate the critical thinking skills necessary for full utilisation of information technology. The oral tradition is not sufficient for South Africa's information needs but should be incorporated into a synergic union with global information systems. Reading has an established role to play in the development of critical thinking skills but South Africa lacks a strong reading culture. The fostering of English-language reading ability is appropriate as English is the *lingua franca* of South Africa and the foremost language of technology. The structure of much popular English fiction has trans-cultural appeal due to its use of archetypal formulas. Popular English fiction provides reading motivation but has a controversial history due to elitist condemnations of its literary quality. To overcome the debate of whether libraries should prefer literary merit or popularity in their fiction collections, it is recommended that diversity be the touchstone and that readers be given full opportunity to indulge in the free voluntary reading that provides fertile ground for the cultivation of critical thinking skills.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Statement of the problem

There has been no research exclusively on the fiction reading interests of South African black¹ adult readers. Nassimbeni (1991) investigated recreational reading as part of a larger survey of the reading interests of black adults, and Leach's (1991) survey of the reading interests of newly literate black adults similarly featured fiction reading interests as part of a broader picture. Current research has tended to focus on occupational or business information needs rather than non-occupational needs (Fairer-Wessels 1987:54-5).

As South African public libraries are reaching black children with more success and a variety of programmes (Van Deventer 1982:29), the focus of this study will be on adults.

The aim of the study is to investigate whether the popular Western-produced fiction purchased in large quantities by the Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Library Service (KZNPLS) is relevant to the needs of black adults using libraries affiliated to KZNPLS, the majority of whom have hitherto been deprived of education, information and the chance to develop a reading culture. KZNPLS is attempting to address the needs of this group (Gray *et al* 1994:5-6).

The severe financial curbs currently imposed by provincial authorities on the purchase of library materials and the call for public libraries to redress their previous neglect of the needs of the disempowered majority has increased the necessity to explore a perception of bias in the provision of English adult fiction, constituting as it does 65% of the budget allocated for the purchase of adult library books by KZNPLS (Gray 1996:pers.comm.). It

¹ For the purposes of this study, the word "black" refers to African people or, occasionally, to North American people of African descent.

has become imperative to base purchasing on actual needs. This study addresses the question of whether expensive recreational fare is being provided for a tiny, privileged minority in the face of the urgent educational and information needs of the disadvantaged majority.

1.2 Definitions

Terms will be defined as they appear in the text.

1.3 Research objectives

KZNPLS acquisition policies are under constant scrutiny from many quarters, including the public, affiliated librarians, library organisations and provincial authorities (NEPI 1992:20, 54; Wyley 1993:10). To stand up to this scrutiny, the acquisitions policy should strive to be both as representative of communities' needs and as transparent as possible.

Considering the current emphasis in South Africa on the educational aspects of library provision which has seen many public libraries aligning themselves with education (ACTAG 1995:14), the purchase and supply of recreational fiction in times of financial duress must be carefully re-evaluated. Such re-evaluation must be both in terms of popular fiction's quality and the use that may be made of the material.

As stated in 1.1, the aim of this study is to investigate whether popular English fiction is relevant to the needs of black adult readers in libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. Concomitant objectives are to investigate whether recreational reading needs and material are less deserving of attention than those of education and whether recreational fiction is wanted at all in the face of the urgent demand for educational and information material; whether popular English fiction can offer support for English second-language reading skills; and to test the popularity among the readers of the various popular fiction genres.

An important area of background investigation to the research is the need to question the pervasive notion that popular fiction is inferior to non-fiction or literary fiction. An attempt will be made to understand how such an attitude arose and why it now seems to be under increasing attack from elements within the literary establishment and academia.

1.4 Justification for the study

In the spirit of reconstruction, it is difficult for KZNPLS to vindicate the continued expenditure of a considerable part of its book budget on an elite, educationally privileged minority readership which has in the past been well looked after at the expense of the deprived majority. It is hoped that the study will assist KZNPLS in formulating a fiction-buying policy that will serve the reading needs of the entire community, especially the formerly neglected black population. Unless a role can be established for popular fiction in serving the reading needs of black library users, KZNPLS will be forced to reconsider the purchase of such material, at least in the present quantities.

1.5 Choice of the period

The study deals with the years from 1975 to 1996, partly because the period before 1975 has been comprehensively covered by other researchers, most notably Gertz (1981), and partly because that is the period during which the researcher has been closely involved with the selection and purchase of fiction at KZNPLS. When research that predates 1975 is utilised in this study, it is for the purposes of background and continuity.

1.6 Components of the study

The study consisted of a literature survey, the design and implementation of a questionnaire as refined by the pretest; data collection by interviews; data analysis and reporting of the research results; interpretation and recommendations.

The literature survey in Chapters Three, Four and Five provided the background to the research. The literature survey was also used to validate the methodology used in the research. The construction and implementation of the instrument are described under methodology in Chapter Six. The survey results appear in Chapter Seven, and the data resulting from the research were interpreted and recommendations made in the light of the literature survey in Chapters Eight and Nine.

1.7 Limitations of the study

A limitation of the study is that the researcher for various reasons (see 6.6 of Chapter Six) worked through affiliated librarians and not directly with the users.

The study does not address the concerns of readers who do not use the library, or readers who have not found what they want in the library and consequently no longer visit it. It does not answer the question of whether people are reading what they really want to read or are reading what is available; nor does it answer the question of whether people have any way of knowing what they really want to read if it is not being provided.

1.8 Summary

This chapter defined the research problem in context and briefly outlined the components of the study. Justification was provided for the study which investigates whether popular English language fiction has any relevance to the reading needs of black adults using

libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. The focus in the next chapter moves to the background of the problem.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

A combination of factors has led to the problem identified by this study, which is whether popular English language fiction has any relevance to the reading needs of the black adult users of libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. The history of disparities in library and information provision in South Africa has contributed to a situation in which redress is urgently required if the country is to achieve its hopes of transformation and development.

2.1 The traditional Western public library model resulting in provision to a select group only

Wherever the traditional Western library model exists in the world, fiction provision predominantly serves the educated middle classes (James 1992:2). In South Africa, not only the fiction service but library provision in general has been tailored to the needs of this group, which comprises mostly the white population despite the emergence of the black middle class in the 1980s (Louw 1992:7). Such needs are overwhelmingly Eurocentric and the traditional Western public library model, which grew from Eurocentric needs in the first place (Fouche 1980:3), has thrived in this exclusive and uncritical atmosphere. Yet more than three-quarters of the population does not share European or North American cultural origins (Moulder 1991:7). Although the problem of selective service to a white, middle class clientele is not peculiar to South Africa but also existed, for example, in the United States of America (USA) (Lyman 1976:4), what has distinguished South African public library provision from that of other countries is that the black, largely illiterate, educationally-disadvantaged majority was ignored not by default but by deliberate policy (Magwentshu 1995:157). The South African Institute for Library and Information Science, until fairly recently the country's leading library organisation whose role it was to nurture

the ethos of the library and information profession, itself subscribed to and actively promoted policies of library segregation (Syphus 1995:4). When attempts were made to provide for black readers, the Western library model was served up with little thought for its suitability, or, at best, paternalistically (Wyley 1993:19), and the libraries provided were often used as dumping grounds for material judged redundant in Eurocentric libraries (Krynauw 1994:5).

A further result of library segregation in South Africa has been the harm done to the middle class white community by undemocratic library practices. Until the late 1980s when the political climate began to thaw (Nassimbeni 1994:149), mainstream library collections were conservative and narrow due to censorship and the cultural boycott (Louw 1991:4). Mainstream librarianship was content to work within a set of unquestioned assumptions concerning a society dominated by a racial elite (Merrett 1988:3). Western urban values dominated the collections almost to the total exclusion of other world views, with the result that many whites are not equipped for the changes of the future, have no grasp of the past in their own country to aid their understanding of present conditions, and are uncertain of how to communicate with other South Africans (Louw 1991:4).

Despite its greater accessibility to the ordinary person than other types of libraries such as academic and special libraries (Salter and Salter 1991:60), the traditional Western public library model is now accepted as alien to the needs of developing communities (Kaniki 1994:50; Manaka 1993:19-20; Neill *et al* 1992:39; Nassimbeni 1990:84). It is not suited to the daily personal, social or cultural life of majority of the black population in South Africa, especially adults (Fouche 1982:34). Not merely irrelevant, it is an obstacle to library use by communities whose members may not have had the opportunity to acquire the advanced literacy skills required to utilize such a resource. The Western library grew out of a literate, educated society, with the result that those who are uneducated or unable to read may be afraid to enter it; and even if they do, will find little of use to them there (Salter and Salter 1991:60). Reflecting this state of affairs, Fouche's survey of black adult library users in 1980, the first of its kind, revealed that only four percent of the black population used libraries. Of this percentage, the typical black library user represented

only one group of the black population - a youngish male, literate, with 10 or more years of primary and secondary education, in the white-collar sector, up to date with current affairs and with an urban, Western-oriented lifestyle (Fouche 1980:19).

More encouragingly, however, Mini's (1990:26) survey of reading habits and library use by blacks in Edendale found that 25% of the respondents were members of the library, although her survey included only literates, while Fouche's included 36% who were semi-literate or non-literate. Of her respondents, 57% were between the ages of 18 and 30, while 35% were between 30 and 45. Thirty-six percent had some high school education and 33% were matriculants. Fifty-five percent of her respondents were female and 45% male. Thus her library user population showed significant broadening of the narrow range of library user characteristics found by Fouche. Nyongwana's 1987 survey on reading habits and library use by blacks in Lamontville showed a similar broadening. Thirty-five percent of her respondents were library users, and 52% of males and 48% of females were readers (although not necessarily library users) (Nyongwana 1987:9).

Eight years ago, many black people in South Africa considered the library a "white" institution (Bekker and Lategan 1988:66). Libraries in developing communities have more chance of success if the librarians come from the community, as they are likely to possess a thorough knowledge of the community and will be accepted by it (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:32). Librarians of the Western model are usually unrepresentative of the developing community and insensitive to its needs (Lyman 1976:4).

Success of libraries in developing areas is known to depend on full community involvement in the establishment and running of the library, even, or especially, if the community was previously ignorant of libraries (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:33; Kotze 1980:17).

Developing communities upon whom the Western library model was imposed were seldom consulted. The *raison d'etre* of a library, Western model or otherwise, is to get the right material to the right reader when s/he needs it (Fouche 1980:2), and in South Africa the public library has the potential to cater for the educational, cultural, social and recreational needs of black adults provided it is careful to take its direction from those needs and grow

out of them (Fouche 1982:34), becoming “community-specific” rather than a concept imposed upon the community from outside (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:25).

In accordance with the pattern of traditional librarianship in South Africa, the provision of popular fiction by KZNPLS has in the past been mainly in response to the recreational reading demands of the white, educated, middle-class elite (Wyley 1993:8). The provincial library services are unique for their purchase of multiple copies of books for entire provinces. In the case of KZNPLS, the books were selected by staff of the central office until 1996. This process is described in more detail in Chapter Five.

2.2 Attempts to transform LIS

Freire believed that development must include “liberation from cultural, political and economic oppression” (Dick 1992:104). Pakkiri, on the other hand, contends that perceptions of development will vary according to the stage of development of a particular society (Pakkiri 1992:169). Mabomba (1992:322) states that no society has achieved high levels of economic development without a correspondingly high rate of literacy.

Among the problems of a library service to African communities are shortage of books, lack of suitable reading material, high rates of illiteracy and the absence of a reading habit among both the literate and the semi-literate (Qobose 1992:306). The library profession’s history of envisioning and planning for Africa’s changing information needs has not been impressive. The situation is made all the more complicated by the threat of closure and the curtailment of funds and services forced on libraries, as well as the inroads other professions are making into the information sector (Neill *et al* 1992:47).

Bearing the development imperative in mind, there can be no librarian in South Africa who remains unaware that the greatest challenge facing the profession is to transform library and information services so that the focus is shifted from the well-served white literate minority to the literacy and information needs of the neglected, semi-literate majority of the

population (Shah and Dreyer 1993:25). The continued existence of libraries in South Africa depends on their ability to make a positive contribution to the development and transformation process whereby the imbalances of the past are corrected (September 1993a:71-2; Louw 1991:5). Despite this apparent consensus, local authorities in some areas, including KwaZulu-Natal, attempted to prevent the opening of public libraries to all users after the abolition of the Separate Amenities Act in 1990 (Nassimbeni 1991:2) and there are occasional reports in KZNPLS of certain individual librarians still obstructing disadvantaged groups who apply for membership of their libraries (North 1996:pers.comm.).

Two views are possible on the direction public libraries should take in developing communities. One is that resources should go to school libraries to create a new generation of readers, with adult services developing naturally as the readers grow older. The other is that the library should be part of the development process and help to create, in full consultation with those it is serving, conditions in which libraries can take root (Fouche 1980:3). The second view seems to be more in line with both the library ethos and the South African situation, where the rapid changes in society have caused information needs to be acute.

In exploring the relationship between development and literacy in the library context, it can be said that in communities where literacy levels are low or non-existent, coping information has been obtained in oral form from informal sources such as churches, women's groups, shebeens, burial societies, legal aid services and word of mouth (September 1993a:75; Bekker and Lategan 1988:66). However, the oral culture as a means of acquiring information has limits in the information age in which both technological development and the means of utilizing it are making life steadily more complex and requiring the individual to develop more and more skills. Increasingly, information is disseminated in print form and requires mastery of print literacy if it is to be fully utilized (Nassimbeni and de Jager 1996:1; September 1993a:75-6; Tsuru and Mawindi 1992:380). It is particularly important for black South Africans to be exposed to information for development because it is a means whereby they will gain access to empowerment,

including the full array of educational, social and legal amenities from which they have been excluded for so long (September 1993a:75).

In spite of its recognition of the value of indigenous knowledge (discussed in Chapter Three), this study takes the position of endorsing literacy and reading as a means of accessing information for development.

Public libraries are in a position to contribute to the transition process meaningfully by providing access to literacy and information, although so far their effectiveness in reaching black South Africans has been limited (September 1993a:72; Pitse 1991:4) and is likely to remain that way for some time (Kaniki 1994:50). In supporting the link between access to information and development, September (1993a:74) argues that the greatest need of disadvantaged communities is information, without which, for one thing, the process of democracy is obstructed. Boon (1992:97) sees information as a resource that is capable of making a direct contribution to socio-cultural, economic, ethnological, political and educational development and consequently vital for personal, organisational and national development. Whereas the Western library, which has developed to its fullest in the United Kingdom, the USA and Scandinavia, grew out of literacy and development (Fouche 1982:35), the library for the developing community is a tool for bringing about literacy and development. It can continue to pursue its familiar functions of education, information, recreation and cultural development, but the practice must change according to the development context and the circumstances of the individual community (Fouche 1980:2; Kotze 1980:33).

Having emerged from the legislated inequalities in information provision of the apartheid era, South Africa faces other, more global, threats. Information is fast becoming a commodity whose content and accessibility is controlled by dominant interests. Africa is being absorbed into a global system which is still largely dominated by a Eurocentric view. The information technology currently sweeping the world is not neutral but contains the values of the society from which it is disseminated (Stilwell 1996a; Neill *et al* 1992:32). In such a situation, information could become not an exchange but a one-way flow from an

external, dominant source primarily concerned with its own interests. The source of information power is in highly developed countries, which could lead to the neglect of global and regional socio-economic interests (Stilwell 1996a). As is often the case when development programmes are initiated by foreign interests, other views or needs are seen as lesser and are marginalised (Brammage 1992:3). The impact of Western culture on Africa resulted in a form of dependency from which many believe the people of the continent have never recovered (Kedem 1992:55), and Mchombu (*in* Brammage 1992:5) has expressed fears that the power of the dominating group disseminating information may leave the disadvantaged in developing communities even more disempowered. Care must be taken that the library does not unwittingly contribute to a situation where disadvantaged communities are neglected even further.

Nevertheless, the fast-developing information technologies, that is, computer-based technology that improves physical access to information (Ford 1995:100), have tremendous potential to link the latest international knowledge and research meaningfully to local indigenous knowledge (Stilwell 1996a). The success of this linkage depends in large measure on librarians. With the commodifying of information, librarians may be tempted to sell a service to business clients and overlook the communities with the more basic needs (Stilwell 1996a). Librarians must ensure that they protect the diversity of world views and that their libraries remain democratic institutions (Brammage 1992:7). They must be alert to the question of who controls information (Merrett 1995a:48). The predominant concern of libraries should be for the needs of the people, and every effort should be made to see that the technology becomes more "people-literate" than that people are forced to be more computer-literate (Stilwell 1996a).

The question of who controls information is all the more relevant in the light of the South African government's commitment to putting the Internet into every South African school (Boers trek into new homeland ... 1996:23)

Literacy is a basic life skill which apartheid denied to vast numbers of South African people; without it, participation in the democratic process and reconstruction of South

African society will be fraught with problems (Pitse 1991:3). Literacy will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Three.

2.3 Shortage of suitable follow-up material for developing readers

A crucial feature of the attainment of literacy is the provision of sufficient follow-up materials on which developing readers can practice their reading skills (Metzger 1991:39; Kotze 1980:3). A major difficulty exists in finding sufficiently interesting and suitable reading material to motivate adults to develop their reading skills. The ultimate goal is self-sustaining literacy, but even if developed to high school graduate level, reading skills and the reading habit can be lost if not used or maintained (Dupper 1994:34; Mabomba 1992:339; Salter and Salter 1991:2-37; Van Deventer 1982:29). A literacy supportive environment in which primary school graduates are likely to remain literate for the rest of their lives is one in which literacy skills are accepted as a normal and essential part of everyday life, but it is a difficult environment to establish (Mabomba 1992:333; Muller 1992:357).

Hence this study is not concerned with bridge literature, or low level vocabulary material used in the first approach to reading (Leach 1991:22), so much as post-bridge literature, which the developing reader uses to progress toward fluency and ultimately toward becoming a fully literate, critical reader. However, many of the problems connected with the lack of availability of bridge literature in developing communities also affect the availability of post-bridge literature.

The number of South Africans requiring literacy aid is open to debate. Although it is commonly believed that 15 million adults are either illiterate or severely undereducated, the *ABE Capacity Building Research Report* commissioned by the Joint Education Trust estimates that a more realistic figure would be five million illiterate or semi-literate adults in the country, or slightly over six million educable adults (aged 15 and over) who are illiterate or severely undereducated (Harley *et al* 1996:24, 29, 30, 49).

The majority of people requiring literacy development in South Africa are black. International research has shown that indigenous material, that is, material written in local, mother-tongue languages, provides the best motivation for readers to develop their skills as it reflects experience, beliefs, values and attitudes with which readers are familiar and can identify - perhaps particularly in the case of black South Africa, which has been deprived of the chance to record its version of history and culture (Nassimbeni 1991:3-4; Onadiran and Onadiran 1984:72; Richardson 1983:18-19; Arnold 1982:11; Lyman 1976:11, 79).

There have been urgent calls for more indigenous books, including those with sensational or sexually titillating plots such as the Afro-romances which have proved popular in Kenya (Nassimbeni 1991:6; Onadiran and Onadiran 1984:72). Despite these calls, publishers do not find publishing for the African market economically viable. Part of the reason is that the target audience is too poor to afford books and high levels of illiteracy perpetuate this situation (Mabomba 1992:340; Arnold 1982:9). However, even if people are literate, publishing will not thrive if they do not possess the reading habit (Msiska 1993:161). The shortage of writers and translators means that material cannot be published at the wide range of levels required, and governments in Africa may not always be prepared to step into the breach and assist publishing for fear of developing a powerful press (Mabomba 1992:340).

Another reason for the scarcity of vernacular publishing is the complexity of the market. There are 11 official languages in South Africa and within these exists considerable disagreement on the correct use of language. With regional differences adding to the problem, a sensitive situation has resulted. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to publish something that will be generally accepted in terms of its language, and publishers have consequently become discouraged about publishing in the vernacular (Groenewald 1996:pers.comm.; Msiska 1993:163; Arnold 1982:14; Fourie 1982:24). Thus, although Lyman states that there is no area more important for libraries than helping readers to hone and develop their reading skills, suitable material in the vernacular is in chronically short supply and the situation seems unlikely to change in the near future (Arnold 1982:16).

However, it is probable that the motivational benefits of indigenous material referred to above, despite their unquestionable value and desirability, may not be so crucial in the higher levels of reading development (Van Deventer 1982:32). There is some indication from research that popular English fiction may have a role to play in promoting reading skills and the reading habit among those whose literacy skills require practice and development (Leach 1991:158). As a well-known example, Harlequin romances have achieved notable popularity in Kenya (Nassimbeni 1991:6). Such literature provides a pleasurable way of increasing vocabulary, reading fluency and communication skills. It is predominantly available in English, the *lingua franca* not only of South Africa but the world and a language which black people in South Africa have reportedly indicated an eagerness to master (Omotoso 1993:6-7; Grobler *et al*1996:pers.comm.). Hence a possible alternative to vernacular post-bridge literature may be light, popular Western fiction already published for the mass market and backed by the financial infrastructure necessary to achieve the purpose of attracting readers on a large scale. This material is relatively easy to read and plotted to formulas of proven universal appeal.

A problem with the use of Western popular fiction as an aid to reading fluency is that it could be perceived as perpetuating the cultural domination of the West (Krynauw 1994:4). This is an especially sensitive issue against the background of the suppression of local publishing by apartheid censorship, which silenced the voices of local black resistance authors for many years (Krynauw 1994:8; Merrett 1985:19). Where these voices were not silenced, libraries have stood accused of deliberately avoiding them, with the same result - local publishing was discouraged and weakened (Krynauw 1994:5). To offset this situation, however, there has been no push for a total break from Western language publications in Africa. On the contrary, there have been calls for Africa to embrace major world languages if it wishes to participate in the information revolution that is changing the globe, and the fact remains that English is not only South Africa's *lingua franca* but the world's foremost language of technological development (Krynauw 1994:7; Neill *et al* 1992:36). Radebe (1995:167) found in her study on the reading interests of Zulu-speaking Standard Two children that 78,6% preferred English. They saw it as the language of advancement and received encouragement from their teachers and parents to learn English

in order to attend better schools, to have a good future in a profession, and to achieve a better lifestyle.

A strong argument thus prevails for South Africa's citizens to achieve a high percentage of bilingual literacy in the interests of the country's transformation and development.

Appropriate books are needed for this process to succeed (Krynauw 1994:7; Neill *et al* 1992:36).

2.4 Attitudes to popular fiction

For at least 100 years in the West, popular fiction has been criticised as substandard reading matter of little or no educational, aesthetic or moral value, yet it forms by far the bulk of the Western library model's circulation. Apart from the unprovable claim that the recreational function of reading is suspect or at least considerably less worthy than the educational function, this disparagement of popular fiction has impacted on librarians in the form of a dilemma: which should take precedence in the budget-restricted selection of a fiction bookstock - demand or quality, literary merit or popularity? (Serebnick and Quinn 1995:6-7; Gerhard 1991:49-59; Nell 1985:161, 164). These issues are discussed more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

2.5 Summary

This chapter described some of the problems resulting from the imposition on developing communities of the traditional Western library model, which in South Africa provided almost exclusively for the educational, information and recreational needs of the white minority. This segregation has meant that the library is regarded by the majority of the black population, especially adults, as irrelevant to their needs. High rates of illiteracy and the absence of a reading culture compound the problem. The challenge for South African librarianship is to transform library services so that the country's disadvantaged inhabitants

have access to information for transformation and development. Illiteracy is the greatest barrier to the acquisition of the level of information required for development in the information age, but insufficient indigenous material is published to provide reading motivation. The question is whether popular Western fiction can provide such motivation.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERACY

As stated in Chapter Two, the greatest challenge facing South African libraries is to shift the emphasis of library services away from the literate, educated minority who were well served during the apartheid era to the information-disadvantaged majority of the population whose literacy and information needs were neglected during the same era. Transformation and development cannot take place without high levels of literacy (September 1993b:12). The lack of these and the evident absence of a reading habit among the majority of the population as a result of historical inequities has made the spread of literacy a priority of libraries in South Africa, whose continued existence depends on their ability to make a strong contribution to the transformation process.

3.1 The oral tradition

Unlike the West, Africa has not been dependent on the printed word for its culture or survival (Amadi 1981:70, 177). Before the twentieth century, many African countries were unfamiliar with written language (Gitywa 1989:21) although reading on a limited scale was prevalent in Africa before the arrival of the colonists and missionaries (Leach and Verbeek 1993:96). History and culture were handed down to succeeding generations through repetitive storytelling (Gitywa 1989:21) and there was a significant indigenous system of formal education (Amadi 1981:57). African culture is still regarded as essentially oral in nature (Fouche 1982:37). In the rural areas particularly, oral methods of communication are the norm and printed communication as found in books, magazines and newspapers is rare (Mabomba 1989:29). The information channels of the oral tradition are still functioning vigorously in spite of the pressure on Africa to develop a print culture (Neill *et al* 1992:43). Kufa (1992:288) suggests that most African people live in traditional village communities or informal urban settlements which are usually culturally homogeneous, a

situation that lends itself well to the continuing existence of oral communication. Later in the chapter the recent emphasis by librarians on recognizing indigenous information systems is noted.

It has already been noted in 2.1 of Chapter Two that the world's information needs are changing with immense speed and the reconstruction process in South Africa in particular will require working with the tools of the technologically sophisticated information age if information crucial to reconstruction is to be accessible and if democracy is to become a reality. Life in the information age is too complex for community-generated knowledge alone to be appropriate for the country's post-apartheid needs and, like other developing countries, South Africa must harness the power of modern technology to serve the country's developmental aspirations (September 1993b:16). Information vital to developing communities is contained in print sources and electronic media (September 1993b:16), much of it in government development plans (September 1993a:75-6), and the oral tradition does not always easily embrace information in the media, which may be outside the limits of its scope (September 1993a:75).

The relevance of oral sources of knowledge should not, however, be underestimated. Oral knowledge forms a rich trove of information on the environment and how to survive in it (Sturges and Neill 1990:9) and it is a raw material well suited to information packaging and retrieval (Kedem 1992:57). Rural communities are illiterate only in a very narrow sense of the word and only from a biased outsider's perception. It is not necessarily lack of information that makes communities disadvantaged but that their needs and their potential as contributors to a nation's development are ignored. As noted in the previous chapter, the danger also exists that Western systems of communication may replace the oral tradition with information channels under the control of outsiders (Lundu and Milimo 1990:147-8). Amadi (1981:131) believes further that the imposition of print-oriented communication upon a previously effective oral tradition has only increased misdevelopment in Africa.

In the African context, it appears unwise to worship solely at the shrine of either literacy or the oral tradition (Dick 1992:121). Two information systems have existed: indigenous and

exotic. Indigenous information consists of traditional information originating locally, while exotic information originates in countries and cultures which are not African. The belief of white South Africa under apartheid was that exotic information should be imposed without consultation on indigenous culture and knowledge, but the realisation has now dawned that neither of the two information systems is more valuable than the other or mutually exclusive. Instead, they are at their best when they exchange and borrow from each other, creating a third information system, the synergic. Synergic information has all the conditions in which democracy and shared decision-making can take root (Karlsson 1994:5-7, 12-13). In Africa, the ancient and the modern are bound inseparably together, both in customs and science, and this has to be recognized by the continent's development programmes (Sturges and Neill 1990:35). Imposing Western culture on Africa is paternalistic and often simply a profiteering move on the part of foreign interests. Culture should be fostered in a way that enables it to develop according to its own dynamic (Louw 1991:4), especially in South Africa where there are three predominant cultures - African, Western and Asian - which have begun merging (Kedem 1992:51). Louw sees culture as "a set of practices and meanings that are ever changing in response to varying circumstances and challenges. Librarians and information workers of the future have the task of feeding this developing culture with information and thereby nurturing its growth" (Louw 1991:4).

