Chapter 1

Introduction

Literature is fast becoming democratized. Literary snobbery is slowly but surely yielding place to tolerance and acceptance of outcasts—cast out by the high priests of canonical literature for their non-conformity or refusal to toe the line. In art, culture, music, dance, in the way of dressing and even eating, popular versions, once scoffed at, are now being welcomed with open arms. In fact, they have even become barometers of fashion. Popular forms unconsciously seem to symbolise youth and modernity. Junk food and its parallels in literature can no longer he kept out of the reach of the majority.

This is the age when pure and impure, right and wrong are no longer white and black or in watertight compartments. Standards are fast changing and becoming relative just as perfection is becoming comparative. Serious critics have labelled popular art and popular literature variously and subjectively. They come in different guises—junk, pulp, trash, cult, mongrel, garbage, formulaic, bestseller and so on. Scorched by the flames of literary criticism like the mythical Phoenix, this popular form has risen again and again. Popular forms incarnate powerfully under different
names. Pop fiction must have been intrinsically strong, as it has withstood much stringent criticism. Popular genres have survived the onslaught of canonical ire. The bestseller that has survived thus sets us thinking. It has taught us the lesson of survival by its very continuum.

Bestseller novels reflect our dreams and nightmares, loss of innocence, feeling of alienation and impotent fury against reality. Through their fictitious characters we can settle scores and win the impossible and become heroic. A bestseller is the magic carpet of Merlin that transports us and helps us escape the harsh realities of life. Such novels also inspire us to face challenges boldly. They are the permissible steroids to strengthen our drooping spirits in moments of weariness and exhaustion.

The canons of literature ever keep changing. Once upon a time, no living language was respected as literary. No living author was acknowledged. In course of time, however, this trend changed. It is fitting and proper that people should live with living literature. A thinking mind should respond to popular literature that has persisted in spite of critical disapproval. Leslie Fiedler, in his book What Was Literature?: Class Culture and Mass Society, asserts that literature cannot be kept alive and growing if popular literature is despised (109-14).
James D. Hart, in *The Popular Boote*, observes:

Belief does not remain static and taste is ever fluid. For knowledge and for faith, for success and for sensation, each period needs its own books, books often trivial but written out of the demands of the day. (280)

A shift in literary tastes indicates a shift in men's attitudes or beliefs. While great writers help us learn more of man, writers of popular books help us learn more of men of that particular age. A popular book pleases a reader as it is moulded by the same forces that shape his non-reading hours. A popular book, according to Hart, recreates the present (280-81).

Robert Southey wrote volumes of prose and poetry. But only his story of *Three Little Bears* is remembered. Ironically, it is always remembered without attribution to Southey. This made him remark, as quoted by Hart, "The Public and Trans-substantiation I hold to be the two greatest mysteries in or out of nature" (288).

Fiedler discusses the unfortunate distinction between high and low literature. They are sometimes called proper and para literature and sometimes known as minority and majority literature—Fiedler prefers to use the terms "compulsory" and "optional" instead (Literature 13).
According to Fiedler, only a minority reads standard, canonical literature whereas popular fiction "lives on in the collective memory of" us all"; books prescribed in schools and colleges are considered literature due to the virtues of the authors, the elegance of style, subtle thoughts and clear language; but popular fiction books are read for "their mythic resonance, their archetypal appeal" (Literature 77).

Fiedler maintains that popular fiction survives by the images existing outside the words. Hence bestsellers can move from one medium to another and, when made into a film, do not lose authenticity. Many people love "Good Bad Books". There are flaws in canonical literature too and even Charles Dickens and Mark Twain are guilty of such flaws—While Harriet Beecher Stowe was in limbo, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Arthur Conan Doyle were rejected outright. Some standard writers merely paid "lip homage" to the canons of literature but made a mockery of literature. It is democratic to allow people to choose what they wish to read. Popular writing is like a primal myth. Therefore, demand for elegant structure and distinguished style is irrelevant. Style is individual and pop fiction, being archetypal, is communal (Literature 122).
While canonical literature divides us, trash literature, being rooted in shared myth and fantasy, appeals to us and unites us. Fiedler confesses his interest in popular fiction and says he has been learning to speak the language of popular literature. In every stereotype or cliche, he asserts, there lies dormant an archetype waiting to be awakened by a critic or a researcher (Literature 140).

Popular fiction is read openly by the majority of readers and on the sly by the high brow minority. Youth, especially, have turned away from canonical works of high literature to less respected popular books. Nowadays bestsellers are read along with standard books (Literature 77-80).

Popular culture and fiction cannot be dismissed with contempt any more. There are no rigid divisions between high and low art. Literature is now viewed as one long continuum. Levels of literature are related, not disparate. "Only the cynic and the heedless can disregard popular literature," as Prank Luther Mott says in Golden Multitudes (5).

