

## Introduction

### What is Literary Media?

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#### Introduction

It has been over a decade since, in her groundbreaking book *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008), N. Katherine Hayles challenged the rigid, exclusive and somewhat obsolete institutional and ideological connotations of the term ‘literature’ in a fast-transforming media landscape. She called for a ‘broader category that encompasses the kind of creative ... artworks that interrogate the histories, contexts and productions of literature, including as well the verbal art of literature proper’ (45). This proposed category, called ‘the literary’, reflects the seismic impact of contemporary digitalisation and the increasing cross-pollination of literary studies with such diverse disciplines and movements as media and cultural studies, social, environmental and computational sciences, pop, fan and participatory culture.

This volume situates its exploration of ‘literary media’ against this backdrop, asking what happens when we expand the horizons of what can be considered literary still further. Whereas Hayles’ concept still posits the literary as a distinct category, and confines itself to works that define themselves as creative/artistic, our definition of ‘literary media’ includes popular cultural forms and media and cultural texts that do not necessarily overtly align themselves to the literary. This may also include paratextual materials, and an approach and method that includes discussion of specific aspects of the socio-political, industry and commercial contexts, as well as analysis of specific texts or works. Fundamentally, instead of keeping the literary and the media as separate categories, we focus on an interdependence of the literary and its diverse forms of mediation that is increasingly apparent in this era of global late capitalism. The term ‘literary media’ for us therefore far exceeds notions and connotations of ‘art’ and unsettles the continuing privileging of ‘literature proper’. Our formulation derives from and has particular resonance for scholars working at the intersection of

literary and media studies and reflects wider shifts in both institutional structures and the long established boundaries or silos of traditional academic disciplines.

A number of recent works (Barekat et al. 2017; Murray 2018) examine how electronic and digital cultures, especially, have transformed literature both in terms of the kinds of texts produced but also more broadly with regards to how those texts are accessed, circulated and evaluated. As Murray has argued, digitalisation and, in particular, debates about the 'future of the book' have also shown the need for sociological approaches alongside the text-based, close reading of traditional literary criticism. Rather than a focus on texts in isolation, literary media instead examines media ecosystems or ecologies that are shaped by a 'convergence of literary, visual, and material cultures' (Collins 2010: 8). As a consequence, networks, infrastructures and platforms themselves become the focus of attention as much as the works or texts produced on and by them.

The interdependence of the literary and its media is both brought to the fore by digital culture, and retrospectively thrown into relief as an historical phenomenon, understudied outside of book history and historically-informed sociologies of literature. In practical terms, this can mean revisiting 'old media' and specific cultural texts through the lens of the literary, and explicitly addressing how our concept of the literary often elides or marginalises mediation and materiality in the attempt to lay claim to the kinds of universalising that result in maintaining the literary as a separate, elite category. It also highlights hitherto under-acknowledged tensions between literature and popular culture, as adaptations and transmedia franchises redraw boundaries between media forms and platforms, and problematise the privileging of the literary. For many theorists (e.g. Collins 2010), such a development is to be celebrated as a means of reconnecting literature with broader-based audiences and enabling renewed forms of participation from those previously marginalised or excluded. It means that the intimate relationship between literature and media being reconfigured by online digital technologies needs to be examined for both continuities and radical breaks with the past.

Most studies relevant to literary media look beyond traditional literary criticism to media and cultural studies, cultural sociology, and book history to better understand

how the transformation is taking place with respect to cultural and creative industries, shifts in cultural authority, and empowerment of readers and audiences. Typically, they look beyond the close analysis of text to explore literature as a social as much as a private activity, and to consider the role of paratextual and extratextual materials in shaping what we understand by the literary. To some extent, this results from the very ways in which ‘media’ are understood by these disciplines – for example, as both something that can be defined in terms of formal and material characteristics, but also in terms of what they ‘do’ (Rippl 2015), or their economic and social functions (Bolter and Grusin 2000). According to these views of ‘media’ they must always be conceived relationally: as ‘old media’ respond to the new, and ‘new media’ position themselves against the ‘old’, with the cultural work of recognising what counts as media seen as ongoing and subject to change. This is especially important as we increasingly recognise and challenge the ways in which media of expression for some groups and individuals may be excluded or marginalised.

This volume of essays sets out new ways of approaching and analysing literary media across a range of genres, styles and materialities, including and transcending conventional notions of fiction, poetry, performance, graphic arts, creative nonfiction, paratextual and extratextual material. Moreover, whereas many studies and cognate terms (as discussed further below) focus their attention on avant garde or experimental works, this volume and our concept of literary media is intended to recognise its presence all around us: encompassing and bridging popular cultural as well as classical and canonical literary forms and practices.