Until recently, libraries in Africa have not acknowledged that oral culture is a sophisticated information system in its own right and that the dilemma facing Africa is how to integrate oral culture with the burgeoning global information network rather than replace the one with the other or try to subject oral culture to standard library procedures (Sturges and Neill 1990:43). Information workers must understand that the oral tradition is not inferior to the print or electronic tradition and that information needs in both traditions must be met if development is to take place in Africa (Dick 1992:124).

3.2 Literacy - definitions

Literacy is a relative term, not an absolute, and definitions vary accordingly (McGarry 1991:35).

Distinctions particularly exist between functional literacy and full literacy. The United States National Reading Centre defines functional literacy as sufficient command of reading skills to enable a person to pursue her/his job competently or to understand society's printed messages as they are encountered (Birchall 1990:5). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) earlier definitions of functional literacy, in 1964 and before, saw it as necessary to increasing labour productivity. Unesco's 1965 definition put the interests of the group first by describing the functionally illiterate as those who were unable to contribute fully to the functioning of the group. Consequent UNESCO definitions conceded that literacy was more important for the individual than the group and that functional literacy should provide people with access to basic human culture and a greater participation in civil life (McGarry 1991:31-5).

For Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, literacy was worthless if it did not result in a critical awareness of the society in which one lived. Literacy that served only economic ends was seen as a tool of oppression (McGarry 1991:35), little better than the illiteracy which left people so vulnerable to exploitation (Lyman 1976:56).

Compaine (1983:130) views literacy as a "dynamic" range of "culturally relevant" skills. Lyman (1976:21, 58) defines advanced literacy as the acquisition of education and culture and a skilled reader as one who is able to evaluate and use what is read.

The *ABE Capacity Building Research Report* (Harley *et al* 1996:12-14) argues that there is no accurate base indicator by which to gauge literacy, and that what constitutes functional literacy will differ in every group and community. However, the report states that a reasonable definition of functional literacy in contemporary South Africa would include "vernacular literacy; English literacy and oral communication; numeracy; post-literacy skills such as alphabetical order and map-reading; some familiarity with administrative and

clerical conventions; and basic economic information in order to cope with things such as income tax, value added tax, hire purchase and banking" (Harley *et al* 1996:14).

This study is concerned with English second-language literacy, accepting the premise that whereas English is not the home language of the majority of South Africans, it is the dominant language of the future (Harley *et al* 1996:14).

Levels of literacy vary from the oral tradition where non-literacy is the norm to full literacy where the reader becomes unaware of the act of reading (Witbooi 1995:20-21). A further and increasingly crucial level is information literacy, discussed in section 7 of this chapter. Definitions of literacy are becoming more exacting and less likely to be gauged by years of schooling or literacy tests as, due to the information revolution and its technology, a very necessary part of literacy will be the ability to locate and evaluate information (Ford 1995:99).

For the purposes of this study, literacy will be defined as a continuing and developing process, the goal of which is to empower people to take and maintain control of their lives and their environment in a rapidly changing world through an ability to access and utilize information (Birchall 1990:6). The possible role of popular fiction in this process will be examined.

3.3 The importance of literacy in South Africa

There is increasing agreement that the social and economic progress of a country depends on the skill of its citizens in accessing the knowledge contained in the printed word (September 1993a:75-6). Transformation in South Africa is threatened by the large percentage of adults and schoolchildren who do not complete their formal education and whose potential to contribute to economic development is stifled by their non-literacy. Literacy and the future development of South Africa are interdependent (Mabomba 1992:322-3). Survival in societies at all levels of development depends on the use of

information at some level, and all people need some degree of information skill to make decisions concerning their daily lives (September 1993b:11). In countries facing a need for rapid industrialisation, education must advance beyond orality if learners are to be empowered (Gultig 1991:28).

Arguments for the acquisition and retention of literacy are compelling, notwithstanding the value of the oral tradition. Development begins with the individual and literacy provides the individual with a chance to gain improved control over his/her life (Wedepohl 1988:21). The motivation common to literacy efforts is the belief that with literacy comes autonomy (French 1985:73). Illiteracy and literacy in the information age are equated with non-survival and survival, oppression and freedom (Lyman 1976:62). In apparent contradiction of arguments for the continuing effectiveness of the oral tradition (see 3.1 above), it is claimed that illiteracy brings with it poverty and disempowerment, especially for women (Fouche 1982:40).

South Africa has embarked on a programme of transition and reconstruction but will be unable to progress far without greater access for its citizens to information. Literacy is fundamental to the acquisition of information skills and information literacy. High rates of literacy have the potential to make a significant contribution to growth, development and democracy. In South Africa, the section of the community most in need of the benefits of transformation is black due to the educational and socio-economic inequities imposed by apartheid (September 1993b:17-18).

In 1991, Moulder (1991:6) anticipated that literacy for all would be the chief priority of the new South African education system and self-sustaining literacy, with the library as one of the means to this, is highly desirable (Mabomba 1992:339). The success of the Library and Information Workers' Organisation's (LIWO) aim of working for "free and equal access to information" implies a necessity for every adult South African to be able to read, write and count (Moulder 1991:8).

However, those who cannot read, write or count should not be excluded from the information-gathering or disseminating process (Louw 1991:4). If development in South Africa is to succeed it requires those in possession of Western print literacy to learn to understand oral culture in order to facilitate the participative exchange of information so widely considered imperative for the country's transformation (Louw 1991:4).

3.4 Literacy for rote learning - the failure of formal education

Literacy learning is considered to be of little value if it results only in a form of literacy whereby the learner recognizes words but is unable to transform them into meaning and comprehension (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:22; Vaughan 1983:96). Whereas functional literacy may indeed make the worker a more efficient cog in the wheel of productivity, the type of literacy that is needed for full participation in democracy and for lifelong learning and critical thinking is one that empowers the individual by enabling her/him to become a self-directed thinker, free of the intellectual rigidities or manipulations of others.

Discovering the power and pleasure of reading leads to a freedom far beyond the political and can never result from the rote learning that characterised much of the South African education system during apartheid (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:22-3), where school textbooks were all the scholars saw, with the result that they associated books with passing exams and never anything else (Mabomba 1992:334).

The goal of all education, formal and informal, should be the realisation of the individual learner's potential (Mnisi 1989:77). One of the gauges of the success of formal education is the extent to which it has given the student the capacity to think for him/herself (Behrens 1995:255). The rote learning of much of the South African formal education system has not cultivated self-directed learners or autonomous thinkers because rote learning consists of passive, mechanical memorising from prescribed textbooks and notes. The single goal of rote learning is to pass examinations. Only the facility for independent study will nurture intellectual freedom (Verbeek and Stilwell 1988:22-3; Mnisi 1989:77), and syllabi

designed to push the masses through examinations are a denial of independence and individuality (Mnisi 1989:83).

A belief has taken hold in South Africa that formal education is the key to the liberation and empowerment of the masses, to transforming the nation and increasing opportunities for employment and prosperity (Gultig 1991:24). This ignores the fact that South African schools have a limited capacity to cope with all the eligible children in the country (Khumalo 1997:1), with the result that many are in the position of having to educate themselves later in life or not at all (Mabomba 1992:328). It also ignores the fact that South African schools have long clung to a distorted, second-hand version of Western education that has been neither appropriate nor relevant. Teachers have adhered to rigid syllabi and been unable to teach widely in their own areas of work because they did not read in them (Gultig 1991:25). Teachers, including school librarians, are themselves the products of a rote learning culture which does not prize reading and fails to foster analytical and critical thinking skills (Radebe 1994:44; Pitse 1991:6). Showing children how to find out for themselves rather than being told is still an idea too unfamiliar to have taken hold in many Southern African schools (Klynsmith 1992:528).

The situation promises to change with a new school syllabus due to be introduced in January 1998. The new system will shift from a content-based curriculum to one based on outcomes, with the focus on learning by doing, learning how to learn and learning from group experience. There will be an emphasis on lifelong learning, while traditional subjects associated with rote learning may be scrapped altogether (School syllabus overhaul 1996).

3.5 The role of the library in informal education

Gultig (1991:25-8) believes that formal schooling has by nature been conservative and resistant to change. In his view, it has not made its pupils literate in the sense of reading beyond the word, nor has it taught them to question rather than accept. It has resulted in

“disempowered learning”. It has failed to breathe new life into cultures destroyed by apartheid or to address development issues such as health or productivity. He sees non-formal education as a progressive alternative to the failings of formal education, empowering, able to embrace change, and rooted in the communities and organisations of its users.

One of the most important roles of the library is educational support, especially of informal education or self-education (Mabomba 1989:35). Rote learning does not need libraries as it does not require or encourage extra-curricula reading (Drewett 1988:226). Shillinglaw (1986:40) points out that, compounding this problem, black schools have in the main been unable to introduce pupils to library use as a normal part of formal education because so many of the schools, due to imbalances in the apartheid-driven education system, lacked library facilities or access to them. Stadler (1991:19) states that the problem of school libraries will need greater attention in new education policies. Although an essential feature of school libraries should be to provide a wide selection of books to stimulate continuing education outside the classroom (Mabomba 1992:339), the resources to do so have not been an option. Books are thus seen only as having a functional purpose, for an occupation or to pass exams, not to provide pleasure or information (Shillinglaw 1986:40). Any experience that pupils have of libraries is as an aid to passing examinations (Tembani 1989:90).

3.6 Lifelong learning and critical thinking

3.6.1 Lifelong learning

An education system that focuses exclusively on the first 20 years of an individual’s life in an era characterised by swift change leaves its graduates a legacy of obsolete knowledge. Continuing lifelong education is imperative for survival (Brewis 1992:40). Many South African organisations, including trade unions and learning institutions, believe that lifelong learning is an essential feature of transformation and a solution to the country’s education problems. Lifelong learning could also serve as the net whereby the people who drop out

of formal education or miss a general education altogether are caught and their needs addressed (Behrens 1995:250-1). Lifelong learning is synonymous with self-directed learning, which equips learners to keep pace more readily with the changes of society (Behrens 1995:258).

Many South African students have not acquired the skills of independent or self-directed learning. Passive and unquestioning, they have accumulated a knowledge base from rote learning but abandon reading after passing their last exams and cannot utilize their knowledge base as a ground for further learning. Without critical thinking abilities they do not have the skills to work with information and cannot identify, evaluate, solve or verbalise problems (Behrens 1995:258).

3.6.2 Critical thinking

Critical thinking is “making sense of our world by carefully examining our thinking and the thinking of others in order to clarify and improve our understanding” (Chaffee *in* MacAdam 1995:239).

Whereas oral culture depends on the memorisation of language to sustain communal culture and its store of information, written language absorbed in seclusion leads to unconventionality and a sense of the self as separate from the community. MacAdam (1995:255) suggests that this is the soil from which self-reflective critical thinking springs.

Critical thinking is based on the skills of reading and writing but exists in the more complex skills of analysing or evaluating what has been read or written (Behrens 1995:259).

Critical thinkers are able to judge the quality of what is read and to distinguish its strong points from the weak. They are equipped to weigh up information or situations and can detect when writers or speakers are attempting, for their own ends, to sway an audience’s emotions by calculated use of language. Without critical thinking, an individual may not be able to recognize propaganda which works against his/her own interests, choose a political

candidate or select correctly from advertised products. Critical thinkers are not easily misled by faulty logic or arguments that lack evidence. They can read not only between the lines but beyond them (Le Roux 1992:498). They possess a crucial survival skill in a world where information is becoming the defining factor of development, both for the individual and for the community (MacAdam 1995:239; Lyman 1976:161-2).

The teaching of critical thinking skills depends on the presence of teachers who are themselves able to think critically and an availability of a wide range of materials to which students have full access (Le Roux 1992:498-9) - two requirements which are in short supply in South Africa, as seen above.

The lack of critical thinking skills among pupils and students is not a problem unique to South Africa. The failure of North American formal education is attributed to the inability of many North American students to think critically. The growth and influence of visual electronic media have meant that children in the USA read less, which is believed to reduce their ability to form abstract images. Thus while most North American students are able to grasp literal information from the printed word, they struggle to perform higher-order thinking and evaluating (MacAdam 1995:245). American researchers using comprehension tests have found that college students with reading difficulties understand facts conveyed in print but cannot relate the information to information read in previous texts. They cannot draw logical conclusions from texts or tell if ideas contained in the texts contradicted each other (MacAdam 1995:246-7).

A crucial factor in the justification for this study of fiction reading is the research which links the role of literacy and the ability of individuals to think in the abstract. Many researchers (see introductory section of Chapter Four) appear to be in agreement that reading is essential to the development of critical thinking (MacAdam 1995:243). Reading asks questions of the reader as well as providing answers, forcing her/him to think imaginatively (Mabomba 1989:36). In the American context, future generations of students are envisaged who, due to television and electronic media, have not spent the first 40 years of their lives "mining the base cognitive and psychological resources of print literacy" and

may lack training in “literate reason, linear argument and left-brain conceptualisation” (MacAdam 1995:257-8). It is easy to see the same situation in South Africa, perhaps not yet from over-exposure to electronic media but from the same lack of exploration of print literacy.

The role of popular storytelling in critical thinking will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.7 Information literacy

3.7.1 Definitions

In the three definitions given below, emphasis differs but there is agreement on what information literacy is:

“Information literacy is the ability to access, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources” (Bruce 1995:159);

“Information literacy is the ability to effectively access and evaluate information for a given need” (Behrens 1992:83);

“Information literacy is knowing how to learn because of knowing how knowledge is organised, how to find information and using information in a way to help others to learn” (Ford 1995:99).

3.7.2 Information skills in disadvantaged communities

Life in information-poor communities seems less complex than in highly competitive information-driven countries, and this has given rise to a perception that information skills are not a necessity for survival in those communities. The predominant oral culture,

respository for “historical, environmental, spiritual, agricultural, scientific and medical knowledge” (September 1993b:15) is seen as sufficient for the communities’ needs. But in reality developing communities are growing inevitably more complex and their survival needs will increasingly require to be met by information contained in documents and electronic media (September 1993b:15; Sturges and Neill 1990:155-6). In the developed world with its exploding information technologies, information literacy is an accepted prerequisite for functioning in the academic, professional and private spheres. Communication, decision- making, education, research and problem-solving are impossible without the ability to “locate, manage, evaluate and use” relevant information from an increasing array of formal and informal sources (Bruce 1995:159).

As information increases and the need to access it grows, the ability of individuals and groups without information skills to control their future may be whittled away. The gap between the information elite and the rest may widen, but ultimately all would be the poorer because the social and economic drain of non-functioning citizens would cause society as a whole to pay a heavy price (Ford 1995:100).

3.7.3 Access to information

The right to access to information is contained in the South African constitution and is seen as imperative for the country’s development (Levin 1995:18). A benefit of information technology, and one that tempers the fears discussed in the previous chapter that information comes laden with the value systems of the North, is that in the South African context it can bring about the sharing and exchange of information and experience between other countries in the South and is not solely reliant on the North’s experience, perspective and economic interests (Levin 1995:19; Stilwell 1996a).

3.7.4 Critical thinking skills in the accessing of information

To exploit the advantages of the information age which, in the South African context, includes the opportunity of redressing social and economic disparities, the citizens of a country must be information literate (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:89). The ability to evaluate and use information is an integral part of critical thinking and self-directed learning. Information literacy requires not only an appreciation of the significance and potential of information but the scepticism that comes with critical thinking (see 3.6.2 above). This scepticism is a vital component of information literacy as the validity of information must be questioned before it is accepted (Bruce 1995:160-2). The information searcher must be able to "discriminate fact from truth" (Ford 1995:100), be alert to bias, ambiguity or illogical reasoning and be able to assess the strength of an argument (Bruce 1995:162). This is especially important in the case of the Internet where there is so much input from all sides and where content, even when subject to peer scrutiny and discussion, is not always tested in a manner comparable to the type of scrutiny that exists in formal academic publishing (Stilwell 1996b:pers.comm.).

In a confusing and uncertain new age, the information searcher will have to develop the ability to sift through a tumult of information, reject a good deal of it, and make connections between bits of information that at first glance seemed unrelated. While technology may have created opportunities for much greater physical access to information, it cannot of itself improve intellectual access. New intellectual skills must be developed. Knowledge is the new frontier of human life and minds must be trained to explore it. To cope with a constantly changing environment, people need more than a knowledge base. They need to learn how to explore their own knowledge base and link it to other knowledge bases, as well as make practical use of it (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:98). This requires the possession of critical thinking skills. The time for thinking, reading and writing is not by any means over (Ford 1995:99-100). As stated in Chapter Two, English is the foremost language of technology and its information systems. Thus the importance of English-language literacy has never been more apparent for South Africa, particularly in the light of the country's transformation imperative as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Internet specifically requires the ability to deal with the enormous volumes of information that have been generated in relatively chaotic style. It is defined as “a mass of computer networks around the world through which people can exchange knowledge and information” (Levin 1995:22). It is the world’s most encompassing method of information dissemination and resource sharing and is accepted as the communication tool of the future. The World Wide Web, the most powerful and fastest-growing tool of the Internet, is a system that is hospitable to every type of information presentation - text, graphics, audio and video. It offers instant access and interaction to those who can afford to use it. It is increasingly used by policy and decision makers, with the result that organisations can use it as a means of influence, expounding their own ideas and illustrating the reality of the situations of the people they represent. It offers great potential for a democratic form of development in South Africa as well as a chance for empowering all the country’s people (Levin 1995:22). Issues of science and technology can no longer be left to the experts if social development is to take place in the information age. Instead, all citizens should be able to develop sufficient grasp of these matters to understand what the implications are for communities. Information literacy equips individuals for the self-directed, lifelong learning described in 3.6.1 above by giving them the enduring ability to find the information they may need for any future purpose (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:90). It offers a way to personal and national empowerment, the true rewards of the information society (Ford 1995:100-1).

3.7.5 Dangers of information technology

The discussion in 2.2 of Chapter Two dealt with the risk Africa faces of being more disempowered than ever by the dissemination of information from an outside power primarily concerned with its own interests. A danger of information technology is that as the information overload swells further and the need to access information accordingly grows ever greater, the ability of individuals and groups to control their future will be whittled away. Unfortunately, the new technologies have already demonstrated a tendency to widen the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged (Woods 1995:11-12). Those most

likely to suffer are the ones already disadvantaged socially, educationally and economically. They are the least likely to have the money or the institutional affiliations to access the information they need (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:89). The gap will deepen as a new information elite inevitably emerges. This is a particular danger to South Africa where there is a pressing need to narrow, not widen further, the great gap already existing between the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the urban and the rural (Levin 1995:19). Although, as remarked in Chapter Two, the South African government is reported to have pledged to put the Internet into every South African school (Boers trek into new homeland ... :1996:23), this is an ambitious objective when it is remembered that governments the world over cannot afford the infrastructure to make the new technologies widely available. Yet an information society will not truly exist unless all its members can exercise the right to access information that will improve their lives (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:89). Various methods of circumventing this problem are under discussion (Woods 1995:12) but not within the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that the sectors of society that are in most need of the empowerment of information literacy are those who are least able to access information; for example, illiterate adults, those with English as a second language, and the poor. A great majority are not even aware of the potential of information to change their lives, and they are also the least likely to visit the libraries that offer the easiest and most freely available access to information (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:91).

Aside from these concerns, developing countries may miss the information revolution through insufficient access caused by technological reasons (Stilwell 1996a) or through governments dragging their heels because of their unwillingness to risk the free flow of information (Boers trek into new homeland ... 1996:23). Any society that endorses individual freedom and democracy must commit itself to the free flow of information for all its citizens (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:93). The South African government has expressed no overwhelming commitment to freedom of information and fears exist that its talk of transparency and openness will turn out to be little more than hype (Merrett 1995b:13).

3.7.6 Information literacy training

Information literacy is at present a worldwide concern. The United States Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development has recognised, for instance, that differences in cultural orientation within a society require more expertise in information management. Information literacy is a means whereby individuals can profit most from the opportunities on offer by the global information society, and United States schools are encouraged to incorporate information literacy training in their curricula (Ford 1995:100).

Information literate people were acknowledged by the American Library Association in 1989 as the USA's most valuable resource and knowledge as its most precious commodity (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:98).

Because the new information technologies are developing and changing so rapidly, it is difficult to know what forms of information technology await the world of the future. Information skills that are developed now must be of a type most likely to adapt to these inevitable changes. But whatever forms of information technology materialise, it seems certain that access to them will continue to depend on the critical thinking content of information skills (Le Roux 1992:503), which in turn depends on the development of the skills of reading (MacAdam 1995:243), an area of vital concern to this study.

Students and educational institutions pursuing the path of rote-learning, as has been the case for too long in South African education (see section 3.4 above), are not likely to be responsive to learning skills requiring information literacy as rote education regards anything beyond passive, textbook-bound learning as irrelevant (Bruce 1995:165). Rote learning is the enemy of democracy, which depends on a wide availability of knowledge and freedom to access it and deal with it critically (Line *in* Le Roux 1992:509). Spoonfeeding facts to pupils is no substitute for teaching them the skills to find, critically evaluate and effectively use information for their needs (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:95). Voters equipped with information skills are more likely to make informed and intelligent choices than the information illiterate (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ...

1995:93-4) as the critical assimilation of information deepens insight (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:98). Those who do not explore information for themselves will be victims of conditioned thinking, able to absorb only what is fed to them by television, the radio or any other persuasive source that may or may not have their interests at heart (Line *in* Le Roux 1992:509), including the outside powers that control information technology (discussed in 2.2 of Chapter Two). Information non-literates are more likely to be satisfied with predigested accounts of life as dished up by television and the entertainment industry. They are more inclined to base their judgments on the words of opportunists or the poorly informed. The information prepackaging that goes on in schools practising rote learning and in the broadcast media inclines people lacking critical thinking skills to accept without question the opinions of others. Information literacy, based on high levels of literacy achieved through reading, enables people to become independent seekers of truth and reach their own conclusions firsthand (Fifteenth Anniversary Task Force ... 1995:90-1).

3.8 Obstacles to reading

Many obstacles to reading have already been discussed in this chapter and the previous one, such as skewed provision of library services resulting in a deficient service to disadvantaged users, lack of accessibility of material, the effect rote-learning has had on reading culture, and the effects of the oral tradition on reading.

This section will briefly mention other obstacles to reading.

3.8.1 The struggle for survival

The value of reading and writing is difficult to recognize in an environment where the main concern is for survival (Pitse 1991:3). Reading uses time and energy and these are needed for the daily struggle for survival in disadvantaged communities (McGarry 1991:151).

Even those who are employed may not find the chance to read - workers have little leisure time, and the situation is even worse for women who have to spend much time doing chores and childcare (Pityana and Orkin 1992:14). In all regions of the world almost without exception, there are more illiterate women than men (McGarry 1991:151).

3.8.2 The domestic environment

A reading home is the greatest single contributor to literacy (Pitse 1991:6), but the domestic environment in rural areas (and often in urban areas) is not conducive to reading or study. The home will probably be used for sheltering livestock as well as humans, the lighting is likely to be poor, and children and pets may be boisterously active in a small space. The privacy needed for reading will be absent with only noise and movement in its place (Baregu *in* Mabomba 1989:29).

Most illiterate people live in rural areas, where education may be looked upon as secondary to domestic chores. New readers irrespective of age are already likely to become discouraged as readers if reading is not part of the cultural or home environment. The illiterate rural setting will not provide this environment, and its effect on those who have obtained some education is likely to be adverse. The influences of the illiterate environment are difficult to avoid and there will be no readily accessible reading materials to counteract them (Mabomba 1989:29-31; Bamberger 1975:3). Publishing presupposes a literate reading public, but in a situation where people are literate but have no reading habit, publishing will fail to thrive (Msiska 1993:160-1) (see 2.3, Chapter Two), with the result that even fewer reading materials will be available and non-literacy will be perpetuated.

3.8.3 Reading as an arduous pastime

Samuel Johnson (*in* Kermode 1983:9) remarked that reading is not willingly undertaken if there is something else to do. The discipline is arduous, time-consuming and frequently undertaken at the expense of life's other, more immediate pleasures. Even in the most advanced countries, large sections of the population abandon reading when they have finished school. It is vital to discover methods that will ensure that reading is a pleasurable experience and a gateway to knowledge (Bamberger 1975:3). One purpose of this study is to explore the possibility that popular Western fiction has the potential to help readers with English second-language reading skills, and this potential is considerably increased if readers associate reading such material with pleasure.

3.9 Summary

This section compared the oral tradition and the printed word as information systems for African communities. A unity of the knowledge provided by both systems is best suited to Africa's information and development needs. The acquisition of literacy, however, is seen as essential to the transformation and development of South Africa. Functional literacy is inadequate as it does not equip the individual for lifelong learning and the critical thinking skills that are essential to information literacy. The rote learning that is thus far characteristic of formal education has failed to produce self-directed thinkers because it does not encourage a reading culture. Reading is considered to be a prerequisite of critical thinking abilities and the attainment of information literacy, but many obstacles to reading exist in African communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

POPULAR² ENGLISH FICTION

As noted in Chapter Three, researchers such as Cannon, Talaska, Postman and Hirsch (*in* MacAdam 1995:242-3) are in agreement that reading is essential to the development of critical thinking skills. Recognizing that pleasure is an incentive to reading, some North American universities have established pleasure reading programmes with the emphasis on recreational fiction such as science fiction, fantasy and romance (MacAdam 1995:252-3). However, popular fiction has had a controversial history in Western culture, and a great deal of prejudice still persists against it in many quarters.

4.1 Demand versus quality

4.1.1 History

The argument about whether popular fiction is legitimate reading material has continued virtually unchanged for 100 years. What was being said about cheap fiction in the 1880s in England and North America compares closely to what is being said in the 1990s about the spate of popular horror stories for adolescent readers (Ross 1995:204). Librarians have always had a vested interest in the issue and from the nineteenth century to the present day have engaged in often angry debate about whether public funds should be spent on what the public wants to read, that is, popular fiction, or on what it ought to read as decided by the moral arbiters of taste, often groups whose personal convictions are so dogmatic that they feel compelled to control the behaviour of others (O'Connor 1995:386-7; Nell 1985:161). The public library has more often than not acted defensively about supplying popular fiction

² The terms popular fiction, formula fiction, genre fiction and light fiction are used interchangeably. See 4.3.1 below for definitions.

(Rosenberg 1986:6), but the reverse, a reluctance to stock serious fiction, has implications that are equally questionable (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.).

Neuberg (*in* Nell 1985:160) notes that the ability to read was fairly widespread among the English poor by the end of the eighteenth century, partly due to the general availability of education in Charity Schools where it was considered that teaching the poor to read texts such as the *Bible* and *Pilgrim's Progress* would make them more submissive, and partly due to the plentiful supply of chapbooks, popular ballads and adventure stories (Ross 1995:210; Nell 1985:160). This had a parallel in apartheid South Africa, where the social engineering of the National Party resulted in the devising of an inferior education system for blacks, enforced by several legislative acts and aimed at making blacks submissive to the ways of whites and equipped only to meet the latter's labour requirements. However, discrimination in schooling began as early as the seventeenth century when education was established on two levels: the children of the colonists were trained to be masters, while blacks were trained to serve (Kalley 1996:58).

As noted in Chapters Two and Three, equal access to libraries was also long denied to blacks, who were given a library service that ranged from poor to non-existent (Stilwell 1993:103-4).

A belief prevailed in nineteenth century Britain that literate workers would be more productive than illiterate ones. Rote learning and teacher brutality had resulted in an ineffective education system and some pupils could not read at all. Once schools were reformed and abuses largely halted, literacy rates improved, and the plentiful supply of cheap books and popular libraries meant that by the end of the nineteenth century literacy levels in both Western Europe and North America reached virtually the levels that they are at today (Nell 1985:160).

At the same time that literacy became widespread in nineteenth century England, the intellectuals of the age, alarmed by the intellectual advances of the underclasses, raised an elitist barrier to the qualification for fully-fledged literacy - only reading the "right"

material conferred true literacy on the reader (Compaine 1983:131). By the nineteenth century, the novel was the dominant literary genre, but the emergence of the popular “penny-novel-journal” (Nell 1985:160) was met with scorn from the *literati* and drew attention to the supposed gulf between popular and educated taste.

