

**PULP FICTION**  
**A JUSTIFICATION FOR READING**  
***TWILIGHT***

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In this project I explore the difference between lowbrow and highbrow literature. It explores why enjoying oneself is shunned as “low class” and why the seemingly torturous pursuit of appearing intelligent is celebrated and made out to be “the height of society.” Consuming media for the purpose of pleasure and emotional release has been stigmatized as “trashy,” while highbrow media is focused more on aesthetics, and is elitist, often requiring an education (often the product of high social positions) to fully understand. My paper considers the development of the taste of classes via exploring the tenets of “pulp” versus “literature” and the motivations and benefits of consuming each. Romance novels are a perfect example of lowbrow literature that provides emotional gratification and, despite being formulaic and stigmatized into trash, are the best-selling genre of literature.

This installation explores the trope-laden 80s romance novel. I compiled the most typical and representative (as well as amusingly typical or self-unaware) covers I could find and then put them together to make multiple composite covers, using the stock positions and shared layouts to my advantage. I included such title combination gems as “Forbidden Magic Bride” and “Temptation Temptress.” I converted two of the composite covers into large scale oil paintings made to look like books. This work is both subversive in nature and critical of performative subversion, as I am turning the lowbrow novel into something highbrow, especially given the historical connotations of oil painting as a medium. Now that the pulp novel has been garnished with the social draperies of old money and put on display, it is acceptable and the viewer is “allowed” to enjoy it; it is supposed to be revered and admired, rather than laughed at.

I want viewers to examine their own views on taste and internalized biases. I hope that, in changing the context in which something previously deemed as meritless is displayed, I can bring attention to the level with which our assigned merit is based purely on socialization and context, allowing the performatively “deep” to be praised and the “shallowly” effortful to be dismissed. I believe people should be allowed to enjoy consuming what brings them pleasure, without the weight of social class and judgment being subconsciously forced upon them.

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*In this paper, I explore the difference between lowbrow and highbrow literature. I wanted to look into why enjoying oneself is shunned as low class and why the seemingly torturous pursuit of appearing intelligent is celebrated and made out to be the height of society. Consuming media for the purpose of pleasure and emotional release has been stigmatized as “trashy,” while highbrow media is focused more on aesthetics, and is elitist, often requiring an education (often the product of and high societal positions) to fully understand. This paper considers the development of the taste of classes via exploring the tenets of pulp versus literature and the motivations and benefits of consuming each.*

I cannot read “good” books: I simply find them so incredibly painful, boring, and tedious. I want to read them, I really do. I want to stimulate my mind and become a more intellectual person who can use the knowledge gained from reading eloquent prose that expose the truths of existence. I want to be someone who can understand the references to classics in intellectual debates, and be able to make my own references. I want to impress people with my extensive vocabulary and an ability to think critically. I am convinced I could become an amazing intellectual person so easily by reading highbrow literature, but no matter how many times I try, I cannot stand it. My attention wanders almost immediately, and it takes all my effort to analyze. It takes me way too long to read a single page, and I often need to re-read it before I can grasp what is going on. For school, I manage to read the entire book out of necessity, but I gain no enjoyment out of it and eventually give up, thinking I am just bad at reading and it is boring. Yet again and again, I devour entire series of trashy books in a surprisingly short time. I get so absorbed in the fictional world that the only thing I can do is finish the book, reading so fast that I am unburdened by words I do not understand or symbolism that goes over my head. I do not need to try and read these books deeply because I can easily exist inside of them. I often find that I read these entertaining books when I want to be distracted from what is going on in real life like a shameful coping mechanism. I chose to look into this disparity between highbrow and lowbrow, which is framed as the difference between intellectual and pleasurable, in order to discover more about my own reading preferences and possibly validate my distaste for highbrow media.

Why do we consume over-emotional pulp media and why is it considered low-brow?