Popular fiction is regarded as negative by many while canonical literature is deemed to be positive. According to many critics, popular literature is standardized,
formulaic, tine-bound, debased, distorted, of HO moral, value and so on. Less knowledgeable readers are to be rescued from the "predatory tentacles of the pleasure of popular fiction," as Derek Longhurst mocks in his introduction to Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure (1). But today English literature is invaded by changes that are complex. Terms such as "semiotics", "deconstruction", "post-structuralism", "intertextuality", "narratology" etc. are no longer considered jargon and they have come to stay. The canons of literature are fast changing with the times. One important feature of popular genres, Longhurst declares, is that "they are not rigidly self-contained categories ... but evolve interactively and in relation to specific historical formations" (5).

One should challenge the myth that great literature is produced by a creative genius unerringly and popular fiction by those concerned with market demand alone. Bestsellers are not mere commodities as Peter Humm, Paul Stigant and Peter Widdowson declare in their introduction to Popular Fictions (9). Literature is said to be great art which enhances our understanding, imagination and intelligence, but popular fiction, according to many critics, subdues or dulls them (11). They assert that
to continue to teach 'Literature' as if it comprises only the "great texts" is to play Hamlet without the Prince Cor even Dracula without the Count). The study of popular fictions calls History back on to the stage as a crucial participant in reformulating a relationship between fictional production and society. (15)

In the light of the above averments, the critique of the conventional study of all forms of writing must be legitimized, for Literatures without History is intellectually unthinkable.

Literature is a source of knowledge and delight. It is a source of power. Harriet Hawkins, in Classics and Trash, says that Shakespeare's Caliban and Hareton in Wuthering Heights remained brutes as they were kept away from books and that deprecating any genre and keeping away from it might make us Calibans (183).

"A best-seller can provide an enjoyable slick surface from which we can skid away from the fixities of literary typology to the freedom of historical and cultural change" (Huiran, Stigant and Widdowson 11).

Edna Ferber objected to being called a bestseller author as it implied substandard writing and non-elite readership as Louis Filler mentions in his introduction to A Question of Quality (1). Filler also states, "Popularity
is a category which, in so open a democracy as our own, presents more opportunities and dangers than many another" (3). He adds that it is strange that the people who fear the free market in economics trust its validity in literature (4).

Ray B. Browne, in his essay "Irving Wallace: Independent Drummer," says that Irving Wallace is proud to be a popular writer rather than an elite one; that the difference between the two is not real, but shades on a long continuum; that while Plato labelled the non-elite oxen and their works dung, Aristotle believed that all levels of life and art are equally important; and that Terence went further and said: "I am a human being; therefore nothing human repels me" (100).

Today the walls between elite and popular, high brow and low brow arts are breaking down thanks to the impact of the mass media. Browne points out that, according to several critics, all of American culture would appear to be popular to foreigners; that Abraham Kaplan argues that popular arts should be regarded as "newly born artifacts that were growing toward maturity in a 'higher' form"; that Susan Sontag, in Against Interpretations, maintains that popular art is an entirely new dimension, to be judged on its own standard and merit and not to be presumed a higher
art and has declared: "One cheats himself, as a hwaan being
... if one has respect only for the style of high culture"; and, that Ross Macdonald, proud to be known as a popular writer, declares: "We learn to see reality through the popular arts we create and patronize. That's what they're for. That's why we love them" (101).

Talking of popular art and popular artists, Russel Nye remarks:

Popular art can depend on no subsidy, state, or patron; it has to pay its way by giving the public what it wants, which may not always agree with what the artist may feel to be the roost aesthetically apt. Satisfying a large audience involves no less skill than pleasing a smaller or more sophisticated one; popular artists can and do develop tremendous expertise and real talent. A best-selling paperback is not ipso facto bad; a song is not necessarily worthless because people hum it; a painting is neither bad because many look at it with pleasure nor good because few do.

(6-7)

According to Fiedler, the form of the novel embarrassed critics in the beginning due to its intimacy and its democratization of culture; however, when it came
to stay, it was accepted; and, roost of today's famous novels were once dismissed as trash (Literature 76).

Anthony Burgess, in The Novel Now, points out that the very term "novel" means "new"; that compared to the traditional forms of literature, there is still an upstart quality about this form; that the novelist's aim is entertainment rather than upliftment: instead of ennobling the world, he presents it as it is with its dirt and meanness; and, that the novelist is not a robed dignitary but a common man of the streets, flinching at nothing (13).

The novel is new in the sense that it seems to strike at certain traditional values. Therefore, it is not surprising that bestsellers move away from the traditional standard novel. "The poet fights against time; the novelist yields to it" (Burgess 17). Burgess goes on to add

We can no longer expect the one big book, the single achievement, to be an author's claim to posterity's regard; we shall be more inclined to assess the stature of a novelist by his ability to create what the French call an oeuvre, to present fragments of an individual vision in book after book, to build, if not a War and Peace or Ulysses, at least a shelf. (19)
According to Gore Vidal, as quoted by Hawkins, like the superstars of each generation, certain books such as *The Lord of the Rings* or the *OZ* books by L. Frank Baum, films such as *The Wizard of OZ*, and television shows such as *Star Trek*, that were first encountered in childhood or adolescence by successive generations, nay "do more to shape the imagination and its style" than all of our "later calculated readings of acknowledged masters" (Preface xvi).