Librarians and intellectuals alike believed that popular novels gave the otherwise “lowly but honest” working classes “false ideas about life” (Rosenberg 1986:6) and “undesirable attitudes” (Leavis 1968:212). Similar beliefs still exist in some quarters. In 1993, Dr. John Habgood, Archbishop of York, included Mills and Boons novels among reasons why divorce rates were so high, stating that such material caused women to have unrealistic expectations from marriage (Cadogan 1994:310). Other observers take a less denigrating line, asserting that the readers of romances are too sophisticated to take the stories literally and seek instead a fantasy of empowerment through strong heroines who are always the ones in control at the climax of the romance (Arnott 1995:Talk on the romance genre ...). Readers of romances, said by Western sources to comprise over 50% of women (Light 1986:142), have been found to be perfectly aware that romance novels are fantasies. They do not expect the characters and events encountered in such stories to resemble characters and events in real life. They read romances precisely for the escape offered from daily life and say that they feel refreshed and strengthened by them (Radway 1986:129-30). Romances, according to some observers, express the deep dissatisfaction of women with heterosexuality by transforming normally unequal heterosexual relations into a fantasy of equality. Romances furthermore present alternative constructs of masculinity that are available nowhere else (Light 1986:142-3)

When popular fiction such as romance does attempt to take a socially responsible line, it is often treated with derision, as when certain “bodice ripper” stories advocated safe sex only to be mocked in major British newspapers by arts correspondents and journalists - an indication of how deep the prejudice against popular literature still runs (Cadogan 1994:311).

The negative view toward popular culture, especially literature, can be traced directly back to the Protestant Reformation which revolutionised the Western conscience by equating pleasure with sin (Nell 1988:26-7) and proclaiming that only work served God (Nell 1985:162). The first appearance of ephemeral literature for the entertainment of the lower classes was in the decades immediately preceding the Reformation and proved a convenient target for its wrath (Nell 1988:27). However, the disapproval of too deep an indulgence in stories has exceedingly ancient roots - in primitive societies, the telling of stories was forbidden before sunset for fear that such an enjoyable pastime would encroach on the working day (Nell 1988:31).

In Africa today, some disparagement of recreational reading similar to that found among Western librarians is evident. Onadiran and Onadiran (1984:68) state that in the wider social and economic background, reading for some immediate practical purpose such as attaining qualifications or skills gives the use of public libraries "greater validity" than the recreational reading motive that features strongly in British and North American libraries.

By and large, however, the merit versus popularity debate has not yet seemed to arouse great fervour among people in Africa who are not of Anglo-Saxon descent, no doubt because their exposure to recreational reading, or reading at all, has been limited due to factors mentioned in Chapters Two and Three.

4.1.2 Current state of the debate

The belief is still strong that popular reading material damages the brain, feeds the unworthiest emotions and is as addictive as a drug habit. The seeming effortless pleasure of true pleasure reading makes it suspect in the eyes of the moral ideologists, who, still labouring under the shadow of the Reformation (see 4.1.1 above), do not distinguish pleasure from sin. Reading for fun is "escapist" - a judgmental term implying that those who seek to escape are not pursuing a good purpose but resorting to unhealthy fantasy

(Nell 1985:162-3). Such a belief seems to conceal a fear of admitting that reading can be a source of pleasure, passion *and* entertainment (Light 1986:141).

Arguments about merit presuppose that there are high and low cultural artefacts, the first innately superior to the latter. However, although plenty of critics and librarians may still subscribe to this view, scholars of popular culture do not (Gerhard 1991:49-50). Questions about quality in cultural artefacts and how to distinguish between the worthy and the meretricious are hinged on social values prevailing at the time. Social values fluctuate and their plasticity gives value judgments a fundamental uncertainty. The belief that some forms of cultural expression form a body of elite culture is a social value judgment and not an absolute. In this light, it is difficult to make value judgments about high and low culture with any real authority (Nell 1985:163-4).

Another difficulty is apparent when attempts are made to settle on the definitive authority that says one thing is high culture and another is not. Experts often disagree radically. To label cultural artefacts in these prescriptive ways denies them the opportunity of evaluation and assessment in terms of what they are and not what they are supposed to be (Gerhard 1991:51, 54). Intellectuals in particular are often ill at ease with popular taste and may fail to question the appropriateness of judging popular fiction in terms of the most stringent standards of literary criticism (Rosenberg 1986:4). The great classics or the reading tastes of a literary-minded adult should not become the standards by which all literature is judged (Mazer 1992:1-2; Ross 1995:214-5). Classics are represented as expressing truths that other forms of novel do not have and as being deeper and more meaningful, but at the same time, they are essentially products of Western society, especially the Anglo-Saxon element, and they do not necessarily portray truths universal to all cultures (Mazer 1992:2). Furthermore, generations of readers have devoured ephemeral fiction because it offers something that great literature does not, and this is a fact that cannot be discounted (Ross 1995:214-5).

A tragic consequence of the force-feeding of classics to children is that such literature comes in a daunting aura of difficulty and irrelevance to young readers' lives and interests,

causing them to think reading is not for them and to reject all literature, possibly for the rest of their lives (Mazer 1992:7). Literary merit and difficulty are frequently seen as interdependent and mistaken for each other. The equating of merit and difficulty may be a further manifestation of the Protestant ethic, which, as stated above, couples pain and virtue. However, the apparent confusion may not be entirely misguided as serious literature commonly employs a larger vocabulary than popular fiction in order to express more complex thoughts (Nell 1988:146).

4.2 Literary criticism

Traditionally, literary critics believed that criticism was concerned with the text alone, ignoring either the author's possible purpose or the reader's likely response. They believed it was possible to distinguish between the literary and the non-literary, merit and non-merit, on textual grounds (Nell 1988:40-1). F.R. Leavis, a prescriptive colossus of mid-twentieth century literary criticism, held that "the trained frequentation of literature alone" was the beginning and end of literary study and could yield full understanding of human experience. The reader was meant to be able to identify fully with the experience in the text, which was simply assumed to be universal. There was no focus on differences among readers, gender or cultural, no acknowledgment that experience could be relative or individually and historically variable. The language of traditional critical writing implicitly assumes that all readers are white, male, middle-class and share similar social and cultural values (Webster 1990:10-11).

The traditional critical approach to literature also holds that only a certain kind of literature is imbued with absolute truth, unchallengeable and beyond any need of proof. Headed by Leavis and T.S. Eliot, disciples of this approach assembled the "canon", a range of British and North American literary works judged to be the essence of the English language literary tradition. This became the core of literary studies in English Departments at schools and universities all over the world. Vast areas of serious writing, especially from other countries, were not considered for inclusion. Popular literature fared even worse - it

was regarded as a threat to great literature and a cultural contaminant (Webster 1990:13-14).

These attitudes changed radically when the the focus in literary criticism shifted from the text to the reader. Each reader's understanding of a work of literature would of necessity be dictated by her or his individual experience, both of literature and of life (Webster 1990:10). The role of the critic changed from the status of judge handing down authoritative proclamations on merit to conduit through which society's shifting values were expressed. Certainties, like the ability to distinguish infallibly between literature and non-literature, began to fall away (Nell 1988:41). Readers' expectations were the cause of a text's being defined as literary, not any quality intrinsic to the text. The reader's response was not *to* the meaning, it *was* the meaning (Fish 1980:3). Elite culture was deflated to the status of social value judgment (Nell 1988:41-2; 44).

Popular fiction studies are now offered by colleges and universities, using various approaches including literary history, sociology and psychology, although this attention from academia has sometimes been resented by genre authors who suspect condescension (Rosenberg 1986:xviii). Of critical analysis, however, there is a severe lack, regrettably so because there is so little understanding of the reading tastes of the majority of readers, the history of genre fiction, or what gives certain genre classics the ability to enchant generations of readers (Rosenberg 1986:xx).

4.2.1 Implications for South African readers

South Africa is made up of a myriad of economic, cultural, educational, religious and racial divisions, which is reflected in its readers. The majority of South Africans do not have English as a mother tongue but as a second or even third language, and some are without it at all. The literary criticism of Leavis and his colleagues would validate the responses of only a tiny percentage of readers who have enjoyed the advantages of a first-world education and lifestyle (Brimer 1992:29-30). There is no such thing as a common South

African frame of reference, and much African and South African writing in English works off a Western frame of reference (Brimer 1992:32). Because social practices are not shared, a text or word can mean very different things in different social or cultural settings. It is considered fallacious to invalidate readings of texts on such grounds. There should rather be recognition that meaning is socially produced. The standard, academic interpretation of texts is not a reasonable option for readers who lack a Western intellectual background, and which authority is to say their readings are invalid if they conflict with the Western mindset (Brimer 1992:36) or do not reflect what has been deemed the truth about a text in the view of one reader, no matter how skilled an interpreter s/he may be (Bosman 1992:42)?

Any current discussion of the reading preferences and interpretations of South African readers has to acknowledge that there is a serious lack of readership surveys of the population. Not even librarians are sure what percentage of readers read serious literature for non-study purposes, who likes which genre of popular novel, or what proportion of time is spent on reading in relation to other activities (Bosman 1992:43). This will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

4.3 Genre fiction (also popular, formula or light fiction)

4.3.1 Definitions

According to Rosenberg (1986:xviii-xix), popular fiction is most readily defined as material for entertainment. Genre fiction and popular fiction are generally seen to be synonymous. Genre fiction is “patterned” or formula fiction, with each genre following strict rules that govern plot and character.

Cawelti (1976:37) provides further insight into the nature and appeal of formula fiction by describing it thus: “Particular formulas clothe cultural images, myths and themes in archetypal story forms that appear to be transcultural if not universal”.

4.3.2 Roots of formula fiction

Oral stories or folktales are the earliest manifestation of imaginative literature and arose in response to the universal human delight in listening to stories (MacCulloch *in* Nell 1988:49). Storytelling is as old as human society and appeals to all ages (Nell 1988:259). A distinctive characteristic of the telling of folktales is the enjoyment derived from repetitions of the same tales. This is mirrored in the child's pleasure in having the same story told over and over again and has its adult expression in formula stories, or genre fiction. Much of the appeal of genre fiction is its ability to satisfy its readers' needs for "safety and predictability" (Nell 1988:143). Each formula story gives the reader security with its reiteration of a familiar structure and plot style (Nell 1988:59-60; Cawelti 1976:9). This is important for readers who do not yet have the confidence to take risks. It is regarded as particularly significant for novice readers as reading satisfaction is guaranteed and will keep them coming back. Such readers lack trust in their own ability to choose reading material, and genre fiction offers security on this score. Eventually, these readers may get bored with a particular style of story, in which case they are ready to explore the next level (Ross 1995:222).

In traditional Xhosa storytelling, audience participation results in *ntsomi* or "fattening the narrative", in which the audience's contributions include dialogue and descriptions (Nell 1988:58-9). The parallel to this in genre fiction occurs when the same basic theme is expanded upon by different authors able to rejuvenate the stereotypes using unexpected new combinations within the formula (Cawelti 1976:11). Genre fiction often produces excellent stories; clever working of the stereotypes can disarm even the most sceptical reader and prevent genres from growing stale (Nell 1988:60). Part of the enjoyment of reading is to see how apparently contradictory elements in the story will fit into a pattern and be resolved, so some work is always required of the reader (Ross 1995:223), strengthening the potential for the development of critical thinking as discussed in 3.6.2 of Chapter Three.

4.3.3 General principles of formula stories

Through the great variety of genres that exist, certain general principles are apparent. A common type concerns heroic action; another type centres on how two people meet and romance is born; a third concerns the unravelling of some mystery. There are encounters with fantasy worlds and creatures; and the melodrama or soap opera which has shown the adeptness that is usually claimed for "great" literature at crossing cultural barriers the world over (Webster 1990:13-14; Cawelti 1976:37). Genres change according to readers' tastes and an intermingling of genres has become apparent in the last 15 or 20 years - sometimes a blend of detective story and horror, or horror, fantasy and science fiction, or the historical and the romantic (Rosenberg 1986:xiii).

The realms of adventure, mystery and romance provide the reader with a hero of either sex with whom to identify, even though the hero may be presented in a different time or in a setting that could exist only in the imagination. Characters in genre fiction tend to be elemental heroes who match the reader's fantasy self (Rosenberg 1986:xvii). Few stories use characters which are difficult to imagine in heroic terms, such as plumbers or streetsweepers, although there is no reason why cultures placing different values on various occupations could not give them an air of mystique (Cawelti 1976:6), such as in novels from the former Soviet Union. The heroic fantasy self is a major part of what keeps readers glued to the tale - the hero overcoming great challenges and dangers, the lover reaching the fulfilment of his or her desires. In these stories, the fantasy self meets its heart's desires and possesses almost omnipotent luck or ability in doing so (Cawelti 1976:38). It is this which offers such good respite from the monotonous round of daily existence where the reader may have little influence on the events of his or her life (Rosenberg 1986:xx; 2; Cawelti 1976:1).

In great literature, identifying with the protagonists can place readers into confrontations with the real world which may impinge too closely on their own lives for comfort. Formula fiction, on the other hand, will not ask readers to confront possibly uncomfortable aspects of themselves or their lives but rather enable them to become immersed in an

idealised fantasy self. The heroes and heroines of formula fiction have heightened qualities of goodness, strength, courage and love. This means that character is not explored to any significant extent and that action is paramount. Formula literature places the emphasis on the immediate excitement and gratification that accompanies fast-moving, often sensationalised plots, not usually to be found in the analyses of character and motivation that may be employed in serious literature. There are formulaic authors, nevertheless, who are able to create the escapist forms of identification in such subtle ways that these stand up to some critical scrutiny (Cawelti 1976:14, 18-19).

For the majority of fiction readers, formulaic reading constitutes most of their reading experience (Rosenberg 1986:4). Even scholars and critics devoted to serious reading not uncommonly derive relaxation from genre fiction. Popular fiction is a cultural and artistic manifestation of formidable power and significance. However, due to its association with relaxation, entertainment and escape, formula stories have not been examined by literary scholars to any great extent. Disciplines where they have been investigated include sociology, gender studies and psychology. Analysts of mass culture have often seen formulaic literature in terms other than as artistic phenomena - for example, as opiates for the masses. However, if the impact of formula stories on culture is to be understood such stories must be assessed as a form of collective artistic expression which uses widely recognized conventions. They are of a more complex nature culturally and artistically than they are generally given credit for (Cawelti 1976:1-2).

Cawelti sees two different types of formula. The first deals in conventions that are specific to a certain culture and period and do not have the same meaning out of that context. The second refers to comprehensive plot types that are not necessarily limited to a particular culture or period. While perhaps not universal in their appeal, they have been very popular in many different cultures at many times. A formula is a blending of a number of cultural conventions with a more archetypal story form (Cawelti 1976:5-6). It is with the second type of formula that the present study of popular fiction and South African black readers is concerned.

Cawelti sees formula fiction as a “kind of literary art”, meaning that it is open to evaluation and analysis like any other form of literature (Cawelti 1976:8). Traditional literary criticism has, as discussed, condemned formula literature on two counts: its conventional, stereotyped nature and its targeting of the needs of escape and leisure. We have already seen, however, that many readers seek the security of a familiar form, and the knowledge of what to expect deepens their capacity to derive enjoyment from other examples of a favourite genre. Formulas also mean quick and professional output from the creators of such literature, who, as witnessed by this researcher during 20 years of book selection experience, are often extraordinarily prolific. Their work has a guaranteed economic return for publishers, unlike many serious novels which incur financial losses. The economic factor doubly ensures the continued publication on a mass scale of stereotyped fiction. One particularly successful example will spawn a number of clones, for example Scott Turow’s (1987) bestseller *Presumed Innocent* gave birth to a currently highly popular sub-genre, the courtroom drama.

The production of formula fiction is not simply a matter of economics, however. The secret of formula fiction is its ability to intensify a familiar pleasure, to repeatedly recreate a well-known world. This repetition also prevails in more serious forms of literature, for example, a new performance of *Hamlet* will win the most general praise if it adheres to an acceptable interpretation in terms of past performances. Any radical new interpretation that challenges accustomed preconceptions of the play is likely to be met with controversy. No matter its artistic merit, it will not immediately provide the special enjoyment that comes with familiarity.

At the same time, too stale and repetitive a reworking of a story will lose its audience (Cawelti 1976:8-11). As discussed in 4.3.2 above, successful formulaic writers have the talent to infuse stereotypes with new life or inviting new combinations, to diversify or enrich the plot in a way that still remains within the formulaic limits. Formula stories are capable of achieving uniqueness, both by supplying in abundance the pleasure anticipated from the familiar structure and by introducing a new element into the formula or enhancing it with the author’s personal viewpoint. If successful, the new elements can form the basis

of imitations and new sub-genres arise. The many sub-genres of the crime novel currently flourishing are a particularly successful example of this kind of development. Keeping a genre vitalised is a special skill because the highly closed conventions of some genres give the writer very little room to play. Yet some of these genres have been so successfully reworked that they endure well beyond their time and culture of origin. Westerns are a case in point, having survived for nearly 150 years (Cawelti 1976:11, 192) and appealing across all cultures (Rosenberg 1986:6), as is confirmed locally by their current high popularity among both the black and white readers of KwaZulu-Natal (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

4.3.4 Genre fiction and serious fiction

The major characteristic of formula literature seems to be its adherence to the goals of escape and entertainment. This has made it subject to the definition of sub-literature (as opposed to literature), entertainment (as opposed to serious literature), popular art (as opposed to high art), lowbrow culture (as opposed to highbrow culture). Unfortunately, these value judgments have caused popular literature to be dismissed as inferior to something else, instead of assessed as a valid artistic form concerned with pleasure and escapism. There is also some dishonesty in this discrimination as the use of imagination to create escapist worlds for pleasure and relaxation is a universal human drive and one that serves a valuable purpose. Each form of literature has its significance. Great literature, as mentioned in 4.3.3 above, reflects the real world with its often uncomfortable, harsh or tragic complexities and ambivalences, while formula fiction banishes the uncertainties and creates an ideal world where things always work out as the reader expects and desires (Cawelti 1976:8-13). The possibility exists that feelings encountered through reading fiction of either kind are sometimes stronger than those aroused by life (Cawelti 1976: 23). Furthermore, the two types of fiction are not at opposite poles but overlap, with many literary works lying somewhere between (Cawelti 1976:13).

4.3.5 Cultural functions of formula literature

The relation between literature and other aspects of culture remains an area that is still obscure. For example, does some literature become popular because it tells a good story, appeals to readers' escapist fantasies and need for relaxation, or because it deals with values and attitudes that strike a chord in its readers? The relation between literature and culture is an area that has remained difficult to penetrate (Cawelti 1976:21), and one that is outside the scope of this study.

It can, however, be assumed that formulas become collective cultural products "because they successfully articulate a pattern of fantasy that is at least acceptable to if not preferred by the cultural groups that enjoy them. Formulas enable members of a group to share the same fantasies. Literary patterns that do not perform this function do not become formulas." Existing formulas have commonly evolved in response to new audience interests (Cawelti 1976:34).

Formulas permit the reader to experience in a controlled way the possibility of stepping over forbidden boundaries. Villains in formula fiction are often the vehicles for this exploration, only to be rejected after their cathartic purpose has been served. An example would be taking illicit routes to great wealth, which explains some of the appeal of gangster novels. A further example would be the number of vampire books in which the reader is asked to identify with the vampire - a highly popular sub-genre in the West that was launched by the success of the Anne Rice tale, *Interview with the vampire*. Another spinoff of the formula novel is that it can assist the reader with changes in values. The Western as an example has changed its portrayal of Native Americans and white pioneers without substantially changing the formula of the Western as a story, thus easing the transition between old and new ways of perception (Cawelti 1976:35-6).

4.3.6 Archetypal structures in genre fiction

There are certain archetypal structures which form the basic patterns of formula stories and reveal something of the human psyche. To define these story types more closely is to gain a clearer distinction between what merely represents an individual culture or period and what reflects more universal human psychological drives (Cawelti 1976:37).

4.3.6.1 Adventure and romance

The adventure story is usually considered to be the oldest type of formula story, one whose roots go back to the earliest myths and epics of human beings and which is enjoyed in various forms by almost every society. It has wide appeal that is believed to be more to men, although this is open to dispute and certainly not borne out by patterns of readership in traditional KZNPLS libraries (Grobler *et al* 1996), where most of it is popular among both genders. Genres that fall into this formula type include thrillers, Westerns and much of science fiction (Cawelti 1976:40; Rosenberg 1986:15, 101).

Regarded as the women's equivalent of the adventure story, and one that has already received some comment in 4.1.1 above, is the romance, especially the "sweet and savage" or "bodice ripper" (Rosenberg 1986:101), although obviously, as stated above, women also enjoy adventure, and many men may enjoy romance. Snitow (1989:137) states that romance is the one great adventure that women are socially sanctioned to seek. Romance is similar to adventure in that it usually contains elements of danger and adversity which the characters must conquer on their way to the all-sufficiency of love (Cawelti 1976: 40, 41-2). Romance reflects changing social mores in particular, with the women's movement resulting in adjustments such as the heroine who finds the love of her life as well as the career of her dreams, whereas in the past she may have surrendered all for love; or she may be dealing with the difficulties of balancing home and career (Cadogan 1994:308, 311; Cawelti 1976:42). Romances for teenagers often engage in thoughtful exploration of sexual identity and relationships, emotional development, relationships with parents. Whereas the

romance formula only has one or two types of hero, the heroines are widely varied to reflect the changing identities upon whom heterosexual women readers will pin their romantic fantasies (Cadogan 1994:276, 15). The hero is not expected to be a real life type of man but exists rather as a split-off section of the reader's own psyche (Arnott 1995:Talk on the romance genre ...).

The romance genre has widened its embrace to include homosexual romance, starting in 1928 with Radcliffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* (reprint 1975), a tortured cry for tolerance, and progressing to the stories of today whose women or men protagonists are comfortable with their homosexuality and which give often rich expression to the rapport between two people - the quality of love as it ideally exists homosexually or heterosexually (Cadogan 1994:244-6).

4.3.6.2 The detective story

The detective story archetype appeals to the reader's intellectual, reasoning capacity and the need to feel that all problems have a clear and rational solution if only the mind can read the clues or signs correctly. Once resolved and explained, the mystery no longer disturbs or troubles (Cawelti 1996:43-4). The line between the crime novel and the mainstream (non-genre) novel is often a very thin one (Callendar *in* Rosenberg 1986:86). In the reading and book selection experience of this researcher, crime has kept pace with the studies conducted into the criminal mind, with the result that authors use character studies based on such investigations to build up convincing background and motive. Crime fiction also keeps pace with crime trends in society as demonstrated by the current spate of crime novels about child sex rings, domestic violence, murders of homosexuals, and other manifestations of modern criminality which are reportedly occurring on a global scale. A further development has been the appearance of crime stories for minority reader groups, including thriving sub-genres where the detective, who represents the reader's fantasy self, may be female, gay, lesbian, elderly or black (regarded as a minority group in the West) ,

and will share with the reader some of the specific characteristics or difficulties of his or her private life as a member of that group (see Appendix One).

4.3.6.3 The horror story

One of the most popular forms of formula story is the horror tale. The appeal of this genre is not to the intellect, and true fright must be an ingredient if the story is to work: "Terror of the unknown haunts us all" (Rosenberg 1986:246). Horror engages our fear of the dark forces of nature which cannot be controlled or understood (Rosenberg 1986:247). A possible reason offered by Cawelti (1976:47) for the success of horror is that it offers the reader moments of "self-transcendence".

Authors of non-formulaic horror such as Henry James' (1898) *Turn of the screw* and David Lindsay's (1922) *The haunted woman* work exceptionally powerfully because they demonstrate that the unknowable can never be known. Cawelti calls these stories of terror, distinguishing them from horror which he considers basically comfortable because it domesticates terror by giving it limits - a clearly defined alien that can be seen and experienced. In the horror formula, the alien creature or horror is ultimately defeated or at least vanquished for the time being (ready for the sequel). Thus a creature of horror such as Dracula may become familiar and essentially unthreatening to the reader (Cawelti 1976:49).

4.3.6.4 The melodrama

The melodrama or soap opera is a genre which has broken through numerous cultural borders, surely assisted by its popularity on television, in South Africa as elsewhere (Arnott 1995:Talk on the romance genre ...). A combination of different genres such as romance, adventure, suspense and crime, melodramas have one pattern in common: although they purport to represent the real world, it is ruled by a benevolent principle because, no matter

how violent or senseless all may seem, it will end happily. The audience's expectations that right will triumph over wrong and good over evil are fulfilled. The world order is presented as being governed by a moral vision that will ultimately prevail, and the numerous characters and sub-plots are there to bear out this message. For this same reason, melodramas date quickly as concepts of moral "rightness" are bound up with transitory cultural value judgments and beliefs (Cawelti 1976:44-7). Genres that belong in this category can include family sagas.

Bestsellers frequently fall into the category of social melodramas but do not follow any specific formula as a rule. The bestselling social melodrama contains the archetype of the melodrama as seen above, where a comforting moral world order finally prevails, combined with a careful, factually well-researched, often highly topical setting which is of great interest to the reader and can usually stand up to a good deal of scrutiny. If the setting is historical, it will adhere closely to actual events and characters. The author creates the impression that he or she is taking the reader behind the scenes to the true situation, "the dirt beneath the rug". One characteristic of the bestselling social melodrama, however, is its short lifespan in comparison with many other popular story formulas. This is considered to be due to its element of moral fantasy (Cawelti 1976:260-2). It embraces the moral values of its day as accepted by its audience so that the wicked can be punished in accordance with such values and the virtuous rewarded, despite the presence of a strong possibility that good may fail. A difficult balancing act must be performed between the moral predictability that the readers expect and the moral conflict that gives the story its flavour. The author must thus have a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of the morality of her or his time, and it is this very insight that will date the story so fatally within a few years (Cawelti 1976:267).

4. 4 The role of popular storytelling in critical thinking

As discussed in 3.6.2 of Chapter Three and in the introductory section of Chapter Four, researchers are in agreement that language, particularly in the form of reading and writing,

is the most crucial element in the development of critical thinking and higher order reasoning (MacAdam 1995:243). The key to critical thinking is indicated as reading, not just in the humanities but across the disciplines. The narrative structure of stories is a framework that assembles differing concepts, which would otherwise be isolated bits of data, into an organised whole, thus making data belonging to the structure manageable. Narration fosters the human ability to understand movement and development in a logical sequence where every additional piece of data affects every other element in the framework - every detail is significant and adds to the quality of the whole. Reading comprehension is believed to depend on the reader's ability to integrate knowledge already acquired with what appears in the text, which demands the skills of critical thinking. A good level of verbal ability is desirable. Students with low verbal ability have been found in research to be able to identify individual words and facts but not to integrate the information with previously acquired information. They cannot make logical deductions, check if ideas contradict each other, recognize assumptions or evaluate conclusions (MacAdam 1995:242-3, 246, 247). The link between reading and critical thinking is important in terms of this particular study. As discussed in Chapter Three, lack of critical thinking abilities results in minds that are unequipped for the self-directed evaluation and use of information that is necessary for the survival of both the individual and the nation in the information age, and is a concern crucial to this study.

A risk of the information age is the misconception that the possession of a large supply of information is the same as the possession of knowledge. The human mind thinks with ideas, not information, and the principal task of education should be to teach students the skills of analysing and evaluating information (Behrens 1995:259; MacAdam 1995:244). The critical mind tries to find connections when faced with numerous disjointed facts or, when confronted with very few, tries to expand them into a pattern that makes sense. The acquisition of knowledge consists of the ability to associate ideas, either in sequence or in contrast. Learning has to be relative to what is already understood. Stories invest information with meaning and context. This is borne out by the oral tradition, whereby for generations information has been passed down by stories. Memory and learning are

facilitated by stories, which have the further power of being more evocative and even more accurate than facts as they are richer in meaning.