According to American film critic Pauline Kael<sup>1</sup>, “trash” literature is meant to titillate and entertain. By design, the lowbrow novel is not a great oeuvre laden with meaningful words leading to a stronger grasp of the universe and ourselves, but rather focuses on plot, shying away from intellectual challenge. Lowbrow, synonymous with “pulp fiction,” is so coined because the short stories were printed on cheaply made wood-pulp paper. Pulp fiction is more emotional and plot driven than highbrow, and often makes best-seller lists. Although pulp is not considered entirely lowbrow, it is still easily accessible and entertaining, and not up to the standard of highbrow. One of the most important aspects of lowbrow is its accessibility; anyone with basic literacy can read these books, and they are incredibly easy to process. Their structure is egalitarian and their target audience echos that. The meaning behind words or plot structures is easier to grasp, and they do not require much effort to read. In fact, it is entirely possible to read a pulp fiction novel in a day, which, I confess, I do often. Much of the ease of how these books are written and read is thanks to a predictable formula for plot structure and character tropes. I interviewed a romance novel writer (who preferred to remain anonymous), who shared that he uses set formulas to make it considerably easy to churn out novels, usually every couple of weeks. Although this doesn’t produce the most elegant writing nor the most elevated plot structure, his books sell *incredibly* well. The plot is also often as relatable as it is formulaic: readers can envision themselves in the place of the main character and experience the plot

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<sup>1</sup> Kael, Pauline. “Trash, Art, and the Movies.” *Harper's Magazine*, Feb. 1969, [harpers.org/archive/1969/02/trash-art-and-the-movies/](http://harpers.org/archive/1969/02/trash-art-and-the-movies/).

vicariously. The author I interviewed<sup>2</sup> does not consider his books the best writing, but he does not think of this as bad. He said, “No one is going to remember my pen name 50 years from now. Once I stop writing it is going to disappear forever. But that’s fine, that’s not what I’m trying to get out of this and that’s not what my readers are trying to get out of it.”<sup>3</sup> Lowbrow is not intended to be the best writing, its intention is to entertain and be consumed quickly. Most people are ashamed to read it, and those of higher status in particular scoff at it, deeming it unfit for their time.

Highbrow literature, in contrast, is not as focused on easily accessible entertainment. Its outcome is not so much the product, but rather the romanticized struggling of the author, over the course of many years spent writing. Highbrow is both syntactically and intellectually complex, dense, and uses deliberate literary techniques such as symbolism and advanced language to develop plot and enhance conceptual themes. Highbrow plots are layered and require rereading and notetaking to understand to them to their fullest extent. Some scholars even spend their entire careers dissecting a single highbrow novel, such as *Finnegans Wake* and other complex texts, whereas lowbrow novels are not often paid this level of attention.

Perhaps the most important distinction between highbrow and lowbrow would be the focus on aesthetics over plot. This is more prevalent in other types of media such as movies, where the artfulness of the cinematography is what marks it as highbrow. Although not immediately gratifying, it is usually thought provoking and an intellectual challenge, something of a “slow burn” and considered the peak of literature. Another important difference between highbrow and lowbrow is how each relates to emotion. Lowbrow literature is characterized by immediate access to emotions; romance novels center entirely around the concept of the romance itself, and tend to over dramatize to make it even more emotional. In a romance novel, realism is abandoned to let the reader play out a nearly impossible fantasy of lust and love in their heads. Without over dramatization and undying passion within the pages, the reader would not be swept away in the world building, which is a key tenet of lowbrow. Even Stephen King’s novels are highly emotional, but, rather than romance, he focuses on intense feelings of terror. Highbrow literature buries emotions beneath layers of concepts and intellectualism, making them not as easily accessible. The emotions may be more contemplative and ruminate over life, far from content one can read as an emotional release. Results indicate that while narrative feelings have a positive impact on both catharsis and insight, aesthetic feelings do not. Aesthetic feelings correlate with absorption and with experiencing more thoughts during reading<sup>4</sup>.

Highbrow may be well written in an aesthetic and intellectual manner, however, lowbrow is not about being intellectual - they are somewhat separate entities. Lowbrow sells much more than highbrow, and its popularity demonstrates that a lot of people enjoy it. Lowbrow may not please readers aesthetically or make them think about the meaning of life, but it is a pleasurable and emotional outlet. Reading about other people’s lives increases empathy and emotional intelligence without having to decode *Finnegans Wake* for a paragraph just to understand the guy doesn’t want to be with the girl anymore.