While discussing what is good or bad literature, Hawkins remarks that there are critical arguments that what counts most is not what you read but the way that you read it ... what matters is not the script involved but the critical or ideological insights emergent from your reading of whatever it is you are reading. (105)

Hawkins points out the flexibility and freedom provided by books thus:

books are useful precisely because you need not necessarily derive from them the message your rulers want you to. On the contrary. You can choose your own role models from wicked characters as well as from virtuous types.... you can learn a lot from what is said between the
lines and from what certain authors do not say or
dare not say. You can learn models of behaviour
traditionally deemed attractive and admirable.....
Or reverse them so as to identify yourself as a
rebel. And so on. These truisms tend to be
ignored in arguments about the academic study of
high literature and popular genres alike. (183)

Critical elitism has always sneered at popular genres
as they give the public what it wants in the way of
sentimentality, sensationalism, sex, violence, romanticism
etc. (Hawkins 108-9). Hawkins takes support from Vidal,
who, in his essay on the OZ books, says that the surest way
to kill the popularity of a work is to put it on the
syllabus; instant hostility to it will be created in the
minds of unwilling students; and, Vidal wonders whether
Baum's survival is due to the fact that he is not taught as
part of any syllabus (109).

The poet Tom Paulin, reviewing a collection of essays
in favour of cultural studies, as quoted by Hawkins,
writes:

The contributors are collectively of the opinion
that English literature is a dying subject and
they argue that it can be revived by adopting a
'socialist pedagogy' and introducing into the
It is difficult to judge where literature ends and sub literature begins. "Themes", "medium", "myth", and "formula" are terms often used in popular literature.

The themes of popular literature are vague and varied. The focus has, in popular literature, shifted to medium rather than content or form. The term "rayth" is interpreted variously and in confusion. John G. Cawelti, in "The Concept of Formula in Popular Literature," says:

All cultural products contain a mixture of two kinds of elements: conventions and inventions. Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and his audience beforehand.

Inventions, on the other hand, are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator. ... (85)

Conventions represent shared experiences and inventions deal with new things not yet realized by us. Conventions stabilise a culture while inventions help it to keep pace with the changes.
While a formula is "a conventional system for structuring cultural products," formula is "an invented system of organization"; formula is linked to culture: "it represents the way in which a culture has embodied both mythical archetypes and its own preoccupations in narrative form" (Cawelti, "Concept" 86).

Genre can be defined as "a structural pattern which embodies a universal life pattern or myth in the material of language"; Cawelti agrees with Northrop Frye's opinion that genres embody fundamental archetypal patterns, reflecting stages of the human life cycle; myths are universal but formulas are specific; Cawelti agrees with Sigmund Freud's view that recurrent myths and stories embody a kind of collective dreaming process and adds that "the idea of a collective dream applies to formula as well as to myth" ("Concept" 88).

In A Fiedler Reader, Fiedler regards popular literature in the same way in which Matthew Arnold regarded the emergence of literature as scripture in a world that was giving up the old time religion (27S).

At present the novel, which itself is in a transitional condition, flourishes "on the border between the world of Art and non-Art," and it is prepared to give
up realism for the "marvelous" and "magical" which it
disavowed earlier (Fiedler, Reader 289).

Fiedler declares:

It is time ... to be through with pretenses; for
to Close the Sap means also to Cross the Border
between the Marvelous and the Probable, the Real
and the Mythical, the world of the Boudoir and
the counting house and the realm of what "used to
be called Faerie, but has for so long been
designated mare madness. Certainly the basic
images of Pop forms like the Western, Science
Fiction and Pornography suggest mythological as
well as political or metapolitical meanings. The
passage into Indian Territory, the flight into
Outer Space, the ecstatic release into the
fantasy world of the orgy: all these are
analogues for what has traditionally been
described as a Journey or Pilgrimage ... toward a
transcendent goal, a moment of vision.

But the mythologies of voyage and vision which
the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance
inherited from the Classical World and the
Judaeo-Christian tradition, and which frose into
pedanticism and academicism in the eighteenth and
nineteenth century have not survived their last ironical uses in the earlier part of the twentieth....

Pop Art, however, can no more abide a mythological vacuum than can High Art: and into the space left vacant by the disappearance of the Matter of Troy and the myths of the ancient Middle East has rushed, first of all, the Matter of Childhood: the stuff of traditional fairy tales out of the Black Forest, which seems to the present generation especially attractive, perhaps, because their "progressive" parents tended to distrust it. But something much more radically new has appeared as well: the Matter of Metropolis and the myths of the Present Future, in which the nonhuman world about us, hostile or benign, is rendered not in the guise of elves or dwarfs or witches or even Gods, but of Machines quite as uncanny as any Elemental or Olympian— and apparently as immortal. Machines and the mythological figures appropriate to the media mass-produced and mass-distributed by machines: the newsboy who, saying SHAZAM in an abandoned subway tunnel, becomes Captain Marvel; the
reporter (with glasses), who shaking Ms civilian garb in a telephone booth is revealed as Superman, immune to all but Kryptonit©--these are the appropriate images ©£ power and grace for an urban, industrial world busy manufacturing the future. (Reader 289-90)