In the process of reading fiction, the reader is not a passive recipient of meaning but an active meaning maker or interpreter (MacAdam 1995:244; Ross 1995:223) (see 4.3.2). As the reader matures, so s/he gains in understanding, improved patterns of thinking and personal growth (Lyman 1976:162). The book offers almost infinite scope for reader interaction, depending on the reader's ability to respond imaginatively and critically. The reader's imagination is engaged and stimulated, promoting an active approach to learning (Deekle 1995:265). Reading has the ability to move the reader's thought away from the world of facts to the abstract realms of general ideas. Educators in general are accused of failing to understand how storytelling develops the human capacity to proceed from fact to critical thinking (MacAdam 1995:244). Probably the long prejudice against popular storytelling as seen in earlier parts of this chapter has a strong role to play in such an omission. Lipman has suggested that the sheer power of narrative works against it. It raises the prospect that there are other ways of thinking and feeling than might be considered respectable or legitimate in a society (MacAdam 1995:244).

Research in 1984 suggested that active readers possess greater emotional resources than poor readers, who were inclined to be "socially naive and less serious" (Delin, Delin and Cram 1995:121). In recognition of the importance of storytelling, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter some American colleges have instituted reading lists to encourage students to read voluntarily. The contents of such lists are not made up of great literature but of recreational or pleasure reading as it is understood that the real issue is the students' failure to embrace reading at all, not the fear that reading popular literature will prevent them from being able to consider complex questions (MacAdam 1995:252-3).

4.5 The role of librarians - information providers, educators or entertainers?

4.5.1 The dilemma: educator or entertainer?

Controversy over genre fiction has occupied a good deal of librarians' time, with many showing disregard for light fiction reading tastes (Rosenberg 1986:5). Others show disregard for more serious reading tastes, even referring to such fiction as "pretentious rubbish" (Gericke 1994). In general, trained public librarians seem to prefer to view themselves as information providers or educators (Nell 1988:34). The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) document refers to recent Library and Information Services (LIS) emphases on the educational and developmental functions of the library which will be at the cost of its recreational role (NEPI 1992:29). Hansen of the former Transvaal Provincial Library Service expressed her organisation's shift toward seeing the library as a means of social and educational development for the community, with an explicit emphasis on the educational and information functions of the public library rather than its recreational function (Hansen 1992:3, 5). A change is evident generally in the Provincial Library Services to a more educational focus. Planners have recently given more attention to ways in which public libraries can directly support formal education, including the provision of study texts and study collections linked to students' curricula and learning needs (NEPI 1992:25). The former Transvaal Provincial Library Service inverted its leisure/study ratio from 70-30% to 30-70%. The Free State no longer considers libraries to be primarily for recreational purposes but also for educational, informational and cultural needs. KZNPLS has changed its policy on textbooks and is purchasing them in quantities. The former Cape Provincial Library Service has shifted focus from supplying mainly recreational reading to literacy and study materials and the provision of study facilities (Stilwell 1995:218). LIS policy documents such as the Community Library Information Services (COLIS) document recommend that LIS fall under the Ministry of Education (COLIS 1994:7.2.1.3). The Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) document, however, contends that LIS cuts across all areas of human expression and should be considered holistically and not only as a matter for an education ministry, but notes that many public

libraries now envisage their role as contributing to lifelong learning (ACTAG 1995:8, 13, 14).

Despite the wish of librarians with traditional training to see themselves in an educational light, in reality they are very likely to be entertainers (Nell 1988:34; Dixon 1986:2). The Puritan ethic demands that all literature must be useful. The hedonist argues that entertainment alone is a legitimate reason for a book to be read. Librarians are caught in the middle - too constrained financially to appease both sides, and with their own subjective judgments often adding to the conflict. On the one hand, librarians are required to get people reading and keep them coming back for more. On the other, they are required to uplift their readers' tastes (Rosenberg 1986:6-7). The scene for conflict was set early in this century when, like intellectuals, many librarians took a repressive view of popular novels, particularly the dime novel and the series book, judging them to be cheap and sensationalistic and liable to encourage "false views of life" (see 4.1.1 above). Many libraries refused to circulate them, causing Ernest F. Ayres, a bookseller in Idaho, to jibe, "Why worry about censorship, so long as we have librarians?" and to point out that the books on the not-to-be-circulated lists were the ones most likely to catch young people's interest and start them reading (Ross 1995:213-4).

Public librarians are likely to be trained to see their role as educational and then to find that over 70% of their libraries' issues are of light fiction (Dixon 1986:2). Nell believes that librarians would save themselves considerable conflict if they simply accepted the role of entertainer and set about exploring the considerable opportunities available to entertainers to broaden and deepen their readers' knowledge of the world and themselves. The goal of education is no different (Nell 1988:34).

Librarians also have as one of their major tasks the assisting of adults to become not only literate but independent and mature readers (Lyman 1977:73), and the role of entertainer offers considerable potential for pursuing this goal.

Recreation appears to be the main use of the traditional public library, but those who lament this state of affairs should consider that recreational reading can be viewed in a positive light when it is remembered that culture in the oral tradition is relayed by the recreational use of storytelling, song and dance (Fouche 1982:36). This is discussed further in 4.5.2.2 of this chapter.

The debate over quality versus demand is one that is not likely to be resolved as neither argument is satisfactory. The thorniest problem of libraries is likely to be budgetary and there is simply insufficient money to cater as widely as may be desirable to taste and ideals (Rosenberg 1986:7). The librarian who favours educational material including serious fiction may exclude too much popular material from the collection, whereas the one who leans too far toward popular material risks being accused of skewing the collection in the opposite direction. The criteria for deciding what is quality and what is not are so difficult to apply that in any case librarians are inadequately equipped to make judgments on that basis alone about popular fiction. Librarians need a practical way to judge what is needed in their libraries (Gerhard 1991:51). The criteria for quality are all too often an imposition of middle class values and an affectation of moral superiority on the part of the appointed experts (Rosenberg 1986:7).

Schooled and pressured as they are to fulfil an educational function and offer the public opportunities for self-improvement rather than recreation (Rosenberg 1986:7), librarians in general may not have been encouraged to embrace any fiction but the canon (see 4.2 above), and least of all formula fiction. Yet to understand literature and develop a knowledge of good and bad, lasting and ephemeral, the librarian's knowledge should be extended to popular materials. The librarian must let go of the rigid standards of quality imposed for so long and explore instead a multilayered standard that shows insight into different kinds of quality and their uses. This would allow decisions to be made about popular fiction that would benefit the tastes, cultures and needs of the library's clientele, strengthen the relevance of the collection and rescue librarians from their impossible balancing act (Gerhard 1991:58).

Acceptance is growing that people learn to read by reading a lot of text that interests them and holds their attention. Provided with sufficient quantities of appealing texts, they will teach themselves to become fluent readers. Before this can happen, however, the librarian has to trust the reader's choices, and this is something that librarians have frequently shown themselves reluctant to do. One of the commonest components of reading development is for the reader to gain confidence in his or her ability to choose books, but evidence from the last 100 years seems to reveal in librarians an overwhelming tendency to think they know better than the reader what s/he should be reading. Readers do not share this assumption and are likely to simply stay away from the library and from books if they cannot find reading material with which they feel comfortable. Librarians need to understand that if people are to be encouraged to read, they must read what they find to be pleasurable, and in sufficient quantities and levels. Given the liberty to indulge in free voluntary reading, readers will learn to experiment, sometimes challenging themselves with something new, sometimes resorting to the pleasures of something familiar (Ross 1995:232-4). Free voluntary reading involves a high degree of reading play - abandoning a book that is not being enjoyed, experimenting with another, following one's reading whims freely. Reading confidence is developed in this way. A characteristic of highly literate readers is their constant engagement in free voluntary reading (Ross 1995:201-2). It is against the spirit of literacy and the powerful experiences that reading can provide, to make a reader who is fervently enjoying a book feel that she or he is not reading legitimately because the book does not measure up to some sort of personal standard or interpretation of society's values as reflected by the librarian or other figure. Canonical books deserve the respect they have earned, but it should not be forgotten that genre books can inspire love, and love of reading is what makes readers (Ross 1995:233; Lyman 1976:57).

4.5.2 Selecting books for the reader

Guides and bibliographies of use for fiction selection are hard to find and those that do exist quickly become dated (Dixon 1986:viii). Research on adult reading habits is limited, and the existing studies have mostly been conducted in Britain and North America. There is

also very little knowledge about the personality characteristics of adults who like reading. However, it is important that librarians and educators should strive to understand their communities' reading preferences, whether these are to be accounted for by temperament, development or generational differences, so that relevant policy decisions can follow (Delin, Delin and Cram 1995:121, 119, 129).

Selection of the public library's fiction collection is still a neglected area. In traditional public libraries, fiction is estimated to appeal to up to 70% or more of the users but has received very little attention from librarians and is often left to choose itself. All too often, the collection reflects the literary tastes and prejudices of the librarian (Dixon 1986:vii, ix). Fiction possibly more than any other section of the collection is susceptible to prejudice and preconception, and not only on the question of popular material against serious fiction. Even though the University of Illinois Library Research Centre found in a survey of American Library Association Public Library Association members that librarians as a whole were willing to stock controversial material, a large minority of the American public is notorious for resisting the inclusion of books by "communists, atheists, homosexuals" and others (Serebnick and Quinn 1995:5-6), to the extent that bomb threats and book burnings are not uncommon.

Confronted by so much subjectivity, the selection of a fiction collection requires a very careful approach. Further obstacles complicate the issue in South Africa. Relevant selection of library materials by South African provincial libraries is hampered by the drastic absence of research into community reading needs, no promotion of the stock, and a shortage of material in black languages (Stilwell 1995:251). Another serious obstacle is the shortage of funding. According to the minimum standards set by IFLA, KZNPLS has half the number of books it should have for the population it is meant to serve (Stilwell 1995:252). This is discussed in Chapter Five.

4.5.2.1 Diversity as a selection criterion

Thirty years ago in the United States of America, Kenneth F. Kister (*in* Serebnick and Quinn 1995:6-7) identified two evaluation criteria for public libraries: quality and demand. Quality for him was too narrowly interpreted and had been hijacked by the “moral majority”, whose interpretations were becoming outdated in an increasingly diverse society. The demand criterion, on the other hand, only represented the wishes of a section of readers. Kister felt that public libraries should rather concentrate on diversity as a major selection criterion. This supports Gerhard’s (1991:58) call for a multilayered approach to popular materials (see 4.5.1). Diversity was defined by Kister as “the active seeking out of published and quasi-published materials which represent diverse reading levels.” Diversity as a selection criterion also meant that censorship could not be applied by the librarian on the grounds of quality or demand. Diversity as construed by the American Library Association entails that views held by minority groups of readers should be represented in the library’s collection, which is not diverse if only mainstream, non-controversial tastes are served (Serebnick and Quinn 1995:6-7). The only bias that the librarian should show in this approach to serving the public is that the collection should be as unbiased as possible. Available funds should be used judiciously by the librarian to build a collection that caters for the whole community, including the special groups that exist within it (Asheim 1983:180).

In South Africa, public libraries went to the other extreme and followed “divisive cultural policies” which neither embraced the needs of the majority of the community nor consulted it (NEPI 1992:29). This was discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Although it may be argued that the justification for purchasing only material for which there is an expressed demand is that it is the most democratic method of selection, the problem is that the principle of “consumer sovereignty” fails to acknowledge that tastes are easily dominated by trends and advertising hype. What is unheeded today is in the headlines tomorrow. Circulation statistics are of no assistance as a guide when it comes to establishing a diverse collection. Libraries are not fast food chains or mass market

merchandisers selecting books by numbers. They do not serve a mass but individuals (Bob 1996:S1-2). In today's South Africa, the tendency to view black people in particular as a homogeneous group is racist and anachronistic. Blacks live under varied circumstances and are present in every social stratum, but in any case reading is a matter of individual choice regardless of the person's conditions of living (Radebe 1995:170).

By the same token, a book of exceptional quality cannot be discarded as worthless if it is not widely read. Libraries should be committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of choice through the widest range of ideas, information and materials. Their users exercise that freedom and choice by browsing through what is available on the shelves (Bob 1996:81-2). In a truly democratic collection, the interests of the majority should be met while at the same time the interests of minorities should be protected (Asheim 1983:180). The total collection should include material on all subjects, to satisfy all tastes and differing educational and cultural standards (NEPI 1992:19). It is the librarian's task to identify and reflect in the bookstock the interests of the entire community and not just the largest part of it. Although a collection that is balanced in this way will almost inevitably run into trouble with the groups who believe that their own point of view is the only valid one, part of the librarian's office is to be prepared to take responsibility for her/his professional judgments and defend them against the censorious (Asheim 1983:184) - a willingness that has been all too absent in librarians in South African history, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five of this study.

Library school curricula can prepare trainee librarians to cope with such situations, for instance the Information Studies Department of the University of Natal in the first level of professional training devotes a workshop to the issue of freedom of information (Stilwell 1997:pers.comm.).

4.5.2.2 Light fiction in the promotion of English language literacy and reading ability

The unresolved debate of quality versus demand in the provision of fiction acquires a new dimension in a situation where library services need to be developed for a population that is struggling toward literacy and second language reading skills. It may be appropriate that light fiction no longer be judged on its alleged lack of literary merit but on whether it is suited to promoting literacy and reading ability.

South Africa's potential library users are mainly black, mainly youthful and in need of assistance with literacy and education. Provision for them is obviously deficient (Shillinglaw 1990:115). A shift away from traditional library fare is required in favour of material suited to the needs of particular users, accompanied by an examination of selection practices deliberately favouring one small, privileged section of the population and its official language policy which historically disadvantaged all other language groups (Stilwell 1995:33, 58; NEPI 1992:28). A corresponding shift away from the concerns of traditional librarians, including the fruitless argument over popular versus serious fiction, would also seem appropriate.

The potential significance of recreational reading becomes a little clearer when it is considered how large a role the recreational use of song, dance and storytelling plays in the transmission of culture in the oral tradition (Fouche 1982:36) as referred to in 4.5.1 above. An example of this is developmental drama, the form of popular theatre which uses a combination of audience participation and theatrical forms such as mime, folk-forms, puppet theatre, music, dance and poetry to teach non-literate members of disadvantaged communities ways of recognising, analysing and coping more effectively with the particular problems of their lives. Audience interest is maintained through the appeal of entertainment (Barraclough 1991:8-9), thus providing an excellent example of the power of recreational activities to educate and inform.

Cultural and recreational needs are often inseparable, but there is a belief that reading is considered to be asocial in African culture (Van Zijl 1987:144). Certainly, it is clear that public libraries and recreational reading do not play a significant role in the lives of the majority of South Africa's black population (Pitse 1991:4-6). Especially among adults, reading library books for leisure is said by some observers to be uncommon. Apart from the expected factors of substandard library facilities, extensive lack of the literacy skills required for leisure reading and a shortage of suitable reading material, some argue that African culture is still strongly oral and the concept within it of recreational reading is not widespread (Van Zijl 1987:144; Fouche 1982:34-9). Books tend to be used for self improvement or the acquisition of qualifications and skills rather than relaxation (Nassimbeni 1991:5; Onadiran and Onadiran 1984:68). The owner of KwaZulu-Natal's largest bookshop has confirmed that the great majority of black adults come to his shop to buy books on self-improvement (Adams 1996:pers.comm.).

Omotoso (*in* Leach and Verbeek 1993:101), however, has stated that the problem is not that people do not read. It is what is available to them that is the real problem. The contention that African people do not read is paternalistic nonsense according to other observers, who point out that the African elite possess a history of reading and the disadvantaged also read if material that interests them is available (Leach and Verbeek 1993:101). This question will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

The problem of how to bring literacy to the black population of South Africa and raise black adults' awareness of the public library is beyond the scope of this study, which is confined to considering the possibility of preventing those black adults and young adults who can read and who are acquainted with a public library from following so many of their peers in Africa (and indeed in the world's most advanced countries) by abandoning reading after it has fulfilled its utilitarian function or after they are no longer required to read by the education system (Bamberger 1975:3).

It has already been seen above that one of the obstacles to reading and the maintenance of literacy skills among those who have learned to read at school is the absence of readily

accessible reading material (Leach and Verbeek 1993:104; Mabomba 1989:30-1). It has also been seen that there is agreement that readers learn to read by reading a lot of material that is personally meaningful, enjoyable and rewarding (Ross 1995:206, 233). People are more likely to read what is the most easily available and the most easily readable, requiring the least effort and the most reward (Lyman 1976:69-70). Reading research has pinpointed accessibility as the most important determinant in reading (Karetzky 1982:99).

Reading research has found that failure to cater for readers' interests and needs is one of the most significant hindrances to reading. Material may be too difficult in vocabulary and style, or it may require a higher standard of education or more experience than the reader possesses (Karetzky 1982:99, 108). The onus is on the librarian to find out what the community's reading interests are or would be. Selection cannot be based on the notion of a typical reader, a species that does not exist, or on what the librarian personally considers to be of value (Karetzky 1982:137). Successful and enjoyable reading depends on the correct matching of book and reader. A mismatch is likely to result in the abandonment of reading for something more enjoyable (Nell 1988:260). Accepting a role as entertainer enables the librarian to set the goal of starting people reading and ensuring that they come back for more. The disparagement of reading for pleasure stands in the way of this objective, but it is pointless to build a collection if readers do not find anything to please them in it (Rosenberg 1986:7). In the light of this, it is unbelievable that some librarians have condemned light fiction, especially series novels, as being bad for readers because they are "too interesting" and "too sensational" (Ross 1995:203). Light novels can be viewed as tools available in the quest of making readers rather than as corrupting influences that debilitate readers' minds and make them unfit for reading anything serious.

4.6 Summary

Although the role of popular fiction in raising literacy levels was already apparent in the nineteenth century, educators, critics and librarians have argued for a century over whether it has any educational, aesthetic or moral value. Many intellectuals and moralists have

promoted the opinion that popular fiction is trash. Fiction librarians are consequently still faced with the problem of whether to give precedence to popularity or literary merit.

However, attitudes to popular fiction from the formal literary establishment have changed and it is now given academic status by many colleges and universities. This chapter looks closely at the types of popular fiction in an attempt to clarify its function and appeal.

Diversity as a selection criterion is endorsed, with a recommendation that popular fiction be judged not on its literary qualities but on whether it promotes literacy and reading ability.

CHAPTER FIVE

KWAZULU -NATAL PROVINCIAL LIBRARY SERVICE AND THE PROVISION OF POPULAR FICTION

As noted in Chapter One, KZNPLS's provision of popular adult fiction has in the past been mainly in response to the reading tastes of a small, educationally-privileged minority. Its attempts to redress imbalances of this nature have encountered impediments as crippling in their own way as the obstacles thrown in the organisation's path during the apartheid era.

5.1 Brief description and early history

The provincial library services were started in the 1940s and 1950s to provide educational and recreational reading material mainly for whites in small towns and rural areas (NEPI 1992:20; Wyley 1993:8). Provision included financial aid, books and other library materials, and professional and infrastructural support. The public libraries and depots receiving these benefits are known as affiliated libraries, and the relationship between these libraries and the provincial library services are conducted according to provincial ordinances (NEPI 1992:20). The provincial library system is based on cooperation between the provincial body and the body responsible for the affiliated library, such as the local authority or health committee. This is believed to result in a generally more efficient and cost-effective service than a situation in which each library acquires, selects, catalogues and processes what in numerous cases would be the same titles (Gray *et al* 1994:5).

The Natal Provincial Library Service (NPLS) was established in 1951, serving an initial clientele of 50 already established libraries for whites. Services for other population groups began in 1953 (Gertz 1981:103). Prospects of opening to other races were affected by racial restrictions (Karlsson 1994:6; Gray *et al* 1994:5). Factors such as the Separate Amenities Act, No.49 (1953), the Group Areas Act, No.41 (1950) and the establishment of

self-governing homelands hampered the provincial library services' ability to serve all race groups. Apartheid was enforced on a local level by ordinances which reserved access to amenities such as libraries for a particular race. NPLS was barred from providing a service to KwaZulu as the area fell outside the jurisdiction of the Natal Provincial Administration. Any pre-existing library facilities in the area had to be closed down because no infrastructure existed at the time to take over the service once NPLS had been compelled to withdraw. Library development in black communities was restricted to the 13 towns under the control of various Bantu Administration Boards which were able to provide buildings and staff (Kalley 1996:57; Gray *et al* 1994:5)

5.2 Equal access after legislative changes

The prospects of equal access to all members of the community remained problematic even after legislative changes such as the abolition of the Separate Amenities Act in October 1990. Some town councils took to underhand methods of keeping black users out of their libraries by charging prohibitively expensive membership fees (Gray 1996:pers.comm.). KZNPLS permits the charging of a district membership fee to cover the costs of serving non-rate payers, but has set a limit on the amount that can be charged and discourages local authorities from taking this measure at all as it is a perceived barrier to library use.

The physical location of libraries in the more affluent areas limits access to the disadvantaged. Equal access is also obstructed by the traditional Western model on which library services were based and which have been suited overwhelmingly to the needs of literate English and Afrikaans whites (Gray *et al* 1994:6; Karlsson 1994:6-7; NEPI 1992:43). NPLS was no exception in its embrace of the Anglo-American public library model, which has stood accused of being elitist and catering to the needs of educated and literate users. This model has been predominantly book-based and more concerned with collections and facilities than user needs. It has stressed professional qualifications among

its staff³, has confined itself largely to the needs and interests of the dominant culture and class, and has maintained a stance of neutrality, namely, information divorced from any socio-political context (NEPI 1992:54).

5.3 Book Selection sub-section

A Book Selection subsection was created in 1970 for the express purpose of reviewing and purchasing material. By then, 90% of the membership of libraries affiliated to NPLS was white (Gertz 1981:105). In 1972, the practice of regular weekly book buying meetings and the reviewing of fiction, juvenile books and non-fiction, prior to each meeting, was begun (Gertz 1981:109). This practice continues to the present day, with adjustments. The dramatically increased volume of books submitted on approval by booksellers, and the accompanying lack of extra staff, has meant, for example, that only juvenile and non-fiction books of a potentially controversial nature, and fiction, are reviewed. In the case of fiction, too much of it exists for the small team of reviewers to cope with, with the result that well-established authors, sequels and certain publishers' series are bought without being reviewed. In times of particular duress, other types of fiction may also be bought blind although the regional buyers have stated a preference for working from reviews (Beacham 1996:pers.comm.).

The buying committee for fiction consists of at least one representative from each of the four regions, an assistant director and one reviewer. At selection meetings, the regional representatives suggest the purchasing in accordance with the expressed needs of affiliated libraries while the assistant director and reviewer chair the meeting and act in an advisory capacity regarding the books. The meetings enable all staff attending to be kept informed of developments in reading patterns and tastes among the membership of affiliated libraries throughout the province (Gray 1996:pers.comm.; Gray *et al* 1994:6).

³ R.F. Kennedy in 1962 lamented that small towns could not afford highly qualified librarians and that the link between book and reader in a rural service would be only a partly trained, unqualified librarian (Gertz 1981:122)

5.4 Centralised selection

In the early days of the NPLS, the first Library Development Officer, T. Friis, laid down a general guideline for book selection, recommending purchase both according to public demand and according to the professional librarians' convictions about which books the public ought to read, with a warning that neither of these philosophies should be followed exclusively (Gertz 1981:108).

Centralised selection has since come under frequent attack due to the limits it places on participation from those it is meant to serve. It is seen as insufficiently responsive to local needs. Selection decisions are frequently made by a small group of KZNPLS librarians without direct input from most of the librarians who serve the users in the affiliated public libraries. Although these libraries have a standing invitation to attend selection meetings, the distances are too great for many of them and attendance has never been good. In an effort to remedy this situation, the KZNPLS has a request system for non-fiction and less popular fiction, and in 1996 monthly bookbuying meetings started being held on a rotational basis at affiliated libraries around the province. Affiliated librarians in the area are encouraged to attend these meetings and voice their opinions and needs. This arrangement has been well-received and in 1997 the frequency of these travelling meetings was to be increased to one meeting one month and two the following month (Beacham 1996:pers.comm.; Stilwell 1995:250; Gray *et al* 1994:6; NEPI 1992:27; Gertz 1981:131).

5.5 Representative selection

Selection of material to serve any community needs to be fair and judicious, but this is especially difficult to achieve in one of different languages and cultures such as served by KZNPLS. Librarians can either promote official cultural values, and by so doing risk excluding large parts of the population, or they can focus on disseminating written and oral material that reflects the cultural heritage and needs of the entire population (NEPI 1992:28).

The provincial library services, while part of second tier government, are in a close relationship with central government which provides the funds for the purchase of books. The result during the apartheid era was that the provincial libraries were expected to adhere to the values of the government (Gertz 1981:163-4). The civil service during the apartheid era was preponderantly white, male and Afrikaans, unresponsive to the needs of the black population and highly instrumental in implementing apartheid policies (Stilwell 1995:29). Hand in hand with these went the conservative, often oppressive morality promoted by the government (Gray *et al* 1994:6).

Provincial librarians could respond in two ways. They could practise a neutrality which placed the individual above society or they could sanction the ideology of the society. NPLS book reviewers were under considerable pressure from the organisation's top management in the 1970s and 1980s to toe the government's rightwing line on morality, with the implication that it was unpatriotic and subversive to recommend books that could be deemed sexually or politically provocative (Gertz 1981:165). The previous director, C.J. Fourie, took the approach originally promulgated by P.C. Coetzee and wrote in 1972: "By making the necessary materials and services available the public library can actually mould the culture of the community ... and degeneration on account of debased influences, like materialism, permissiveness, etc., will be prevented" (*in* Gertz 1981:194).

Prescriptive statements such as this went against the principles of book selection and the librarian's ethic of resisting any attempts to limit the freedom of the individual to find out and think for him/herself (Gertz 1981:252). Complicating the issue further was the difficulty of applying censorship to "immoral" writings because of the subjectivity inevitably involved. Little assistance or guidance was forthcoming from the professional body SAILIS, which preferred to ignore the matter, and the attitude of provincial librarians in general became one of resigned acceptance of a situation that was seen as impossible to change (Gertz 1981:255-6). There were also many provincial librarians who were happy to consider themselves as public servants above their role as professional librarians (Gertz 1981:336). Signs of a change in this perception were reported by Stilwell (1995:203), who

found that 70% of the provincial librarians surveyed by her regarded themselves firstly as librarians, with just over 5% regarding themselves firstly as civil servants.

Provincial libraries operated within the bounds of apartheid legislation (Karlsson 1994:8). They were instructed by law to act as agents of the state. Many provincial librarians actively co-operated, more often than not acting with deference and caution toward the law. In company with other South African librarians, they accepted and facilitated censorship (Wyley 1990:9; Merrett 1985:26, 31). In its attempts to control the words and thoughts of South African society, the National Party put restrictions on some 18 000 books between 1948 and the late 1980s (Wyley 1990:9).

During the apartheid era, the NPLS management tried actively to promote the values and ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism. NPLS reviewers and regional librarians in the 1970s and 1980s were opposed to top management's willingness to embrace the apartheid government's norms and values (Gray *et al* 1994:6), a willingness frequently so over-zealous as to force rejection on sexual or political grounds of material that even the censors had passed (see Appendix Two for examples). The result, in the researcher's own experience, was often tense, acrimonious fiction buying meetings during which the reviewers and regional representatives fought for more open attitudes and for a reading of all "offensive" passages in the context of the book as a whole. These disputes became more heated as, in the late 1980s, the censors gradually began to relax their definitions of sexually offensive material, but top management had difficulty in following suit and clung to repressive and paternalistic ideas about what other adults should be allowed to read.

A crucial event was the formulation of NPLS's first fiction policy in 1989. Reviewers and regional staff met in private after office hours to formulate a strategy to prevent conservative religious and racist views from dominating the document, but achieved only partial success. The result was a curious document in which the different beliefs of its compilers - politically and morally conservative and paternalistic on one hand, much more tolerant and democratic on the other - sat uncomfortably together (see Appendix Three).