Our authors include writers and practitioners with experience of working in the cultural industries and engaging with readers and audiences from a range of cultural backgrounds. Their work explores what literary media is; who participates in it; where we might encounter it; how it can work; and why we might want to study it. Inclusive in its approach, this Companion includes contributions that extend these discussions in terms of both geography and history and which engage with a wide range of theoretical perspectives and methods.

## Aims of This Book

At this time there is no single volume that explores the concept of literary media, so this Companion will be a unique resource and, it is hoped, a landmark text that will define this emergent field. Each of the chapters has been specially commissioned for this volume: providing fresh and original insights into the wide range of literary media practices represented. This Companion is aimed at scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including literature, media and cultural studies, library and information science, new media studies and book history. Discussion around the intersections between literature and media are increasingly informing both teaching and research in these areas, and literature is increasingly multi and transmedial – so much so that its long-lasting alignment with print is fast dissolving. In addition to challenging the print and narrative dominated discussions of many existing studies even of emerging electronic and digital literatures, we set out to include diverse examples of performance, live events, graphic arts, games, creative nonfiction and poetry. The term literary media is new, and this volume will help to disseminate and establish it through the examination of specific examples of literary media to define, redefine and interrogate existing and emerging understandings of what the term may mean for theorists, educators and practitioners.

## Social/Cultural Context

Studies of literature that engage with contemporary media and the digital revolution often tend to focus on technological change and new affordances, and to treat literature and ‘other’ media as distinct or even conflicting. Two notable exceptions to this are Collins’s *Bring on the Books For Everybody* (2010) and Murray’s *The Adaptation Industry* (2012). Both treat literature and media as co-existent and mutually influential, and both also engage in depth with trends and wider shifts in the cultural industries. Both studies also embrace popular cultural forms within their analysis of the literary and are unafraid to discuss how literary texts are bought, sold and promoted in the cultural marketplace. Both writers are a major influence on how we understand and define ‘literary media’ and contribute to ongoing discussion with a foreword (Collins) and chapter (Murray) for this volume. Another key influence of these studies is the increased focus on reception, again not rigidly distinguishing

between readers, audiences and (to a lesser extent) users, but demonstrating how in the contemporary cultural marketplace engagement with cultural texts crosses media as well as notions of taste, modes of reception and socio-economic backgrounds.

Murray's book also concerns itself with what she calls the 'feedback effect' – how film adaptations but also associated promotions and merchandising such as books covers may enhance sales of the adapted work of literature, and how fans of the book and/or the adaptation may go on to produce their own unauthorised adaptations in the form of fanfiction, fan art etc. Similarly, Gray has argued persuasively that contemporary theorists of cultural texts need to engage with and take seriously paratextual materials that have previously been too easily dismissed as only of significance to marketers or brand managers. Instead, he demonstrates through his analysis of specific case studies 'the significant primary power that these supposedly secondary intertexts hold over consumption' (2008: 33), expanding what comes under the remit of the cultural experience to include discussion of trailers, posters, author and cast interviews and the like.

Connecting these groundbreaking studies is a desire to challenge accepted wisdom and orthodoxies about prevailing taste cultures. In the case of Murray, this is made with direct reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whereas for Collins it is primarily the phenomenon of postmodernism that has reconnected literature with a broad-based audience, resulting in a situation whereby 'who reads it, how it is read, where it is read, and even what is read under the heading of literary fiction have all changed in fundamental ways' (2010: 4). The essays in this volume all adopt this more sociological approach to the literary, reflecting the impact of new technologies and the shift towards what Collins calls 'image-based' content, and an understanding of literary culture as 'an exuberantly social activity' (2010: 4). As many theorists have demonstrated, this new sociality and, for some, democratisation of literary cultures have been accelerated by the affordances of the digital and online cultures, and the emergence of 'migratory' media audiences willing to 'go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want' (Jenkins 2006: 2).