There is no condescension or mockery in today's writers. According to Fiedler, these writers axe living in the only world in which they feel at home. They are able, therefore, to recapture a certain rude magic in its authentic context, by seizing on myths not as stored in encyclopedias or preserved in certain beloved ancient works—but as apprehended at their moment of making, which is to say, at a moment when they are not yet labeled myths. (Reader 291)

Reiterating the goals of literature, Fiedler remarks:

The Dream, the Vision, ekstasis: these have again become the avowed goals of literature; for our latest poets realize in this time of Endings ... that merely "to instruct and delight" is not enough. (Reader 292)

Great art should also lead to release and liberation. According to Fiedler, with the Closing of the Gap,
"literature beccnas again prophetic and universal" (Reader 294). He calls upon critics not to be high brow and to accept popular forms:

Pledged like Isaiah to speaking the language of everyone, the prophets of the new dispensation can afford to be neither finicky nor genteel; and they echo, therefore, the desperate cry of the Hebrew prototype: "I am a man of unclean lips in the midst of a people of unclean lips". (Reader 294)

The term "bestseller" has been coined with a specific purpose. It fills a need. Commonly used today, the term describes what are not necessarily the best books, but books people like best. If we analyse popular books, we get an idea of the books people have actually read; not books they should have read. Popular fiction is an index to the social history of a particular period. Bestsellers help us understand the thinking of people at a given point of time.

It is interesting to analyse and study the success of bestsellers. They are filled with personal adventure and sensationalism. They tell a good story about action and courage. Another reason for their popularity is strong characterisation. "While reading bestsellers, readers are able to make contact with and relate to people full of life
and vitality. Even when the book is not well written, the substance and the vivid construction meet popular demand. Other factors contributing to its popular appeal are timeliness and topical interest, fantasy, exotic settings, sex and glamour (Mott 285-88).

Bestsellers appeal to all kinds of people. They keep the fire of imagination stoked. The characters in books come again and again in different disguises and names to Inspire us to great deeds of courage. They are barometers to record the emotions, thoughts and anxieties of the present. They indicate social trends. Popular literature is no longer a narcotic nor its fans mere junkies. Bestsellers provide for intertextuality and the reader is able to identify himself with the fictitious characters.

Cawelti, in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, regards popular story formulas as having great artistic and cultural value. Talking of formulaic literature, he observes that, while novelty widens our imagination and prepares us to face new situations, familiarity produces a controlled landscape of imagination where the tensions of ordinary experience are dissolved and familiar experience soothes the mind. Predictable structures guarantee to fulfil our expectations. Such formulaic literature is useful for relaxation, escape and entertainment
Introduction 1-2). This aim has of tea been ignored by literary scholars as being mundane, as it opiates the masses. There are several popular story formulas wherein several major archetypal patterns merge with cultural mythology. Cawelti goes on to list some of these formulas: adventure, romance, mystery, melodrama, alien beings, crime and detective novels, the western and the bestselling social melodrama are some of the formulas used (2-4).

Bestsellers satisfy the utmost expectation of the reading public. What people expect is entertainment, according to Ray B. Browne:

Entertainment—that is, telling a good story—was originally and always has been the primary purpose of the novelist, though many critics and academics tend to forget or to play down this perfectly honorable object. In so doing they try to frustrate human nature and so succeed in falsifying it. (101-02)

Defending bestsellers in his introduction to Necessary American Fictions, William Darby declares:

I am convinced that bestselling fiction serves as an intellectual barometer for a culture. Such novels are "necessary" because they reaffirm and often "sanctify" pre-existing values, especially
for an audience which often attributes unquestioned authority to the printed word. (1)

Bestselling novels reflect widespread social beliefs and ideals. They often represent wish fulfilment and daydreams of the society. Darby observes: "Throughout our century the bulk of American bestselling fiction has reaffirmed the basically absolutist—morally black and white—views of the mass audience" (369). Bestsellers are means for an individual to reaffirm his views. Such works are necessary to create and sustain the fundamental beliefs of the people in general. This mode of writing slowly changes the rules of canonical literary forms and situations which they use with alterations (Darby 369).

In his novel *Cakes and Ale* Somerset Maugham has something to say of the bestseller and the best book, as quoted by Burgess:

The elect sneer at popularity; they are inclined to assert that it is a proof of mediocrity; but they forget that posterity makes its choice not from among the unknown writers of a period, but from among the known.... It may be that posterity will scrap all the best-sellers of our day, but it is among them that it must choose. (20)
It is not necessary to equate the known and the best. "It is enough that the informed part of the reading public should be sufficient to bring an author back into print or, if he is still in print, keep him there. This is real best-selling" (Burgess 20-21).

In her introduction to *The American Dream and the Popular Novel*, Elisabeth Long states that novels explore the inner desires and outer constraints of men. The self and society meet in novels. They provide access to the "innerness" of the characters and also portray the complexity of the society. The interplay between the subjective and the objective world is depicted in novels (3).

Novels describe the individual's desire, dreams and nightmares. In them, one sees a fictional representation of the relationship between man's inner aspirations and external action: they link the personal and the social. Novels "imply a community of shared meaning" (Long, introduction 4).