The trends that taste goes in and out of demonstrate that highbrow is just a social construct. Writers like Isaac Asimov and Kurt Vonnegut were considered pulp trash when they

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<sup>2</sup> Romance Novel Author, Anonymous. Personal Interview. April 2018

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Koopman, Emy. “Predictors of Insight and Catharsis among Readers Who Use Literature as a Coping Strategy.” *Scientific Study of Literature*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2011, pp. 241–259., doi:10.1075/ssol.1.2.04koo.

first wrote their books, but have now risen above that, to be now considered higher-brow because their vanguardism. They are only highbrow because of the trends that dictate the tastes of classes. It is not always about the content and how it is written, but rather the decision of society. There are novels out there that are highbrow because they are difficult. There are strengths to every style of writing, and there are very bad highbrow novels out there. They are considered highbrow and still considered better than a really well written romance novel, which is absurd. There can be examples of boring and uninspired time wasters in any category you can think of. When I argue for lowbrow novels and pulp fiction, I argue for the plot based literature that actually sells well and people enjoy, not the lowbrow that is unquestionably bad and truly without merit.

What marks highbrow as “good” and lowbrow as “trash” has been fabricated entirely by society in order to enforce a system of rigid social classes and reward the socialization of the wealthy. High society maintains social standing through elitism, and dismissal of popular culture defines American intellectuals and their claim to a superior sensibility. Literature, especially pulp, also fits in to aspects of visual entertainment, such as soap operas or sitcoms. German philosopher Theodor Adorno<sup>5</sup> denounced television for promoting the “very smugness, intellectual passivity, and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds.” He believed that mass media produced formulaic results and brainwashed consumers into conformity. Lowbrow media creates mindlessness and blind consumption of constructs and ideas created by society: the premise of what highbrow is against. Highbrow culture uses this passivity to support their own dominance, acting as if they have transcended that. However, Adorno did not only believe that lowbrow media was a societal construct, he argues that for highbrow as well, saying, “the sharp dichotomy between highbrow and lowbrow music has been erected by the administrators of musical culture into a fetish which neither side may question.” This argues that both highbrow and lowbrow culture are societal constructs; trends that followers of each support blindly. Highbrow culture is exactly the same act of consuming societal propaganda as lowbrow, but with work that is designed to seem more complex and harder to access. In the 1930s, Clement Greenberg, an influential art critic and essayist, famously prescribed modernism as the antidote to the inferior cravings of “mass man,” sneering at *The New Yorker* for repackaging kitsch to socially ambitious Americans<sup>6</sup>. Through the perspective of the born-and-bred elite, media that is easy to access and not challenging to the individual is marked as lowbrow, whereas working hard to understand media marks it as highbrow. However, this idea of working hard is not related to intelligence. Often, it is just being gifted with access to “more advanced” learning, practices, knowledge, and materials. Anybody with a dictionary could read *Moby Dick*, but only people of high intellectual status are the ones with the resources to analyze it and say the socially correct things while doing so. The highbrow media does not always have to relate to skill, and often appears as an inverse of quality as art that requires less technical skill tends to be bathed in more “intellectual skill” and context. For example, in modern art, many more conceptual art pieces are considered highbrow but did not take much effort to make. The white paintings<sup>7</sup> of Robert Rauschenberg did not require any technical skill. Because he is famous, he is able to create

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<sup>5</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Routledge, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Mallon, Thomas, and Pankaj Mishra. “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow - Do These Kinds of Cultural Categories Mean Anything Anymore?” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 July 2014,

<sup>7</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting* [three panel], 1951; latex paint on canvas, 72 in. x 108 in. (182.88 cm x 274.32 cm); Collection SFMOMA, Purchase through a gift of Phyllis C. Wattis; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

almost any art and it will be commended and analyzed by famous art critics. The “cultured” museum goer would be able to discuss the meaning behind it but someone of low status may be confused or laugh at it because they have not been conditioned to appreciate it and have the language to analyze it.