For book and cultural historians the paradigm shift away from traditional literary criticism's focus on reading as an intensely private experience is more a necessary

historical check to the relatively recent dominance of this notion in terms of even the relatively short span of print cultures in human history. Thus while social media and Internet forums may have massively magnified the scale and speed of feedback, audience participation and interaction, there are plenty of historical antecedents for many of these activities (see Weedon, this volume). But alongside the greater sense of empowerment that activity on this scale brings, digital technologies and online cultures have also brought greater opportunities for creative expression, often arising out of what may begin as readerly engagement. In turn, this has led to debates and discussions about the fragility of divisions between production and consumption (as in the prosumer), writing and reading (the wreader) and concern that the very notion of ‘the audience’ as a predictable mass of beings no longer has any validity. Alongside discussion of whether we are now ‘post-audience’, questions have also been raised about the continued relevance of notions such as spectatorship (implying a certain passivity) and even the whole notion of the ‘screen’ as something which materially divides or separates people rather than bringing them together in shared activities in shared spaces (see Fizek 2022). Thus in her discussion of the ‘post-transmedia, post-platform specific and platform-agnostic age’, Atkinson (2014: 6) rightly suggested – almost ten years ago – that the mono-media forms and media-specific boundaries of book, film, and game are things of the past.

The rise of fan studies as a discipline has led to fresh reconceptualisations of the literary, and consideration of the ways in which traditional and evolving reading practices may be labelled as ‘fannish’ (Thomas 2011). Creative engagement and play with literary sources has exploded with the advent of online forums and platforms. This engagement may take the form of written stories of varying lengths, but also encompasses fan art and fan videos (vids), while the sources drawn upon also cross media and modalities as fans draw on materials from books, films, video games etc. (see Shao, this volume). As with the debates surrounding contemporary adaptations of literary texts, fan engagement often brings into question notions of ‘before’ and ‘after’, ‘old’ and ‘new’ media challenging as they do chronologies and hierarchies. Moreover, in fan cultures the literary must be understood as part of a ‘multimedia stew’ (Gardner 2008) both from the point of view of the pre-existing texts that fans choose to draw inspiration from, and also from the point of view of the means by which they choose to express themselves (Thomas 2010).

The chapters in this volume are wide-ranging, drawing on approaches and concepts from book history and its focus on modes of production, reception and material cultures, on media and cultural studies' use of quantitative and ethnographic methods, and on literary linguistics' reliance on empirical data. But there are many other movements and influences shaping our emerging understanding of what literary media can and might mean. For example, chapters on autofiction (Dix; Ivansson and Gibbons) and real-world narratives (Hatavara et al.) draw on life writing and investigate its challenges to artificial boundaries between the real and the fictional (or between daily, lived experience and the literary), while contemporary narratology and new materialism constantly question what counts as 'experience' and who or what can record or relay that experience to others. In turn, this connects with important work emerging to decolonise existing disciplines and modes of practice, drawing on non-Western and Indigenous world views and mythologies (Barnes and Cardinal; Mukherjee; Burt and Waldman), queering heteronormativity, or reflecting critically on how we speak of or to disability, animals and the non-human.

Computational approaches to literature and the digital humanities have also had a profound impact on the study of literature. The practice of 'distant reading' employs the latest computational tools to mine information from literary texts and corpora in ways that would be impossible for individual or even teams of readers. In some cases, the methods have already established antecedents for example in corpus linguistics or information studies but, as some of the chapters in this volume demonstrate (Pianzola, Gee), the applications and implications of some of these new methods are only now starting to be realised. Likewise, with the emergence of electronic literature (Erslev, Patti), digital-born fictions (Cox, Bell, Goicoechea, Nair et al., Skains), locative media (Murray, Pullinger and Dovey), games (Bjärstorp and Ragnerstam, Mukherjee, O'Sullivan) and immersive theatre (Westling), definitions of the literary are continually being redefined. Expanding production contexts (streaming content; on demand cultures) and seemingly infinite possibilities for engaging with new literary material make it more and more difficult to generalise about reader/audience experiences. While it is important to acknowledge the increased dominance of large global corporations on cultural production as they crowd out independent producers or simply just swallow them up (see Thompson 2021, also Dietz this volume), new

models of patronage, personalisation and customisation are also springing up, for example authors auctioning off the names of their fictional characters or offering the readers the opportunity to purchase bespoke or personalised content relating to their works. With the debates around fan labour and ‘playbor’ and controversies about works of art or graphic narratives being sold as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) or produced by Artificial Intelligence (AI), it is becoming increasingly impossible to consider works of literature in isolation from the markets, platforms, and production contexts that so define and shape them.