Seen in this light, bestsellers are more a social phenomenon than a literary one. They find resonance with the majority of the reading public. Bestsellers are cultural artifacts due to their link with the social world.
Success and individual achievement, the two key aspects of Jtaarican identity, are recurrent concerns in American bestsellers (Long 7-9).

Long analyses the interesting relationship between authors and audiences: some authors hope to express truth and uplift the spirit of Ken, others simply wish to tell a good story, while yet others satisfy their innermost urge by writing novels; authors have been motivated by the desire for self-expression as well as the desire to reach out to people; authors always stay attuned to the changes in social-cultural environs; bestsellers indicate the type of people who read such books and whose demands have made them popular; and, one can also analyse what the readers get from such books (44-45).

Bestsellers reach more people than their sales figures indicate. People know bestsellers and recommend them to others; the social network spreads and bestsellers catch the attention of a very wide section of readers and have an impact even on the indifferent readers. Talking of Jtoerican bestsellers, Long observes:

More than any other socially defined literary category, except perhaps ‘the classics’... bestsellers represent that part of the world of books that Americans, in general, participate in
as readers. Bestselling novels, then, are those works of current written fiction Americans have most in common with each other. (50-51)

Long links authors, publishers and audience in a communicative process as they are intuitively interdependent and bound by similar values. Popular novels "are in line with the values of their readers, for they are the novels that people have chosen to be open to" (Long 53).

Literary critics are involved with the abstruse texts of the canonical literature of the age. There is a gap between their reading and the reading of the public. Their evaluation is not valid beyond literary communities and universities. "In other words, cultural relativism has entered literary thought as the relationship of the literary world, and its reading, to the broader social world, and its readings, has shifted" (Long 54).

Modern texts are becoming difficult and conventions are being violated. "Roland Barthes calls these texts 'writerly' because they require the reader almost to assume the creativity of a writer in order to accomplish a reading" (Long 54). Books today invite various interpretations. Literary critics have begun to link responses to a text to the cultural environs.
Stanley Fish, as quoted by Long, emphasises the social context of interpretation: according to him, texts have neither an infinity of meanings nor a lack of meaning; meaningfulness is always dependent on an interpretive coitmunity (57). Bestsellers are considered to be conventional entertainment literature; they are easily consumed communications from author to reader; and, people opt for bestsellers fully knowing what they will be experiencing (Long 58). Most bestsellers, according to Long,

probably settle easily into the sediment of their readers' past experience, becoming part of their tacit and taken -for-gr an ted ways of viewing the world, the structure of assumptions that seems so natural it hardly ever rises to conscious awareness. (59)

Bestselling American novelists and socio-cultural critics work side by side to portray the itoerican Dream and the American Nightmare and they chronicle this dramatic cultural transformation (Long 191). Down the ages, bestsellers have mirrored urges, motives and inner drives. Entrepreneurial ideal flourished in an uncomplicated world. The fragmented world put an end to this. Hierarchy interfered with success and sacrifices were demanded in the
frightening, complex society. Life was no longer simple. Self-examination and cynicism entered bestsellers. But this could not completely cloud the value of individual independence. The calling has become more spiritual now and mystical. To illustrate some characters are forged by failure, others are successful yet restless (Long 192-94). Moreover, bestsellers "show a striking multiplicity of explicitly innovative response to social-structural change" (Long 195). Exhaustion and the spirit of survival alternate. The crisis of modern life is attempted to be conquered by renewal of conviction in traditional institutions. Some bestsellers reflect the erosion of morality while others search for some order amidst the chaos. Diversity in real life leads to diversity in bestseller as well. Characters retreat into the self but come back to the real world.

One of the chief thematic concerns of modern fiction is man's ability to survive. Man endures suffering with quiet dignity and battles against odds with courage and intelligence. The survivor protagonist leads American fiction away from nihilism. New value systems are evolved: hidden resources and potentialities are tapped and survivors become inspiring symbols for those in need of hope and courage.
Terence Des Pres, in the preface to *The Survivor*, is concerned with the subject of survival: the human being is capable of surviving beneath pressure and crisis, which affect body and mind; yet, one survives by being alive, sane and human; the art of survival is an experience; the ability to maintain dignity and courage and humanness in the face of nihilism reveals man's endurance; men and women have a power, a talent for life, a reliance on life in Itslef; the experience in itself is valuable—the means more than the end; and, survivors "keep life and spirit intact" (vii).

American fiction in the first half of this century was negative and man was portrayed as a weak, broken being suffering from disillusion and despair. But, in the second half, American fiction took a new trend and became positive. *Man's* survival amidst complexities became the chief thematic concern of authors. With indomitable courage he struggles within and without and survives with intelligence and resourcefulness. Sukhbir Singh, in his introduction to *The Survivor in Contemporary American Fiction*, states that Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut affirm that "man possesses adequate imagination and self-consciousness to prevail over the odds of life by recreating a new system of values suitable for the changed
conditions of the present world" (9). Survivors are silent rebels and do not wish for major transformation. They endure suffering with dignity and do not resort to violence to win their ends. They may be destroyed but not defeated. They have no motivation for revenge. They live without losing dignity. They are not ambitious. Their efforts to live with dignity make them heroes. They symbolise world peace and provide hope for others (Singh, introduction 1-14).