In comparison, some lowbrow art is created with incredible technique, but does not adhere to the trend of what is considered conceptually highbrow. “High status” people (whether performative or not) enjoy the traditionally technically void conceptual art because it transcends the usual definition of aesthetics and what art means and scoff at technically well done but easily enjoyed art. The act of this scoffing is what creates high and low culture and self-congratulates those who are privileged enough to have tastes on the higher side of the societal boundaries they continue to cement in place. Pierre Bourdieu, a contemporary French philosopher and socialist argues this as well, saying, “Taste is first and foremost distaste, disgust and visceral intolerance of the taste of others... The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated.”<sup>8</sup> According to Bourdieu, the creation of tastes of the higher classes are from denouncing the tastes of the lower. Anyone of high culture would never dare truly appreciate something considered distasteful, or this would ruin the divisions of highbrow and lowbrow that so-called “cultured” people created by denouncing the tastes of others. Interestingly, in this paper, I am denouncing higher culture, validating lowbrow, and possibly making that highbrow. My intolerance for highbrow is what would make lowbrow better. According to Lawrence W. Levine in *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988), sacralization results from a cultural shift in which art becomes less shared across the culture, and instead is elevated in such a way that only elite audiences are considered to have the knowledge and means to access it. These audiences, in turn, “approach the matters and . . . works” of serious cultural producers, such as classical orchestras, “with proper respect and proper seriousness, for aesthetic and spiritual elevation rather than mere entertainment”<sup>9</sup> (146). All forms of media are products of society, and interacting with any of them is consuming propaganda. What makes highbrow and lowbrow is just the construct of taste, which is a construct of class.

These cultural distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow have stigmatized emotional media as lowbrow trash. In doing research for this I bought some romance novels at a bookstore and I was so incredibly embarrassed. I could not look the cashier in the eye with my stack of books with half naked couples on the cover. I thought about saying that it was for research, to somehow justify my purchasing of these novels, but that is the exact elitism that disparages the novels. Why should people be embarrassed of literature that is entirely healthy and enjoyed by many people? Instead of being appreciated, the romance novel has basically been stigmatized as pornographic filth. In 1953, an antipornography committee published a report, saying “The so-called pocket-size books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works, have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy,” it concluded. “The exaltation of passion above principle and the identification of lust with love are so prevalent that the casual reader of such literature might

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Spitzer, John, and Lawrence W. Levine. “Highbrow/Lowbrow-The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America.” *American Music*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1990, p. 233., doi:10.2307/3051953.

easily conclude that all married persons are adulterous and all teenagers are completely devoid of any sex inhibitions.”<sup>10</sup>

There is a cultural assumption in the Western World that difficult equals better, especially in literature. Though there have been authors who have gone against this and mixed highbrow and lowbrow and thought about why these dichotomies exist, there is definitely an assumption in Western culture that if something gives you immediate pleasure, then it is not as worthwhile as delayed gratification. If you have to do the work to understand it, it's a more stimulating experience, whereas, if you don't have to do the work, it's easier and more like a release than a challenge. Much of this cultural assumption has become part of the backbone of the Western canon over the last 100 years.

Pulp fiction novels are considered to be the lowest form of literature, and by some, not even worthy of being called literature at all. All this ridicule aside, pulp fiction's commercial success is unmatched. People read this more than most other books, constituting “the single largest share of the fiction market.” Romance novels generated \$1.37 billion in sales in 2001, additionally, in that year, at least 74.8 million people read a romance novel.<sup>11</sup> Danielle Steel, a well-known lowbrow romance novelist, is the number one best-selling author alive.<sup>12</sup> They lead to immediate gratification instead of having to work for it, but *why* are they so pleasurable? The desire to experience emotions is considered to be a key motivation for the use of entertainment media, and pulp fiction novels use this motivation to its last drop, both relatable to the reader and based on plot rather than being thought provoking, which leads to an easy access of emotions and quicker release. A variety of emotions and other affective phenomena have been studied in the context of media use including empathy, suspense, humor, interest, eroticism, as well as negative emotions such as fear and sadness<sup>13</sup>.