In 1990, after political changes were well under way and the Internal Security Act was amended, a relaxation occurred and KZNPLS librarians were able to acquire a much wider range of material without any disqualification on purely political or moral grounds (Gray *et al* 1994:6). Some concern about repression remains, however. Regional librarians are often reluctant to buy homosexual material because of complaints from conservative affiliated librarians, and the purchase of fantasy has also tended to become problematic due to claims from conservative Christian readers and affiliated librarians that it is "satanistic" (Grobler *et al* 1996).

5.6 Disparities in service

Service to black communities lagged well behind the service offered to whites by NPLS (Gertz 1981:112). People particularly ignored were those in rural areas and urban townships. Provincial library services have well-established infrastructures which could be exploited for regional library development (NEPI 1992:29). A small number of resource centres attempted to fill the gaps left by state library structures and address community needs. Their limited resource base and restricted infrastructure meant that they were not able to cope alone with the huge gaps in the support of education, literacy and development, especially in the rural areas (NEPI 1992:31-2, 43).

The NEPI report revealed that many public librarians, particularly in the early 1990s, were increasingly aware that their selection practices needed scrutiny because of discrimination, whether deliberate or by default, against users of race groups other than white, and languages other than English and Afrikaans. Vast gaps exist in collections that were developed for literate, educated white users. Little provision was made in the past for material in other languages and for adults of limited reading skills, even when black libraries were served. Yet provincial libraries have seemingly been in a strong position, due to their buying power, to encourage publications in black languages and for the newly literate (Gray *et al* 1994:6; NEPI 1992:28; Gertz 1981:184). Some effective attempts in this regard have been made by both the former Natal and the Cape Provincial Library Services

over the past two decades (Stilwell 1995:59), but militating against success on as broad a scale as desirable are the obstacles to publishing in black languages, discussed in 2.3 of Chapter Two of this study.

Along with the other provincial library systems, KZNPLS sees its role as reaching beyond the privileged minority it served for so long, to communities who suffered from historical neglect in the past. It is now attempting to pursue the African librarianship approach of identifying needs, considering new techniques of information delivery, acknowledging the heritage of African cultures and adapting professional skills and training (NEPI 1992:47, 57).

5.7 State approach to LIS

The NEPI (1992:48) report revealed that the education authorities considered LIS as auxiliary to education at best, not integral. As stated further in the NEPI (1992:49) report, the National Advisory Council for Libraries and Information concluded that the public's interests were not best served by government, and that market forces should be encouraged to take over. In spite of positive developments culminating in the policy of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Library and Information Services' Function Report (1996), this can in retrospect be seen as part of a disturbing new trend in some sectors of LIS to see information as a commodity, overlooking the fact that if the state were to abdicate responsibility for information provision and the market take its place, those most in need of information - the disadvantaged - would not be able to afford it and, there would be no redress (NEPI 1992:50). The attitude expressed by the National Advisory Council for Libraries and Information is possibly shared by other players and reflected in the chronic underfunding affecting provincial library services, including KZNPLS (see 5.8 and 5.10 below) (KZNPLS 1994).

An exception to this attitude, however, appears in the Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, which views libraries as integral to society in their provision of access to

educational, cultural and recreational materials and resources. It sees a vital role for LIS in formal and non-formal education as well as in promoting a culture of reading and learning, and describes LIS as essential to reconstruction. It recognizes that the vast majority of South Africans have no access to even the most basic library and information services, the distribution of which has been restricted according to factors such as race, income and geography. The development and financing of libraries is seen, moreover, as a provincial responsibility, to be shared with local governments. It contends that certain functions which would be ideally performed at local level (perhaps such as bookbuying) could be done at provincial level for practical and economic reasons (South Africa. Department of Arts, Culture and Technology. Draft White Paper on ... 1996:27-8).

5.8 Financial obstacles to expansion of LIS sector

The advent of political freedom in the 1990s led to urgent demands for alternatives to apartheid education (Nassimbeni 1994:149). Provincial library systems have progressed to a realisation that their role goes beyond service to their current clients, mainly the educated elite, and have expressed a desire to identify and serve needs in under-resourced areas (NEPI 1992:47), including education support. Wyley's finding in 1993 was that provincial library systems generally took for granted the Western library model, but that NPLS was one example of an articulated awareness of the need to correct imbalances, which included catering for the needs of the newly literate, the need for the provision of school textbooks, and the need for staff to be trained in community information services. NPLS had already given a practical display of its attitude by adopting the policy of absorbing interlibrary loan costs for its users (Wyley 1993:10).

It is accepted that libraries can help create a climate for democracy by providing access to information, a right which underlies all civil, political and social rights. It follows that a properly planned and financed information and library system is necessary to assist in tackling the education crisis and improving education, both formal and non-formal, cost-effectively (NEPI 1992:44-5). Due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act, No.41

(1950) and the Separate Amenities Act, No.49 (1953) by which different race groups were compelled to live in different areas and to use separate amenities, facilities, services and cultural institutions, library facilities and equipment for blacks were severely short-changed. Immense planning and funding will be required to correct the situation. Lack of library services has been instrumental in depriving the black population of the right to information, whether on an educational or recreational level (Kalley 1996:70).

The apartheid government was unresponsive to educational initiatives from mass-based movements, resulting in inequities in the control and funding of libraries. Ideally, it is the government's responsibility to plan and finance a suitable national library system (Stilwell 1991:364). One of the obstacles preventing effective library services from reaching rural areas is the lack of financial resources to extend existing services sufficiently (Karlsson 1994:8). As yet, there is no clear indication that the present government plans to address the problem, despite its urgency (Bawa 1996:16). This neglect is possibly the legacy of the weak image of the public library, which failed to grow and develop with the mood of the times and thus was overlooked. Spending public money requires considerable justification (Stilwell 1991:116), and the public library's profile may simply not be high enough.

5.9 Threat to fiction

In 1991, a Work Study report on NPLS recommended that, rather than increase the organisation's budget, the provision of adult fiction and audiovisual services by NPLS be stopped in order to make money available for other uses, such as an increase in staff. Adult fiction and audiovisual material were apparently in danger of being considered dispensable as entertainment, but there was no suggestion of consulting the users on how they felt about the proposal (the question of the value of popular fiction has been discussed in depth in Chapter Four).

The recommendation was rejected by NPLS, whose librarians produced a defence of the continued provision of adult fiction and audiovisual material (Gallagher and Banach

1992:32-35), which reached sympathetic ears in the then Natal Provincial Administration. However, even with improved funding it remains impossible for KZNPLS to meet all the demands placed on it. One solution is to investigate community needs more fully and decide which areas to focus on (KZNPLS 1994). In 1978, NPLS Chief Librarian Shillinglaw (*in* Gertz 1981:195) emphasized the need for the public library to widen its scope by accommodating a wide range of non-traditional informational and cultural needs. The importance of community surveys was stressed as there could be no clear objectives without a thorough knowledge of the community. The needs of the community as a whole and not simply an elite group must be met by librarians (Gray *et al* 1994:7; Gertz 1981:198).

5.10 KZNPLS's financial position

With the changing political scene and the liberalisation of South African society, KZNPLS began buying a wider range of materials, especially textbooks and literacy material. As libraries opened to all races, so usage increased, but shortage of funds to buy material meant that the stock began to shrink. New libraries also opened in previously unserved areas. It was not considered feasible to move stock from large, well-supplied libraries, for although situated in historically white areas, they experienced the greatest usage by all race groups after the abolition of the Separate Amenities Act in 1990 and the Group Areas Act in 1991.

The number of books submitted to the Acquisitions Section for possible purchase increased from 19 166 in 1981 to 42 335 in 1993 (with no concomitant increase in staff). Despite annual budget increases, inflation and the declining value of the rand meant that KZNPLS was forced to buy fewer and fewer books. Budget increases also did not allow the organisation to replace "dead" stock or to cater for growth in existing libraries. According to the IFLA minimum standards for a population the size of KwaZulu-Natal's, there should be 7 million books available. The amount in 1994 was 3,5 million, including the stock of the Durban and Pietermaritzburg municipal libraries. Thus KZNPLS is unable to provide

for the present demand, let alone the new libraries that the province desperately requires. As the new libraries would be mainly in historically black areas, discrimination effectively persists (KZNPLS 1994).

5.11 Summary

KZNPLS is attempting to redress past disparities and provide a service to all groups within the community, but it is hampered by the lingering effects of its traditional past, and by its current lack of funding resulting from the state's apparent reluctance to assume responsibility for library services to the people. On the positive side, its fiction selection is at present comparatively free of censorship and repressive ideologies. KZNPLS's predominant concern is the serious financial shortage which is threatening both the present service and the urgently-required expansion to disadvantaged communities.

CHAPTER SIX

METHODOLOGY

6.1 Choice of methodology

The methodology took the form of a literature review and a survey.

6.1.1 Literature survey

A literature review was undertaken to provide an account of the history and present state of the debate on the merits of popular fiction as opposed to serious fiction. The sources for the literature review included South African and international books and library journals.

The literature documenting South African library and information work was reviewed to identify recent developments in the library and information scene as it has responded to the changing socio-political situation in South Africa.

6.1.2 Descriptive survey

The descriptive survey was used for its ability to describe the characteristics of the population studied and because it is suited to the exploratory nature of the study.

Exploratory surveys are employed to expand the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon in question. They can help establish priorities for further research, clarify concepts and identify new problems. Exploratory surveys may suggest insights but cannot test them. Such surveys are only a first step and require more controlled studies to test whether emerging hypotheses have general applicability (Powell 1993:54-6). Hence this method was well-suited to the little-researched subject area of the present study.

The survey was conducted by means of interviews using a protocol developed specifically for the purpose of the study.

The results of the survey were interpreted in the light of insights provided by the literature review.

6.2 The Survey

Interviewing is acknowledged as one of the most common methods of data collection (Stone and Harris 1984:6), and it was decided to use the interview method rather than a mailed questionnaire for the purposes of the study, especially as the population of the study was not sufficiently large to make interviewing expensive or impractical. The response rate of the interview method is almost always better as the motivation to complete a mailed questionnaire is often lacking in respondents (Powell 1993:107; Stone 1984:5). Verbal communication can yield fuller results than a printed questionnaire (Leedy 1989:142-4; Busha and Harter 1980:77-9), although, if respondents have a lot of time in an interview to consider their answers, they may be less candid (Powell 1993:105). The greater time allowed by the mail questionnaire, on the other hand, can encourage more carefully considered and accurate answers, with the additional benefit that anonymity is likely to elicit franker responses (Powell 1993:84; Busha and Harter 1980:62). Against this is the possibility that respondents to a mail questionnaire will interpret questions in different ways (Powell 1993:84). The researcher was aware that some respondents interviewed were likely to find certain questions or concepts difficult to grasp. The interviewer would be in a position to clarify areas of misunderstanding, although care was necessary to do so consistently (see 6.5.2.1 below). The interview also allows respondents to qualify their answers to ambiguous questions (Powell 1993:85; Stone and Harris 1984:11; Busha and Harter 1980:63). Further in the interview's favour is that it requires no writing skills from respondents (Stone and Harris 1984:11), an important consideration in the present case where none of the respondents had English as a first language. The interview is generally more flexible than the mailed questionnaire and offers the interviewer the chance to explain

the purpose of the study in an informal and non-threatening manner (Powell 1993:105; Stone and Harris 1984:11). This was considered an important advantage for the current study.

6.3 Choice of interview type

Three types of interview were considered for the study: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Stone and Harris 1984:6). The more structured the interview - that is, the more closed questions it contains - the easier the data is to analyse, which is an important consideration when time and resources are limited as in the present study. The unstructured interview, on the other hand, yields more data and allows respondents to express themselves in their own way. Previously unconsidered but valuable new lines of questioning may emerge in an unstructured interview, and the researcher did not want to forego entirely the possibility of gaining information in this way, especially as little research has been done in the area. However, data analysis is difficult in an unstructured interview because of the amount of material that results and the lack of consistency in subject coverage, and so it was decided that a completely unstructured interview would not be practical or appropriate for the study (Stone and Harris 1984:7-8; Busha and Harter 1980:70).

The structured interview, in which the question and response categories are all set in advance, was also considered for the study. In conducting a structured interview, the interviewer does not normally have to be responsive to the respondent or use discretion in asking questions. The straightforward data analysis increases reliability. However, information that does not fit into the predetermined answers is lost, and if the questions and answers are not adequately framed, respondents may have to distort their answers to fit into the response categories. Structured questions also allow respondents to hide ignorance (Stone and Harris 1984:7; Busha and Harter 1980:70).

In practice, a compromise between structured and unstructured is usually the most desirable and feasible form of interview, especially in the library and information context (Stone and Harris 1984:9; Stone 1984:3). In this particular study, the semi-structured interview was used for the survey.

6.4 Construction of the survey instrument (Appendix Four)

Due to the likelihood that respondents were not highly versed in Western popular fiction (for reasons discussed in Chapters Two and Three, with further discussion in Chapter Eight) and would require guidance in their answers, the survey instrument consisted mainly of structured questions. However, with only a few exceptions each set of questions included an open response (“Other”) to cater for responses not anticipated by the researcher. Only one question invited complete freedom of response and was intended as a “catch-all” for any comments respondents wished to add on the question of fiction provision and use in their libraries. The highly structured nature of the instrument ensured that data analysis would be more reliable (Stone and Harris 1984:7; Busha and Harter 1980:70).

The questions were derived from the literature reviewed and the researcher’s own experience of fiction provision and use in libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. They were compiled in consultation with the supervisor of the thesis, Dr. C. Stilwell, and Mr. A. Leach, a former Regional Librarian at KZNPLS and a lecturer at the Department of Information Studies, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The questions were designed to be of such a nature that respondents were likely to be able to answer them, but if they did not that would also be a significant finding.

Comparative rating scales were used in most of the questions (Stone and Harris 1984:13-14). Respondents were asked to rank the importance of a number of items, with five points being allocated to the most important and one point to the least important. Respondents

could give the same ranking to more than one item in a question if they felt that a number of items rated equally in importance.

6.5 Limitations of the interview

6.5.1 Interviewer's demeanour

Respondents' answers can be influenced by the interviewer's reactions unless the interviewer asks questions in a neutral manner and takes care to react with polite interest rather than with surprise, pleasure, disapproval, agreement or disagreement (Powell 1993:105-6; Stone 1984:30; Busha and Harter 1980:79). This goes hand in hand with the responsibility of the interviewer to create an informal, non-threatening atmosphere for the interview (Powell 1993:105; Busha and Harter 1980:78). The interviewer chose to interview respondents either in their own libraries or at regional headquarters where they went for book exchanges. In both situations, the respondents were familiar with their surroundings and with most of the people around them. The interviewer was dressed in a casual, non-threatening style for all the interviews.

6.5.2 Bias

6.5.2.1 Possible interviewer bias

Bias is perhaps the greatest danger in the interview survey. Interviewing is a subjective technique and the interviewer may unconsciously affect respondents. If one interviewer conducts all the interviews, the bias's very consistency may make it harder to detect (Bell 1987:70,73; Stone 1984:24-5). On the other hand, the use of one interviewer can maximise general consistency in a positive way (Stone and Harris 1984:24) by, for example, ensuring standardisation in the clarification of questions (Leach 1991:173). If the interviewer expands on questions or rephrases them, the result can be different questions for different

respondents, and the danger is obviously much greater with more than one interviewer (Powell 1993:105; Leedy 1989:148). In this study, the researcher conducted all the interviews as it was decided that the consistency achieved by doing so would minimise bias, although the ever-present risk of interviewer bias remained.

The interviewer was aware of the importance of not leading respondents or putting words in their mouths, but did ask them to explain an answer more fully when it was felt necessary (Powell 1993:106; Busha and Harter 1980:79).

6.5.2.2 Possible respondent bias

On a topic as susceptible to subjective value judgments as popular fiction, the study was particularly at risk from librarians bringing their own prejudices to bear on the importance of popular fiction to their users (see Chapter Four for discussion on librarians' role in the popular fiction debate). This aspect will be discussed at greater length in 6.11.3 below.

It is generally accepted that bias is not possible to avoid and that researchers would do best to acknowledge its existence (Leedy 1989:167; Bell 1987:73).

6.6 Scope of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the fiction reading interests of black adults in KZNPLS library and not the fiction reading interests of the adult population as a whole. The researcher was interested in exploring whether recreational English language fiction was relevant to the reading needs of black adult readers in KZNPLS libraries, and whether recreational fiction was wanted at all in the face of the urgent demand for educational and information material. Although previous studies have suggested that there is a need for and interest in recreational fiction among black readers (Leach 1991:266; Nassimbeni 1991:6; Mini 1990:24), no studies have been done on black readership of popular Western fiction,

and some observers have suggested that African people have no interest in novel-reading (Van Zijl 1987:144; Fouche 1982:37). There was accordingly a possibility that fiction was being read only for study purposes.

The survey was also intended to test the popularity among readers of the various recreational fiction genres in order to ascertain those for which the demand was highest.

The study was limited to KZNPLS affiliated public libraries and the municipal libraries of Durban and Pietermaritzburg were not included or consulted in any way.

Rather than attempt to select representatives from the library user population that the study was investigating, it was decided to limit the survey to the librarians of the historically black libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. It was felt that this was a method of increasing the user population's representativeness, a way of gaining broad access to the population's fiction reading interests as each librarian could be reasonably expected to have some knowledge of what these interests were. The disadvantage of this decision was that there was no guarantee the affiliated librarians would prevent their own frames of reference from dominating their responses. Another reason for limiting the survey to the librarians was that the accessibility to the researcher of respondents from the user population would have been a problem for practical reasons, including the large size of the population, expense and time constraints (Busha and Harter 1980:60).

The total population of librarians of historically black libraries, 22 in all (Gray 1996:pers.comm.), were included.

6.7 Sampling

Purposive or judgmental sampling was used in the survey, based on the researcher's knowledge of the population and objectives of the research. Judgmental sampling allows the researcher to choose respondents according to criteria established by the researcher such

as their status or particular experience (Burgess 1984:55). As discussed in 6.6 above, the survey was confined to the librarians of the historically black libraries affiliated to KZNPLS, who would act as representatives of the library user population.

In non-probability sampling the researcher has in any case no guarantee that the sample will be representative of the population. It is acknowledged as impossible to evaluate the risks of error in making inferences from the representatives to the population (Powell 1993:62-3). No formula exists in this type of sampling for estimating sampling error (Phillips 1976:295). Non-probability samples are subjective and their representativeness can be gauged only by subjective evaluation (Kalton 1983:7). However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, a non-probability sample such as the present one was chosen because of its advantages of being affordable and for its compatibility with the time constraints of the study (Powell 1993:62-3).

The personal interviews were not impractical or unduly expensive to undertake because the province of Kwazulu-Natal is relatively small and all the respondents were situated within a few hours drive from Pietermaritzburg. KZNPLS supported the research and supplied the means of transport. This was an important factor as the research was not backed by any grant other than a bursary awarded by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration for tuition fees.

6.8 The pre-test

The survey was pre-tested in two historically black township libraries affiliated to the Western Cape Provincial Library Service. It was decided to use Western Cape libraries because of the similarity of the provincial library system there to the one in KwaZulu-Natal, and because the population to be tested in KwaZulu-Natal was too small for any to be sacrificed for the pre-test. It was considered undesirable to expose respondents to a practice run, as they may have answered differently the second time and possibly been less candid (Powell 1993:105).

The two libraries to be used for the pre-test were chosen for the researcher by an Assistant Director of the Western Cape Provincial Library Service for their predominantly black membership whose mother tongue was not English and because they had the highest rates of black adult English fiction readership in the Western Cape.

The first Western Cape librarian to be interviewed in the pre-test was proud of her library and reacted well to the questionnaire. Her English was extremely fluent. She amplified her answers with interesting and relevant information. She experienced no problems with any of the questions except for showing some basic difficulty in distinguishing science fiction from scientific literature and indicating that crime meant something very different to her community from English murder mysteries. Although categories of fiction not usually associated with popularity among black readers, for example sea stories, were popular in her library, it was emphasized by the Assistant Director who accompanied the researcher to the library that the English fiction readership at the library was very enthusiastic.

The second librarian was very tense. She did not consider her answers and gave top points to everything. Due to nervousness, she may also not have understood all the questions, which led to a decision on the researcher's part to rephrase some of them into simpler language - not only for similarly nervous librarians but for those whose English was not particularly fluent. When the interview was over, she relaxed visibly and it was apparent how forthcoming she could have been without the anxiety. Although her library also had an enthusiastic English fiction readership, she differed from the first librarian in stating that each and every category of fiction was "very popular", which may once again have been due to the feeling that this response was expected of her.

After the pre-test, some of the questions were reworded into simpler language, as mentioned, to facilitate understanding for librarians who would not have English as a mother tongue and whose concentration, in addition, might be impaired by nervousness. The interviewer also went into the main survey aware of the possibility that, despite the presence of books belonging to the various fiction categories in their libraries, some librarians would not understand what all of these categories meant due to the highly

Westernised reading culture from which the categories spring. English language fiction categories are derived from prolonged experience of the nuances and fine distinctions of Western fiction and doubt has existed among KZNPLS qualified librarians about their general usefulness (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.). The survey included a question on this point.

Apart from the points raised above, there were no evident problems with the interview protocol or its implementation during the pretest. The pre-test interviews were conducted in the librarians' own offices to assist as much as possible in the creation of an informal atmosphere. The interviewer felt able to be friendly without sacrificing polite neutrality and the atmosphere was cordial in both interviews despite the anxiety of the second librarian.

6.9 The interviews

For the survey proper, twenty-two affiliated black librarians were interviewed. All interviews of the eight Coast and three South Coast⁴ affiliated librarians were conducted at the combined regional headquarters in Pinetown. The librarians were there on routine book exchanges and it was often possible to interview two in the same morning. This arrangement was more efficient and less costly in petrol than setting up appointments at individual libraries. The librarians of the two coastal regions did not know in advance that they would be interviewed but none showed unwillingness when approached. Although any advantage that might have resulted from interviewing them on their own territory was lost, the interviews were conducted very informally in working areas of the regional offices, with which they were presumably familiar. The atmosphere in both regional offices is characteristically friendly and informal.

⁴ KZNPLS is at present made up of four regions: Coast, South Coast, Midlands and North.

In the Midlands Region, three librarians in or close to Pietermaritzburg were visited at their libraries by the interviewer and the other two were interviewed in the regional office while there for book exchanges.

The interviews of the Northern Regional librarians necessitated an overnight trip and all six librarians were interviewed at their libraries.

Of the 22 librarians interviewed, two were indisposed but had knowledgeable stand-ins. One librarian was new and confessed ignorance due to inexperience, but answered the questions anyway. Another asked if she could keep the questionnaire overnight for more time to consider the questions because her library was new. She duly returned the completed questionnaire the next day.

6.10 Data analysis

Data analysis was done manually by the researcher to maximise consistency. In the structured questions, data analysis took the form of descriptive statistics. In most instances, this took the form of aggregating the values, spanning the range from most important to least important. The semi-structured element ("Other") included in most questions was not used by any respondent. In the open-ended question, content analysis was used to determine categories and patterns.

6.11 Evaluation of the efficiency of the research methodology

The research instrument served the exploratory purpose for which it was intended and succeeded in providing the data required for descriptive analysis, which was done manually by the researcher. Data provided by the research instrument illuminated the research problem and indicated areas of action and further research.

6.11.1 Respondents

As discussed in 6.2 above, in order to ensure maximum consistency the interviewer explained questions in the same way each time to any respondents needing clarification (Powell 1993:105; Leedy 1989:148). In most cases the respondents seemed to grasp what was required. Regional staff warned the interviewer of one respondent whose English was known to be poor but who would not admit it. It is thus difficult to say if those responses were as reliable as they should have been.

Some librarians did not elaborate on their answers, preferring to adhere to the range of structured responses. Others expanded on the structured answers in an articulate manner.

There was repeated difficulty with the concepts of “gay” and “feminist”, perhaps because it is in Western cultures that these issues are most articulated, although media interest in South Africa in both women’s and gay issues is fairly thorough and conscientised. As noted in Chapter Three, meaning is socially produced (Brimer 1992:36) and in large sections of South African society, gay and feminist issues appear to labour under strong social taboos. In cases among the respondents where “gay” was understood, there was once laughter and once slight hostility. Most were unfamiliar with the notion of gay and feminist literature but would possibly have seen none of it, as neither is purchased in large quantities due to expressed lack of demand by most of the province’s affiliated librarians - although doubt exists about how far they are in touch with all their readers. Such an issue remains outside the scope of this study.

6.11.2 The interview situation

As noted in Chapter Six, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to create an informal, non-threatening atmosphere for the interview (Powell 1993:105; Busha and Harter 1980:78). Despite the interviewer’s attempts to put respondents at ease, however, a few were tense. Although it was explained to all respondents that the purpose of the interview

was to help KZNPLS provide a better service to their users and not to examine the respondents' performance or judge their libraries, the handful of nervous respondents still seemed to feel that they and/or their libraries were being tested. Most of the respondents, however, seemed comfortable and were willing and cooperative subjects. Some appeared to relish the opportunity of discussing their experiences in providing a fiction service to their users, while others strayed onto general library matters. A few said they had learned something from the interview. Some expressed a strong desire for guidance from people with more experience.

Respondents were not warned in advance of the interviews as the interviewer did not want them to be more nervous than was already likely to be the case. The fact that some of them were indeed tense seems to indicate that this was a well-founded decision.

6.11.3 Respondent bias

It was possible that the affiliated librarians who were the subjects of the study brought their own prejudices into identifying their readers' fiction interests. They could have been disapproving of reading for pleasure as librarians are sometimes inclined to be (Rosenberg 1986:5), as discussed at length in Chapter Four of this study. They may have felt that their library or their job would seem more worthy if their users were seen to be primarily interested in educational material (Nell 1988:34; Onadiran and Onadiran 1984:68). They were likely to be products of a non-reading culture (see 3.4 of Chapter Three) and thus not fiction readers themselves, which could make it harder for them to be sure of their responses to some of the questions.

It has been the experience of this researcher that even qualified librarians are sometimes unsure of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The reasons may include the absence of a reading background or the possibility that not all library schools include fiction courses in their curricula. It may be that some libraries do not keep fiction and non-fiction separate. Whatever the causes, such uncertainty became apparent when respondents were

asked to rate the popularity of the fiction categories used by KZNPLS (see Appendix One). In the crime category, for example, it was occasionally evident, both in the pre-test (see 6.8 above) and among the librarians of the actual survey, that crime did not mean English or American murder mysteries but something factual and immediate. Science fiction, as also became apparent in the pre-test (see 6.8 above) may have occasionally been mistaken for scientific literature. The popularity ratings of the fiction genres would have been affected to some extent by such uncertainty about the meanings of categories. While the researcher explained to the best of her ability what they meant, it was not always possible to be sure that the respondents were clear in their minds as a result.

After the survey was finished, the researcher realised that a question such as “Do you read fiction yourself?” may have been illuminating in assessing the extent of bias and lack of knowledge.

6.12 Summary

This section described the methodology used for the study, particularly the survey. The merits of the interview method were discussed and reasons given for the choice of the semi-structured interview for the survey. Limitations of the semi-structured interview, including bias on the part of both interviewer and respondents, were considered. The sampling method was described and results of the pretest reported. The efficiency of the research methodology was evaluated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SURVEY RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the survey are described. Because of the small size of the sample, percentages are not indicated. Where appropriate, percentages are given in the interpretation of the results in the next chapter.

7.1 The goal of the library

In response to the question: "What do you think should be the most important goal of this library? Provision of materials for (please give five points for what you think is most important and one for least)," the following result was obtained:

TABLE 1: Rating the goal of the library

Goal	Rating
Education support	106
Literacy support	95
Information provision	90
Recreation	80
Other	0

In the opinion of the respondents, education support should be the most important goal of the library, followed by literacy support and information provision. Recreation is regarded as the least important goal but still rated 80, well above half of the most popular goal. One respondent could not rate the importance of information provision. There is evidence of considerable cohesion in the range of goals.