As definitions of the literary change and become permeable, the processes and qualities of creativity also come into question. New technologies and publishing models can increase equalities and creator rights (for example, by making royalty splits and payments swift and direct, offering direct communication with readers, and giving independent creators open access tools or the opportunity to crowdfund projects), but can also create new hierarchies and exploit and undermine existing creative roles. What happens when art is (co-)produced by machines, and digital copies and currency exclude those who cannot (or will not) engage with suitable technologies? For example, many comics readers feel strongly that AI art takes work away from artists, and that NFTs encourage profiteering, exploitation and speculation far beyond that already present in the creative industries. Or are NFT books with unique AI art not so different from a limited edition hardback run with a creator signature or artist sketch? Moral ideologies and emotional responses come into play here alongside stereotypes and archetypes.

For those working in the visual arts, literary media may be a welcome concept that supports and opens up new research possibilities. For example, comics scholarship has often foregrounded the storytelling and narrative properties of the medium, leaving visual impact or material presence underexplored. Approaching comics from a literary media perspective can shift the emphasis from exceptionality onto interconnectedness and invite exploration of the visual, the corporate, or other networked relationships. Similarly, viewing games as literary media allows new research into possible forms, anthropological underpinnings and aesthetic affordances of play. Medium-specific, procedural multimodality becomes the *modus operandi* for

ludonarrative and ludopoetic experiences (Hawreliak 2019), and it allows literary scholarship to join forces with other aesthetic, social and computational disciplines.

The impacts of new publishing materialities also become apparent when we consider literary media. Materiality shapes definitions of the text – in the case of comics, for instance, it often directly informs accepted terminology, which is culturally specific. So in Britain and America the term ‘comics’ foregrounds content and genre, while ‘comic books’ brings in a further reference to the print format, but in other countries different aspects such as history, narratology (e.g. sequentiality) or aesthetic are emphasised. In France comics are ‘*bande dessinées*’ (drawn strips), but in Italian they are ‘*fumetti*’ (puffs of smoke – referencing speech balloons), in Spain they are ‘*tebeo*’ (from the magazine title *T.B.O.*) or ‘*monitos*’ (little sketches), in Chinese ‘*liánhuánhuà*’ (linked images), and so on (Groensteen 2012). These definitions affect what is considered to be a comic – often excluding experimental or avant garde works – and so new technologies and materialities push at existing boundaries. When digital comics began to appear Scott McCloud named the medium ‘the infinite canvas’, urging creators to treat the screen as a window rather than a page (McCloud 2009). But further possibilities such as adding sound and movement quickly led to the development of ‘motion comics’ – challenging traditional perceptions of the medium and blurring the lines between comics and animation. More recently, the development of smartphone technology has provoked further evolutions of storytelling, for example by adding 3D effects.

Smartphones and other portable devices also provide new points of access to reading and playing literary media. They may increase accessibility, for example by allowing the page order and reading direction of Western and Asian comics to be ‘flipped’ to suit the reader’s preferences, or by making narrative games playable and savable beyond the living room and other static environments. But the platforms and programmes used may also affect the ways that creators make stories and how readers experience visual storytelling. Apps such as comiXology and Google PlayBook offer different ways of increasing readability on small screens and these initiatives impact on how creators design their content (Skains), with the aesthetics of overall page layout arguably becoming less significant. Digital platforms also affect the reader regarding issues of property and ownership, as texts across media (movies, music,

comics) may not be available for download and subscription services replace more traditional models of ownership.

## Impact of the 2020 Global Pandemic

This volume was first conceived just before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is undoubtedly the case that many of its key concerns and reflections have been thrown into sharp relief by the experiences of ‘lockdowns’ that many of our contributors underwent, as well as the rapid rise of new technologies facilitating telepresence at a time when face to face contact was so problematic. While many literary related activities moved online during this period (as documented by Dane and Marsden in this volume), hybrid digital and physical events and activities also became commonplace, fundamentally challenging once again both the delivery and the reception of the literary across multiple media modes and modalities. In at least some cases, this has been seen to have a lasting positive impact on access to the literary, notably for underserved communities so long excluded due to physical, economic or ideological barriers of various kinds.

## Literary Media Tales

As this volume’s ethos is to consider texts as inseparable from their contexts of production and reception, we pause here to reflect on our own lived experiences of ‘literary media’. We by no means wish to suggest that the experiences of three white women from affluent societies is by any means representative, but offer these experiences as illustrations of the interpenetration of media across our life journeys accompanied by some theoretical reflection; setting the scene for the discussions that follow.