Entertainment media's wide range of emotional gratification extends directly to mood management; people want to consume something exciting or emotional when they are bored, and if they are over-stimulated, they want to consume something soothing. Additionally, strong fabricated emotions can distract individuals from negative thoughts and even be used to cope with real situations. Besides managing real life emotions, the excitement associated with novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences can be gratifying in its own right. Zaleski in *Sensation-seeking and Preference for Emotional Media Stimuli* (1984) found that individuals with a strong sensation seeking motive actually preferred both positive *and* negative intense emotions over neutral ones, as this is used as a separate outlet of emotions as a distraction or coping mechanism for real ones<sup>14</sup>. On the other end of the spectrum, individuals use their choice

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<sup>10</sup> Menand, Louis. “Pulp's Big Moment.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 19 June 2017, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/05/pulps-big-moment](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/05/pulps-big-moment).

<sup>11</sup> Seltzer, Leon F. “The Triggers of Sexual Desire Pt 2: What's Erotic for Women?” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 14 May 2012, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201205/the-triggers-sexual-desire-pt-2-what-s-erotic-women](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201205/the-triggers-sexual-desire-pt-2-what-s-erotic-women).

<sup>12</sup> “The Five Top Bestselling Authors of All Time”. *Historythings.com*. 24 February 2017. Retrieved 13 November 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Bartsch, Anne, and Reinhold Viehoff. “The Use of Media Entertainment and Emotional Gratification.” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 5, 2010, pp. 2247–2255., doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.444.

<sup>14</sup> Zaleski, Zbigniew. “Sensation-Seeking and Preference for Emotional Visual Stimuli.” *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 5, no. 5, 1984, pp. 609–611., doi:10.1016/0191-8869(84)90040-0.



of media to adjust their moods to the demands of their current situation; if, for instance, one has been provoked, and wants to retaliate but cannot, an aggressive story can be used to obtain this vicariously<sup>15</sup>.

Research shows that readers experience the greatest level of enjoyment when good things happen to what they deem as “good” characters and bad things happen to “bad” characters<sup>16</sup>. A specific subset of this is relief, readers receive after experiencing suspense when a bad outcome is feared for a beloved or identifiable character. Experiencing strong negative emotions (such as sadness, especially when in relation to catharsis) can be rewarding, as shown by some authors who suggest that while simply coping with emotions is a demanding skill, coping successfully can make the reader experience stronger gratification and reward<sup>17</sup>. I often crave watching a really sad movie or consuming anything that will make me cry a lot. I find it powerfully cathartic to bawl about something artificial.

The relatability and vicarious nature of plot-based entertainment adds experientially to the lives of readers, who can also form *parasocial*, or one-sided, relationships with fictional characters as complementary sources of social and emotional gratification.<sup>18</sup> It is easy for readers of narrative media content to adopt the perspective of the characters, and experience emotions reflecting their evaluation of events from those fictional viewpoints that are nonetheless based in reality, however exaggerated. Emotional involvement goes along with other modes of reception such as film, with portrayals of others in similar situations can also help individuals to cope with their own misfortunes and shortcomings. Using fiction as a separate emotional outlet allows readers to release emotions in a “safe” world, without consequences. When engaging in a fictional world, our appraisal system—by which we judge whether events are plausible and try to determine the proper emotional reaction—is quieted<sup>19</sup>. This allows for overdramatized storylines and accompanying reactions to serve as healthy coping mechanisms, which can give us clearance in real life to feel emotions to their greatest extent. Romance novels give the reader what they want; whether it be taboo, power, or fantasy. Their unrealistic storylines allow readers to live out a fantasy and satisfy impossible wishes.

Besides being emotionally gratified by reading pulp, being transported into fictional narratives can also increase empathetic and emotional intelligence in the day to day lives of

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<sup>15</sup> Maio, Gregory R., and Victoria M. Esses. “The Need for Affect: Individual Differences in the Motivation to Approach or Avoid Emotions.” *Journal of Personality*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2001, pp. 583–614., doi:10.1111/1467-6494.694156.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, Jonathan. “Identification with Media Characters Measure.” *PsycTESTS Dataset*, 2001, doi:10.1037/t30292-000.