7.2 Reading material

The question asked was: “Which of the following do your adult users most want to read (please give five points for the most important and one for the least).”

TABLE 2: Rating of materials adult users most want to read

Material	Rating
Study-related material	106
English language fiction	91
Magazines	87
General non-fiction	82
Newspapers	80
Other	0

Study material is the most sought-after resource of the library. English language fiction is more desired than either newspapers or magazines. Again all categories are rated highly with the lowest being well above half of the highest score.

7.3 Types of Reading material for adult literacy support

In response to the question: “Rate the following types of reading material in terms of helping your adult users with literacy (please give five points for the most important and one point for the least)”, the following results were obtained:

TABLE 3: Rating of materials helpful in supporting adult literacy

Material	Rating
Easy readers	97
Newspapers	91
Magazines	88
Popular English fiction	70
Other	0

Easy readers are rated as the type of material most helpful to adult users wanting to improve their literacy, followed by newspapers, magazines, and, some way behind but well above half the highest score, popular English fiction.

One respondent could not rate the importance of popular English fiction in this question.

7.4 English language fiction adult readership

The question to be answered was: "Can you estimate how many of your adult users read English language fiction?"

TABLE 4: Estimated adult readership of English language fiction: library responses per quartile

%	No. of libraries
0%	0
1 - 25%	5
26 - 50%	6
51 - 75%	11
76 - 100%	0

In 11 of the libraries, 51 - 75% of adult users read English language fiction. In 6 libraries, 26 - 50% read such fiction, and in 5 libraries, 1 - 25%. None of the libraries report an English language fiction readership of over 75% or of nil percent. Of the adult users, 26 - 75% read adult English language fiction in 17 libraries, which is just over 77% of the libraries surveyed - a solid core.

7.5 Reasons for adult users reading English language fiction

“What are the reasons, in your opinion, that adult users read English language fiction? (Please give five points for the reason you think is most important and one for the least)” was the question asked:

TABLE 5: Rating of reasons for adult English language fiction reading

Reasons	Rating
Improve English language skills and reading ability generally	96
Study (set works)	94
Pleasure/recreation	90
Other	0

Reading English language fiction to improve English language skills and reading ability generally is seen as slightly more important than reading it for study purposes. Recreation is seen as the least important reason but only marginally so. One respondent could not rate the importance of study and recreation because he did not have enough material in either category and was in the habit of referring users to a large nearby library also affiliated to KZNPLS.

7.6 Reasons for not reading English language fiction

The respondents were asked: “If there are adult users who do not read English language fiction, what do you think are the reasons for this? (Please give five points for what you think are the most important reasons and one for the least.) If all your adult users read English language fiction, please go to Question 7.”

TABLE 6: Rating of reasons for not reading English language fiction

Reasons	Rating
Prefer magazines and newspapers	87
Prefer to read in another language	85
Too difficult for level of literacy	79
Only interested in study	62
Fiction provided not to their taste	47
Other	0

Most adult users who do not read English language fiction do not do so because they prefer reading magazines and newspapers. The next reason is that they prefer reading in another language. English fiction is too difficult for the level of literacy of some, while a lesser reason was that they are only interested in study. The least important reason is that the fiction provided is not to their taste. Not all respondents were able to rate all the possibilities and there were 12 “don’t knows” from eight respondents - one to the first answer, five to the second answer, five to the fourth answer, and one to the fifth.

7.7 Suggested changes in English language fiction provision

In response to the question: “Can you suggest changes in the English language fiction provided by KZNPLS that might make adult users want to read it more? (Please give five

points for the changes or developments that you consider most important and one point for the least), the following response was obtained:

TABLE 7: Rating of desirable categories for English language fiction provision

Material	Rating
Easy readers	101
Light, popular novels	98
Novels set in South Africa	90
Novels set in Africa	88
Other	0

The most significant development that the respondents want to see in the English language fiction provided by KZNPLS is more material to improve basic English literacy, that is, easy readers. Light popular novels are seen as the next requirement, followed by novels set in South Africa and novels set in Africa. There are no great variations between the scores.

7.8 The role of reader guidance in improving English language fiction usage

The question asked was: "In your opinion, would reader guidance, that is help from the librarian in choosing what to read, increase the use of English language fiction by adults? If yes, rate type of guidance (please give five points for the most important and one point for the least)".

TABLE 8: Rating of types of reader guidance in English language fiction provision

Type of guidance	Rating
Displays	104
Person-to-person	99
Posters	88
Lists (bibliographies)	74
Other	0

All the respondents agree that reader guidance could increase the use of adult English language fiction in their libraries. Displays are considered to be a more effective form of reader guidance than person-to-person assistance, with posters in third place and bibliographies the least helpful.

One librarian said she did not have time for person-to-person guidance. The scores for this question are again fairly close.

7.9 Reasons for reading the more serious forms of English language fiction

The respondents were asked: “ Do your adult users read less popular forms of English language fiction for pleasure or only for study? If for pleasure, what types of fiction do they like? (Please give five points for the type most in demand and one point for the least).”

TABLE 9: Rating of Reading of less popular types of English language fiction

Type of fiction	Rating
African Writers Series	63
Black American writers	31
Feminist fiction	31
Classics	22
Gay fiction	15
Other serious novels	0

This question is the one found most difficult by the respondents. Only six respondents completed the question. Five did not attempt it at all. Three said that less popular forms of English fiction are read only for study in their libraries. Seven did not know what to say about gay fiction and five were not sure about feminist fiction. Three did not know if classics are read for pleasure and two did not know if there is any recreational interest in black American writers. One believed that the African Writers Series, black American writers and feminist novels are read only for study.

Some respondents may have guessed that the African Writers Series would be the most likely of the less popular forms of English language fiction to be read for pleasure simply because of its higher turnover due to study purposes. Black American writers and feminist fiction tie for a low second place, while classics and gay fiction are almost completely unread.

7.10 Popularity of English language fiction by categories

In response to the question: "As you may be aware, KZNPLS categorizes popular fiction into various types or genres, for example romance, suspense (see Appendix One). Can you rate the popularity of each category among your adult English language fiction readers?", respondents replied as follows:

TABLE 10a: Rating of reading of English language fiction by category

	Rom	Susp	Crim	Horr	Adv	West	Myst	War	Sea	Fant	SF	Hist	Fam	Relat	Hum	Anim	Coll
VP	20	7	9	2	2	7	3	3	3	4	6	5	2	8	3	2	7
Pop	2	10	9	2	5	9	4	6	1	7	2	4	11	8	8	8	12
FP		3	2	5	2	2	3	4	0	4	4	5	4	4	3	1	2
NP		2	1	9	8	4	11	8	17	6	9	8	5	1	3	6	1
?			1	4	5		1	1	1	1	1			1	5	5	

VP = Very Popular; Pop = Popular; FP = Fairly Popular; NP = Not Popular;

? = Don't Know/Not Sure

It was decided to add the very popular and popular categories together to measure the overall popularity of the genres. Where two categories add up to the same amount, the one with a higher "very popular" rating is put first.

TABLE 10b: Fiction categories in order of overall popularity

	Rom	Coll	Crim	Susp	Relat	West	Fam	Fant	Hum	Anim	Hist	War	SF	Myst	Adv	Horr	Sea
vp	20	7	9	7	8	7	2	4	3	2	5	3	6	3	2	2	3
p	2	12	9	10	8	9	11	7	8	8	4	6	2	4	5	2	1
fp		2	2	3	4	2	4	4	3	1	5	4	4	3	2	5	0
np		1	1	2	1	4	5	6	3	6	8	8	9	11	8	9	17
?			1		1			1	5	5		1	1	1	5	4	1
T	22	19	18	17	16	16	13	11	11	10	9	9	8	7	7	4	4
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th

T = Total popularity rating

The three most popular categories are therefore Romance, Collections (short stories) and Crime. Romance is by far the most popular, with 20 respondents describing it as very

popular and two respondents as popular (22). Seven respondents rated Collections as very popular, 12 as popular (19), two as fairly popular and one not popular. Nine respondents rated Crime as very popular and nine as popular (18). Two said it was fairly popular, one not popular, and one did not know.

Crime and suspense overlap considerably as genres, especially American crime and suspense, and Suspense is a close fourth behind Crime with seven very popular, 10 popular (17), three fairly popular and two not popular. Relationships is fifth with eight very popular, eight popular (16), four fairly popular, one not popular and one don't know/not sure. Westerns take sixth place, scoring the same popularity total as Relationships with seven very popular and nine popular, followed by two fairly popular and four not popular.

Seventh is Family Sagas, which score 13 popularity points - two very popular and 11 popular, with four fairly popular and five not popular. Fantasy and Humour both score 11 popularity points. Fantasy has four ratings of very popular as opposed to Humour's three. Fantasy is rated as popular by seven respondents and Humour as popular by eight. Four respondents rated Fantasy as fairly popular and three Humour. Fantasy has more ratings of not popular - six - than Humour, which has three, but Humour scores a high total of five don't know/not sure and Fantasy one.

Tenth is Animal stories, rating two very popular, eight popular, one fairly popular, six not popular and another high total of five don't know/not sure. Some librarians said that Animal is more popular among younger readers than adults.

History and War both score a total popularity rating of nine. History is in 11th place with five ratings of very popular, while War rates three very popular. History was rated popular by four respondents and War by six. History scores five fairly popular and War

four. Both categories rate a high total of eight not popular, and one don't know/not sure each.

Mystery and Adventure both score seven overall, with Mystery in 14th place due to its rating of three very popular, while Adventure rates two very popular. Mystery rates four popular and Adventure five, Mystery three fairly popular and Adventure two. Both score high ratings for not popular - Mystery 11 and Adventure nine.

The last two categories, Horror and Sea, both rate only four in popularity. Sea rates three very popular, which is surprisingly high, and Horror two. Sea rates one popular and Horror two. No respondents rated Sea as fairly popular but five did so for Horror. Horror scores nine not popular and Sea 17, by far the highest of any category's not popular rating, earning it the position of least popular fiction genre in the study.

7.11 Fiction categorization

The question asked was: "Do these fiction categories serve any purpose, for example are they useful to you helping guide adult users?"

TABLE 11: Usefulness of fiction categories

Response	No.
Very useful	12
Useful	9
Not useful	0
Don't know	1

More than half of the respondents considered the fiction categories to be very useful, while close to half found them useful. No respondent considered them to be not useful, but one

of them didn't know, feeling that a system should rather be devised to suit his library's particular readers.

7.12 Language preferences

Respondents were asked: "Which language would users prefer to read?"

TABLE 12: Responses about preferred language

Response	No.
English language fiction	2
Zulu language fiction	5
No preference	14
Don't know	1

By far the majority of respondents said that their users are satisfied with both English and Zulu material, with only two stating a preference for English and five a preference for Zulu. One didn't know whether English is preferred or whether it only seems that way because Zulu is in short supply.

7.13 Other category comments

The question asked was: "Any other comments about the provision or use of adult English fiction in your library?"

This question elicited much straying from the subject of fiction with respondents using it as a platform to voice general concerns and ideas. The responses detailed below are those that fall under the scope of the study.

7.13.1 No further comment

Nine or close to half of the respondents could think of nothing further to say, while two were satisfied with their fiction and had nothing to add.

7.13.2 More English language fiction

Five of the respondents wanted more fiction material. Three of these were interested in more literacy material for adults. One asked for more light fiction in all categories and another listed popular fiction authors that were needed, including Sidney Sheldon, Danielle Steel, Virginia Andrews, Harold Robbins and Mary Stewart.

7.13.3 More Zulu fiction

Two respondents said there was not enough Zulu fiction, one of them adding that Zulu is wanted for pleasure reading. A third remarked that English language fiction is more popular with young adults, whereas adults use the library mostly for study or to read Zulu fiction.

7.13.4 General materials provision

Two respondents felt that they have too few materials generally. One of these said that adult users are using Junior Macs (easy readers written for children) and other junior English. However, all junior and adult material is grouped together in his library.

7.13.5 Guidance

Two respondents expressed a need for guidance. One of these asked in particular for someone to visit her library to check her stock and give advice on how to attract readers.

7.13.6 Theft

One respondent said there is such a problem of book theft in her library that she has to spend much of her time monitoring users instead of doing other tasks.

7.14 Summary

This section presented the results of the survey according to the order in which the questions appeared in the instrument. In the following chapter, the results are interpreted in relation to the research problem and the literature survey.

CHAPTER EIGHT

INTERPRETATION

As stated in Chapter One, the chief aim of the survey was to investigate whether popular, Western-produced fiction is relevant to the needs of black readers using libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. More specifically, it was to investigate whether such fiction is of any assistance in improving the English second-language reading skills of adult black library users, and whether recreational fiction was wanted at all in the face of the urgent demand for educational and information material. Although previous studies have suggested that there is a need for and interest in recreational fiction among black readers (Leach 1991:158; Mini 1990:27), no studies have been done on black readership of popular Western fiction as has already been stated, and some observers have suggested that Africans have little interest in novel-reading (Van Zijl 1987:144; Fouche 1982:37). There was accordingly a possibility that fiction was being read only for study purposes.

The survey also tested the popularity among readers of the various recreational fiction genres in order to ascertain those for which the demand was highest.

Findings of the present study are compared where relevant with those of Rowan's (1996) study on fiction reading in libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. Rowan's study was targeted at all the libraries affiliated to KZNPLS and achieved a 50% response rate. The present study is confined to the total population of black libraries affiliated to KZNPLS.

Numerals are used to refer to survey question numbers in order to make them more easily distinguishable from chapter numbers.

8.1 Recreational function of English language fiction

English language fiction, which as discussed at length in Chapter Four is normally associated with recreation more than any other category of reading material, was in Question 2 rated second only to study material as the type of reading material most desired by black adult readers, ahead of newspapers, magazines and general non-fiction. All material was rated highly, however, again indicating broadness of needs. This broadness of needs is supported by Qobose's (1992:306) statement that shortage of books and lack of suitable reading material are problems of a library service to black communities (see 2.2 of Chapter Two), as well as Nassimbeni's (1991:7) finding that blacks identified many deficiencies in their stock.

These responses should be set against the background of responses to Question 1, which asked respondents what they thought should be the most important goal of their libraries. Although recreation was considered the least important goal, it was not far behind the other goals of information provision and education and literacy support, amounting to well above half of the rating for the most important goal of education support. The study did, however, confirm that recreation was not perceived to be as significant a function in these black libraries as Nell (1988:34) suggests is the case in traditional libraries. This lesser emphasis perhaps indicated a lack of recreational reading culture among black people and to some extent supported the opinion that Africans are not interested in reading novels. On the other hand, recreation as a goal of the library scored relatively high and reflected that there *was* an interest in recreational novel reading. Thus a finding of little interest in recreational novel reading as well as, however, the existence of some interest (see above and 4.5.2.2 of Chapter Four) were supported. The cohesion in the range of goals in Question 1 revealed broad needs.

The response to Question 5, which tested the reasons for reading English-language fiction, paralleled this finding. Although recreation scored the lowest, it was a very close third to the first two, improving English language skills and reading ability generally, and study. This question provided a further indication that recreation was not the main use of English

language fiction as in traditional libraries, including the traditional libraries affiliated to KZNPLS (Rowan 1996:63), and also signified that the most important perceived function of such fiction was to improve English literacy skills and reading fluency. Mini (1990:27), however, found in her survey on the reading habits and library use of blacks in Edendale that “a place for recreation and relaxation” was one of the most frequently mentioned answers to the question, “What do you think the library is there for?”.

In response to Question 7, the type of fiction material that respondents would like to see more of in their libraries was first easy readers and then light, popular fiction rather than the type of novel more likely to be used for study purposes (novels set in Africa and South Africa). This supports Rowan’s (1996:64) finding that fiction by African writers was not popular generally in the libraries affiliated to KZNPLS. The relative unpopularity of classics suggests that the more complex level of language (see 4.1.2 of Chapter 4), the presentation or the themes employed in serious literature may present difficulties to readers. Rowan’s study (1996:63) made a similar finding and suggests the libraries were catering for a less sophisticated user preference. The present study found no great variations in these preferences, however, perhaps suggesting that the respondents either did not distinguish clearly between types of fiction or that they felt a need for more of all types. Whatever the case, popular English fiction was seen to have a significant place in the libraries’ requirements.

Of the reasons given in Question 6 as to why adult users do not read English language fiction, the most significant was that magazines and newspapers were preferred (see further in 8.3 and 8.4) and the least significant was that the English language fiction provided was not to their taste. It was noted in 7.2.6 of Chapter Seven that this was a problematic question for some of the respondents, and five could not say if the fiction provided was to their readers’ taste or not. Their lack of certainty was likely to be a manifestation of the lack of knowledge produced by the absence of a widespread fiction reading culture (see 8.8 below and 3.4 of Chapter Three).

Further to Question 9's probing of whether serious fiction was read for recreation, it was evident that respondents battled with this question and appeared to be out of touch with fiction reading interests to the extent that they could not say if serious literature was read recreationally. This is discussed in more detail in 8.8.

The relatively good performance of magazines in the survey adds a boost to the recreational function of the libraries. Magazines, like English language fiction, are commonly associated with recreation (see 8.4). The study did suggest, however, that popular English fiction appears to be in steady demand from black library users for improving English language and reading skills generally, for literacy and for recreation.

8.2 English language fiction and literacy

Question 1, which asked respondents for their opinion of what should be the library's most important goal, revealed literacy to be the second most important, with educational support the first. The responses to Question 3, however, revealed that popular English fiction was the least significant reading material in terms of helping adult users with literacy, a not unexpected result considering that popular English fiction is usually written on a level requiring more developed reading skills than easy readers, magazines or some newspapers (the study did not explore what language or level of newspaper was preferred by users, or if some users confined their newspaper reading merely to the scanning of headlines). Nevertheless, popular English fiction still rated well over half the total for easy readers, which were the most important aid to adult literacy, indicating that popular English fiction is fulfilling a role of some significance in improving adult English literacy.

Question 6 asked respondents the reasons why adults did not read English language fiction. The third most significant reason (out of five) was that English language fiction was too difficult for the readers' level of literacy. This was less than 10 points behind the most significant reason of preferring magazines and newspapers and suggested that language of English fiction presents a significant deterrent to those whose literacy is not fluent. Only

one respondent did not know how to rate this point, although Question 6 in general, as mentioned, perplexed respondents to the extent that eight of them produced 12 “don’t knows”.

There is obviously a considerable need for English literacy material as revealed by the responses to Question 7. Respondents indicated that, of changes they would like to see in the English fiction provided by KZNPLS, more easy readers would be the material most appreciated by their adult readers. This suggested the presence of a desire for bilingual literacy, with English perceived, as Radebe (1995:167) suggests, as the language of advancement and a better lifestyle (see 2.3 of Chapter Two, 8.3 and 8.10.)

8.3 English language fiction in relation to educational material

In response to Question 1, educational support was seen as the most important goal of the respondents’ libraries and recreation the least, but at 106 points for education and 80 for recreation, the latter was still highly rated. Nevertheless, the response mirrored the emphasis LIS authorities have placed on the library’s responsibility to contribute to education (Stilwell 1991:233), particularly after the educational deprivations of the apartheid era (see 3.4 and 3.5 of Chapter Three). The response gives added weight to the commonly held concept that the educational function of the library is more important than the recreational function (see 4.5 of Chapter Four). Omotoso (1993:23) for one argues for the information content of novels. Too strict a categorisation of fiction as recreational would preclude recognition that English language fiction is routinely set for study and thus forms part of formal education.

Respondents were asked in Question 2 what material was generally most wanted by their adult users. The highest rated was study-related material (including set-work fiction), indicating again the emphasis on the educational use of the library (Mabomba 1989:35) (see 3.5 of Chapter Three); second was English-language fiction, ahead of magazines and

newspapers. This was an interesting finding (see 8.4 below), contradicting Kotei's statement that "literature communities throughout the world read more serialised literature than books ... Whereas the average African literate in an urban area may read a pamphlet, magazine, or newspaper every day of the week, he may not glance at a book the whole year" (*in* Leach and Verbeek 1993:101). All types of material were highly rated, however, suggesting, as have the responses to other questions, that needs are broad.

Question 5 asked for reasons why adult users read English language fiction. The ratings were particularly close, with the improvement of English language skills and reading ability rated the highest. This finding affirms that users recognize the importance of attaining bilingual literacy and that English is seen as a language of special significance (see 2.3 of Chapter Two). Study purposes (set works) came next but were only two points behind, while pleasure/recreation was four points behind study purposes in third position. Thus all the motives for reading in English were significant but did not contradict other findings of the survey that educational reading is perceived as more important than recreational reading (see above and 8.1). Again, it is important to point out the educational role of fiction reading.

In Question 7, respondents were asked if KZNPLS could make changes in its provision of English language fiction that would result in users wanting to read it more. Here an increase in the provision of light, popular novels came second only to the need for more easy readers (noted in 8.1 above). Fiction that was more likely to be associated with formal study, such as novels set in Africa and South Africa, were less required, suggesting perhaps that the respondents had not experienced a demand or that they did not associate such material with study, due to a possible unfamiliarity with fiction types (see 8.9 below). However, there were no great variations in the ratings for these categories of fiction, again suggesting broad needs. What can be deduced from the responses to this question is that popular fiction is in high demand, indicating that it has an established place in black reading needs.

8.4 Newspapers and magazines

Respondents indicated in Question 2 that study-related material, English language fiction, magazines and general non-fiction, in that order, were more wanted by adults than newspapers (see 8.3). As noted in 8.2 above, the questionnaire did not distinguish between language and levels of reading of newspapers. Although newspapers were the least wanted material, they were still highly rated, being well above half the total for the highest. The smaller demand for newspapers reflected in this question was not borne out in the responses to Questions 3 and 6, however. In Question 3, newspapers were rated second only to easy readers as the material most helpful for improving adult literacy. This may have referred to newspapers aimed at the newly literate and handed out free, such as the *Learn with Echo* supplement published by the *Natal Witness*. In Question 6, the main reason why adults did not read English-language fiction was that they preferred newspapers and magazines. This is in apparent contradiction of the response to Question 2 (see 8.1). The instrument was not sufficiently sensitive to provide the data to elucidate the contradiction and further study is indicated. One respondent, for instance, remarked that her readers were not interested in newspapers because, due to the inefficient post, they were very out of date when they arrived. However, the finding is consistent with the perception (*in* Leach and Verbeek 1993:103) that throughout Africa the reading of newspapers and magazines is more widespread than the reading of books. Kotei (*in* Leach and Verbeek 1993:103) explains their appeal by pointing out that articles in newspapers and magazines tend to be simple and brief, have an immediacy that comes from dealing with current events and trends, and contain articles of local relevance. The popularity of the Onitsha market literature of Nigeria is in part explained by its format, lying somewhere between the book on one hand and the newspaper and magazine on the other (Leach and Verbeek 1993:100-1).

In the present study, magazines fared more consistently than newspapers. In Question 2, they were the third most wanted adult reading material for adults, after study-related material and English language fiction and before general non-fiction and newspapers. In Question 3, they were the third most helpful material in improving adult literacy, after easy readers and newspapers and before popular English fiction. In Question 6, the preference

for magazines and newspapers was the main reason why some adults did not read English language fiction. While magazines do have an educational role, they are usually more recreational and entertaining in their presentation than newspapers. This may be one of the reasons for their greater consistency in the results of this survey, and they are not so strictly dependent on prompt delivery. Nyongwana (1987:11-12) reported that magazines had appeal among the respondents of her survey because of the wide variety of popular subjects discussed in them.

Mini's (1990:23) survey found that 80% of the respondents read books, magazines and newspapers, which she said contradicted perceptions which claimed that South African blacks read newspapers to the exclusion of books. Nyongwana's (1987:10) survey in Lamontville found that books, magazines and newspapers were popular among the people, of whom 87% read books, 87% read newspapers and 78% read magazines - although a few read newspapers or magazines only.

The current study, by repeatedly showing that black readers' needs and interests are broad, strengthens the argument against any claims that South African blacks read only particular kinds of material and are not interested in others. It suggests that a range of material is used for a range of purposes.

8.5 Percentage of adult users reading English language fiction

Seventeen or 77% of the libraries reported that 26-75% of their users read English language fiction, which is a fairly solid middle core of readership for novels and short stories. There is no room for complacency, however, in view of the fact that 65% of the adult book budget of KZNPLS is spent on English fiction. Although 11 or 50% of the libraries indicated that 51-75% of users read English language fiction, on the converse side 50% of the libraries reflected an English language fiction readership of below 50%, and in nearly a quarter of them (5 or almost 23% of the libraries), English language fiction

readership was below 25%. An interesting area for further study would be to investigate how this compares with world English language fiction reading trends.

8.6 Reader guidance

While the difficulty the respondents appeared to experience in answering some fiction-related questions suggests a need for more in-service training concerning fiction provision (see Chapter Nine), all respondents agreed that reader guidance could improve the use of English language fiction, and displays were the considered the most helpful form of guidance although all methods were rated high. The researcher had anticipated that person-to-person guidance would be the most effective form of reader guidance, but its second place was perhaps due to many of the librarians' lack of confidence about English language fiction (see 8.8 below) and their own absence of experience in the area, as discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Three. Possibly displays required less knowledge from the librarian, as display material could often be forthcoming from regional headquarters. Person-to-person guidance was ruled out by one respondent who said she did not have the time. Another respondent complained that the high incidence of theft of library materials in her library meant that she had to monitor users constantly and had little time for her necessary library tasks. Although Nadine Gordimer (1992:31) expresses the opinion that it is better to lose books to people who are using them than have them sitting on the shelf, the respondent concerned obviously resented the problem deeply as a hindrance to the operation of her library.

KZNPLS acknowledges that it is attempting to address the needs of a different kind of clientele than in the past (Gray *et al* 1994:5), and that it must provide support in the form of guidance and in-service training. The organisation has a huge fiction stock which must not be permitted to become a white elephant. Reader potential must be nurtured by guidance. An interesting area for further study, for instance, would be whether the extreme popularity of a formula such as romance (see 8.7.2 below) is to some extent by default, in the absence of reader guidance.

8.7 Fiction genres

8.7.1 KZNPLS fiction categories

Genre or formula fiction is discussed at length in Chapter Four of this study. The genres tested were the fiction categories used by KZNPLS since 1985 and devised by the regional librarians at the time. Appendix One includes an explanation of these categories as defined by the librarians. The categories are closely based on those familiar to all readers of Western genre fiction and used in the literature on formula fiction, as described in Chapter Four.

For non-genre fiction, the librarians chose “Relationships” to indicate novels that deal more seriously with human relationships than genre fiction such as Romance or Family Sagas. “General” was chosen for novels that do not fit into any other category. The “General” category was left out of the survey after the first few respondents found it too vague to respond to.

8.7.2 Popularity of fiction genres

It was anticipated that Romance would sweep the board when the popularity of fiction genres was explored by the survey, and there was no surprise in the result. Romance is one of the most formulaic of all genre fiction and at the same time exploits a theme of high universal interest. In Snitow’s (89:138) view, the “denatured” quality of formula romance means that anyone can identify with it. As discussed in 4.3.2 of Chapter Four, the more formulaic a fiction genre is the more likely it is to appeal to newer readers, who are insecure in their ability to choose reading material but who know that a certain formula guarantees reading satisfaction (Ross 1995:222). Its appeal to the most advanced readers should also not be forgotten (Nell 1988:xiii, 4-5).

In Rowan's (1996:33) study of all KZNPLS libraries, romance was the third most popular genre, which indicates a high user interest in all the province's groups.

The appearance of short stories (Collections) in second place was initially a surprise. In traditional libraries affiliated to KZNPLS, namely, those with a predominantly white readership, short stories have long been one of the least popular categories (Grobler *et al*, 1996:pers.comm.). Following the same principle operating in magazines (see 8.4 above), it seems likely that for second-language reading, obviously less fluent than mother-tongue reading, short stories provided a less daunting prospect than a whole novel. Nell (1988:93) states that one way to test the daunting nature of a full novel is to learn a second language and then settle down with an exciting-looking novel in the newly acquired tongue. The reader soon becomes forcefully aware of the difference in being able to read and having reading fluency.