## Literary TV – Bronwen

I grew up in a house with few books. What books we did have (an eclectic mix including nonfictional works and hymn books) were kept in a small cupboard. The local library was therefore my main source of reading materials, but even there I experienced frustrations as a reader, being turned away one day for trying to return a book I had only taken out that morning. We also never went to the cinema as a family. TV was our thing, and while we started out with a set that could be contained behind closed doors, by the time I was in my early teens the TV was on all of the time for most of the day, every day. Around this time, I became enamoured of literary adaptations generally broadcast on the BBC on Sunday afternoons or evenings. An added attraction was that I might be allowed to miss an evening service at chapel to watch the latest episode of *Jane Eyre* or *Nicholas Nickleby*, and, even more blissfully, I could do so alone. It is almost impossible for me to separate this love of these adaptations from my love of reading or love of literature. The faux-leather set of Dickens novels that my parents owned suddenly became more attractive, and after watching Alan Rickman as Mr Slope in the TV adaptation of the *Barchester Chronicles*, I sought out any Trollope I could lay my hands on. If I am honest, I often did not go further than coveting and acquiring these books, but it did instill in me a fascination with the ‘classics’ and with the myriad ways in which they could be interpreted and brought to life. This shaped what was to become my future vocation. It undoubtedly influenced my fascination with fictional dialogue and informed my approach to teaching, especially when I got my first full time academic post teaching literature as a part of a Communication degree at Bournemouth University.

The first chapter I published after arriving at Bournemouth (Thomas 2000) examined the film adaptation of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and the ‘accelerated ageing process’ (Sheen 2000: 9) by which the novel, its paratexts and its afterlives blur and merge so as to challenge and erode ‘literary fetishism’ (10) and the idea of the ‘classic’. Teaching a unit on ‘narrative structures’ I discovered a body of work theorising why serial narratives, including the much-derided soap opera, are so compelling. Often drawing on literary-based theories, including German reception theory (Allen 1992) or the carnivalesque (Fiske 1987) and arguing for more critical evaluation and close textual criticism of television ‘texts’ (Cardwell 2006), these theories allowed me to engage with students who were often reluctant readers and

even more reluctant readers of theory, as well as opening up new avenues of research into adaptation and media and new media narrative forms. They also provided a welcome corrective to the notion that the hours I spent watching TV were somehow wasted. Later, with growing interest in novelistic and ‘complex’ television (Mittell 2015), and new viewing/reading modes and practices such as the ‘collective intelligence’ (Jenkins 2006: 27) displayed by online forum users or the ‘second screening’ facilitated by social media platforms such as Twitter, shows such as *The Wire*, *Mad Men* or *Breaking Bad* could readily be drawn on as rich illustrative examples and case studies. Meanwhile, TV continues to provide an important platform for the literary, for example broadcasting live the annual Booker Prize event, or providing literary programming from the author interview to television book clubs (see further Mildorf and Marsden this volume).

I continue to draw on key texts theorising television narratives, production contexts and reception in my work on literature and social media, fan cultures and online readers. Rarely any longer are these discussions confined to one medium. So new subscription models, phenomena such as ‘binge watching’ and season finales provide opportunities to explore parallels with historical and emerging literary practices, as illustrated by the concept of ‘must-read TV’ directly examining ‘how your Netflix habit is changing contemporary fiction’ (Manshel et al. 2021).

## Literary comics – Julia

I was a childhood bookworm and (I now accept) bibliophile. My bedroom was a jumble of paperbacks covering mystery, fantasy, school stories and more; but my strongest memories are of the books I read at my Nanny and Grandpa’s house: my aunt’s hardback first editions of Blyton’s Famous Five series with colour dust covers, and the small gold-bound hardbacks of Alexandre Dumas and H. Rider Haggard that my Dad had won in the Boys’ Brigade and Sunday school. The packaging and the visuals of these books impressed me and when I reread my childhood favourites today on Kindle I’m amazed how easily I can recall all their cover images and even internal illustrations.

For me, then, reading was always a visual and tactile experience. So it probably wasn't surprising that as well as prose, I enjoyed reading comics, mostly found at jumble sales or picked up at doctor and dentist surgeries or in youth clubs. There were slapstick comedy titles like the *Beano* and the *Dandy*; school stories and Cinderella tales in girls' comics like *Tammy* and *Bunty*; and even mystery and horror comics like *Misty*. I bought big stacks of these at church jumble sales until I was 9 years old or so, when a story in one scared me so much that I retreated for some years back into the safer space of Marvel UK's weekly *Care Bears* comics, alongside a subscription to a title called *Big!* that reprinted old Fleetway comedy strips.