But there seems to be another breed of survivors, who too live with dignity but go a step further. They are ambitious; they are not silent rebels; they thirst for revenge—they are transformed significantly. They do not merely suffer trials; they fight against them and emerge as either avengers or achievers. Tired of being the prey they become predators. They are neither defeated nor destroyed. They inspire others with their heroic struggles, and, what is more, they are not the traditional heroes: they are female heroes, real heroines who overcome, survive, avenge, aspire, and, achieve. They are the female protagonists of Sidney Sheldon's novels. The voice denied to their mythological predecessors has been granted to these women. They move away from traditional tailor-made roles of fictional women. They are not silent sufferers or martyrs.
They are not woman who take injustice lying down. They are human, terrible, intelligent, ingenious and pragmatic. Emotions are pushed to the background and they are ruled by their head. Yet, they retain their fascinating femininity. They seem to undertake the mythical quest and are transformed. Pain leads to change and they seem not to be governed by man-made codes. They become enigmas and nothing can destroy them. They are heroic female protagonists, who appear in novel after novel by Sheldon. His heroines set the reader pondering. There seems to be a pattern caramon to all the novels of Sheldon: women who are survivors and achievers. They battle against injustice, social odds and gender bias.

Sheldon provides a medium through which the scattered whines and whimpers might become a bold statement of conviction: "I can do anything. I will survive. Nothing can break me."

According to Cawelti, bestsellers are as diverse as the Interests of the readers to which they cater; there can be no such thing as a particular or hard and fast formula for a bestselling novel; non-formulaic writers like Saul Bellow and Thomas Pincheon have written bestsellers and Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Berger made use of formulaic conventions for irony and satire in their novels; but,
within the diversity of bestsellers one sure success formula seems to be the social melodrama; and, this has become a best selling formulaic type (Adventure 260). The social melodrama "synthesizes the archetype of melodrama with a carefully and elaborately developed social setting in such a way as to combine the emotional satisfactions of melodrama with the interest inherent in a detailed, intimate, and realistic analysis of major social or historical phenomena" (Cawelti, Adventure 261). After a melodramatic portrayal of problems, poetic justice is established in such novels. Melodrama, is "one of the basic archetypes of moral fantasy" (Cawelti, Adventure 262). It affirms cosmic order. The social melodrama is dated to its readers and is time bound as it depends on the values and views of a specific age. The social melodramatist's artistic skill is implied in such readers' response as "He certainly knows how to tell a good story" or "He knows how to hold the readers' interest" or "I just couldn't put the book down" (Cawelti, Adventure 263).

This type of novel calls on us to over-react. It focusses our attention on moments of crisis, in order to excite our emotions. We are moved from one crisis to another. There are different types of crises, the most sensational involving matters of life and death. Besides,
there are crimes in love, success, marriage, divorce, betrayal, moments of deep commitment, alienation, temptations and so on. The novel is woven around climactic moments of crisis. The characters are confronted by terrible problems. There are major public spectacles like a trial, murder, war etc. In such novels there is diffuseness of structure due to the mass of information. At the same time, suspense has to be maintained. This is no simple task of construction. There are miraculous coincidences and striking reversals in a social melodrama (Cawelti Adventure 264-66). Another structural difficulty is stated by T.S. Eliot in Selected Essays: "It consists in delaying longer than one would conceive it possible to delay a conclusion which is inevitable and wholly foreseen" (380).

In spite of the moralistic predictability of melodrama, in order to achieve suspense, the writer must at least temporarily make it seem possible that the good may fail. Thus social melodrama, to be successful, requires complex moralism. The social melodramatist must be able to merge conventional wisdom with current trends of values and attitudes. Time and again the formula has been utilised successfully by writers like Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Seyers, Harold Bell Wright, Winston Churchill, Zane Grey,
Harold Robbins, Irving Wallace, Jacqueline Susann, Arthur Hailey and others (Cawelti, *Adventure* 262-63). This is what Sheldon has done in most of his novels.

Novels based on this formula provide us escapism to a fantasy moral world where poetic justice is still prevalent. We feel we are given a good deal of realistic details and information. The novels affirm the moral order in the universe and in Sonne way become contemporary parables of regeneration (Cawelti, *Adventure* 261). It is to be noted that the heroines of the novels of this formula, in recent years, have lost their submissiveness and are becoming aggressive and courageous. They are independent, self-reliant women who give importance to love and morality. The novels often centre on crime and scandal. There is no religious preoccupation in them. Such novels also portray the 'failure of success'. There is an obsession with sexuality but traditional values, institutions and morality are upheld (Cawelti, *Adventure* 278-81).

A full account of popular story formulas and formulaic writing has not been given in this thesis. There are several omissions even in the formula of social melodrama analysed above. A complete historical survey has not been provided. This formula used by bestselling writers
is too diverse for definition—in fact, as diverse as the tastes of the readers to which it caters. Its artistic, literary, cultural and social characteristics have only been hinted at.