The Crime and Suspense categories, in third and fourth place respectively, overlap in style and subject matter to a large extent as has been stated, especially in American fiction. The survey did not examine whether English or American crime (see Appendix One) was preferred by readers as the researcher did not want to make questions too complicated for those not immersed in the subtle distinctions of Western fiction genres and especially the numerous sub-genres of Crime (see 4.3.3 of Chapter Four). The fact that Crime and Suspense followed each other so closely in the ratings indicated that their distinctions and overlaps are similarly popular. Crime and Suspense were the top two most popular genres in Rowan's study (1996:33), again indicating uniformity among all the province's user groups. The sensitivity of the crime genre's subgenres to minority interests (as noted in 4.3.6.2 of Chapter Four) may play a role in its high appeal to a wide spectrum of readers.

Relationships, in fifth place, is the largest fiction category used by KZNPLS and in one way its appearance in the top six most popular fiction categories was appropriate.

However, while the quality of Relationships material as defined by KZNPLS ranges widely from light stories written in popular style to more serious fiction, most of it, to a greater or

lesser extent, is written on a deeper level than genre fiction where the bulk of light, popular material is found. It is therefore interesting that its readership should be so strong - very popular and popular in 16 of the 22 libraries, with only one respondent rating it as not popular and one unsure. In the light of Ross's (1995:222) suggestion that formula fiction is ideally suited to novice or uncertain readers, it is significant that the top six categories in KZNPLS's historically black libraries contained two categories - short stories and Relationships - that were not bound by formula.

Relationships appear sixth position in Rowan's study (1996:33). This suggests that a not insignificant proportion of KZNPLS's black readership does not exclusively require the safety of formula fiction and is exploring fiction's broader realms.

That the Western was the sixth most popular genre, very closely behind Relationships, was not a surprise as regional staff had reported a rising demand for it among black readers (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.). The particularly repetitive formula may be of assistance to second-language readers wishing to improve their skills, and at the same time, like Romance and as noted in 4.3.3 of Chapter Four, this genre uses a formula that has a particularly high universal appeal (Cawelti 1976:11; Rosenberg 1986:6). This result was supported by Rowan's (1996:33) study, in which Westerns were placed fifth overall.

The top six most popular categories thus included four that fulfil the requirements of formula fiction as described in 4.3.3 of Chapter Four, with the emphasis on fast-moving plots offering the reader immediate excitement and gratification (Cawelti 1976:14). The top six also included two non-genre categories. This ratio reflects the evidence in fiction reading all over the world that formulaic reading makes up most of the reading experience (see 4.3.3 of Chapter Four). It also reflects, at one-third of the top six, a substantial interest in non-formula reading, although the appeal of short stories, as noted above, may be due to their brevity.

It is worth noting again at this point that the reading of formula fiction is never passively escapist but always requires some work from the reader, as part of the enjoyment of

reading is to understand how contradictory elements of the story will eventually be drawn together and resolved (Ross 1995:223) (see 4.3.2 of Chapter Four).

Five of the present study's top six popular fiction categories are represented in the top six of Rowan's (1996:33) study, the only difference being short stories, which she did not include, and Family Sagas, which were third in her study and seventh in the present study. The two studies thus support each other to a very great extent in ascertaining the most sought-after adult fiction reading material in libraries affiliated to KwaZulu-Natal. The appearance in the top six placements of this study and Rowan's (1996:33) of Romance, Crime, Suspense and Westerns, would seem to lend support to Cawelti's (1976:37) notion that archetypal formulas such as these have universal appeal, and are not bound by individual cultures or periods. There is also a possibility that formula fiction's blend of certainty and escapism offers comfort to South African readers living in a society in transition (see 4.3.4 of Chapter Four).

Family Sagas, which, as noted in 4.3.6.4 of Chapter Four, are often indistinguishable from the social melodrama or soap opera described by Cawelti (1976:44-7) as one of the archetypal formulas that break through cultural borders, was in seventh place and popular in 13 libraries. This may be consistent with the popularity among black viewers of soap operas, usually family stories, on television (Arnott 1995: Talk on the romance genre ...).

Fantasy and humour were both rated popular in exactly half of the libraries. Fantasy, although popular in many (but not all) traditional libraries, is an unknown quantity among black readers and KZNPLS regional librarians have tended to believe that it is not popular with them (Grobler *et al*, 1996:pers.comm.). Yet the librarians who stated that it was very popular (four) and popular (seven) seemed confident of their responses, and although there were six ratings of not popular, there was only one don't know/not sure. On the other hand, five respondents said they did not know or were not sure if Humour was popular. Humour is a form of expression that seems particularly culture-bound, and this high rating of don't know/not sure looks appropriate when it is considered that most of the humorous fiction bought by KZNPLS is Eurocentric and unlikely to appeal to all cultures (see 4.2.1

of Chapter Four). In any case, not very much is submitted to KZNPLS by booksellers in the Humour category.

The Animal category, another small category, was similar to Humour in that it garnered a high score of five don't know/not sure, although it reached tenth place in popularity. Regional librarians as well as a few of the survey's respondents contended that black adults are not known for an interest in animal stories (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.). In contrast, Radebe (1995:168) found that animal stories were the most popular reading matter among the black Standard Two children surveyed by her.

History and War received a relatively cool response from most of the respondents, with less than half (nine) rating them as very popular or popular, and a large minority of eight rating both categories as not popular. The tepid response to these categories may be attributable to their propensity to deal with specifically European or North American history and wars rather than the history and liberation wars of Africa or South Africa.

Although Science Fiction was given the same very popular rating as Westerns, its total popularity rating put it in 13th position. It was also rated as not popular by nine or almost half of the respondents, giving some support to the theory put forward by regional librarians that Science Fiction is generally not popular with black readers (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.). Its position of 12th out of 20 in Rowan's (1996:33) survey suggests that an unenthusiastic response to Science Fiction is found across a wide range of KwaZulu Natal's user groups. Its relatively high rating of very popular in six of the black libraries may need to be tempered with the possibility that not all respondents were clear about its meaning and were likely to confuse it with scientific literature, as noted in 8.8 below and 6.7 of Chapter Six. Again, the sensitivity of the instrument was an issue.

Mystery and Adventure both scored seven overall in popularity, but both are problem categories in terms of this survey. They are the smallest categories bought by KZNPLS and many respondents are unlikely to have seen examples of them. Mystery is confined to fictional ghost stories and unexplained happenings (as distinct from Horror). The

Adventure category has a specific KZNPLS meaning, restricted to books where humans are pitted against the elements or where they embark upon quests that test their strength, courage and ingenuity (see Appendix Three) - not adventure as an archetype of formula fiction, described in 4.3.6.1 of Chapter Four. Mystery was rated as not popular by half the respondents and Adventure by eight of them. Adventure rated five don't know/not sure, indicating that the respondents were not familiar with the category.

The two least popular categories, Horror and Sea, were both rated as very popular or popular by only four respondents. Horror rated nine not popular and Sea a very high 17, making it the least popular category in the study. This is not surprising as the genre consists mainly of 18th century British naval sagas. As noted in 4.2.1 of Chapter Four, South Africa is made up of numerous cultural, educational and racial groupings from the apartheid society, a fact which is reflected in its readers, and the appeal of sea stories is mainly to older male readers of British extraction (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.). The only surprise is that it was rated as very popular by three respondents. The unpopularity of Horror is less easily explained. Judging by the amount of it that is published, it is one of the most popular fiction categories in the West at the moment, a popularity that is strongly apparent among KZNPLS's white readers (Rowan 1996:26). It is also one of the archetypal structures in genre fiction as identified by Cawelti (1976:47) (see 4.3.6.3 of Chapter Four). The finding that it has not taken off among local black readers could possibly be explained by the forms it has taken in recent publications, for example, an emphasis on vampires, which seem to have made a particular impression on the Western mind. As Cawelti (1976:21) notes, the relation between literature and other aspects of culture is an area that remains difficult to penetrate.

8.8 Respondents' lack of knowledge

Some respondents' unfamiliarity with fiction and the reading tastes of their users became particularly apparent in Questions 6 and 9. Question 6 asked them what were the reasons adult users did not read English language fiction. As noted in Chapter Six, there were 12

“don't know” from eight respondents. Five respondents did not know whether their users were only interested in study and five did not know whether users preferred magazines and newspapers to English language fiction.

As pointed out in 7.2.9 of Chapter Seven, only six respondents were able to complete Question 9 and five did not even attempt it. Of all the questions, this was the one respondents found the most difficult. The question asked if serious fiction was read for pleasure or only for study and highlighted how little many of the respondents were in touch with the reading motives of their own fiction readers. This finding supports Bosman's (1992:43) claim (see 4.2.1 of Chapter Four) that the serious lack of readership surveys in South Africa has meant that not even librarians are sure what percentage of readers read merit literature for non study purposes. Some respondents may have guessed that the African Writers Series would be the most likely to be read for pleasure simply because of its higher turnover due to study purposes. Regional librarians, however, claim that there is little demand for African Writers Series apart from study (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.).

Question 13 reflected a possible further lack of knowledge in that nine respondents could think of no further comments to make about the provision or use of adult fiction in their libraries.

These findings offer support for the claim that there is a limited reading culture in South African black life at present (see 3.4 of Chapter Three), and indicate a necessity for fiction training for librarians affiliated to KZNPLS (see Chapter Nine).

8.9 Usefulness of fiction categories

In 1994, there was a move from some KZNPLS librarians to discontinue labelling the fiction purchased by the organisation according to the fiction categories as the usefulness of these categories to affiliated librarians and/or users was in doubt. Regional librarians undertook to ask their affiliated librarians informally if they wished the categories to be

continued. The response indicated that the affiliated librarians liked the categories. In the present survey, it was interesting to see that, despite the Eurocentric nature of the categories, 12 respondents or just over half of the population found them very useful, while nine found them useful. Although no respondent said they were not useful, one made the very interesting comment that he would like his library to devise its own system of fiction categories to suit its readers. This would be a particularly worthwhile area for further study, given the fact that popular English fiction appears to have a well-established role in black reading tastes but that there is apparently some confusion about what the categories mean.

8.10 Language preferences

Fourteen respondents or nearly 65% of the population said their users had no language preferences and were happy to read both English and Zulu material. Only two said their users preferred English, however, while five said their users preferred Zulu. With the shortage of material published in Zulu (see 2.3 of Chapter Two), it is hard to satisfy these users.

Omotoso's survey in the Western Cape indicated that black library users were keen to master English (Omotoso 1993:6-7), while Mini's (1990:23) survey revealed that 52% of her respondents read both English and Zulu, while 26% read mainly Zulu. In some of KZNPLS's affiliated libraries, it has been found that black parents predominantly want English picture books for their young children so that the latter are set on the road to becoming proficient in English (Grobler *et al* 1996:pers.comm.; Groenewald 1996:pers.comm.). This compares well with Radebe's (1995:167) finding that 78,6% of the black children in her survey preferred English, as noted in 2.3 of Chapter Two of the present study.

Consistent with Mini's (1990:23) survey, the present study suggests that adult users wish to learn English but not at the expense of Zulu. Bilingual literacy, as noted in section 3 of

Chapter 1, appears to be the ideal. English may be the language of transformation and development (Krynauw 1994:7) (see 2.3 of Chapter Two), but indigenous language should not be sacrificed in the process. The Final Report of the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG) calls for the development of indigenous literature and states that knowledge of indigenous languages is necessary for nation building (LANGTAG 1996:53. 59). African readers need books that are appropriate for the needs of African communities and as a counterbalance to a Western way of life. Libraries have a social responsibility to promote reading in indigenous languages as a skill fundamental to African development. A language cannot flourish unless readers are grounded in the literacy of their own culture (Neill *et al* 1992:37).

There is thus still a need for libraries to use their influence with publishers for more material in indigenous languages (Gray *et al* 1994:6; NEPI 1992:28; Gertz 1981:184), as discussed in 5.6 of Chapter Five.

8.11 The open questions

While the fact that close to half of the respondents could think of nothing further to say suggests that open-ended questions of this type may be difficult to answer, it could also suggest an absence of familiarity with English language fiction as discussed in 8.8 above. A further two had nothing to add because they felt satisfied with their fiction, which may also suggest limited awareness of the problems or the potential of fiction provision to black adult readers. The remaining half of the respondents made remarks that support the findings of the survey as a whole - a need for more library materials generally, with particularly a need for more literacy material, light English fiction and Zulu fiction. There was also an expressed need for guidance. The argument for training in fiction librarianship is discussed further in the next chapter.

8.12 Summary

Popular English language fiction is relevant to the needs of adult black users of libraries affiliated to KZNPLS, not principally for recreational purposes but as material to improve their English language skills and reading ability in general. Although not the main goal of the library or of users' reading interests, recreation does, however, fulfill a significant purpose. Educational support is seen as the main purpose of the library but literacy material is the most sought-after stock. The six most popular fiction categories were very similar to the top six in Rowan's (1996:33) study, suggesting that formula fiction appeals across cultural boundaries. English is not being read at the expense of Zulu as material in both languages is required. A particularly strong finding was that needs were very broad. The findings also reflected a fairly pronounced lack of knowledge about fiction on the part of many of the respondents. Recommendations on the survey's findings will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Relevance of popular English language fiction

The study investigated whether popular Western-produced English language fiction was relevant to the reading needs of readers in the historically black libraries affiliated to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Library Service. The evidence gleaned from the survey indicated that popular English fiction was strongly relevant to the reading needs of adult black library users. Although educational material was in highest demand, English language fiction was the next most required adult reading material. In most cases, the term “English language fiction” came to mean light popular novels even when the survey instrument did not break the English language fiction into types, as one of the survey’s findings was that literary or “serious” English fiction was not in high demand by users.

Of the types of English fiction required, light, popular novels were the most in demand after literacy material. Light, popular novels are normally associated with recreational reading, yet the survey indicated that the recreational function of the library was not as important as the functions of education support, information provision and literacy support. Similarly, the main reasons for reading English language fiction were not recreational (or for study) but for improving English language skills and reading ability generally. This finding is consistent with Ross’s (1995:232-4) claim that if people are provided with sufficient quantities of appealing text, they will teach themselves to become fluent readers. It is a major finding of the present study because it undercuts the merit versus demand debate that has occupied so much of Western librarianship’s time. This debate, as noted in Chapter Four, does not yet seem to be an issue in South African black fiction reading, and it should not be permitted to develop into one. Black fiction readers should be spared the guilt and snobbery that has accompanied Western reading tastes. They should feel free to indulge in the free voluntary reading recommended by Ross (1995:232-4) (see 4.5.1 of Chapter Four), free to enjoy popular fiction as much as they wish and for whatever reason

they wish, and free to challenge themselves with “better” fiction from their own choice and not as a reaction to outside dictates that they are otherwise not “real” readers. Free voluntary reading is the road to reading confidence (Ross 1995:201-2) and contributes to the development of the critical thinking abilities that are needed for the transformation and development of the nation.

The need for popular fiction among black readers as indicated by this study must be nurtured in the interests of establishing a strong reading culture. If the proportion of fiction purchased by KZNPLS is reduced due to budget cuts or any other reason, such as pressure to provide mainly study material, such reductions must not be too severe in proportion to other library materials required. Popular fiction has an established role in the attainment of critical thinking skills and information literacy, and the entertainment value that keeps readers coming back to it means it can play a powerful part in the educational thrust (see Chapters Three and Four). It is a power that must be harnessed and not allowed to wither on some elitist scrapheap.

9.2 Popularity of popular English language fiction genres

The study’s finding was that interest in all popular English language fiction genres exists to a greater or lesser extent. Based on the findings of this study and supported by that of Rowan, it is recommended that all genres should continue to be purchased to serve the reading needs of all readers in the province. The most popular categories among the libraries of the present survey were significantly consistent with Rowan’s (1996:33) findings. The exception was short stories, which Rowan’s survey did not include but which regional librarians have stated are not popular in the traditional white libraries.

The purchasing of popular English language fiction by KZNPLS is already weighted heavily in favour of the genres found popular in the present study (excepting short stories). The present study found that a problem with the libraries surveyed is that they do not receive sufficient quantities of popular fiction. KZNPLS is constantly denied its requests

for the increase it needs in the book budget (Bawa 1996:16) and thus it cannot afford to buy more popular fiction, which is extremely expensive due to the deteriorating exchange rate. The organisation is already stretched beyond its limits in its provision of materials to libraries (KZNPLS:1994). The prospect of diverting popular fiction away from the libraries which have historically enjoyed a good service from the organisation to libraries which have been disadvantaged has not been entertained because the formerly white libraries are experiencing a steady growth in black membership (Gray 1997:pers.comm.). However, it may be appropriate to begin distinguishing between advantaged and disadvantaged black people in favour of the latter. As already mentioned, black people are not a homogeneous group (Radebe 1995:167) with the same standard of living and the same reading needs.

Related to the question of materials provision, a consistent finding of the survey was that needs are wide-ranging and not confined to specific types of material. A shortage of all types of books (and other library materials) was being experienced. Qobose (1992) and Nassimbeni (1991) have commented on book shortages as a problem of library provision to African communities.

This study has no answers to the dilemma but it does provide support for the continuation of the battle to convince financial authorities of the importance of libraries, and in the meantime for the search to find creative ways of dealing with the shortages.

9.3 Serious English language fiction

The lack of knowledge displayed by respondents on the question of serious fiction types and readership indicated that they were unfamiliar with such material. This may be one of the repercussions of the absence of a strong reading culture, but it is not assisted by the fact that, due to pressure from affiliated librarians, KZNPLS is now purchasing most serious fiction only for the literary collection in Head Office. Although books are available on request from the literary collection, many library users remain unaware of this and thus do

not see the books. This is a perturbing situation that requires more thought and investigation on the part of the organisation.

Rowan (1996:63) suggests that the “literary” novel appeals only to an elite minority of readers and that KZNPLS cannot afford to cater for this elite in the current financial circumstances. The present researcher differs from this opinion. In the interests of diversity (Serebnick and Quinn 1995:7) and to withstand the subjectivity and censorship brought to the selection of library materials by various moral and other pressure groups, the collection must aim to cater for the entire community of the province, including any special interest groups that exist within it (Asheim 1983:180). The restriction of books to certain types hinders free voluntary reading and puts limits on the reader’s opportunities to grow as a reader. It opens the way to the restriction of books on the grounds of quality or demand, a situation that has bedevilled libraries for long enough. As a reading culture begins to take hold, there will always be readers who want more challenging material, and it must be available for them. Failure to cater for readers’ interests and needs is one of the most significant hindrances to reading (see 4.5.2.2 of Chapter Four). Just as light, popular fiction should not be judged on its alleged lack of literary merit, so the more serious fiction should not be judged on its alleged lack of popular appeal. Significantly, the survey did reveal responses suggesting that non-formulaic fiction was being read.

To counteract the lack of fiction knowledge revealed by the survey, not only of serious fiction but also of some of the less popular forms of genre fiction, the study recommends an intensification of fiction awareness training, both by KZNPLS in the form of fiction workshops and in-service training, and by library schools which may not pay sufficient attention to fiction in their training courses. As many of their students are likely to become public librarians, it seems inappropriate to neglect such a large aspect of public library provision, especially one with so much potential for producing skilled and critically aware readers.

9.4 Eurocentricity of fiction genres

One of the survey's findings was that the Eurocentric formula fiction genres used by KZNPLS presented a barrier to some affiliated librarians and doubtless also to their users. The Eurocentricity of these categories is understandable because of the Western culture within which the fiction genres originated. To overcome the problem, it may be worth investigating whether popular fiction could be grouped into categories that would make more sense to people who experience problems with them. Another possibility is that the fiction workshops or in-service training recommended in 9.4 above could include sessions in which qualified librarians explained the categories in a way that would enlighten affiliated black librarians. It is possible that not all white affiliated librarians understand the categories either. KZNPLS already acknowledges the importance of regular training seminars and workshops on topics of value to affiliated librarians (Bawa 1996:16)

9.5 Popular English language fiction and basic literacy

Popular English language fiction's role in basic literacy development did not seriously rival the role of easy readers. Although the part played by English language fiction in the acquisition of literacy skills was not insignificant, the survey showed that easy readers have an irreplaceable function in this area. Literacy is obviously a major concern among the users of the black libraries. It is recommended that easy readers continue to be purchased in appreciable quantities, and that KZNPLS continues to encourage publishers to produce them in both English and indigenous languages.

9.6 Reader guidance

Although all the librarians surveyed were found to be in agreement on the necessity for reader guidance, they were hesitant about providing person-to-person guidance. Low levels

of confidence regarding fiction could be alleviated by the fiction workshops and in-service training recommended in 9.4 and 9.5 above.

9.7 Newspapers and magazines

The survey found the role of newspapers to be inconsistent, possibly because the instrument was not designed to explore the many different types and languages of newspapers. The finding that they were second only to easy readers as the material most helpful for improving adult literacy may refer to newspapers published for the newly literate, such as the *Learn with Echo* supplement to the *Natal Witness*. Further investigation is indicated. There was a finding that if the arrival of newspapers was delayed by tardy postal services, interest in them was greatly reduced. This is a problem that also requires further investigation.

Magazines performed well in the study, as consistent with their objective of engaging and stimulating their readers without taxing them unduly. Again, the study did not differentiate between different types and languages. However, whereas libraries affiliated to KZNPLS are usually allocated magazines in accordance with their circulation figures, black libraries are accorded a special dispensation and receive magazines in greater quantities (and in both languages) because of their acknowledged importance to the readers (Gray 1997:pers.comm.).

9.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the main findings of the study were that black adult readers were principally concerned with improving their basic literacy via easy readers, and then in improving their English language reading skills and fluency via the use of popular English language fiction. However, the study repeatedly indicated that needs were very broad, and it was difficult to single out any type of material that was particularly needed at the expense of other types.

What was clear, however, was that fiction played a significant part in black reading, and the aim of the study to investigate this role was fulfilled. The study also indicated that fiction training, both in library schools and by KZNPLS, was needed for the benefit of the affiliated librarians surveyed and for librarianship in general.

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APPENDIX ONE

FICTION CATEGORIES USED BY NPLS

ADVENTURE

Follows the old tradition of the hero who pits his strength against the natural elements and enjoys the danger. Often set in wild areas of the world, and may feature treasure hunts, lost mines, lost cities, etc. Plot is of prime consideration. Character analysis or development is usually minimal.

CRIME

A crime is committed and the story describes how it is solved through the analysis of clues. There are two basic types of crime novel: those featuring police detectives who usually work as a team within the rules of the police department (these novels are known as "police procedurals"); and those featuring the private detective or the amateur sleuth, usually a loner and possessing much more freedom than the police detectives.

The reader is often taken into the private life of the detective, whether police or private, man or woman. The detective is usually portrayed as a very human, realistic type of person, with whom the reader can identify. For appeal to different reader groups, the detective may be feminist, gay, black, elderly, etc.

Background detail is important for atmosphere and the characters must be sharply defined. Characters in crime novels used to be one-dimensional, but now one finds a lot of character exploration and sometimes virtual psychological studies employed to build up motive for a crime.

There is a difference between British and American crime and many readers will read only one or the other. American crime tends to be "tougher", with more bad language, more sex, drugs, sadism, gore and stereotyped characters. Both British and American crime novels have armies of readers who become addicted to them.

SUSPENSE (Thrillers, Spy, Intrigue)

In suspense stories, "the characters and reader are in a constant state of uneasy anticipation of the worst, which all too often happens" (Rosenberg). Plot and character are manipulated by the author to keep the reader guessing as to the outcome. There may be some character analysis and

development as the author is concerned not only with what happens but why. Plot is very important and usually fast-moving, especially with the build-up of tension.

There is often considerable factual background detail to evoke atmosphere and to make the story convincing. A successful suspense novel will involve readers fully.

Suspense is usually rooted in the real world. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war robbed many spy writers of their best source of plots. Popular thriller themes at the moment include international terrorism, industrial espionage, ecological suspense, medical suspense, sexual harrassment and sinister religious cults.

A very popular type of thriller at the moment is the psychological suspense novel. This may overlap to some extent with the crime novel (see above). There is usually some form of psychological abnormality which causes the suspense, eg. a psychopathic sex killer (whose method of despatching his victims can be described in horrifying detail).

HORROR

"Terror of the unknown haunts us all" (Rosenberg). The horror genre is for readers who delight in being frightened. Horror takes its subject matter from the supernatural and the occult: ghouls, apparitions, poltergeists, witches and warlocks, vampires and werewolves, monsters and mummies, demons and dark magic, nightmares and hallucinations, mind or soul stealing, psychic perception, or just the evil that can exist in the human heart.

Characters usually work through darkness and emerge into light, but sometimes the dark claims them for ever (an increasing trend right now). There is usually not much character development. Reader involvement is very high because fear is perhaps man's most basic instinct.

Some horror stories use gruesome and nauseating descriptions of bodily harm. These are called "splatter" novels. They are not in favour with NPLS and are rarely purchased.

SCIENCE FICTION (SF)

This is a very broad genre and a hard one to define. It concerns itself with the universe and man's place in it, as well as man's relation to nature and conflict with it.

Science fiction is speculative in nature, especially about the potential uses of science and the future of humankind on this world or any other. It encourages readers to think for

themselves about the future as well as the past and the present.

There are numerous themes and types of science fiction, some of which are described thus:

Hard science: this form of SF plays with hard sciences like mathematics (4th dimension, spatial in time); cybernetics (artificial intelligence, mind of the machine); meteorology; archaeology; exobiology (study of life forms beyond earth); medicine; astronomy; physiology (effect of space travel on human body); chemistry (drugs); technology; etc.

Space opera: naive space adventure stories of extravagant and fantastic dimensions, usually involving galactic empires and their space battles.

New wave: derived from the soft sciences such as psychology, sociology and religion, these stories treat human nature realistically through topics such as sex, drugs, oriental religions, art, morality, ecology, overpopulation, politics, gender issues, feminism, etc.

Alien beings: monsters, humanoids, disembodied intelligences. Maybe invaders of earth or encountered on other planets. Relationships between them and humans provide limitless possibilities.

Alternate and parallel worlds: offer chance to explore what would have happened if history had been different, etc.

Antiscience: fears that technology will destroy humankind.

Apocalypse: survival after almost total destruction of the earth due to nuclear holocaust, plague, etc.

Dystopia/utopia: speculates on the most ideal society (utopia) or the most awful (dystopia). Includes social criticism, biological tinkering, politics, human nature, etc.

Messianic/religious: euphoric future brought to pass by saviour, messiah or superman offering redemption and salvation.

Ecology: humankind's relation to the environment, including corruption and control.

Robots, androids, cyborgs: interrelationship of human and machine.

Comedy and poetry: includes satirization of SF themes.

FANTASY

Overlaps as a genre with science fiction and many authors are active in both. The distinction is that "SF follows and obeys the laws of nature in the universe as we know it, however fantastic some of its devices may seem; while fantasy strictly follows a set of laws formulated by each author for an imaginary world, rules which need have no congruence with the laws of nature as we know them but which must conform to their own logic" (Rosenberg). SF and fantasy share, however, a preoccupation with other worlds.

Some themes and types:

Sword-and-sorcery or heroic fantasy: believed to be the oldest theme in literature. The heroic human rights wrongs, is always on a quest and has to fight numerous supernatural enemies, demons and wizards with the help of magical weapons and amazing powers.

World of faerie: adult treatment of elves, goblins, fairies.

Mythology and legend: imaginative retellings of established myths and legends.

Humorous fantasy: unlikely events produce amusing results. Often very tongue-in-cheek.

The human characters in fantasy are often ordinary people from the everyday world suddenly transported to a fantasy world where some great task is likely to await them, usually a role in helping to save the fantasy world from destruction by evil forces. Although fantasy can explore human nature, the characters are usually one-dimensional.

Fantasy offers its readers an escape from the drudgery of their lives into a new, magical world where wonderful adventures can be enjoyed. Plot and atmosphere are very important. Although much fantasy can be described as formula fiction, the genre has many remarkably imaginative and sophisticated authors. Like SF, this is a genre open to experimentation.