My interest in comics picked up again as a teenage goth in the late 1980s, thanks to my brother and to DC Comics' launch of their Vertigo imprint with titles such as *Sandman* and *Preacher*. Vertigo was heavily promoted as having a writerly focus, with the majority of its launch titles coming from high-profile British creators. I combined my comics fandom with an undergrad fascination with Romantic and Gothic literature into a PhD study on the redefinition of comics as literature and the use of literary models like Gothic to help us understand their storytelling. My work was initially formalist – I wanted to understand what narrative methods these comics used to create their most impactful and memorable moments – but, more recently, my long-forgotten memories of British girls' horror comics have led me away from this type of 'lit crit' close reading. Girls' titles dominated the British comics industry between the 1950s and 1980s but are all but forgotten today, and as I dug into their lost history I found myself increasingly engaging with the concept of literary media, which has expanded and redirected my research towards investigative projects to discover the unnamed creators, publishing practices and international influences behind these comics (Round 2019).

Leading scholars such as the late Martin Barker have used comics to draw attention to the hidden stakeholders behind publishers (1984), and the active work of audiences in interpreting and responding to content (1989). Both the British and American comics industries have famously exploited their producers and consumers in multiple ways: for example, by requiring creators to sign away all rights as part of cashing in payments, removing artists' signatures from work and keeping all originals, and axing

popular characters or titles without warning to sustain high profit margins. Researching the collaborative, international, and corporate processes behind British comics and their treatment of their readership has been a quest with real moments of joy, such as reinstating artist names on new collections of their work or showing creators pages of their work they had not seen for decades (and sometimes not at all). It has contributed to my teaching on Bournemouth University's English and Literary Media MA, and led me to reconsider what I thought I knew about global comics industries. This has been informed by scholars such as Christopher Murray (2017), Isabelle Licari-Guillaume (2022) and Kelly Kanayama (forthcoming), who have written insightfully about British–American transatlantic exchange. The forces that have shaped the production and reception of global comics are further illuminated by Casey Brienza's (2016) work on the Americanisation of Japanese manga and books by John Lent (2015) and Paul Gravett (2017) that uncover the breadth of Asian comics.

Finally, acknowledging literary media has also made me more aware of the publishing processes and practices that have shaped all of my favourite stories – from my beloved *Care Bears* (a franchise developed from American greeting card illustrations, although the comics were worked on by many of the British girls' comics writers and artists) to many paperback series such as *Nancy Drew* or *The Hardy Boys* (which were entirely the product of ghostwriters). Seeing my childhood texts in this new light no longer feels like an elegy for the myth of Romantic authorship, but rather a celebration of the collaborative, creative and corporate networks that analysing literary media reveals.

## Literary transmedia and play – Astrid

I remember my youth in 1980s' and early 1990s' Southern Germany as saturated with pre-digital multi- and transmedia. My family has been 'reading' across platforms ever since I can remember – from the daily broadsheets that I consumed second-hand after my Dad had abandoned them after breakfast to political radio talk shows that were constantly playing in the kitchen, and the TV with its ever-looping CNN

broadcasts next to the ironing board in the basement. And while this side of my early mediated life tended to be preoccupied with what I admired and somehow feared as ‘serious’, adult media culture, I sought creative relief in what was then perceived as the German/European canon of young person’s fiction – from Ottfried Preußler to Astrid Lindgren and Michael Ende. But I also sought relief in diverse forms of play – and more consciously so as I grew older. With a pianist as a grandfather, my legacy as part-time musician was predestined, and early on I discovered the restorative, self-expressive and creativity-inspiring powers of musical performance. Of course, playing Vivaldi, Mozart and Bruch on my beloved violin wasn’t exactly the same as the storified delight I garnered from Enid Blyton and Robert Arthur cassette audiobooks or the dreadfully gendered *Connie* comics and neoliberalist glossy girl magazines my peer group considered cool at the time. However, when I think about music as a form of self-expression, I suppose the ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) of self-forgotten play instilled a sense of biographical awareness in me that helped me build a reflective stance on my own early life as a story in episodes, interspersed with intervals of recreational play.