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, Thalia R. “The Pleasure of Unadulterated Sadness: Experiencing Sorrow in Fiction, Nonfiction, and ‘in Person.’” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2009, pp. 232–237., doi:10.1037/a0015343.

<sup>18</sup> Appel, Markus. “Fictional Narratives Cultivate Just-World Beliefs.” *Journal of Communication*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2008, pp. 62–83., doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00374.x.

<sup>19</sup> Vorderer, P. “Enjoyment: At the Heart of Media Entertainment.” *Communication Theory*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2004, pp. 388–408., doi:10.1093/ct/14.4.388.

readers.<sup>20</sup> In one study, participants who felt fully transported into the story exhibited higher affective empathy and were more likely to engage in reciprocal prosocial behavior. In another study, reading-induced affective empathy was related to greater bias toward subtle, fearful facial expressions, decreased perceptual accuracy of fearful expressions, and a higher likelihood of engaging in prosocial behavior. These effects persisted after controlling for an individual's dispositional empathy and general tendency to become absorbed in a story<sup>21</sup>. There is a motivational "self-development" factor characterized by individuals' interest in consuming literature in order to observe strong emotions and understand how others think and feel.<sup>22</sup> Fictional narratives provide an over emotionalized view of someone else's story, allowing readers to gain an understanding of empathy and struggles and become a more emotionally intelligent person. While lowbrow increases emotional intelligence due to being plot based and relatable, highbrow novels are more likely to increase IQ as they are thought provoking instead of empathy inducing.

Reasons for reading more complex literature stem from both societal pressures and the draw of delayed gratification.. Once the tough language and themes are decoded, the reader can access higher knowledge and experience a sense of relief and growth at the conclusion. This can be almost seen as masochistic: gaining pleasure by suffering through the book. The concept of eudemonic motivation, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning, rather than hedonic, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance<sup>23</sup> assumes that media use can also be motivated by individuals' search for deeper insight, meaning, and purpose in life. The aesthetics of highbrow literature give the reader gratification through experiencing beauty. There was also a weaker but positive correlation with elaboration (reading between the lines) indicating that emotional involvement can be helpful for the pursuit of a broader variety of goals while reading.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, there is a societal element that makes the reader seem cultured and intelligent by reading a complex and difficult novel. People want to be applauded and respected for being raised with the background to like something not everyone else can.<sup>25</sup> This ties back to the idea of the concept of highbrow versus lowbrow. No one considered a high society person would be caught dead reading *Twilight* unless it was for some

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, Dan R. "Transportation into a Story Increases Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Perceptual Bias toward Fearful Expressions." *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2012, pp. 150–155., doi:10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.005.

<sup>21</sup> Lazarus, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver, Mary Beth, and Anne Bartsch. "Appreciation as Audience Response: Exploring Entertainment Gratifications Beyond Hedonism." *Human Communication Research*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2010, pp. 53–81., doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01368.x.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2008, May). Development of hedonic and eudaimonic measures of entertainment motivations: The role of affective and cognitive gratifications. Paper presented at the annual convention of the International Communication Association, Montreal, Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Maio, Gregory R., and Victoria M. Esses. "The Need for Affect: Individual Differences in the Motivation to Approach or Avoid Emotions." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2001, pp. 583–614., doi:10.1111/1467-6494.694156.

<sup>25</sup> Ollivier, Michèle, and Fridman, Viviana, "Taste/Taste Culture". International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Sociology, University of Ottawa, 2001, Ottawa, Canada.

reason other than pleasure, like for research. Someone in a lower social class might consume higher literature in an attempt to become of a higher social standing and make themselves look better. Reading all of Moby Dick and understanding it can be used as a bragging point if it comes up. This is seen in music as well, as there is no obvious relation between intelligence and music in terms of ability to listen and accessibility, just what is considered “good” or not. People trying to be of a higher class will reject popular music and instead turn to a subculture genre to be seen as cooler. However, once enough people reject popular music, the subculture will become the main culture.