MYSTERY

One of the smallest categories, "Mystery" includes stories about inexplicable events such as ghosts, occult happenings, religious mysteries, etc. No horror, or very little.

ANIMALS

Includes any story about animals in realistic situations, eg. survival in the wild, pet stories, farm animals, etc. Animals

in unrealistic situations, eg. speaking, thinking like humans or having human-type adventures, usually go in Fantasy.

SEA

Many sea stories are historical, dealing particularly with the British naval wars of the 18th and 19th centuries when Britain was the world's dominant seafaring nation. Many others, however, are set during the two world wars of the 20th century. Characters are one-dimensional although sometimes based on actual historical figures, and plots are stereotyped.

WESTERNS

Most Westerns are cowboy stories that feature simple conflicts between good and evil, set in the American west in the 19th century. They are based "in a dream of freedom in a world of unspoilt nature" (Rosenberg). Stereotyped plots and characters, with the emphasis on action.

WAR

This category indicates books that deal with actual military operations and does not include books that happen to be set in wartime but do not describe battles in detail. War books can be about any war in history and are almost always based on actual wars. The main interest is in the action, with characters there to support the plot.

HUMOUR

Some humorous writing goes with its genre, eg. humorous fantasy, humorous SF, humorous crime. Otherwise, any novel is categorised as Humour if its overriding tone is humorous.

FAMILY SAGAS

These stories often describe several generations of one family, commonly starting in the late 19th or early 20th century. The family's fortunes can change dramatically as the years go by. Favourite themes are immigrant families rising to wealth and power in America over a number of generations, or landed aristocracy in Britain losing wealth and power. Some run to several volumes. No great depth of characterisation.

HISTORICAL

Any stories set before the First World War (1914). Historical novels can be divided into two groupings: authentic historical background and characters, or lightweight stories such as romances or sagas, with a historical setting that is more backdrop than anything else.

The second group is much larger than the first, offering readers an escape into a past world of glamour and adventure. The "Historical" category thus covers a broad range of reading, from serious literature to simple costume romance.

ROMANCE

Some overlapping occurs with Historical (see above). Romance is written principally for women who want to escape to a romantic world of their dreams. Romances are usually written to strict formulas and their readers do not like these formulas to be meddled with.

Themes and types:

"Womanly" romance: contemporary in setting, with home and marriage the passport to a happy life.

Soap opera romance: sin, suffering and retribution saturate the pages in this type of romance, which is heavy on afflictions such as divorce, love triangles, adultery, illness, etc. "True confessions" fit in here.

Doctor and nurse: young nurse and romantic, god-like doctor find "love among the bedpans".

Romantic suspense: these books contain adventure and suspense but the heroine's romantic involvements are of paramount concern.

Historical romance: creates a historical atmosphere (no extensive details) in which to place the romance.

"Sweet-and-savage" or "hot" historicals (also known as "bodice rippers") are characterised by lush historical settings and by sex scenes frequently so graphic as to verge on soft porn. For female readers who want unrealistic but explicit love fantasies.

RELATIONSHIPS

A very broad category that covers subjects such as

relationships among human beings, eg. realistic love stories (non-formula), realistic family stories (not family sagas), feminist novels, alternative lifestyle novels, studies of human nature, and so on. Characterisation is more important than plot and can go to great depths.

Much of the more serious fiction is put into this category, including most of the classics. Many readers find "Relationships" novels satisfying on a level that formula fiction cannot reach.

GENERAL

Whatever fits into none of the above, but mostly of a more serious nature. For example, a political novel with little real interaction between the characters - more a study of ideas - could go here.

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Moran, Heather. Spy thriller still on a high. Daily News, June 29, 1990

Sherman, Steve. Horror spreads across the country. Publishers Weekly, Dec 4, 1987

APPENDIX TWO

**SOME EXAMPLES OF ADULT NOVELS REJECTED, AND THE REASONS
GIVEN FOR REJECTION, AT NPLS BOOK SELECTION BUYING MEETINGS
DURING THE 1980s: BOOK SELECTION RECORDS 1992.**

Burroughs, William

(Title not recorded)

Reasons for rejection: "Homosexual act p.10-11. Revolting descriptions p.17-19. More revolting descriptions p. 35, 39, 76-7, 82-3. Homosexuality (sic) throughout."

Date: 5.6.1981.

Donleavy, J.P.

Schultz

Reasons for rejection: "Bad language."

Date: 22.5.1981.

Gaunt, Graham

The incomer

Reasons for rejection:

"1. Coarse descriptions of sexual encounters.

2. Fair amount of swearing."

Date: 9.6.1981

Lesley, Warren

The stars of Texas

Reasons for rejection:

“1. Sex: p.10, 126, 166, 304.

2. Rape p.90-1.

3. Incest p.134.

4. Swearing p.248, 313.”

Date: 12.6.1981.

Lufton, Betty Jean

I'm still me

Reasons for rejection: “Passage on condoms, etc.”

Date: 24.7.1981

Leonard, Elmore

City Primeval

Reasons for rejection: “Black, white sex.”

Date: 7.8.1981.

Sanders, Lawrence

The third deadly sin

Reasons for rejection: “Violence, gory, sex”.

Date: 15.8.81

Moss, Rosie

The school master

Reasons for rejection: “Like Wessel Ebersohn - South Africa - torture, etc.”

Date: 15.8.1981.

Boyd, Willian

On the Yankee station

Reasons for rejection: "Risky."

Date: 15.8.1981.

Morrison, Toni

Tar baby

Reasons for rejection: "Sex, bad language."

Date: 21.8.1981.

Foster, Margaret

Marital rites

Reasons for rejection: "Sex."

Date: 19.9.1981.

Dunning, D.

Simon's wife

Reasons for rejection: "Oral sex."

Date: 19.9.1981.

Lamb, Nancy

Gentlemen callers

Reasons for rejection: "Obscene phone calls."

Date: 19.9.1981.

Govender, Ronnie

The lahnee's pleasure

Reasons for rejection: "Swearing."

Date: 16.10.1981.

Oates, Joyce Carol

A sentimental education

Reasons for rejection: "Sex."

Date: 13.11.1981.

Vonnegut, Kurt

Palm Sunday

Reasons for rejection: "Bad language."

Date: 11.12.1981.

Wilson, Colin

Poltergeist

Reasons for rejection: "Blasphemy."

Date: 19.2.1982.

Perriam, Wendy

After purple

Reasons for rejection: "Bannable, blasphemous, sex and swearing."

Date: 23.4.1982.

Wallace, Irving

The seven minutes

Reasons for rejection: "Violence, swearing and sex."

Date: 12.5.1982.

Boyle, T. Correghan

Water music

Reasons for rejection: "Sex and swearing."

Date: 4.6.1982.

Chisholm, Matt

MacAllister on the Commanche Crossing

Reasons for rejection: "Too much swearing."

Date: 16.7.1982.

Piercy, Marge

Braided lives

Reasons for rejection: "Sex and swearing."

Date: 23.7.1982.

Wolff, Tobias

Hunters in the snow

Reasons for rejection: "Swearing."

Date: 18.2.1983.

Leonard, Elmore

Split images

Reasons for rejection: "Swearing twice on one page."

Date: 15.4.1983.

SouEIF, Ahdaf

Aisha

Reasons for rejection: "Lesbian lovemaking p.96-7."

Date: 12.8.1983.

Wambaugh, Joseph

The Delta Star

Reasons for rejection: "Language - filthy stuff!"

Date: 12.8.1983.

Haviland, Diana

Defy the storm

Reasons for rejection: "Explicit lovemaking p.32-3; sex, sex and more p.73; sexual orgy p.160; rape p.246-7; more rape p.253-4."

Date:19.8.1983.

Schaeffer, S.F.

The madness of a seduced woman

Reasons for rejection: "Sex and violence."

Date: 10.8.1984.

Beauman, Sally

Destiny

Reasons for rejection: "p.21 fellatio; p.22 sex; p.32 bad language; p.40-45 sex; p.98-99 fellatio; p.139, 158-60 dirty old man; p.217-220 fellatio and homosexual sex with young boy; p.246-248 oral sex; p.289 sex; p.295 sex; p.310-313 sex; p.461 fellatio; p.547 oral sex.

Date 3.7.87.

Men on Men: Best new gay fiction

Reasons for rejection: "This book is bannable."

Date: 24.7.87.

Leavitt, David

The lost language of cranes

Reasons for rejection: "p.80-2 homosexual sex; p.101 homosexual sex."

Date: 30.10.1987.

Pizzey, Erin

First lady

Reasons for rejection: "p.100 lesbian sex; p.322-3 oral sex."

Date: 30.10.1987.

Rice, Anne

Belinda

Reasons for rejection: "p.118 oral sex; p.237-8 oral sex."

Date: 30.10.1987.

Theroux, Paul

The black house

Reasons for rejection: "p.156-8 oral sex; p.237-8 oral sex."

Date: 30.10.1987.

Mars-Jones, Adam and Edmund White

The darker proof - stories from a crisis

Reasons for rejection: "p.238-9 homosexual sex."

Date: 27.11.1987.

Kincaid, D.

The sunset bomber

Reasons for rejection: "p.52 lesbian oral sex; p.60 sex; p.166 sex; p.192-3 lesbian oral sex".

Date: 27.11.1987.

Mordden, Ethan

I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore: tales from gay Manhattan

Reasons for rejection: "Gay male stories but with too much sexual candidness for the local general public."

Date: 27.11.1987.

THE

RIGHT BOOK

**Book Selection Policy of
the Natal Provincial
Library Service**

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APPENDIX THREE



68861

1989



**Boekeuringsbeleid van
die Natalse Provinsiale
Biblioteekdiens**

DIE

REGTE BOEK

PREFACE

Books and other library material have been acquired since 1952 for the Natal Provincial Library Service and book selection has taken place from the beginning.

The first post for a full-time book-selector was created during 1970 and Miss Barbara Bee was appointed. For several years she made a considerable contribution to the development of a book selection policy and system, but nothing was put in writing although the need for a written document was always felt.

During 1987 it was finally decided to put the policy and practice in writing. The staff of the Book Selection Section started reading relevant literature and a draft policy was drawn up. The draft was circulated amongst the staff and completed in 1988.

This document is now published as a guide to the staff of the Library Service and the affiliated libraries. It must be seen as a starting point and recommendations and comment will be welcome.

Nothing is so good that it cannot be improved.

C. J. Fourie - 5 APR 1989

CHIEF, LIBRARY SERVICE

NATAL PROVINCIAL LIBRARY SERVICE

BOOK SELECTION POLICY

1 Corinthians 10

23. "All things are lawful,"
but not all things are helpful.
"All things are lawful,"
but not all things build up.

24. Let no one seek his own good,
but the good of his neighbor.

1. The aim of the Provincial Library Service is:

To provide, in co-operation with departments and sections of the Administration, local authorities and communities, library services of high quality to the inhabitants of the Province.

2. The public served

The communities to which the Library Service makes library materials available comprise people with a wide range of cultures, educational levels, religions, ages and degrees of sophistication. Material is selected for these groups according to their distinctive needs. In the same way library materials are also provided to the departmental libraries serving the specific needs of departments and sections of the Administration. The specialists served by each library normally indicate their needs.

3. The educational process

The public library forms part of the educational system of the country and contributes to the formal, non-formal and informal facets of the educational process. South Africa forms part of the Western civilized world - a cultural milieu which presupposes a Christian morality, ethos and mores. The public library should thus execute its educational task in such a way that it will contribute to and be in step with the Christian Western Civilization. In the book selection process the Library Service must thus take cognisance of the requirements of Christian morality, but must also take cognisance of the realities of human nature, and of the fact that characters in novels, including novels of literary merit, may not act according to Christian principles. Moreover, other religions and cultures must be respected and provision should be made for literature about them.

4. Cultural enrichment

The total educational process, from childhood to old age, is aimed at transferring the culture of one generation to the next. If this is not done effectively the result will be a shallowing or even decay of the culture. The culture must thus be transferred to the next generation to promote the cultural enrichment of the communities in a harmonious way.

5. Conservation of cultural heritage

It is essential that the people involved in book selection should have sensitivity and understanding in their approach to the cultures of the communities for which they are providing material. History, language, social structures, religion, art and music form the fibre of the total cultural heritage of the community. Material that may be slanderous, degrading or have a destructive effect on the cultural structure of any community should not be included in the bookstock.

6. The reading needs of the readers in our communities

- (a) Information needs vary widely, from simple facts for the private individual to knowledge for professional and administrative purposes.
- (b) Orientation need. This is the need of a layman to find out more about a topic or process, and is usually satisfied by popular or introductory works on the topic.
- (c) Personality development. This is the need to be enriched and to come to a better understanding of human nature and moral values, resulting in a broadening of the reader's experience.
- (d) Companionship. Many people are lonely and choose to use library material to fill the need of companionship.

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- (e) Aesthetic appreciation. Most readers make use of library material because they want to enjoy and appreciate the wide variety of aesthetically beautiful facets contained in library material.
- (f) Escapism. Many readers are living under difficult, unhappy and monotonous conditions, and they have a need to use library material to escape from their difficulties and the pressures of everyday life.
- (g) Relaxation. In our modern, high-pressure lifestyle, many readers have a need to read for relaxation - to unwind and enjoy the quietude that an enjoyable book can bring.
- (h) Pleasure. Many readers so much enjoy the activity of reading a good book that it does not matter to which literary genre, it belongs. This is a valid need which should not be denied to the reader.
- (i) Use of leisure time. Many people have more leisure time than ever before and the reading of books, as well as the use of other forms of library materials, forms an important part of the use of leisure.
- (j) Bibliotherapy. Books may be used, whether deliberately or unconsciously, for the solving of personal problems.

7. Selection versus Censorship

The Provincial Library Service is not involved in censorship but has the task of selecting from a great many titles of varying quality and usefulness the most suitable books to serve the reading needs of the public of Natal.

8. Internal security

The book selection process must be implemented with an awareness of factors such as subversion against the state, and while works that are responsibly critical of society will be acceptable, works promoting revolutionary resistance will not.

9. Public funds

The Library Service is using public funds and thus has the responsibility of spending in a very careful and meticulous way, not buying unnecessary, useless material or material that will have a damaging influence on readers. On the other hand, there is the responsibility of acquiring books that will contribute to the well-being of the community - books that should not be left out of the bookstock.

10. The task of the Book Selection Section

It is the task of the Book Selection Section to :

- (a) work through the books sent from the book-sellers as appro copies and pre-select material that seems suitable for further attention;
- (b) check the books against the stock records and sort them into categories;
- (c) evaluate the books (fiction and juvenile) and write meaningful reviews;
- (d) keep up to date with the current book publishing by scanning journals and newspaper reviews;
- (e) prepare lists of non-fiction books proposed for selection to be sent to the regions for perusal.

11. The task of the Book Selection Committee

- (a) The Book Selection Committee is an important part of the book selection system. The selectors, being professional librarians, have to assess the books. The selectors bring to the table :
 - (i) their respective backgrounds, attitudes and beliefs;
 - (ii) their experience in life;
 - (iii) their knowledge of the reading needs of the people of Natal;
 - (iv) their knowledge of books and book-stock in the system.

- (b) The Selection Committee is assisted by reviews from journals and newspapers, as well as the reviews of members of the Book Selection section.

- (c) The Book Selection Committee has to make a recommendation whether a title should be bought or not and in what quantity. These recommendations should be the result of a consensus decision of the Committee. If consensus cannot be reached, the matter must be referred to the Director, Library Service, for a final decision. The Director has the authority to veto any decision or to amend the quantities recommended.

- (d) Booksellers and affiliated librarians are encouraged to attend the meetings.

12. The task of the reviewer

The book reviewing staff should have a thorough theoretical background of the principles of book reviewing and of the book selection policy of the Library Service. It is necessary for a reviewer to take cognisance of the use made of the books in the public libraries.

13. The task of the regional staff attending the book selection meetings

(a) Fiction and juvenile works

In coming to a conclusion whether to purchase and in what quantity, the regional staff

should read the reviews and be guided by them while at the same time considering the needs of their regions.

(b) Non-Fiction

(i) The list of books proposed for selection is checked and discussed in the Regional Library and forms the basis for the final selection process. Each regional representative should scrutinize and evaluate the books and indicate which number of copies will be needed for their region.

(ii) A very great responsibility rests on the shoulders of the regional staff in that they in isolation decide on the books to be bought for their region. Care should be taken to develop the non-fiction bookstock in a balanced way.

(c) The Reference Library has its own policy and fulfills three purposes :

(i) to provide information and research material in response to demand and reasonable potential demand;

(ii) to supplement the non-fiction collections of the Regional Libraries;

(iii) to develop a comprehensive collection of important books.

14. The mechanics of book selection

The following consists of broad guidelines that should be judiciously applied.

(a) Each book should be selected on merit and those librarians involved in the selection process should, as professionals, strive for objectivity, holding in abeyance personal prejudice and opinion.

(b) Specific needs of the public should be taken into consideration. Information on these needs should be continuously fed back to the Selection Committee by the Regional staff and public librarians. Librarians from Book Selection and other sections should also travel regularly to affiliated libraries to gather feedback.

(c) During selection the objective assessments of the book reviewers should be the primary consideration in determining the worth of books.

(d) Each book should be assessed as a whole and individual passages should not be judged in isolation. Consideration should be given to the validity of and necessity for their inclusion.

(e) If a book reviewer is in doubt whether to recommend a book, or the meeting is in doubt whether to purchase it, second and even third opinions must be sought on the whole book, and all these opinions presented to the Book Selection Committee for decision.

- (f) Books should not be rejected on the grounds that the subject matter is controversial or unpleasant, but must be judged on the way in which the subject is handled.
- (g) All sides to issues, provided the approach is reasonable, should be represented in the bookstock.
- (h) Books should be rejected by the Book Selection Committee on the following grounds :

offensive gratuitous sex (written for cheap titillation)

racial slander

religious slander

uninteresting

poor physical appearance

poor physical durability

excessive use of bad language

threat to internal security

Rejected books are entered on the microfiche catalogue.

- (i) A fairly extensive collection of novels that are accepted classics, as well as modern novels considered to be of exceptional literary merit, should be developed in the Reference Library and made available on request.

15. Adult non-fiction

15.1 Contents

The book's worth must be assessed as far as possible within our limits, using where available the aid of reviews written by experts in various review journals, such as Choice, British Book News, Library Journal, etc. The contents of the book should be accurate, and up to date where relevant. The author's authority should be gauged and attention given to his knowledgeability, objectivity, sensitivity, level of readership, literary command and style. Non-fiction material comes in categories both of information and leisure reading.

Ready reference material is bought for the Reference Library and standard public libraries.

15.2 Accessibility

In the case of informational material, the book's content must be readily accessible to users by means of contents pages, indices and pagination. The text should be logically presented, documented with bibliographies and references and furnished with glossaries where necessary.

15.3 Presentation

Format and print must be of acceptable standards, together with the dustjacket's appearance, the layout of the text and the quality of the illustrations. The price should be taken into consideration. Coffee table books are assessed

for their subject coverage, value in display and promotion of the appreciation of books. The visual element, perhaps more than the written word, can encourage group interaction, e.g. discussion, etc.

15.4 Durability

The book's physical strength must be adequate, including the quality of its binding and its paper, and whether it is hardback or paperback. Paperbacks require particular circumspection regarding their durability. Ringbinding is acceptable in certain subjects, e.g. music.

15.5 Usefulness

Books must be selected with the Natal Provincial Library Services's present subject coverage in mind. For example, books of slightly inferior quality may be bought if there is nothing else in stock on that subject. Where there is coverage in stock, the scope and treatment of the subject in new books should be compared with the books already available. The level of treatment in general must be assessed, e.g. whether it is comprehensive, scholarly, introductory, etc. All levels qualify for purchase except the very highly specialised.

16. Adult fiction

16.1 The book must be categorised, e.g. thriller, romance, science fiction, and the best of each category bought. Each genre has a different function and is read for different reasons,

which must be taken into consideration. Elements such as plot and characterization are assessed according to genre (plot is of greatest importance in thrillers, characterization in relationships, for instance).

16.2 Style, quality of writing, readability, authenticity, etc., must be assessed, and reviews in journals are consulted whenever available for possible fresh insights.

16.3 Popularity of the genre, theme and author, separately or together, must be considered. Small numbers are bought of books not anticipated to have wide appeal, provided they are considered of sufficient merit.

16.4 Physical appearance and condition are important the dustjacket should if possible be attractive (otherwise borrowers show little interest) and the binding durable, whether hardback or paperback. Purchase of paperbacks may be preferred to hardbacks because of the former's often more inviting appearance.

17. Juvenile fiction

17.1 In the case of picture books, the illustrator shares equal importance with the author, and text and illustrations should complement each other, both in mood and description of events. As wide a variety of illustrative styles as possible should be included, to stimulate the child's aesthetic development.

- 17.2 Imaginative quality must be a significant consideration in juvenile literature, together with readability and enjoyment. Comic strips are not usually purchased.
- 17.3 Language and vocabulary development are important in books for younger children, and stories must be suited to age levels in all cases. Particularly for older children, the story's topicality carries great weight. Teenage problems must be sensitively handled by the author, and sex and bad language require careful vetting.
- 17.4 Board books are only bought if there is space for processing.
- 17.5 Pop-up books are bought only for display.
18. Juvenile non-fiction
- 18.1 Juvenile non-fiction material is also made available as a supplement to school education, with particular reference to school projects. Books are rejected for poor physical condition, poor contents and for subjects not in demand. Topicality, objectivity and currency are important factors, as well as the quality of illustrations.
- 18.2 Layout is important, including contents lists and indices. Binding must be durable.
- 18.3 Sex education and the treatment of family problems are carefully examined before purchase.

- 18.4 The needs of particular groups of children should be remembered, so that material not considered for general purchase may be acquired for them.
19. Young adult
- Care must be taken to develop a balanced selection of material. Important considerations, especially in books dealing with contemporary life, are the sensitivity with which the characters' problems are handled and the level of readability. Contemporary themes with an element of guidance for the reader are in particular demand. Sex and bad language should be approached with circumspection.
20. Easy reading material ("Makliks")
- A special collection of books with simple texts should be developed for readers of all ages who are newly literate, learning another language or experiencing reading difficulties.
21. Large print
- Large print books of both fiction and non-fiction are acquired for readers, especially the elderly, with weak eyesight.

22. Zulu and Xhosa

Most juvenile and adult books published are bought.

23. Foreign languages

Provision of foreign language books is a courtesy service, with purchase depending on availability and demand. Books are considered on merit.

24. Procedure for complaints

Complaints about material felt to be offensive may be reported either to the Director or the Regional staff, who will request Book Selection to investigate and report back to the Book Selection Committee for any further action deemed appropriate.

Klagtes oor materiaal wat as aanstootlik of krenkend beskou word, kan of aan die Direkteur, of aan die Streekspersoneel voorgelê word, wat Boekekeuring dan sal versoek om ondersoek in te stel. Hulle bevinding word aan die Boekekeuringskomitee voorgelê wat dan daarop sal reageer.

24. Prosedure vir klagtes

Vooriening van boeke in vreemde tale is 'n hoftikheidsdiens en aankope hang af van beskikbaarheid en aanvraag. Boeke word op meriete beoordeel.

23. Vreemde tale

APPENDIX FOUR

ADULT ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FICTION SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to examine whether recreational English language fiction written in popular style is relevant to the needs of your users and of assistance improving English second-language literacy skills of black adult library users who are able to read in English.

The purpose of the survey is not to test the performance of you or your library but to look for ways in which the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Library Service can serve your users' needs more adequately. The survey is being done on an anonymous basis and your library will not be mentioned by name. Please take as long as you like to answer questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Please try to answer all the questions.

1. What do you think should be the most important goal of this library? Provision of materials for (please give 5 points for what you think is most important and 1 for least):

Information provision	/ /
Education support	/ /
Recreation	/ /
Literacy support	/ /
Other (please specify)	/ /

2. Which of the following do your adult users most want to read (please give 5 points for the most important and 1 point for the least):

English language fiction / /

Study-related material, e.g. dictionaries, reference books or textbooks / /

Newspapers / /

Magazines / /

General non-fiction material / /

Other (please specify) / /

3. Rate the following types of reading material in terms of helping your adult users with literacy (please give 5 points for the most important and 1 point for the least):

1. Popular English fiction / /

2. Easy readers / /

3. Magazines / /

4. Newspapers / /

Other (please specify) / /

4. Can you estimate how many of your adult users read English language fiction?

0%	/ /
1 - 25%	/ /
26 - 50%	/ /
51 - 75%	/ /
76 - 100%	/ /

5. What are the reasons, in your opinion, that adult users read English language fiction? (Please give 5 points for the reason you think is most important and 1 for least.)

Improve English language skills and reading ability generally / /

Study (set works) / /

Pleasure/recreation / /

Other (please specify) / /

6. If there are adult users who do not read English language fiction, what do you think are the reasons for this? (Please give 5 points for what you think are the most

important reasons and 1 point for the least.) If all your adult users read English language fiction, please go to Question 7.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. They prefer to read in another language | / / |
| 2. They are only interested in study | / / |
| 3. They prefer magazines and newspapers | / / |
| 4. The fiction provided is not to their taste | / / |
| 5. Too difficult for their level of literacy | / / |
| Other (please specify) | / / |

7. Can you suggest changes in the English language fiction provided by KZNPLS that might make adult users want to read it more? (Please give 5 points for the changes or developments that you consider the most important and 1 point for the least.)

- | | |
|---|-----|
| Material to improve basic English literacy (easy readers) | / / |
| Light, popular novels | / / |
| Novels set in Africa | / / |
| Novels set in South Africa | / / |
| Other (please specify) | / / |

8. In your opinion, would reader guidance, i.e. help from the librarian in choosing what to read, increase the use of English fiction by adults? If yes, rate type of guidance (please give 5 points for the most important and 1 point for the least):

Person-to-person guidance	/ /
Posters	/ /
Lists (Bibliographies)	/ /
Displays	/ /
Other (please specify)	/ /

9. Do your adult users read less popular forms of English language fiction for pleasure or only for study? If for pleasure, what types of fiction do they like? (Please give 5 points for the type most in demand and 1 point for least.)

Classics	/ /
African Writers Series	/ /
Black American writers	/ /
Feminist fiction	/ /
Gay fiction	/ /
Other serious novels (please specify)	/ /

10. As you may be aware, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Library Service categorizes popular fiction into various types or genres, eg. romance, suspense. Can you rate the popularity of each category among your adult English language fiction readers? For clarification I have brought a guide containing descriptions of each category as used by the KZNPLS.

10.1 ROMANCE

Very popular / /

Popular / /

Fairly popular / /

Not popular / /

Don't know/Not sure / /

10.2 SUSPENSE (THRILLERS)

Very popular / /

Popular / /

Fairly popular / /

Not popular / /

Don't know/Not sure / /

10.3 CRIME (DETECTIVE STORIES)

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.4 HORROR

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.5 ADVENTURE

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.6 WESTERNS

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.7 MYSTERY (GHOSTS, THE OCCULT)

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.8 WAR STORIES

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.9 SEA STORIES

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.10 FANTASY

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Not sure/Don't know	/ /

10.11 SCIENCE FICTION

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.12 HISTORICAL

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.13 FAMILY SAGAS

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.14 NOVELS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.15 HUMOUR

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.16 ANIMAL STORIES

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

10.17 SHORT STORIES

Very popular	/ /
Popular	/ /
Fairly popular	/ /
Not popular	/ /
Don't know/Not sure	/ /

11. Do these categories serve any purpose, eg. are they useful to you in helping guide

Adult users?	/ /
Very useful	/ /
Useful	/ /
Not useful	/ /

12. Given the choice, which of the following would you adult users prefer to read (please select only one category):

English-language fiction	/ /
Zulu-language fiction	/ /
No preference	/ /

13. Is there anything else you would like to say about the provision or use of adult English-language fiction in your library?

Thank you for giving me your time.