It will be a good starting point to mention something about Sheldon and his works. Born in Chicago in the year 1917, Sidney Sheldon has garnered international praise and recognition in four diverse fields: over 200 television scripts, twenty-five major motion pictures, six Broadway plays and sixteen novels with sales figures over 200 million to his credit, ranking him as one of the world's most prolific writers. He has won several awards including an Oscar.

Sheldon is one of the few major authors to have almost all his novels filmed as major motion pictures or as blockbuster miniseries for television.

Sheldon was born during the Depression. His parents were school drop-outs and he himself had to struggle against several difficulties. His phenomenal rise to fame is itself a typical Rags-to-Riches story. Sheldon had the urge to write at a very young age. After serving in the Air Force during World War II, he began writing play scripts for Broadway. Later, in Hollywood, he became a successful screen writer at MGM Studios and Paramount Pictures.
After leaving MGM as a writer/director/producer, Sheldon became involved in the fledgling television industry. He created, wrote, and produced the hit series, "I Dream of Jeannie" and "Hart to Hart".

It is interesting to note that at the age of fifty, at the top of his profession as a film and television producer, Sheldon turned to writing novels. He tells Sarah Booth Conroy of the Washington Post: "I got an idea that was so introspective I could see no way to do it as a television series, movie or Broadway play, because you had to get inside the character's mind. With much trepidation, I decided I'd try a novel." The result was The Naked Face (1970), which won awards as the best first mystery novel of the year.

The Other Side Of Midnight, Sheldon's second novel, was a huge hit and firmly established him as a bestselling author. His subsequent works, A Stranger in the Mirror, Bloodline, Rage of Angels, Master of the Game, If Tomorrow Comes, The Sands of Time, Windmills of the Goda, Memories of Midnight, The Doomsday Conspiracy, The Stars Shine Down, Nothing Lasts Forever, Morning, Noon, and Night, The Best Laid Plans and Tell Me Your Dreams have solidified his position as one of the top bestselling authors alive today. Sheldon's novels are published in seventy-three languages.
in a hundred countries with over 200 million copies in print. His name has been included in the Guinness Book of Records as "The Most Translated Author".

When asked to explain his universal appeal as an author, Sheldon reflects on a visit he once paid to Morocco: "As my guide and I walked through the throngs of people in an outdoor souk, we noticed several groups clustered around various entertainers performing their acts. However, there was one fellow who really caught my attention. He was just sitting and talking quietly to the crowd which was seated around him. My guide informed me he was the village storyteller. And I thought to myself, "That's what I am—the village storyteller—except I'm lucky enough to be able to tell my story to millions of people around the world."

Declaring that he enjoys the challenge of writing novels more than any other type of writing, Sheldon reflects:

As a novelist, I'm able to go into much greater detail than when writing a film or TV script. When you do a movie or television show, you have hundreds of collaborators. In my books, I can't rely on an actor's facial expressions and actions to bring my characters to life. I have to go into
much greater depth and give them personal histories and emotional dimension, if they axe to be believable. There are no set director or movie cameras to supply the visual settings. My descriptions have to be more than 'Greece; twilight; a convent' I need to provide the word pictures which will flesh out and enhance the story's plot.

A stickler for accuracy and realism, Sheldon researches his subjects in great detail and often spends a year in travelling in foreign countries, observing their customs and mapping out locales. He says:

Accuracy and authenticity are very important to me in my novels, because a reader can always tell if an author is *faking' it. If you read about one of my characters eating a meal in a restaurant in some exotic part of the world, you can bet that I've had that very meal in that same restaurant. Caring about details makes the difference between a fair book and a really good one.

Sheldon says that when he begins a novel he has no plot in mind, only a central character.
As I begin to talk, the novel comes to life. I feel that the story is given to me--I don't know where it comes from, but when it starts to roll, the characters take over. They tell the story, and I just get swept along.

It would be of interest to take a peep into the writer's mind with the help of the following excerpts from his interviews:

Q. You've written for the stage, screen and television, yet you enjoy writing novels the most. Why is that?
A. I love the freedom that the narrative form provides. When you write a movie, you have a hundred collaborators. But when you write a novel, it's yours. There's this sense of excitement because you invent and control the characters. You decide whether they live or die. I find this type of creative process tremendously stimulating.

Q. You have over 200 million books in print, published in 73 languages in 100 countries worldwide. To what do you attribute this international appeal?
A. I think people throughout the world identify with my characters. Perhaps it's because the characters in my books are more than just "all good" or "all bad". I try to give both my heroes and villains an emotional dimensionality which provides the motivation for their actions.
My work has often been characterised by book reviewers as "can't-put-down-reads." I think that's because believable action is based on authenticity, and accuracy is very important to me.

Q. The main character in your novels is usually a female who is a survivor against all odds. Is there a reason for that?

A. It's never been a conscious decision. I think it's because I really don't believe in the "dumb blonde" myth. The fact that my female characters have strong personalities but are also physically attractive probably reflects the women I've known in my life.

My mother, who was faced with raising a family during the Depression and worked at a retail store until she was in her 70's, my late wife, Jorja and my current wife, Alexandra, epitomise the type of woman who is intelligent, purposeful and resourceful, but never at the expense of her femininity.