Another descriptor of lowbrow literature is as a “guilty pleasure”: implying it is shameful and lesser than other forms of literature. Essayist Adam Sternbergh’s New York Times article, *All of the Pleasure, None of the Guilt*, details this phenomenon by stating that, “condemning certain aspects of the culture as unworthy or spiritually harmful or, even worse, somehow morally detrimental is a popular critical pastime with a terrible batting average: basically .000, if you want to run the numbers.<sup>26</sup>” He argues that society loves to shame people for enjoying themselves. People invent reasons to make it seem as though pleasure is a bad thing: a sin. He goes on to say, “Jazz, rock 'n' roll, hip-hop, comic books, sitcoms, slasher films, pulp novels, you name it — all have at one time or another been dismissed as somehow less than noble, their consumption salted with guilt from on high, yet somehow all survived and even thrived.” All of this pleasurable entertainment has co-existed with the media of the highest of brows. Being happy and receiving uncomplicated joy shouldn't be a guilty pleasure. People shouldn't feel guilty about what they consume. I think that's an absurd thing. I do not know of anyone without a guilty pleasure, and if someone did not have one, they would be an incredibly boring person. Lowbrow media unnecessarily and constantly has to prove itself to be taken seriously.

The author I interviewed described a conceptual poet named Kenneth Goldsmith. He listened to the traffic radio all day and transcribed that and then published it as a book<sup>27</sup>. He is considered highbrow and got incredibly famous because he was doing things no one else was doing. No one wants to read traffic reports, because, they are literally dry traffic reports. They want to read a page, enjoy it, and then talk about what it means. I like the poetry that is lyrical and interesting and I don't even care if it gives me much payoff as long as I enjoy reading. That is the best romance or the best painting. It doesn't need to be a bad thing to enjoy looking at a pretty picture and not analyze it. I think there's always been this bias against entertainment, enjoyment and pure pleasure. There shouldn't be anything wrong with that. It shouldn't be bad if you read a book and actually enjoy it and get sheer pleasure out of that. A lot of high art goes against that. It is not supposed to be enjoyable. More intense books may be more emotional for some people as it may come more natural for them to read something like that, but for someone else it may be extremely difficult and they may not get the catharsis out of it. But the people who cannot read those higher books are shamed for reading something that is on their level. It is supposed to be cerebral and I completely disagree with that. I think it is bad in the same way that reality TV is bad and video games are bad, but there's nothing wrong with any of those things. Any entertainment is fine so long as you're not letting it ruin your life, yet society trains us to think that immediate pleasure is a sin. As long as we don't spend every waking moment sitting

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<sup>26</sup> Sternbergh, Adam. “All of the Pleasure. None of the Guilt.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 7 Feb. 2014, [www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/magazine/all-of-the-pleasure-none-of-the-guilt.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/magazine/all-of-the-pleasure-none-of-the-guilt.html).

<sup>27</sup> Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Traffic*. Make Now, 2007.

on the couch and watching a movie or read a book, nobody should be judged for what they consume. Just let people enjoy things.

You may think *Twilight* is one of the stupidest series out there. Overdramatized teenage drama with the added bonus of vampires and werewolves. Yet these novels have sold over 100 million copies. That is a lot. Although not works of literary genius, people love to read them. When I pick up *Twilight* I do so to find some emotional release. I am transported into a sappy, melodramatic and incredibly unrealistic world of undying love. I am distracted from any intangible feelings of the moment and can instead cry over when Edward leaves Bella even though he said he loved her. Or when she has to choose between Edward and Jacob: an eternity of passion or a best friend who could care for her. This may sound so incredibly stupid, but that may just be society telling you that. Why shouldn't I be able to gain emotional gratification out of reading a book? It is not hurting me, it is even increasing my empathy and emotional intelligence. There is a stigma against enjoyment and pleasure in society. The unfair labeling of media as lowbrow sustains cultural and class rifts. I am not bashing highbrow literature in my justification of lowbrow, I am calling out the way that society uses intolerance of accessibility and pleasure to raise social class. As long as it is enjoyable in some aspect, media consumption should not be judged and used as a way to put down other people.

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