With my early musical excursions came a keen awareness of performativity inherent in mediated play, and that I soon found paralleled in a love for theatre, opera, ballet and – with different peer groups – film and cinema. I remember adoring the productions of the Stuttgart Theater der Altstadt, the Altes Schauspielhaus and the Stuttgart Ballet. As an undergraduate at the Stuttgart Academy of Music and Performing Arts, I regularly obtained last-minute, 10DM ticket deals for the Großes Haus to enjoy Humperdinck, Puccini and Berg operas from the first row and to admire the singers’ talent in bringing to life a host of fascinating fictional characters right at my fingertips. I also found pleasure in playing narrative music (see Burton, this volume), with staged and instrumental performances of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance*, and Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, to name a few. I indulged in the characters, events and settings evoked by the motifs, rhythms and harmonies, and in the vibes of communality that made these performances happen.

But play has never been just music for me. My maternal grandmother was a passionate player of card and board games, and in her characteristic, streetwise

fashion she never failed to give my brother, cousins and me a sense of winnability at the likes of Sorry, Mikado and Memory while ultimately always keeping the upper hand over who was going to win and when, including herself – big style. The key paradigm shift happened around 1983, when my early adopter Uncle V. purchased a Commodore 64 for ‘work’. Inevitably, we were hooked, and each visit to my cousins’ house turned into a frenzy of turn-taking proto-couch-coop. I don’t know whether it was my index finger or the space key that suffered more from the tireless hacking away at *Winter Games* speed skating, and I lost count of the endless fights we had over who was going to be next to not make it across the floating logs on *Frogger*. I also remember the shared bliss as being relatively short-lived during each visit because the games of that era were predominantly games of emergence (Juul 2005), with hardly any story arc to speak of and predominantly abstract characters.

It wasn’t until I entered graduate school that I was able to combine my love for performative storytelling, games and play with digital media. Hypertext had entered the stage of literary scholarship, and reading first-generation theorists like Landow, Bolter, Ryan and Hayles opened my eyes to the vast opportunities lying ahead of literary studies in the new millennium. At the time, literary hypertext was already past its ‘golden age’ (Coover 1999), and while the German e-literary scene showed hopeful signs of a new era in Flash and other web formats (Simanowski 2002), what is now known as digital fiction was only beginning to grow in new, post-Storyspace directions. So whilst I completed my PhD engaging critically with notions of canonicity in post-canonical literary media (Ensslin 2007), my academic career developed at the intersections between electronic literature and the institutionally more palatable game and transmedia studies.

The early years of my scholarship were, like Julia’s and Bronwen’s, more formalist in nature and shaped by a desire to come to terms with the materialities and narrative affordances of diverse platforms of digital storytelling and literary gaming (Bell et al. 2014; Ensslin 2014). More recently, this sense-making quest has transformed into the need to proactively shape the literary media landscape, and to explore the therapeutic qualities of digital fiction on mobile devices that commonly serve to promote idealised bodies, Instagram-style. My team’s work in this area is reflected by Nair et al.’s chapter in this book, and it is my hope that literary play and performativity can

generate more inclusive environments of self-expression and self-compassion in the years to come.

## Structure of This Book

The volume is bookended by reflections on the place and value of the literary in the contemporary age from two leading thinkers: Jim Collins, whose work has already been mentioned here as a major influence, and Julie Rak, who continues to push at the boundaries of how we define the literary and to challenge the ways in which some existing practices and assumptions continue to exclude and alienate many individuals and groupings. Both raise important questions about the development and impact of literary media which the essays in the volume return to time and again, and which also concern us all as educators and writers engaged with exploring the many new and unpredictable ways in which literary media emerge and evolve.

The first section of the book ('Literary Media in Context') then features new essays by Alexis Weedon and Marina Grishakova, both of whom have worked closely with field-defining terms (transmediality and intermediality) that inform our concept of 'literary media'. Both provide fascinating historical insights into both avant garde experiments and everyday practices whereby the materiality and mediated nature of the literary come to the fore. In both cases, the chapters resist the temptation to shoehorn diverse practices into neat boxes or linear trajectories. Simon Rowberry's chapter on the historiography of the ebook explores but also contests the dominant narrative of the emergence of this new format providing a more nuanced media archaeological analysis which addresses head on the particular challenges of describing and mapping formats that have long become obsolete.

In the sections that follow our authors continue to draw on but also critique prevailing assumptions and accepted narratives in their explorations of established, new and emerging instances of 'literary media'. We asked all of our authors to explicitly engage with the concept of literary media both as it relates to their key case studies,

and how it might reinfect their understanding and usage of theoretical terms and models from within their own more established intellectual disciplines.