Sheldon's bestsellers are also mirrors that reflect contemporary American values and changes in American society. In short, the novels are the media of mass expression. His novels also reflect, through their female protagonists, the American dreams and nightmares, and loss of innocence. The pursuit of wealth, power and freedom in a
land, of opportunity, the ruthless pursuit leading on to loss of innocence, the resultant disillusion and cynicism, the shallowness of material power—all these are brought to the reader through Sheldon's heroines. Seen in this light, Sheldon's novels have great social relevance to our age. They bring us information. They parade models of positive and negative traits before us. They also provide a stage that brings our deeper problems into focus.

Bestsellers are formula literature consumed by a large section of the reading public. They are contemporary and are socially relevant. Therefore they may be regarded as evidence literature. They bear witness to the social changes that sweep a particular country at a given point of time. This study aims at asserting the value of formulaic literature and the bestsellers of Sheldon. A shift in focus, a scientific approach and painstaking analysis are sure to yield rich results. Sheldon's strong female heroes, their struggle for survival and excellence, their emergence from a chrysalis of inertia and passiveness to a state of intense awareness and action, their transformation into iron butterflies and the pattern of the prey turning predator have been studied seriously. The archetypal elements in the heroines have been traced. The craftsmanship of the writer has also been analysed.
psychological study of the characters and the social relevance of the novels axe only hinted at as they are beyond the scope of this study. For the same reason, the history of bestsellers has not been traced. Such a task may be undertaken by future scholars.

In a pioneering work, constraints are inevitable. Lack of secondary source on Sheldon's novels, having to cross the border from standard to nonstandard literature and trying to close the gap between compulsory and optional literature—these were some of the challenges faced by this researcher.

By way of introduction, Chapter 1 argues that popular fiction should be accepted as it has come to stay. The argument takes support from several well-known critics. Formulaic literature has been analysed and the value of bestsellers, which are formula works, has been assessed. The dominant themes in contemporary American fiction, survival and individual achievement, have been dealt with successfully by Sheldon, whose novels have strong female protagonists. The novelist is introduced with a brief biography and a few excerpts from his interviews.

Chapter 2, titled "Prey Turns Predator", is a thematic study of the eleven novels selected for detailed analysis. A brief synopsis of each of the novels is provided to bring
out the moment of crisis and the transformation in the heroines. The heroines pass through a five-stage pattern in the course of their transformation. These stages vary from heroine to heroine but the transformation of the heroines from a state of helplessness to one of total control and power is clearly discernible. In *soma* novels the crisis is dramatic, while in some others, it is of a more subtle nature. The struggle the heroines pass through is either external or internal. In novels with more than one heroine, the focus is distributed and, therefore, diffused.

In Chapter 3, the archetypal elements in Sheldonian heroines have been traced. The chthonic self in the heroines has been unearthed. The omnipotence of the great goddess or White Goddess in mythology, long since suppressed by patriarchal interpretations, has been established. The chthonic element in other literary heroines has been pointed out as a parallel for similar elements found in Sheldonian heroines. The Quest myth, the Leviathan myth and other myths found in Sheldon's novels have been brought out. The chapter concludes with a note on myths in the making.

The craftsmanship of Sheldon has been examined in Chapter 4. His descriptive capacity, command over the language, use of humour, irony and pathos, the authenticity
and realism in his novels, and his views, observations and social awareness are discussed. Sheldon's psychological insight has been shown as being responsible for his memorable characterisation. His novels are assessed as formula literature and the techniques used by him have been examined. The titles of the novels and the epigraphs have been briefly commented upon.

Chapter 5, by way of summing up, reiterates the value of formulaic literature and the social relevance of bestsellers and expresses the hope that bestsellers will soon be welcomed into the portals of standard literature. The chapter reasserts that the Sheldonian heroine is indeed prey turned predator, who has emerged as a mare complete being after a crisis. Sheldon's heroines are archetypal and chthonic. His craftsmanship is a contribution to formulaic literature.

While the study has examined all the novels of Sheldon, eleven of them have been selected for detailed thematic analysis in Chapter 2. In these novels, the pattern of the prey turning predator is obvious. The heroines are more dominant and active than their counterparts in the other novels. The selected novels, studied thematically are, in chronological order: The Other Side of Midnight, A Stranger in the Mirror, Rage of Angelst,
Master of the Gams, If Tomorrow Comas, Windmills of the •
Gods, The Sanda of Time, The Stars Shine Down, Nothing
Lasts Forever, The Best Laid Plans and Tell Me Your Dreams.

The bibliography, besides works cited in the thesis, includes secondary sources consulted, but not cited in the thesis.

This thesis has been documented according to the guidelines provided by the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, by Joseph Gibaldi, 4th ed. (1995), Indian ed. 1996.
Notes

1. All the biographical details relating to Sheldon and his own statements about Ms craft, as expressed in several interviews, have been taken from loose leaves of information provided by Sheldon himself to this researcher through mail. These sources are not included in the bibliography.

2. Sheldon's sixteenth novel, *Tell Me Your Dreams*, appeared in India only after the synopsis of this thesis was submitted. So, the synopsis made no mention of it.