Part II ('Forms, Media, Materialities') addresses specific emerging genres and forms of literary media such as locative narratives or autofiction. This section also includes explicit reference and analysis of media and materials not always discussed in the context of the literary, including journalism, music, real-life experiences and podcasts. It explores how material presence and location impacts on our experience of storytelling: for example, in Murray's opening analysis of locative narrative (which investigates the multimodal qualities of such texts and questions the extent to which they are emancipatory or perpetuate existing hierarchies) and Pullinger and Dovey's discussion of ambient literature (which considers the ways in which stories are both *situated* and *situating*). It develops existing discussions of forms such as autofiction: which Dix extends beyond prose by analysing its **visual-verbal dialectic** across multiple media, and Ivansson and Gibbons consider in the context of the archive, combining cultural studies, multimodal analysis, cognitive stylistics and narratology. The following chapters in this section explore the types of storytelling we might find in journalism, focusing on concepts such as disnarration (Lambrou) and the intersections between print and online literary journalism, interrogating ideas of bias and prestige (Murphy). Literature as a verbal and oral art is also explored via the poetic and rhetorical qualities of oral histories (Hatavara, Hyvärinen and Mildorf) and the literary interview (Mildorf). Burton's subsequent analysis of song cycles also engages with an understudied form of literary media, revealing the ways in which these adaptations resist conventions and traditions such as linearity. Finally, Rubery examines podcasting's impact on contemporary literary culture, by focusing on the emerging genre of the 'podcast novel'.

Part III ('Creators, Networks, Intermediaries') features contributions by scholars and creative practitioners expanding the discussion beyond the boundaries by which literary authorship is conventionally defined. Research reflected here includes how bots might remediate literary expressionism (Sheehan and Wright), how machine learning leads to new forms of mimesis-as-misrepresentation (Erslev), and how networked and collaborative writing give rise to medium-specific forms of digital-born writing (Patti, O'Sullivan), to culture-specific visual storytelling (Burt and

Waldman), and to multilayered plot development across ontological spheres (Klaiber). Chapters in this section further centre the materiality of digital platforms as seminal parameters in the creative process (Skains), and examine the opportunities and challenges they entail for literary editions, curatorship and preservation (Gee). Thus, at the heart of this section lie considerations surrounding the networks and mediating platforms that arise around different literary media forms, and discussions about how we may preserve and present literary media for future generations.

Part IV ('Markets, Economies, Industries') examines specific production and publishing contexts (China, Japan, Australia), and provides in-depth analysis of the marketing and promotion of literary media materials (Kiernan, Dane) and the selling of books in both bricks and mortar and online retail environments (Frost, Rayner, Kamei-Dyche and Dietz). Individual chapters engage with contemporary economics (Frost) and discussions of neoliberalism (Henesy), but also provide fine-grained analysis of a range of consumer preferences and practices from fan production (Shao) and ritualistic readerly pilgrimages (Kamei-Dyche) to algorithmically stimulated forms of participation generated and controlled by social media platforms (Meurer). As well as providing insights into emerging and established cultural markets and industries, therefore, this section also demonstrates how the roles of authors, readers and cultural intermediaries are all impacted.

Part V ('Audiences, Engagement, Environments') considers reading and other aspects of situated audience engagement. Its contributions engage with the evasive phenomena of immersion and interactivity in digital fiction (Bell, Goicoechea) and film/TV (Cox), with concepts of sociality, seriality and performativity (Bjärstorp and Ragnerstam, Pianzola, Westling), and with the increasingly central role of social media as spaces of literary engagement (Birke). It foregrounds the socio-political, cultural and epistemological environments that both shape and are shaped by literary media, including Indigenous ways of knowing (Barnes and Cardinal), postcolonial paratexts (Mukherjee), and post-pandemic entanglements (Marsden). Chapters in this section provide a detailed exploration of how readers and audiences engage with new platforms (Netflix, Wattpad, YouTube) as well as how new technologies provide innovative ways of providing audiences with experiences that reimagine and reinvent the thrills and spills that we associate with the 'live'.

## Limitations of Scope/Future Development

This volume represents current work relevant to the emerging concept of ‘literary media’, but we recognise that this is a fast-moving field and technological, cultural and social change will inevitably result in some of what we discuss here becoming passé or even obsolete. We also recognise that there are some gaps in terms of representation, both geographically and in terms of underserved groups. But we hope to have demonstrated that the term ‘literary media’ is intended to be responsive to change and inclusive. The editors are grateful to our contributors for challenging and refining our initial attempts at defining and using this new term, and for their patience and perseverance in bringing this volume to publication in the context of a global pandemic.

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